An Investigation of the Function of Discourse Markers in a YouTube Video of a Teenager

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Article Info	Abstract
Date submitted: 02.02.2022 Date accepted: 22.02.2022 Date published: 23.02.2022 *Research Article*	YouTube is the preferred online platform for today's teenagers. As such, this article aims to explore the audio-visual discourse in the form of a YouTube video and analyse the role and functions of discourse markers. Since they are communicative tools guiding, organizing, and assessing the ideas in the discourse, the use of these linguistic components is related to the communicative purpose of the text. Also, the present research strives to provide a basis for looking at spokenness implied into the discourse markers' usage. For the purpose of this study five particular discourse markers have been chosen to be analysed: oh, I mean, yeah, so, okay. Knowing more about this topic can help and benefit the correct interpretation of utterances expressed by teenage YouTube speakers and facilitate understanding of their intentions. **Keywords:** discourse analysis, discourse markers, audio-visual text, YouTube videos, spokenness, teenagers

1. Introduction

Different researchers describe discourse markers differently due to the way they look at the discourse in each of their studies (Brinton, 1996). From the perspective of communication and the definition and classification of discourse markers. Bright (1992) mentions that the discourse analysis and the comprehension of language and its use within conversation has concentrated on various aspects of linguistic theory. Linguistic studies serve as a forerunner to the studies of discourse markers, e. g. in the areas of how language links speakers and listeners or how speakers structure their language. These studies have developed the understanding of discourse markers as an area of the linguistic concern.

The rationale and motivation of the present study is that, there are numerous papers discussing the roles and functions of discourse markers in the discourse of audio-visual texts, however, little is known about this matter in the discourse of YouTube videos, particularly. YouTube videos can be considered a genre with authentic speech where we deal with conversation, i.e. the discourse typified by spokenness. The significance of this study can provide the basis for looking into what degree of spokenness is implied in the usage of discourse markers. The potential problem could appear as a gap in the literature since there is the scarce data acquisition regarding the audio-visual discourse in question. Thus, knowing more about

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this topic can help and benefit the correct interpretation of utterances expressed by teenage YouTube speakers and facilitate understanding of their intentions. In line with that, main advantages of this matter might be the development of different language skills and expression of smooth and fluent speech in order to achieve successful communication. However, some disadvantages of this issue could be seen in misunderstanding and/or underestimation of the study of discourse markers as the tools of language and important linguistic devices.

2. Literature Review

2.1. Audiovisual text

Zabalbeascoa (2008) states that "if we accept a text as a speech act or, more broadly, as any instant of communication, we will conclude that an audio-visual text is a communication act involving sounds and images". Furthermore, Zabalbeascoa (ibid.) develops his statement and distinguishes mutually complementary and equally important components of the audio-visual text, which is a combination of verbal, non-verbal, audio and visual elements.

Nowadays YouTube videos and blogs are an integral part of children's and teenagers' lives. Since these types of audio-visual text are targeted at different groups within these viewers, dividing them by their nature and content provided, they also have different functions to serve. As Matkivska (2014) believes, generally, the main function of audio-visual text is to meet the expectations of its recipients. Also, the synchronization of verbal and nonverbal components with other aspects of the media "art" is an important characteristics of audio-visual discourses' performance, not only to make an impression, attract an interest in more and more viewers or to gain popularity. Moreover, Matkivska (ibid.) states that texts are viewed in the situational context but also in wider global meaning which comprises an audio-visual product as a whole.

YouTube occupies a central role in the media life of teenagers (Pereira, Moura, & Fillol, 2018). They approach it as either consumers and/or producers and for many of them it is their main source of information. Burgess and Green (2018) state that YouTube contributors and participants have collectively generated the platform as a cultural system. Teenage YouTube communities develop through the shared "values and discourses around authenticity and social connexion" (Burgess & Green, 2018, p. 95). While analysing the content of teenage videos, it includes socialization and dealing with relevant teenage issues such as puberty, first dates, culture, school life, gender identity (Balleys, 2017). Moreover, YouTubers discuss teenage concerns and questions, and provide identity models (Balleys, 2017). Thus, for many teenagers YouTubers have become aspirational models they are likely to identify with (Aran-Ramspott, Fedele, & Tarragó, 2018; Scolari & Fraticelli, 2017). Furthermore, teenagers even want to become YouTubers and consider it a profession (Establés, Guerrero-Pico, & Contreras-Espinosa, 2019).

Teenagers use YouTube for watching videos and thus adapt practices originally developed in the context of television broadcasting. With the new, interactive and social platforms they are provided with a sense of community due to the identification with YouTubers since they have a similar age, taste, aims, and perform similar practices (i.e. gameplays). However, there are two more significant aspects why teenagers follow YouTubers: to be entertained and to learn with them. YouTube has emerged as the most important informal learning platform for teenagers where YouTubers give tips and share experiences that most of the teenagers can apply in their routines (Scolari, 2018). According to Maskar & Dewi (2020); Putri & Sari (2020) YouTube is a website on which users can upload, share, and view videos and it is one of the online media that can be applied for learning speaking skills. Teenagers are a group of users that continues to grow worldwide and thus deserve research attention (Bucher, 2018).

2.2. Spokenness

As Bilá, Kačmárová, and Džambová (2015) state, language is a component of a communication act and its individual utterances depend on the nature of a speech event which is embodied by the intention of a person producing it. They point out that the audio-visual text is planned to create an illusion of natural speech since it was pre-scribed for the reason to be acted out. At the same time, the discourse of YouTube videos which is a subject of the research of this study and falls into the area of audio-visual text, to a certain extent bears traces of text prepared in advance to be performed with the intention to create an illusion of spontaneous communication.

Speech, especially conversation, is by the stylistics literature characterized as spontaneous, impromptu, and loosely structured. Crystal (2001, p. 25, 28) introduces closer speech-related characteristics: "Speech is typically time-bound, spontaneous, face-to-face, socially interactive, loosely structured, immediately revisable, and prosodically rich".

Since the main focus of this study are discourse markers and their role and functions in the audio-visual text of YouTube video dialogues, the topic of "spokenness" is considered to be significant for further discussion. Consequently, to some extent, there is an interest to find out whether or not the use of discourse markers in the above mentioned discourses implies "spokenness" and contributes to authentic spontaneous speech.

2.3. Discourse markers

Discourse markers play a significant role in managing the flow and the structure of spoken and written discourse, furthermore their presence facilitates achieving goals in successful communication and use of the language. Discourse markers function at the level of discourse and connect sequences of utterances, whereas guiding the receiver's interpretation of text according to the producer's communicative intention (Kohlani, 2010). Discourse markers are grammatically optional and semantically empty, however they fulfil many different pragmatic functions on the textual and interpersonal levels of discourse (Brinton, 1996). On the whole, since discourse markers are communicative tools guiding, organizing, and assessing the ideas in the discourse, the use of these linguistic components is related to the communicative purpose of the text.

2.4. Functions of discourse markers

When speaking about the functions of discourse markers on the textual level, the scholars agree that they contribute to coherence and textuality of discourse. Different classifications of researchers are drawn from Halliday's (1973) cohesive relations corresponding to discourse markers as conjunctive relations by bonding the text elements together. Kopple (1985, p. 87) states that textual metadiscourse "shows how we link and relate individual propositions so that they form a cohesive and coherent text and how individual elements of those propositions make sense in conjunction with other elements of the text".

Based on functional domains of discourse markers there are two main functions suggested by Brinton (1996): textual and interpersonal, which carry the main difference and significance of any discourse. Based on Halliday's Systemic Functional Linguistics (1973) she (ibid.) agrees that the textual function refers to the organization of discourse, its coherence to the preceding and following text, and/or its relevance to the situational context. On the other hand, the interpersonal function is interested in relations among people such as a reflection of the speaker's stance towards a participant and/or a content of communication, mutual interaction of participants, taking on roles, expressing feelings, understanding explanations.

Brinton (1996) introduces her conception of pragmatic marker functions and based on it Castro (2009) proposes that textual function of discourse markers has its role in initiating discourse (claiming the hearer's attention), closing discourse, taking turns (acquiring or relinquishing the floor), serving as a filler

(sustaining discourse), indicating a new topic or a shift in a topic, denoting new or old information, marking sequential dependence, repairing one's own or other's discourse.

Another categorization of discourse marker functions is presented by Aijmer (2002) who distinguishes a frame function of a discourse particle with a global coherence function and the use of qualifying function with a local coherence function. In the frame of textual domain, she (ibid.) suggests such functions as marking transitions, introducing a new turn, introducing or closing a digression, self-correction, while a qualifying function is used to indicate agreement or disagreement, to response to a question or a request, to compare or contrast.

The interpersonal functions of discourse markers in the area of discourse analyses within any communication, spoken or written, suggest that these expressions are linked to reactions, responses and relations built by the participants while expressing their attitudes, feelings and evaluations in the social exchange (Castro, 2009).

Derived from Brinton (1996), Castro (2009) mentions that there are two categories of interpersonal functions of discourse markers. Subjectively, their role is to express a response to the preceding discourse (to back-channel, to express a reaction), whereas interpersonally their function is to express agreement, sharing and cooperation, to show the understanding, requesting confirmation, expressing difference or face-saving.

Similarly, Aijmer (2002) points out that interpersonal function of discourse particles is to express a response or a reaction to the preceding utterance, to express uncertainty, to seek confirmation and to back-channel. From the point of view of face-saving, politeness and indirectness, phatic discourse particles, which she (ibid.) calls the particles with interpersonal functions, form the interactive system in communication and contain features of everyday conversation.

3. The Study

YouTube videos as a part of immense video host sites whose content can be accessed and viewed online belong to the digital audio-visual discourse. They represent a specific form of communication since this kind of discourse production is extremely important and ubiquitous in today's globalized media and information society.

Teenagers are considered to form a large group of Audi visual content viewers. From such a production they expect a knowledge base of their cultural and social models of ordinary contemporary life. Also, videos might represent a huge part in forming their personal identity and the identity of various virtual communities. Many times through language and communication of so called YouTube "influencers" there comes to mixing up of cultural traditions and social norms of teenagers' personal preferences and authoring initiatives.

The present study focuses on the role, functions and distribution of discourse markers in the discourse of audio-visual text with the attention to teenage YouTube videos. Consequently, the research questions guiding this study are:

1) What is the use of discourse markers (their role, typology, functions and frequency) in the discourse of audio-visual text?

2) How do discourse markers in this discourse contribute to "spokenness"?

The methods used are:

a) Analysing the role and the functions of discourse markers in the audio-visual texts of teenage YouTube videos;

b) Comparing the characteristic patterns in this type of audio-visual text.

The corpus for the purpose of the study consists of a video transcript downloaded from YouTube website. The subject topic of this type of audio-visual text is the private life of the youtuber Carson Johns. He is a 16-year-old American teenage boy from Utah, attending a local college in the city of Riverton. In his YouTube channel he shares more than 250 videos discussing many different topics from the life any teenager could relate to, such as friends and family, cars and driving, school, travel, challenges, workout, teen crush and dating, or some pranks and tutorials. As he says, by his channel he tries to show the things he does throughout his life and to help inspire others to follow their dreams and know that anything is possible.

For the purpose of this study, the data for the research analysis of the teenager's YouTube video have been taken from pre-scripted spoken texts. Namely, a YouTube video called *LEARNING to DRIVE A MANUAL CAR* (stick shift) available from 26th February 2020 in length of 11:47 where Carson strives to share his experience in learning a skill of driving a manual car. Since getting a driving licence is a big issue for a teenager and a majority of cars driven on European roads are manuals, this specific video has been selected accordingly. In the corpus, five (5) particular discourse markers have been chosen to be analysed: oh, I mean, yeah, so, okay. These discourse markers are seen as helpful linguistic clues that he and his mates as text producers use in order to achieve successful communicative acts.

4. Findings and Discussion

Total word count of the transcript is 1, 826 words, which was taken as the basis for calculating the frequency of each of the selected discourse markers (oh, I mean, yeah, so, okay). There are some markers which have slightly different variants of their forms, e.g. oh/ah, yeah/yep/yup/yes, okay/ok, and are displayed together as the same. The total number of all the discourse markers mentioned was 124 which composed 6.8% of the total word count. Furthermore, the number of occurrences of each discourse marker differs quite considerably. As far as the functions of the discourse markers mentioned, there are found 52 occurrences fulfilling textual functions and 72 occurrences fulfilling interpersonal functions of discourse markers (see Fig. 1).
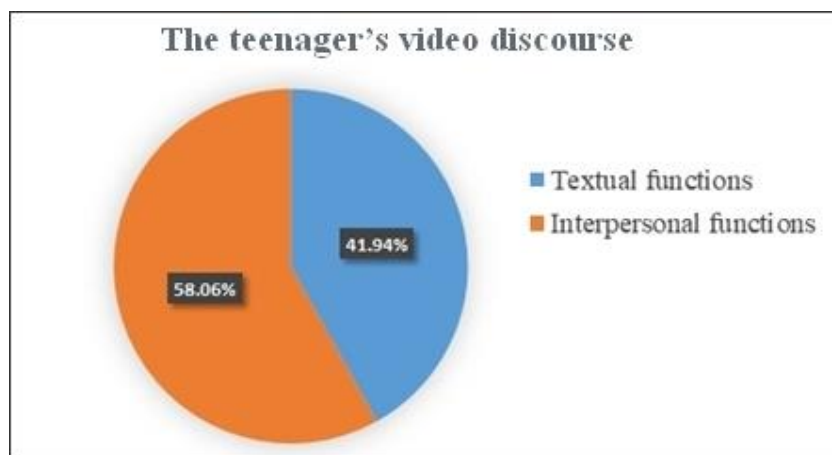

Figure 1. A numerical reflection of DMs distribution in the teenager's video discourse

As it can be seen from Figure 1, the selected discourse markers in textual functions represent 41.94% of the total discourse markers count, while discourse markers in interpersonal functions compose 58.06% which is a prevailing deal in this type of audio-visual genre.

Taking into consideration the textual function of discourse markers in the video in question, out of the selected discourse markers only two forms (so, I mean) perform this kind of function. However, the number of the discourse markers occurrences differ considerably.

Table 1.

Frequency and distribution of DMs in textual functions in the teenager's video discourse

Total DM in textual functions count: **52**		
DM	**Occurrence**	**Distribution (%)**
So	49	94.23
I mean	3	5.77

Table 1 displays the occurrences of discourse markers *so* and *I mean*, and their percentile representation within the total selected discourse markers count in textual functions of the teenager's video discourse. As it is clearly shown, the discourse marker *so* is very frequent, occurring 49 times and having 94.23% within the total number of occurrences of discourse markers. On the other hand, the discourse marker *I mean* is used less frequently, occurring only 3 times. The textual functions of the discourse marker *so*, often called as a causative or an inferential marker, identified in the teenager's video discourse are related to the discourse coherence and are used as in the following:

- to initiate discourse, e.g.:

(1) ***So*** *today he's going to teach me because I've never watched a video on it.*

- to close discourse, e.g.:

(2) I've never even tried ***so*** *this is gonna be the first time trying hard.*

- to take or give a turn, e.g.:

(3) ...hit the brake, ***so*** *focus,* ***so*** *clutch in and brake in...*

- to initiate a new topic or a partial shift in topic, e.g.:

(4) ...where do I go? Okay, ***so*** *go back to the top and you can try that again.*

- to mark sequential dependence, e.g.:

(5) ...letting off the clutch and pushing the gas at the same time ***so*** *it's kind of like this.*

- to mark logical transitions in the discourse, e.g.:

(6) This car's got a lot of power so that doesn't help the situation. ***So*** *is it something you gonna try again or are you over it?*

There is also the use of the discourse marker *I mean* whose function in the video mentioned is to help to make what the speaker says clearer to the listener and serves these functions:

- to repair one's own or other's discourse, e.g.:

(7) ...you are a good teacher, yeah, ***I mean****, that's really good...*

- to help hearers to grasp the proposition, e.g.:

(8) So basically you have to feel at what point the gas starts to actually go, do you know what ***I mean****, like, once you need to feel at what point the gas actually starts to engage.*

As to the interpersonal functions of the discourse markers in the teenager's video discourse, three forms (and their variants) of the chosen discourse markers are identified (*oh/ah*, *yeah/yep/yup/yes*, *okay/ok*). The total count of occurrences is 72, nevertheless the frequency of each discourse marker differs.

Table 2

Frequency and distribution of DMs in interpersonal functions in the teenager's video discourse

Total DM in interpersonal functions count: **72**		
DM	**Occurrence**	**Distribution (%)**
Yeah/Yep/Yup/Yes	31	43.06
Okay/Ok	26	36.11
Oh/Ah	15	20.83

Table 2 portrays the occurrences of discourse markers *yeah, okay, oh* together with the slight changes in their forms (e.g., *okay/ok*) and their percentile representation within the total selected discourse markers count in interpersonal functions of the teenager's video discourse. Table 2 shows that the most frequent discourse marker is *yeah/yep/yup/yes*, occurring 31 times and having 43.06% within the total number of occurrences of selected discourse markers. Besides, the discourse marker *okay/ok* is used likewise frequently, occurring 26 times with distribution of 36.11%. The discourse marker *oh/ah* also composes a great part of the mentioned discourse markers occurring 15 times and having 20.83%.

The discourse markers *yeah/yep/yup/yes* and *okay/ok* from the discourse analysed reveal that they act interactively and fulfil several identical functions. They are used:

- to express agreement, sharing and cooperation, e.g.:

(9) KOREN:...*you can see my feet, though?*

CARSON: **Yeah**, *I'm looking.*

KOREN: **Okay**. *Ready?*

- to express a response or a reaction, e.g.:

(10) CARSON: *So do you leave your foot over the clutch the entire time?*

KOREN: **Yeah**, *well, you can't.*

(11) CARSON: *Where do I go?*

KOREN: **Okay**, *so go back up to the top and you can try that again.*

- to seek confirmation and/or to back-channel and show the understanding, e.g.:

(12) KOREN: *Do you know what I mean?*

CARSON: **Yeah**.

(13) KOREN: *You have to have the clutch all the way in.*

CARSON: *All the way in, **okay**.*

- to express the difference politely and to save face, e.g.:

(14) CARSON: *Is it hard?*

KOREN: *[nodding]*

CARSON: *How hard?*

KOREN: **Yeah***, you'll find out.*

As far as the discourse marker *oh/ah* in the video concerned, it shows a versatile usage to the preceding discourse with various functions, such as:

- to indicate surprise or sudden realization where it is used as an interjection and stands by itself, e.g.:

(15) **Oh***! That was rough!*

- to express a response or a reaction in a positive way, often used in combination with other words or phrases and rising intonation, e.g.:

(16) **Oh***, yeah, here I am in the passenger seat and Koren is gonna teach me...*

- to express a response or a reaction in a negative way, often used in combination with other words or phrases and falling intonation, e.g.:

(17) **Oh***, no, no, not yet, not yet!*

Summary of the Findings

On the whole, the roles and functions of discourse markers *oh, I mean, yeah, so, okay* and their respective form variants (*ah, yep/yup/yes, ok*) identified in the YouTube video discourse uttered by teenagers are both textual and interpersonal. The frequency and distribution of DMs in interpersonal functions is dominant over the textual. The textual functions of DMs are more associated with the discourse coherence and are used to open or close discourse, to sustain discourse, to mark sequence or to repair the discourse while the interpersonal functions of DMs are more related to the reactions, responses and interactions between the participants. The study also reveals that the DMs analysed in the teenager's video discourse serve more than one function, i.e. they are multifunctional. Moreover, some discourse markers (e.g. *oh*) do not display their functions but they gain them in the context.

Overall, the findings of the present study move away from the findings of other related studies in this particular field of literature and show that YouTube videos as a part of audiovisual discourse can provide opportunities for acquiring and improving learning skills and linguistic abilities by the use of discourse markers. Despite the lack of the sufficient amount of relevant literature, the results of the study in terms of its rationale and significance have proven that the usage of discourse markers in teenage YouTube videos play prominent roles and serve many important functions. The present findings imply that by the correct interpretation of DMs, misunderstandings can be avoided, language skills improved and successful communication achieved. As far as the authenticity of the speech of teenage YouTubers and implication of "spokenness" is concerned, the results of this study are possible to be used for further investigation and development of this matter.

5. Conclusion

The presented paper focuses on investigating the role and functions of discourse markers in the discourse of teenager's audio-visual text. For the purpose of achieving the aim of the study, the frequency and functions of discourse markers were analysed in the YouTube video uttered by a teenager.

The results of the paper show that the general distribution of selected forms of discourse markers (oh, I mean, yeah, so, okay) in the mentioned audio-visual text is quite different, with a relatively high frequency of their occurrences. As far as the functions of discourse markers is concerned, the distribution of DMs in interpersonal functions is dominant over the textual function. Indeed, the distinction between the usage of discourse markers is not so considerable since textual functions of discourse markers compose 41.94%, whereas in interpersonal 58.06%.

To sum it up, the results of the study reveal that the interpersonal discourse markers are related to the general interaction between the participants and textual functions of discourse markers work with the particular discourse (eg. open, close, sustain, repair, etc.).

The novelty of the study consists of two aspects. First, it provides the analysis of role and functions of discourse markers in a relatively unknown genre of audio-visual text spoken by teenagers. As far as it is known, there have been some previous studies in this field focused on discourse markers used by adults, however a little is known about studies focused on discourse markers used by children or teenagers. Second, the study examines the similarities and differences in the use of discourse markers used by teenagers in the audio-visual genre of YouTube videos and strives to classify the implication of "spokenness" contributing to authentic communication, which is also relatively new in the investigated area.

Teenagers use YouTube videos to learn about different topics, moreover, the educational use is intertwined with social and productive use. One of the most successful factors of communication is its effective flow which can be assured and facilitated by the use of discourse markers. Thus, as far as pedagogical implications of the study are concerned, the results could be utilized by teachers and learners of English linguistics to determine the fluency of a language speaker by the amount of discourse markers and his/her awareness of their correct usage in the audio-visual discourse in question.

6. Limitations and Suggestions for Further Research

The findings of the study provide opportunities for acquiring and improving learning skills and linguistic abilities by the use of discourse markers in the area of the teenagers' YouTube video discourse. They can add up more horizons in the pragmatic research in linguistics. Also, the results can serve as a guideline for other researchers to conduct the further investigation related to this field of the pragmatic study. In addition, the findings can give contributions and insights to apply linguistics for learning purposes and, thus, can be used as a reference for similar future studies. However, the limited corpora used in this study is insufficient to be able to make an objective conclusion and a larger data is preferable for the future research.

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Appendix

YouTube video analysed:

Johns, C. (2020, February 27). *LEARNING to DRIVE A MANUAL CAR (stick shift).* YouTube.

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MG1JtBMHdOQ&fbclid=IwAR1V5PF_-r-Ukt4VCIApW178_bv-d0zF8ndyb7d4S7XNBi63tHO1A-IbDRs