

**Obsolescence and  
innovation in discourse-  
pragmatic change:  
The view from Canada**

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# Discourse pragmatic variation

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Jan 1, 1970 – Dec 31, 1980 ▾

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Clear

## Scholarly articles for "**discourse-pragmatic variation**"

[Methods in discourse variation analysis: Reflections on ...](#) - Pichler - Cited by 19

[The stuff of change: General extenders in Toronto](#) - Tagliamonte - Cited by 33

No results found for "**discourse-pragmatic variation**".

Results for discourse-pragmatic variation (without quotes):

[PDF] [Internal state words : cultural and situational variation in ...](#) - Ideals

<https://www.ideals.illinois.edu...> ▾ University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign ▾

by M Gearhart - 1979 - Cited by 11 - Related articles

Feb 15, 1979 - 3: Goetz, E. T. Sentences in Lists and in Connected **Discourse**,  
November 1975. ... 7: Ortony, A. Names, Descriptions, and **Pragmatics**, February 1976.

[PDF] [Aspects of code-switching in the discourse of bilingual ...](#) - Ideals

<https://www.ideals.illinois.edu...> ▾ University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign ▾

by EF McClure - 1977 - Cited by 118 - Related articles

# Discourse-pragmatic variation



# Discourse pragmatic variation

- ❖ Straddling the boundaries of syntax and pragmatics
- ❖ Requiring reference to subjective, interactional and textual information
- ❖ Many practitioners from late 1970's onwards
  - ✦ *Sankoff, G, Dines, Schourup, Schiffrin*
  - ✦ *Sankoff, D., Macaulay, Laberge, Vicher,*
  - ✦ *Cheshire, Erman, Stenström, Aijmer, Jucker, Stubbs*
  - ✦ *Overstreet, Dubois, Andersen, Stenström*
  - ✦ *D'Arcy, Pichler, Denis ...*

# Discourse pragmatic variation

- ❖ *Discourse* marker
  - ✦ connective functions; “sequentially dependent elements...bracket units of talk”
    - ❖ Schiffrin 1987: 31
- ❖ *Pragmatic* marker
  - ✦ “empty expressions found in oral discourse”
    - ❖ Brinton 1996:29
  - ✦ “low degree of lexical specificity and high degree of context sensitivity”
    - ❖ Andersen 2001:40
- ❖ *Discourse-pragmatic* marker
  - ✦ “syntactically optional elements”
    - ❖ Pichler 2013:4

# Still to be learned?

- ❖ “ There is a great deal to be learned yet, then, about the interrelations that exist between syntax and semantics, and about the way in which the syntactic structure of informal spoken language can best be analyzed.”

✦ 1987

✦ *Jenny Cheshire, 1987:278*

# Trends

## 1970's

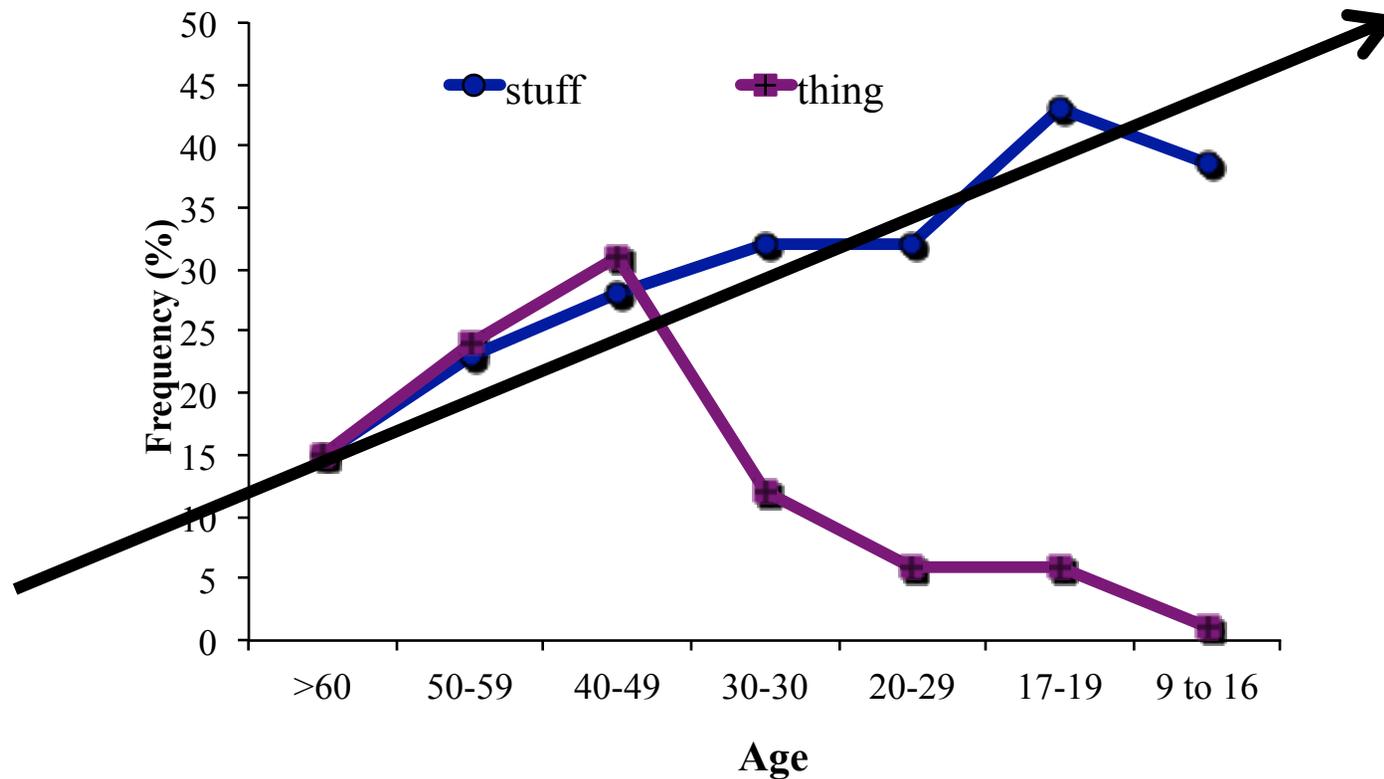
- ❖ Early work targeted features that were sentence initial, left periphery
  - ✦ Aijmer 1997, Fraser 1988, Keller 1979, Schiffrin 1987, Schourup 1983, etc.

## 1980's-2001's

- ❖ Rise of research on all sorts of 'markers'
  - ✦ *sentence tags, general extenders, epistemic markers, you know, you see, I don't know ...* collocations of all kinds

# Dramatic change General Extenders in Toronto

Tagliamonte & Denis 2010



# Dramatic change

## Utterance Final Particles

### Toronto

Denis & Tagliamonte to appear

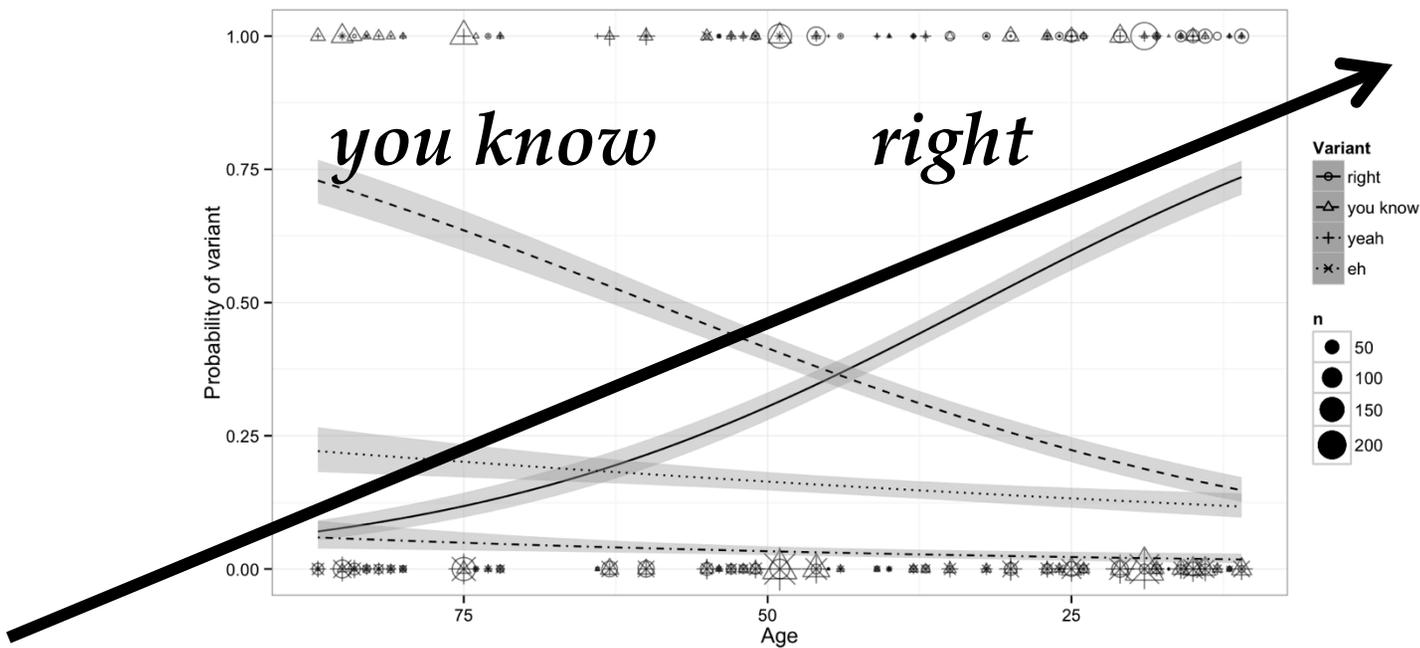


FIGURE 2. Binomial probability of *right*, *you know*, *yeah*, and *eh* variants by speaker age.

# Left periphery

*So uh. Well* I really loved it. *You know uh* I enjoyed it.

✦ William Carlsburg, 82, 2003

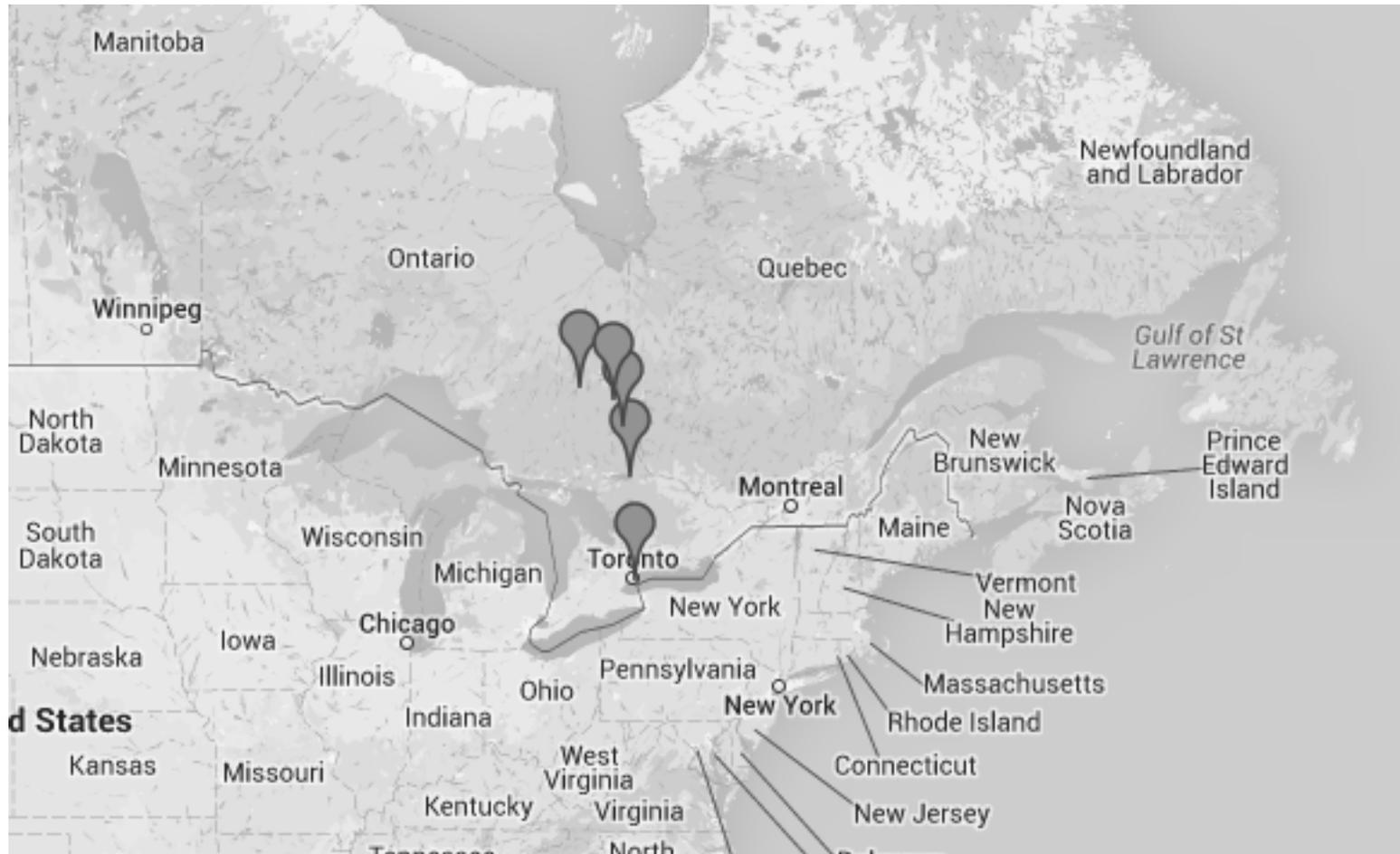


✦ *Oh, okay, well okay then I guess- I guess m-- that- that is my destination that I'd aim for. If not that, um, I don't know, I think you could stay in your house.*

✦ Trevor Klinke, 20, 2009



# Canadian English



# The Data

- ❖ 72 speakers, born and raised in Ontario, Canada
- ❖ Five communities
  - ✦ *Toronto, North Bay, Temiskaming Shores, Kirkland Lake, South Porcupine*
- ❖ 12 individuals / community; 24 in Toronto
  - ✦ young / middle / old
  - ✦ Male / female
  - ✦ Education; job type

# How to circumscribe?

- ❖ For 21 speakers, extract every reasonably well formed clause initial utterance
- ❖ Exclude false starts
  - ✦ *you just like- you-know* you watch your step
- ❖ Exclude quotatives
  - ✦ 'Cause they were *like-* I never associated much with Timmins people
- ❖ Exclude cases with badly broken phrase structure
- ❖ Exclude *yes/no* answers to direct questions
  
- ❖ **TOTAL N = 9278**      **DMs = 11.6%**



# The outer rim

- ❖ *Oh okay yeah* so because you grow up with it, you just don 't even hear it
- ❖ *Oh okay no* that doesn't work, go back, go back
- ❖ *Yeah oh yeah* we get into scrubbles
- ❖ *Oh yes yeah* the- the miners talked about it amongst themselves

# The outer rim

## ❖ THREE SLOTS

1. I heard what you said

❖ *Oh, Ah, Yeah, Gosh, Gee*

2. Acknowledgement

❖ *Okay, I know, yeah, no*

3. Response, agreement

❖ *No, yeah, yup*

❖ 3.2% of the data

# The inner rim

- ❖ *So like I guess* someone took the grocery cart.
- ❖ *Well I think* he went back
- ❖ *So I think* I'm remembering the fact

# The inner rim

❖ ONE SLOT, four markers

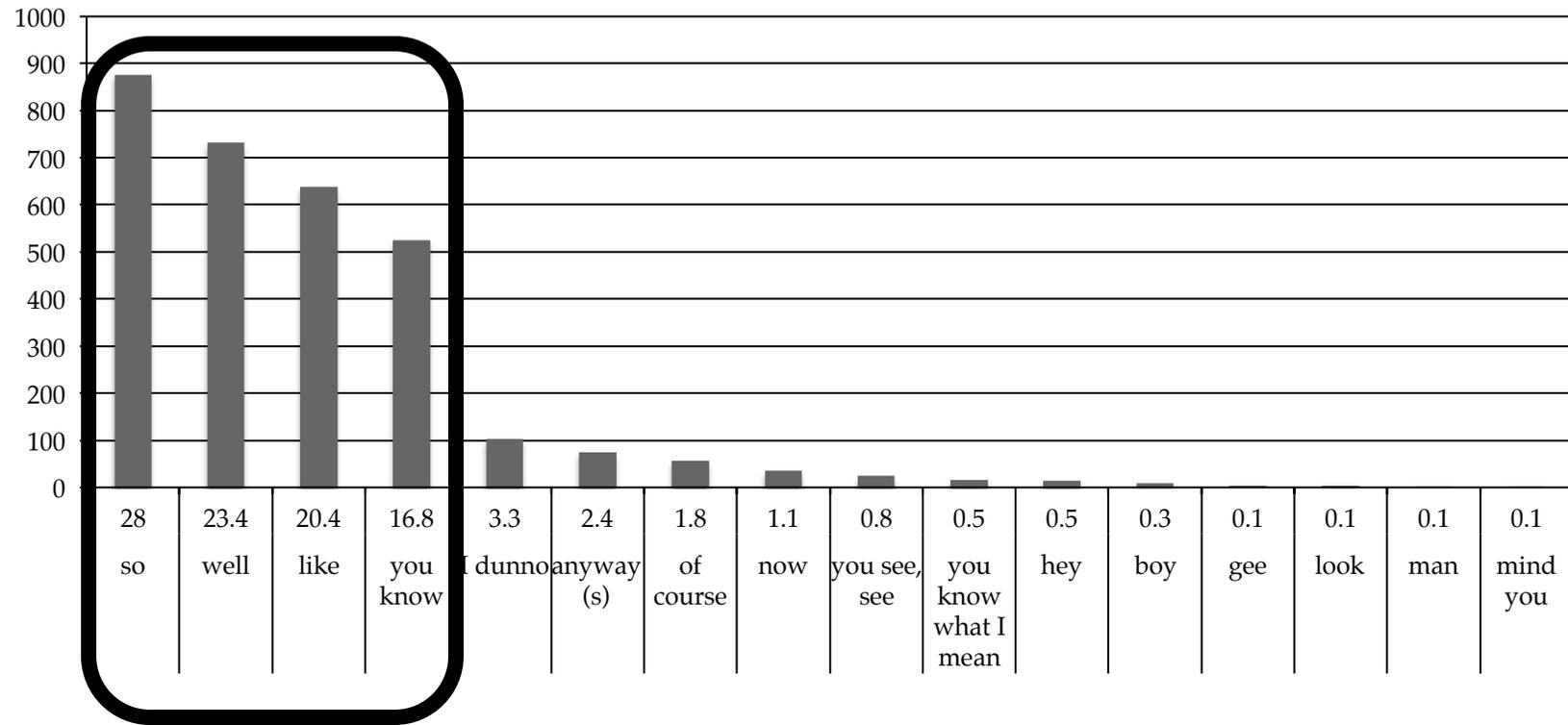
1. I think
2. I mean
3. I guess
4. I believe

❖ 1% of the data; parentheticals

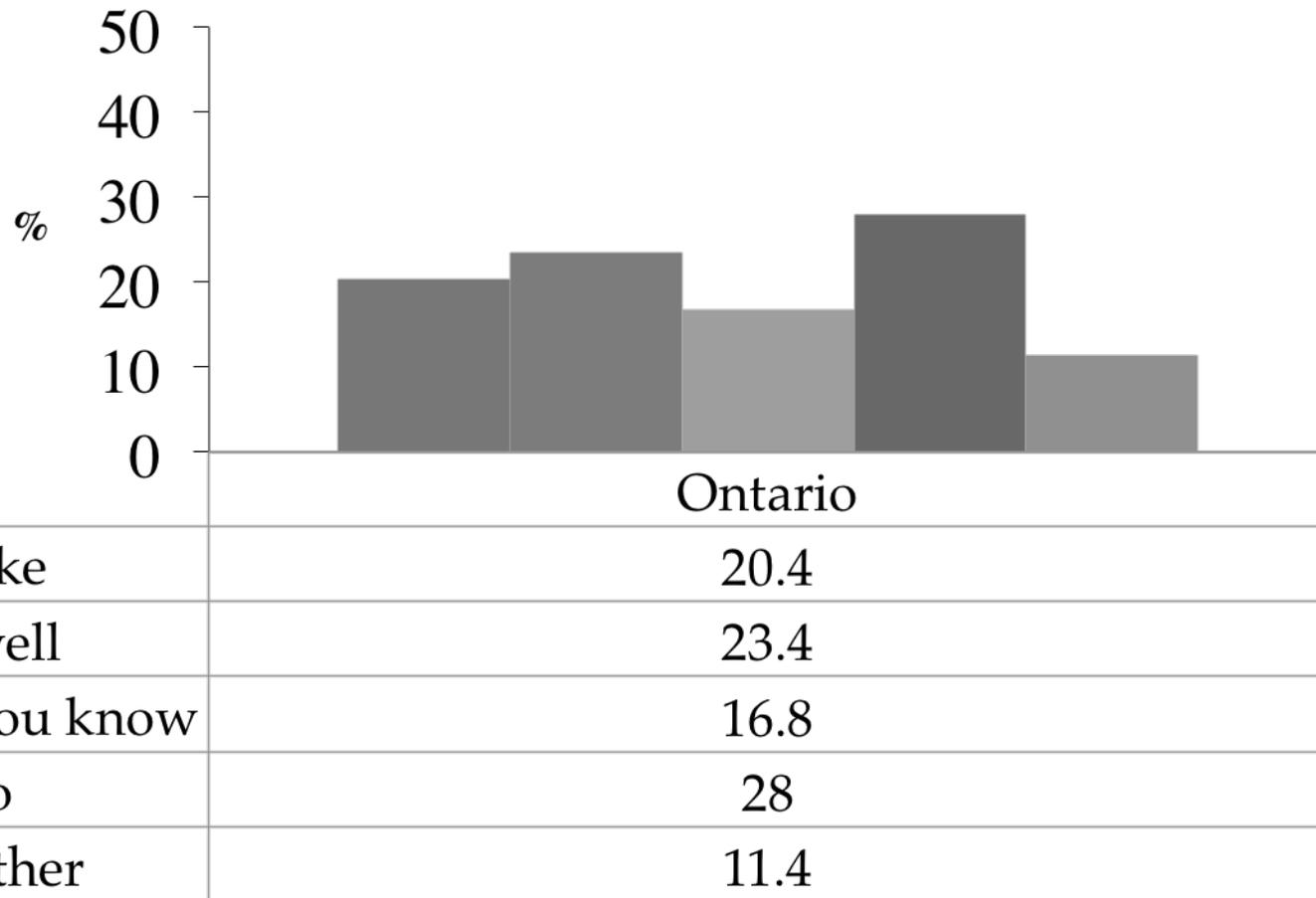
# Discourse Markers [DMs]

- ❖ All items on the left periphery just below CP, excluding outer and inner rim forms
  - ✦ *Yeah oh yeah well you know* you were at little bit at the service
  - ✦ *And so I think* that wasn't particularly difficult or anything
  - ✦ *No. Like* there's some stereotypes like, "*Oh* the Cobalt kids all do drugs"
  - ✦ *And like you know* the shower starts ...
  - ✦ *By golly* we better build a railroad
  - ✦ *Geez* I don't remember

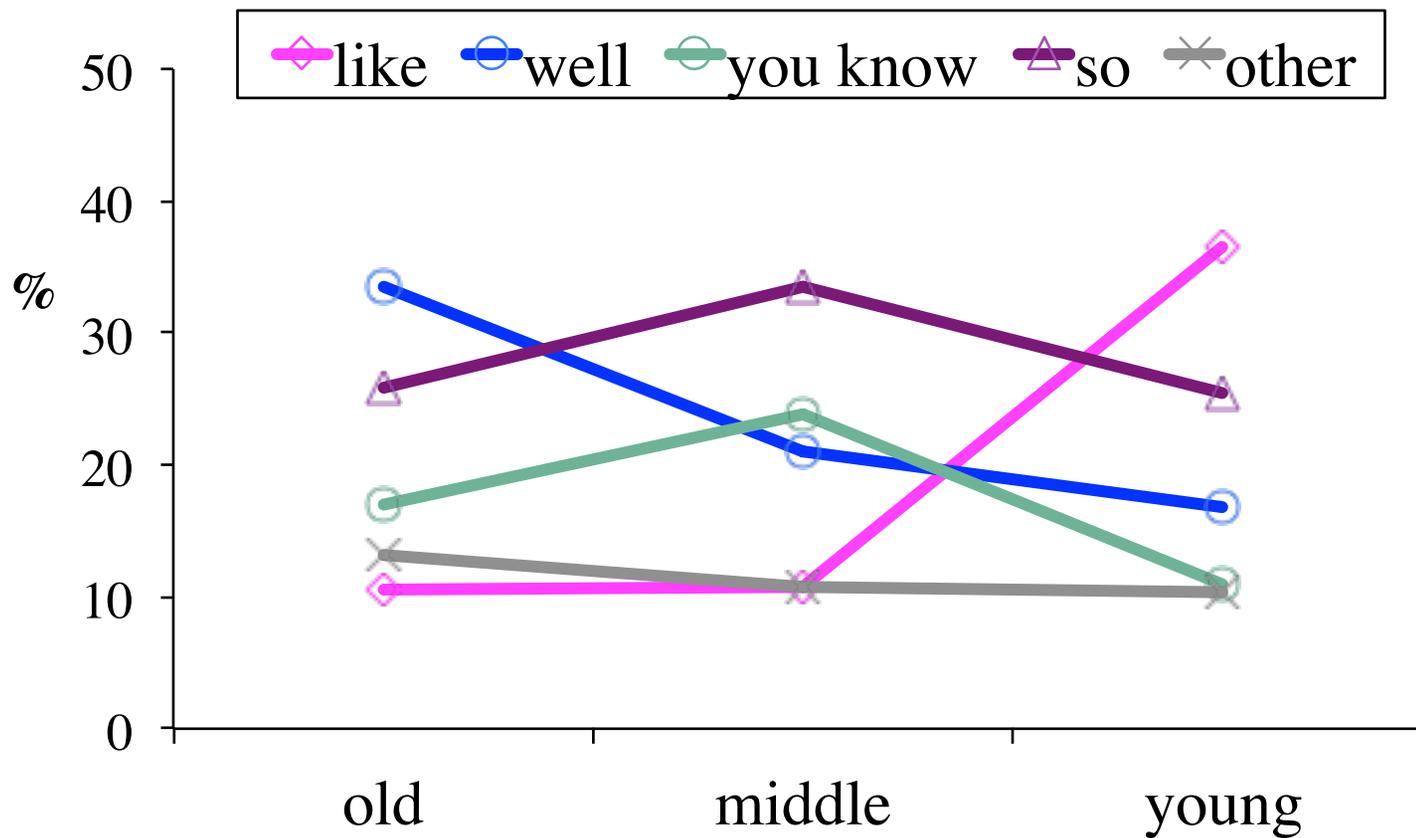
# DM's overall



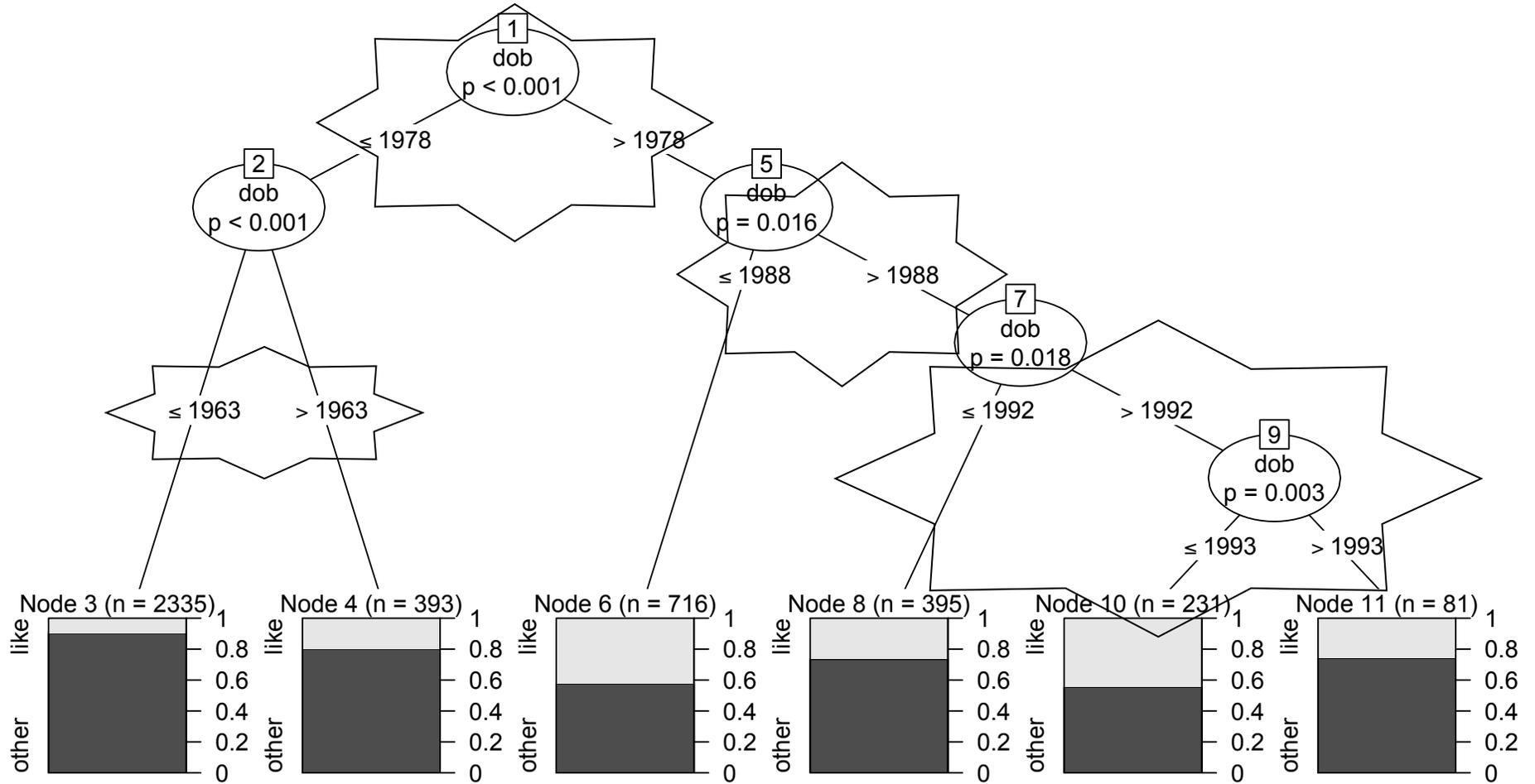
# DM's overall



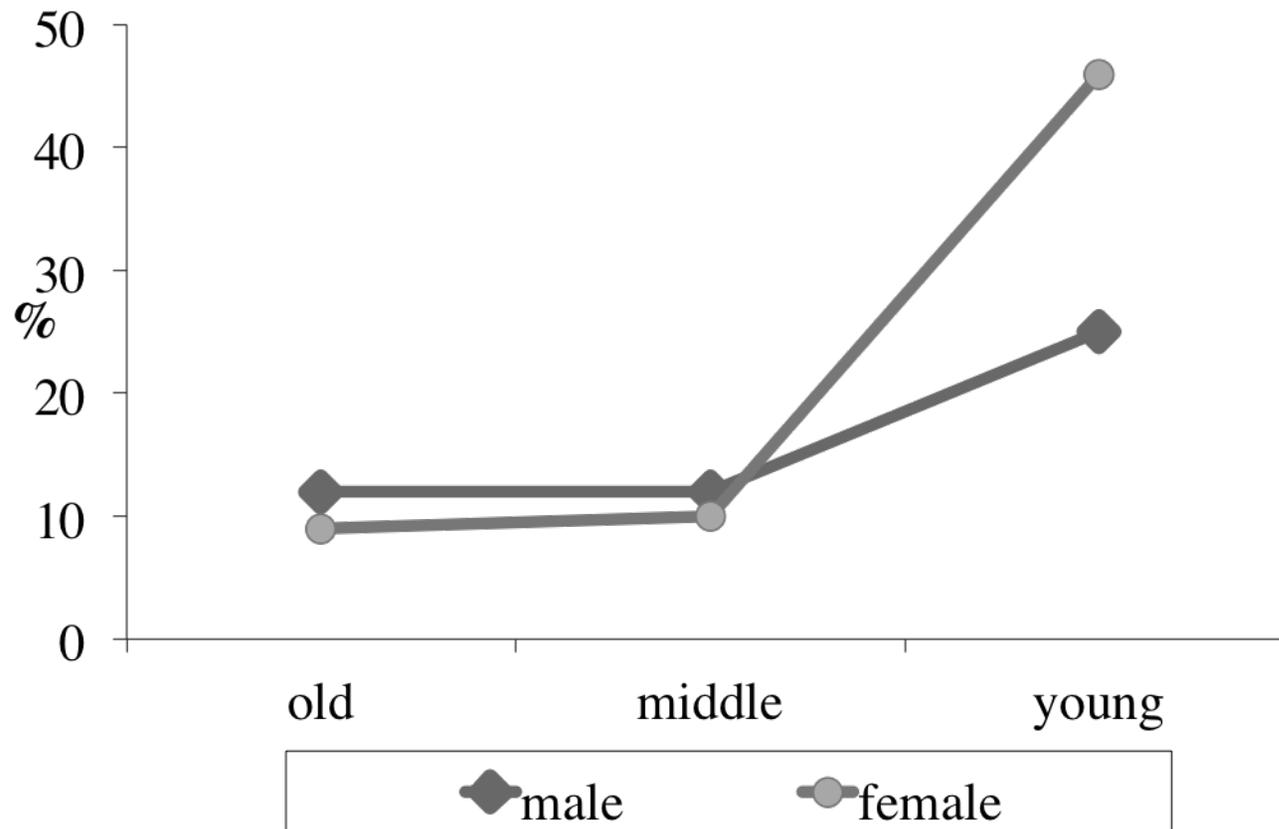
# DM's in apparent time



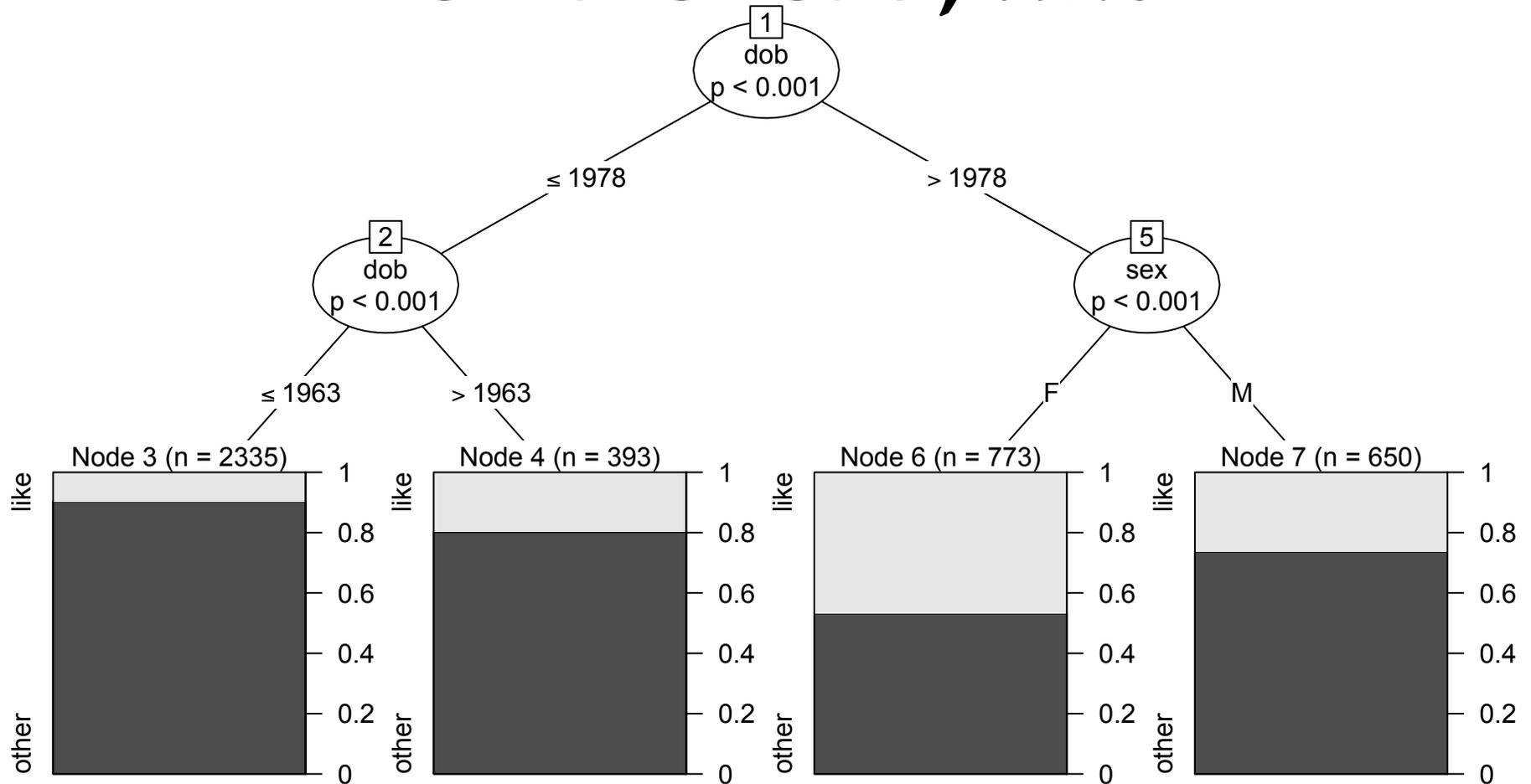
# Development of *like*



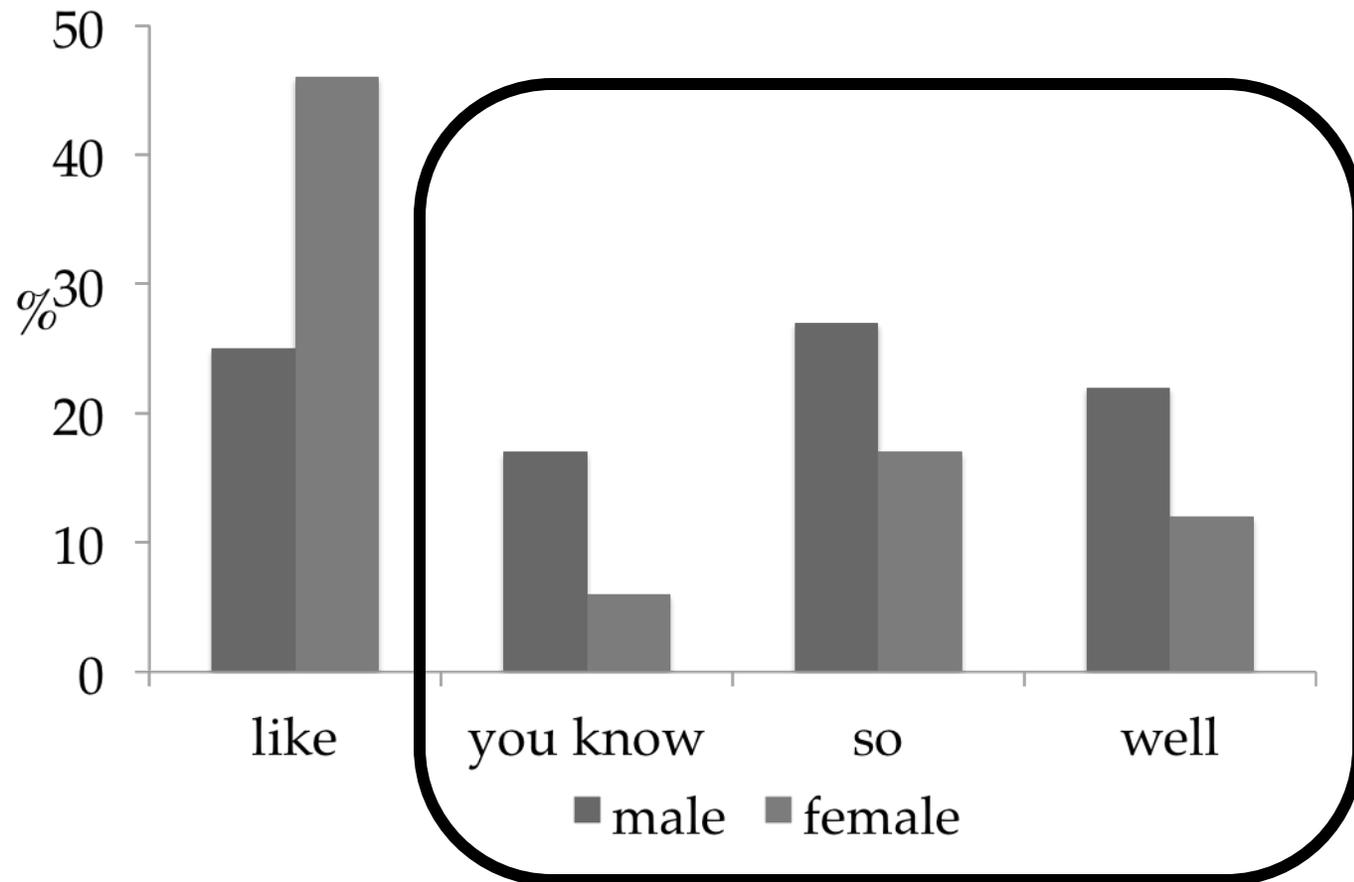
# Female lead, *like*



# Female lead, *like*



# Male lag



# What's going on?

- ❖ LP DM's are not that frequent. Even in these highly informal interactions
  - ✦ Only about **11%** of all utterances
- ❖ Striking sociolinguistic embedding!
  - ✦ "*socially diagnostic*" Pichler & Levey (2010:26)
- ❖ Not simply a suite of discourse-pragmatic functions
- ❖ Strong indications of linguistic change in progress
  - ✦ "*possibly indicative of linguistic change*" Pichler & Levey (2010:26)

# Multidimensional influences

- ❖ DMs do subjective, interactional and textual work.
- ❖ What do these social trends reflect?
  - ✦ Reorganization of multifunctional discourse-pragmatic systems?
    - ❖ Functions are changing
  - ✦ Lexical replacement?
    - ❖ One form replaces another for the same function
  - ✦ Grammaticalization
    - ❖ Form undergoes reanalysis

# Well...

- ❖ *Well* widely known to be a marker of
  - ✦ response
  - ✦ discourse boundary
  - ✦ response utterance initiator
  - ✦ starter
  - ✦ attention getter
- ❖ What is changing, the marker or the function?

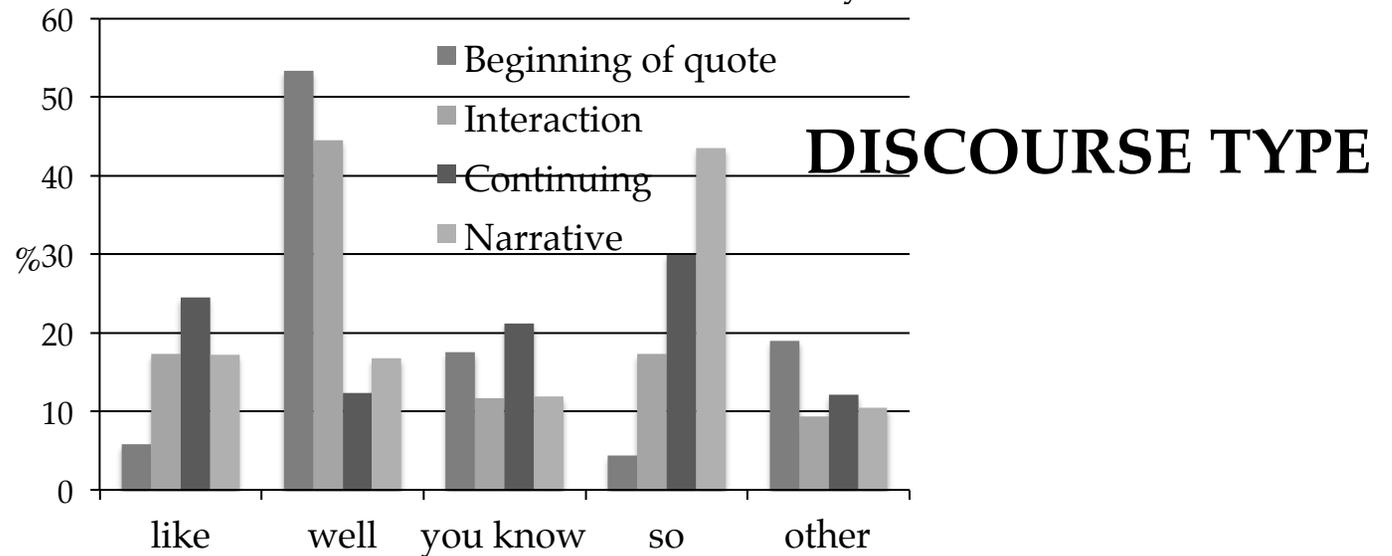
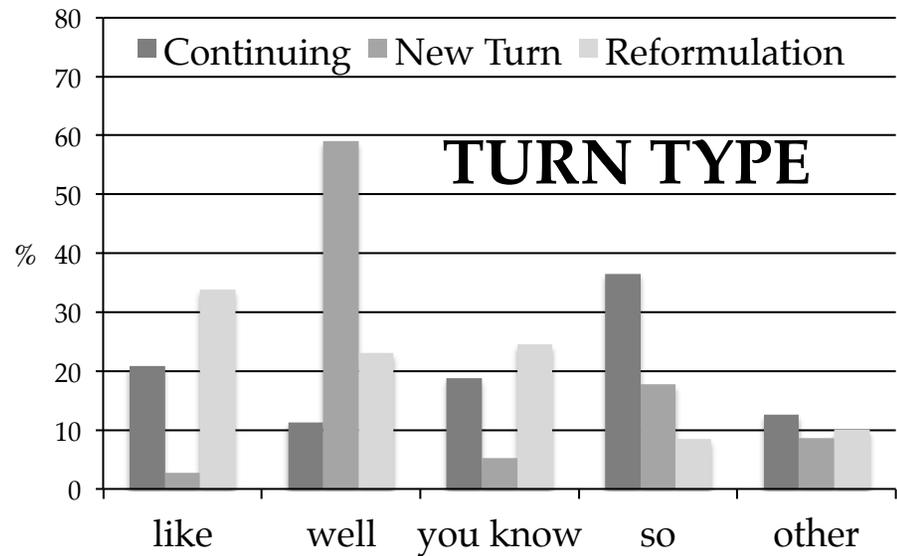
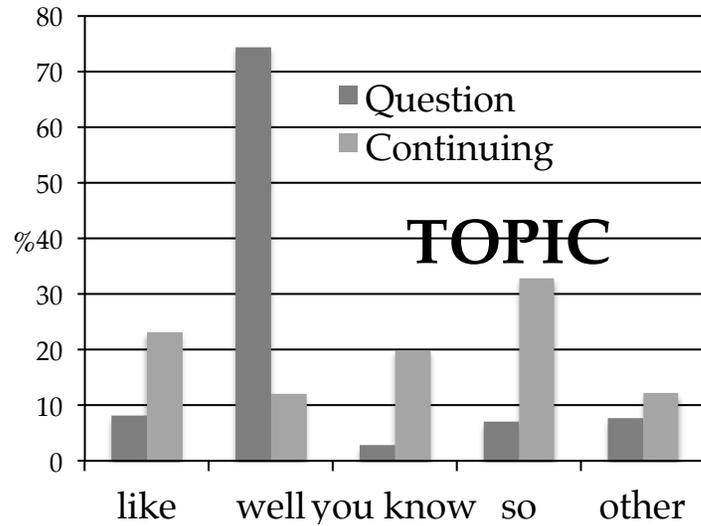
# Like ...

- ❖ *Like* widely reported, but often well defined function often lacking
  - ✦ Focus
    - ❖ Underhill 1988
  - ✦ Reformulation or discourse “link”
    - ❖ Andersen 2001:269, 273
  
- ❖ What is changing, the marker or the function?

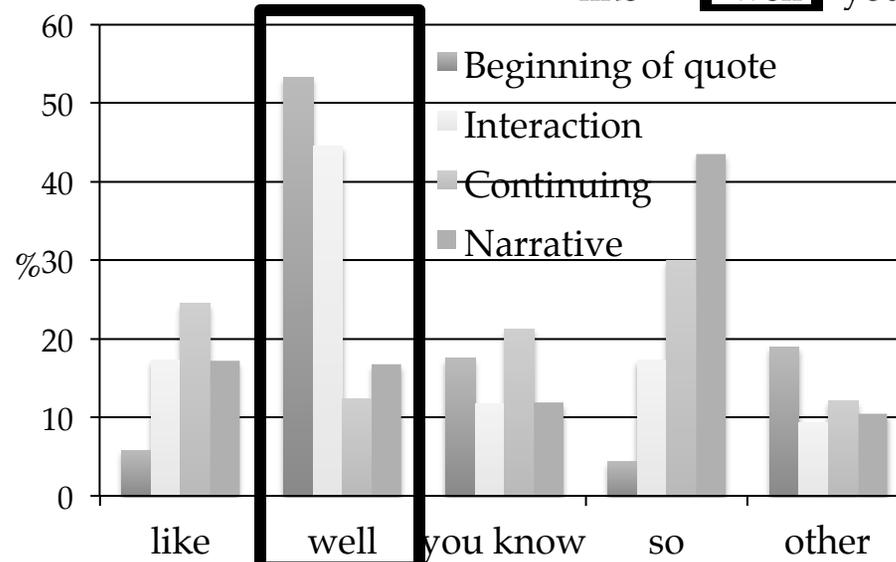
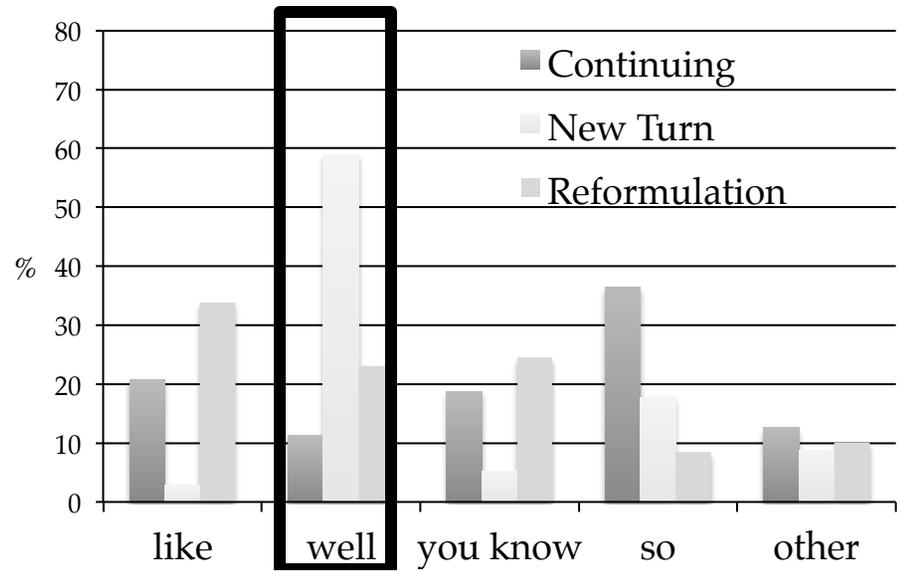
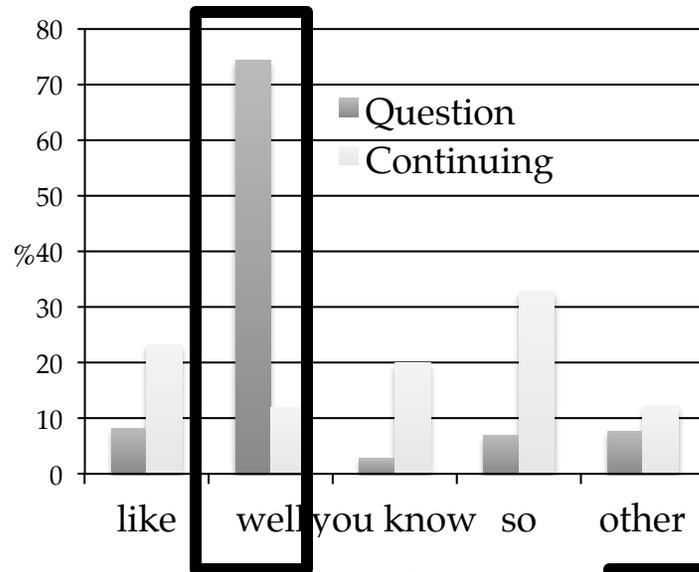
# Topic, text and discourse

- ❖ Left periphery is the “locus for topic continuity or change”
  - ✦ Traugott, 2013, Degand 2014
- ❖ Code for:
  - ✦ Type of interaction, *answer to a question, ongoing (linked) discourse*
  - ✦ Nature of the discourse, *narrative, back and forth interaction,*
  - ✦ Type of turn, *new, reformulated, ongoing*

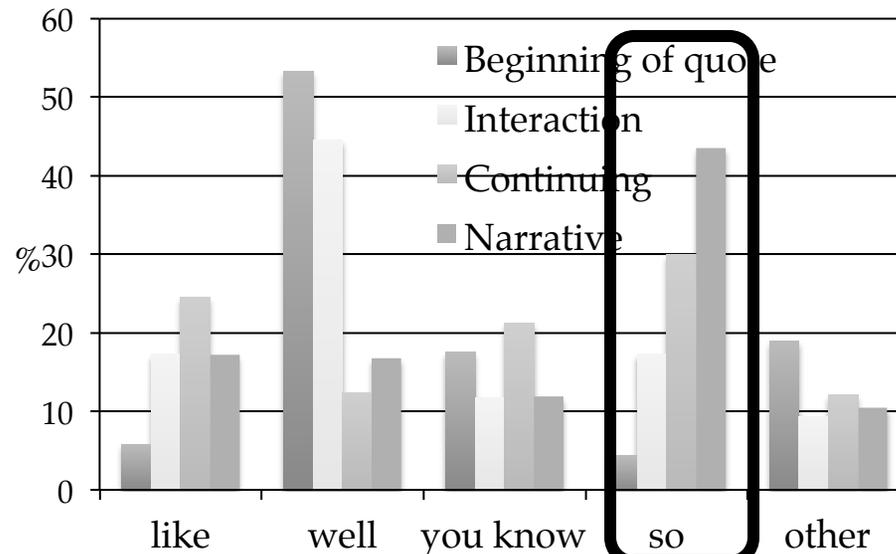
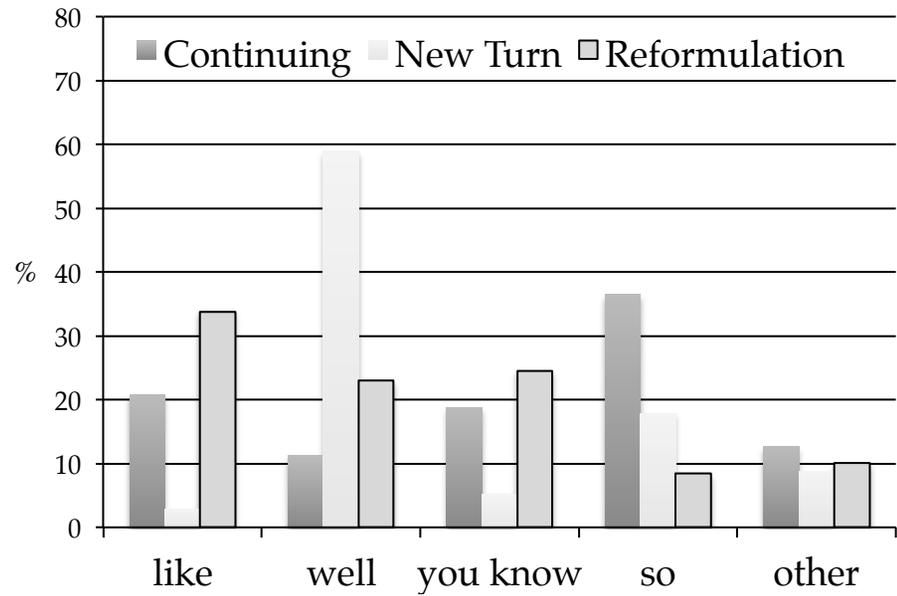
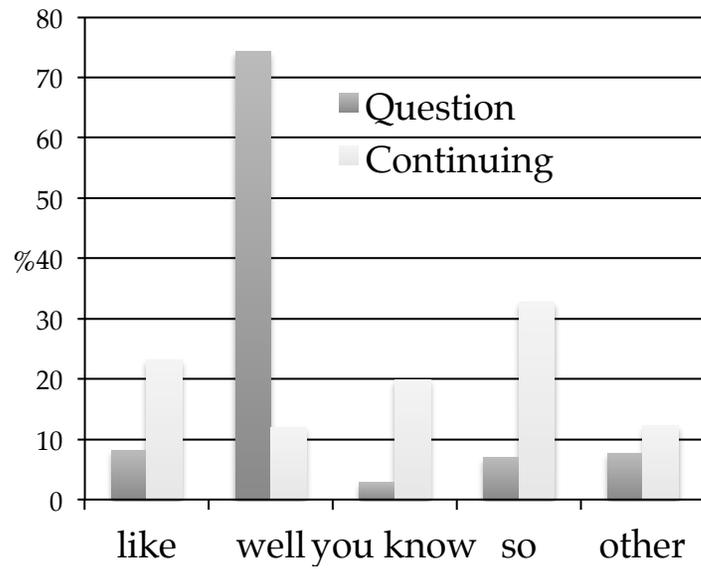
# DM functions



# *well*



# SO



# Interim Summary

- ❖ The DM system, like other, variable parts of grammar has many forms, but several main forms dominate
- ❖ DM's clearly share functions, but they are not as broadly multifunctional as previously thought
- ❖ Some DM's are highly correlated with certain functions
  - ❖ *well* = initiating; *so* = continuity

# How to study it?

- ❖ “Linguistic behavior, like other behavior, is subject to statistical variation that can best be accounted for by an underlying model that is probabilistic rather than deterministic in nature.”

❖ *Gillian Sankoff* 1973:82

# Logistic regression

<i>you know</i>	OLD	MIDDLE	YOUNG
N = 3125      Input	.14	.21	.07
<b>Type of interaction</b>			
Unprompted talk	.62 ↑	.56 ↑	.56 ↑
Answers question	.15 ↑	.20 ↑	.20 ↑
<i>Range</i>	47	36	36
<b>Discourse nature</b>			
Interaction	.57 ↑	[.52] ↑	[.55] ↑
Continuous talk	.53	[.52]	[.49]
Narrative	.35	[.40]	[.47]
<i>Range</i>	22		
<b>Type of turn</b>			
Reformulated	.60 ↑	.71 ↑	[.53]
Ongoing	.53	.50	[.52]
New turn	.39	.31	[.43]
<i>Range</i>	21	40	
<b>Education</b>			
No post-secondary	.44	[.56]	.38
Post-secondary	.56	[.48]	.61
<i>Range</i>	12		22
<b>Sex</b>			
Female	[.48]	[.53]	.34
Male	[.52]	[.48]	.69
<i>Range</i>			25

*obsolescent*

# Logistic regression

<i>so</i>	OLD	MIDDLE	YOUNG
N = 3125      Input	.19	.30	.20
<b>Type of interaction</b>			
Other	.63 ↑	.56 ↑	.60 ↑
Answer to question	.13 ↑	.18 ↑	.15 ↑
<i>Range</i>	50	38	45
<b>Discourse nature</b>			
Interaction	.39	.57	.43
Continuous talk	.46	.43	.50
Narrative	.74	.63	.61
<i>Range</i>	14	20	18
<b>Type of turn</b>			
Reformulated	.16 ↓	.22 ↓	.15 ↓
Ongoing	.54 ↓	.56 ↓	.57 ↓
New turn	.62 ↓	.57 ↓	.61 ↓
<i>Range</i>	46	35	46
<b>Education</b>			
No post-secondary	.41	.24	[.50]
Post-secondary	.58	.58	[.51]
<i>Range</i>	17	34	
<b>Sex</b>			
Female	[.49]	.45	[.51]
Male	[.51]	.56	[.48]
<i>Range</i>		9	

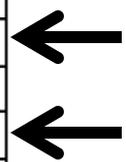
*stable*

# Logistic regression

<i>well</i>	OLD	MIDDLE	YOUNG
N = 3125    Input	.312	.176	.094
<b>Type of interaction</b>			
Other	.35	.40	.37
Answer to question	<b>.90</b>	<b>.92</b>	<b>.92</b>
<i>Range</i>	55	48	55
<b>Discourse nature</b>			
Interaction	.53	[.43]	.44
Continuous talk	.53	[.50]	<b>.58</b>
Narrative	.39	[.59]	.34
<i>Range</i>	14		24
<b>Type of turn</b>			
Reformulated	.60	[.55]	.66
Ongoing	.43	[.47]	.40
New turn	.61	[.57]	.65
<i>Range</i>	18		26
<b>Education</b>			
No post-secondary	.60 ↑	.58 ↑	.56 ↑
Post-secondary	.41 ↑	.48 ↑	.45 ↑
<i>Range</i>			
<b>Sex</b>			
Female	[.49]	[.53]	<b>.45</b>
Male	[.51]	[.47]	<b>.56</b>
<i>Range</i>			

!

*stable*



# Logistic regression

<i>like</i>	OLD	MIDDLE	YOUNG
N = 3125      Input	.076	.088	.346
<b>Type of interaction</b>			
Other	.57 ↑	.55 ↑	.55 ↑
Answer to question	.28 ↑	.26 ↑	.26 ↑
Range	29	29	29
<b>Discourse nature</b>			
Interaction	.61 ↑	.59 ↑	[.52]
Continuous talk	.55 ↑	.56 ↑	[.49]
Narrative	.26 ↑	.22 ↑	[.50]
Range	35	37	
<b>Type of turn</b>			
Reformulated	.77	[.60]	.66
Ongoing	.53	[.50]	.38
New turn	.29	[.42]	.41
Range	46		25
<b>Education</b>			
No post-secondary	[.46]	.71	[.52]
Post-secondary	[.54]	.44	[.48]
Range		27	
<b>Sex</b>			
Female	[.46]	[.49]	.60
Male	[.54]	[.51]	.39
Range			21

*grammatical  
change*

# Mixed effects model *like*

Number of obs: 4151, groups: indiv, 72

Fixed effects:

	Estimate	Std. Error	z	value	Pr(> z )	
(Intercept)	0.040444	0.585325	0.069	0.944913		
age:discourse.1REFORMULATION						
age:discourse.1N	0.019196	0.008227	2.333	0.019629	*	
age:discourse.1D	0.010875	0.004920	2.210	0.027090	*	
age:turn.1NARRATIVE						
age:turn.1D	-0.025320	0.008202	-3.087	0.002021	**	
age:turn.1I	-0.033778	0.009352	-3.612	0.000304	***	
age:answer1ANSWER						
age:answer1C	-0.004644	0.007958	-0.584	0.559520		

Signif. codes: 0 '\*\*\*' 0.001 '\*\*' 0.01 '\*' 0.05 '.' 0.1 ' ' 1

# Summary

- ❖ Once function is accounted for the trajectories of discourse-pragmatic change in apparent time reveal:
- ❖ Stability of form and function
  - ✧ *well* marks an answer to a question and the onset of quoted speech
  - ✧ *so* marks continuity, particularly in story-telling

# Summary

- ❖ Sometimes pragmatic functions stable
  - ✦ “*while particular forms may, in fact, be quite transient, the pragmatic functions themselves are preserved*”
  - ❖ Brinton 1996:278
- ❖ In other cases, e.g. *like* the evidence suggests grammatical development
  - ✦ Incremental increase in frequency from older to younger people!
  - ✦ Female lead develops over time
  - ✦ Levelling across discourse type
  - ✦ Specialization for type of clause

# Clause marking

Female, 87

*So* I didn't make any comment  
to that.

*So* we get back to the door  
*and* he said "xx?"

I said "xxx."

He said "xxx."

*So* I gave him my name and I  
gave him my phone number.

Female, 16

*Like* my sister came home from  
Europe so everything-

*Like* she brought all her European  
clothes back,

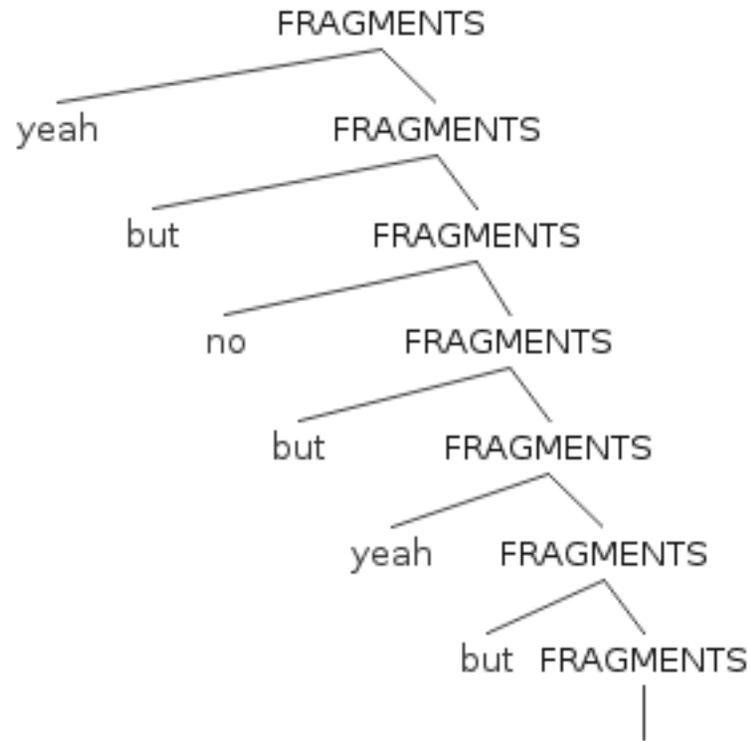
*and* she has so many nice things

'cause *Like* I'll ask her to borrow it  
*and* she doesn't want me to and it's  
like- it's upsetting.

*Like* it's really nice,

*Like* you don't find this stuff in  
Canada

# Is there a DM structure?



*A string of apparently disconnected babble...*

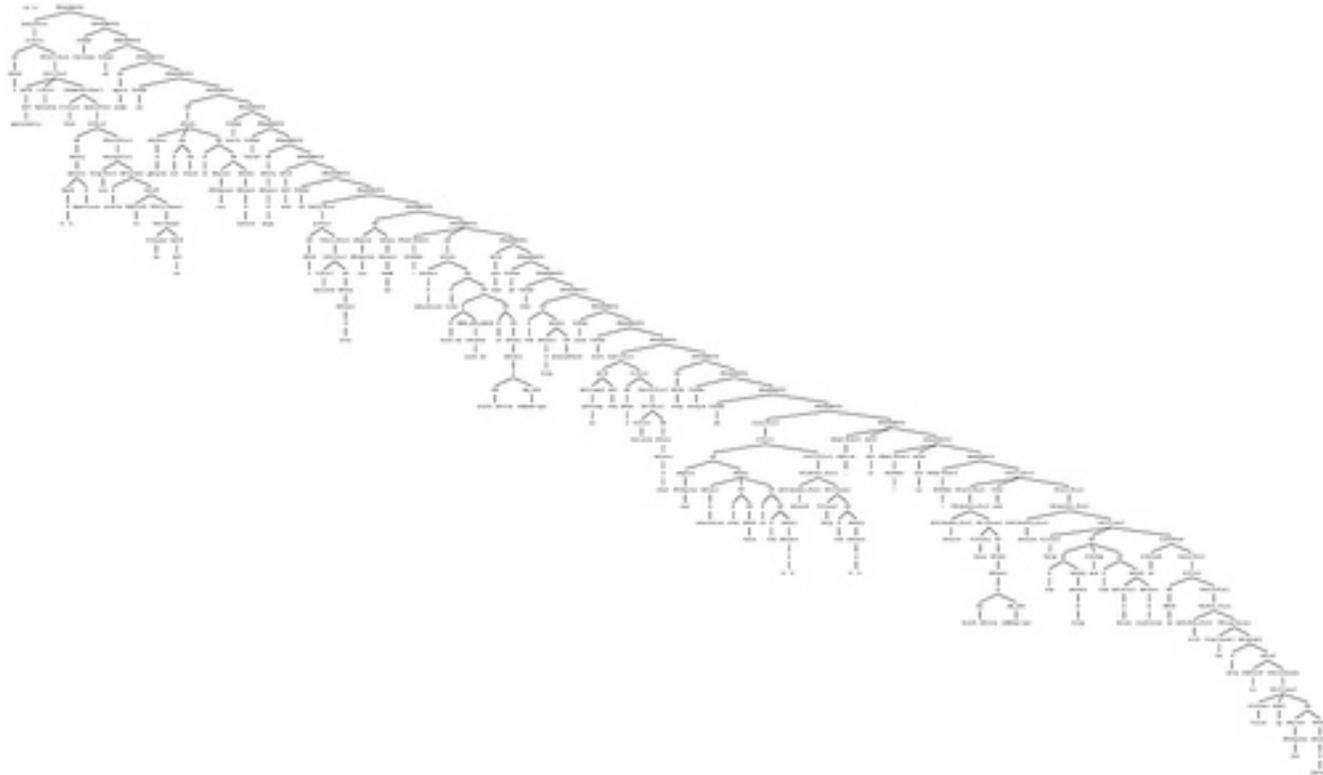
Mark Liberman, Language Log, 09 / 2007

# Grammar?

I personally believe that U.S. Americans are unable to do so because, *uh*, some, *uh*, people out there in our nation don't have maps. And, *uh*, *I believe* that our education, like such as in South Africa and, *uh*, the Iraq everywhere *like such as*, and, *I believe* that they should- our education over here in the U.S. should help the U.S., *uh*, or, *uh*, should help South Africa. And should help the Iraq and the Asian countries *so* we will be able to build up our future [for our children]

Parsed segment of an answer by *Lauren Caitlin Upton*, age 18, 2007 to a question at the Miss Teen USA pageant

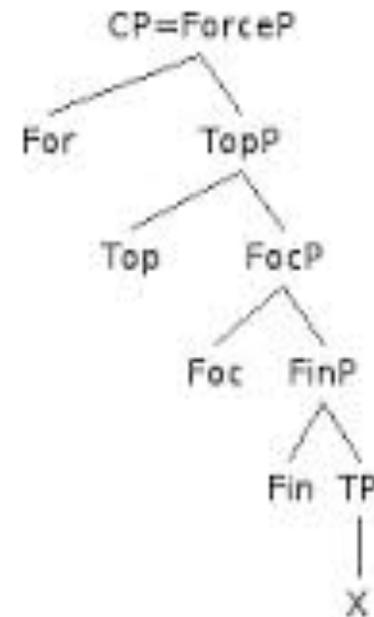
# Grammar?



Parsed segment of an answer by *Lauren Caitlin Upton*, age 18, 2007 to a question at the Miss Teen USA pageant

# Syntax of DM's

- ❖ Syntacticians are starting to realize that DM's are actually systematic and patterned with their own syntactic slots
  - ❖ Interrogative and relative pronouns
  - ❖ Topics
  - ❖ Focalized elements
    - ❖ Rizzi 1997; Cinque & Rizzi 2010
  - ❖ Particles
    - ❖ Massam 2006; Haegeman 2013



# Syntax of DM's

- ❖ A SPEECH ACT [SA] layer, two tiers
  1. **[SA1] Attention**
    - ❖ Establishes a discourse relation
  2. **[SA2] Consolidation**
    - ❖ Reinforces an already established relation — *linking?*
      - ✦ Haegeman 2013

# The cartography of LP

ATTENTION

ADV

CONSOLIDATION

PAR

ADV

A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H	I	J	K	L	M	N	O	P	Q
ATTENTION	ACKNOWLEDGE	AGREE/DISAGREE	UH	CONJ 1	ADV	SLOT 1	SLOT 2	ADV	UH	CONJ 2	UH	AGREE/DISAGREE	UH	PARENTHETICAL	ADVERB	SUBJECT
oh (boy)	okay	yeah	uh	and	then	so	you know		uh	if	uh	yeah	uh	I guess	then	
gosh	yes	yes, yeah	um	because	now	well			um	when	um	no	um	I mean	basically	
wow	oh	no	ah	but	actually	now			ah		ah		ah	I think	now	
golly	right	nope			basically	fine									whatever	
see		yeah, exactly			then again										actually	
hey		yeah, yeah													maybe	
															probably	
															meanwhile	
															currently	
															eventually	
															finally	
															hopefully	
															occasionally	
															technically	
															again	
															sure	
															you know what	

Hesitations

Conjunction

Two DM slots

Conjunction

Hesitations

Adverbs

# Summing up

- ❖ What do the social and discourse-pragmatic developments across these LP DMs reveal?
- ❖ The left periphery is systematic and hierarchically organized
  - ✦ “*finely articulated structures*” (Labov 1982:75)
  - ✦ “*richly articulate and rigidly ordered*” (Cinque 2006)

# Summing up

- ❖ DM's shift by "*gradual micro-step development*", just like change in progress elsewhere in the grammar
  - ✦ Labov, 1972 *inter alia*; Traugott, under review
  
- ❖ Integration of discourse and syntax
  - ✦ "*syntacticization of discourse*"
    - ❖ Sankoff 1976; Massam 2006; Haegeman 2013 etc.
  - ✦ "*more goes on in syntax and semantics than occasionally meets the eye*"
    - ❖ Boyer 2014

# Summing up

- ❖ Reorganization of multifunctional discourse-pragmatic systems
  - ✦ Some forms and functions are stable
- ❖ Lexical replacement
  - ✦ A suite of forms, most infrequent, some rare, possibly a slot of constant renewal
- ❖ Grammaticalization
  - ✦ *Like* is undergoing reanalysis
  - ✦ Watch for ongoing developments

*Well you know I suppose that's it!*

*So you know I guess that's it!*

*Like you know I think that's it!*

# Thanks to...

- ❖ The Social Science and Humanities Research Council of Canada (SSHRC) for research grants 2001-present



Social Sciences and Humanities  
Research Council of Canada

Conseil de recherches en  
sciences humaines du Canada

Canada

- ❖ The Killam Trust for the Research Fellowship 2013-2015.



# Thanks to...

- ❖ *Alexandra D'Arcy* for her foundational work on *like* in Toronto
  - ✦ (D'Arcy 2005)
- ❖ My post-doctoral assistant who is extracting and coded the thousands of tokens
  - ✦ *Bridget Jankowski*
- ❖ My Senior Research Assistant
  - ✦ *Nader Mohammed*

