

# Discourse contexts within sociolinguistic interviews, a presentation of the LANCHART DCA coding scheme

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(Language Change in REAL Time)

# Overview

- The problem: Big data, diverse data: comparability
- The Discourse Context Analysis
- Discussion: Strong points, moot points and weak points
- Conclusion

CHAPTER one

# THE PROBLEM

# Language change in real time

- Studying language change in real time will almost always make you dependent on
- someone else's data

# Ideally...

- Ideally we would want all data to be collected following current best practice
- But note that yesterday's best practice may differ significantly from today's

# An example

- **How to obtain vernacular data**
- One school: group sessions with people who know each other very well will keep each participant in line because friends or family will immediately notice once an informant strays from his vernacular (Gumperz and Blom)
- Another school: Break through the informant's natural defences during the sociolinguistic interview by using the tricks of the trade (Labov 1984)

# Comparability

- Obviously, we want to compare and only compare likes
- This means that we have to control for what we do NOT want to vary, viz. the SITUATION
- We want to compare what is as far as we can get SIMILAR SITUATIONS with a DISTANCE IN TIME

# Old data and new data

- Old data may differ in a lot of ways but in one respect we have to live with them, they are OLD
- This means that they have been recorded with what is now old equipment
- That is a moot point for all of us: The equipment is a hidden variable we can almost never control for



CHAPTER two

**LANCHART AS AN  
EXAMPLE**

# Starting point: STYLE

- The Labovian notion of STYLE
- The impossibility of getting at the real vernacular; observer's paradox
- Why would the informant NOT be casual with the interviewer?
- Changing relationships between interviewer and interviewee
- Casual vs. formal style

## The solution: The DCA

Instead of a simple dichotomy between *a formal* and *a casual* style, we adopted a Discourse Context Analysis format with six dimensions, hence a lot more potential 'styles' than just two

# Sources of inspiration

- Labov 1966, 1972, 1984, 2001
- Albris on style analysis in Gregersen and Pedersen 1991
- Halliday 1984
- Levinson 1992
- Macaulay 2005

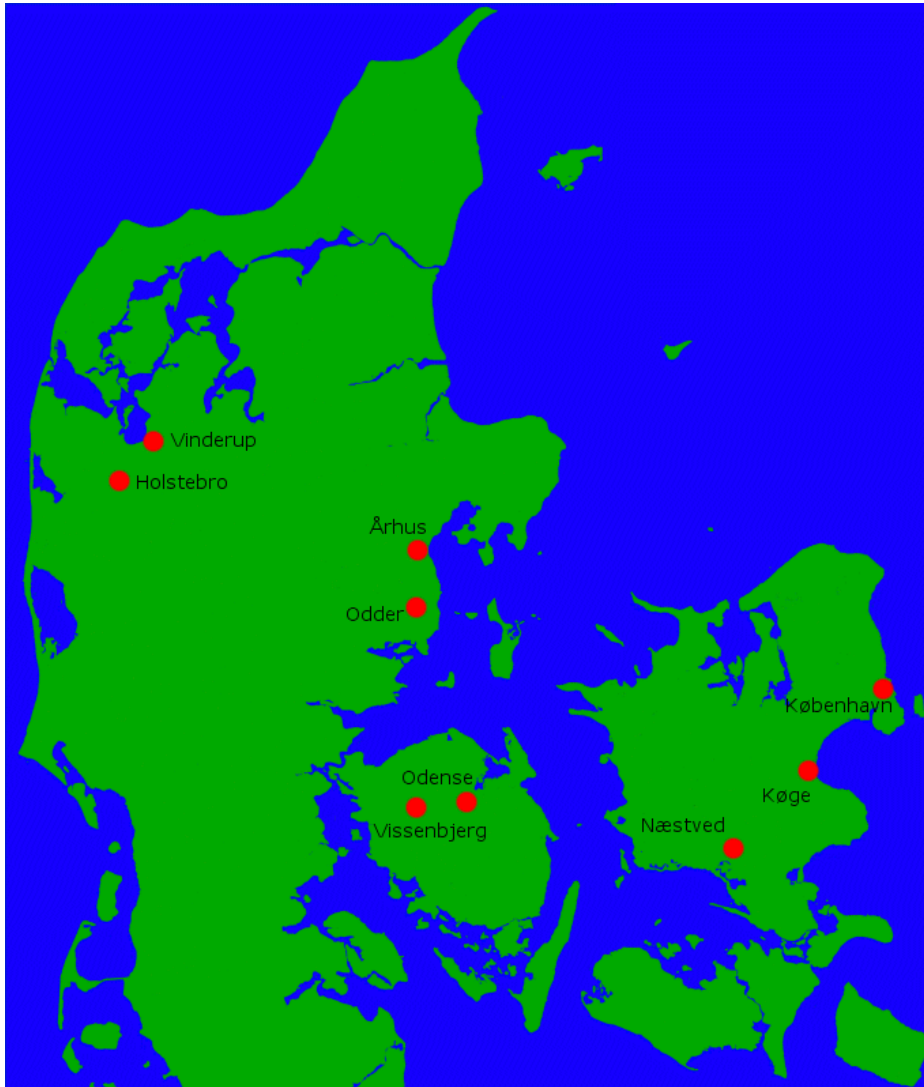
# The six dimensions

- **Full annotations** (i.e. all passages have to be assigned to a category):
  - S (Type of Speech Event),
  - A (Activity Type) and
  - M (Type of Macro Speech Act)
- **Partial annotations** (i.e. only passages which fulfill the criteria for assignment to a category are annotated):
  - **G (Genre),**
  - I (Interaction) and
  - U (Enunciation)

# An ultra brief history of the DCA

The DCA was developed through a close analysis of an *exploratory corpus* consisting of 21 recordings selected so as to maximize the variation in the total LANCHART corpus

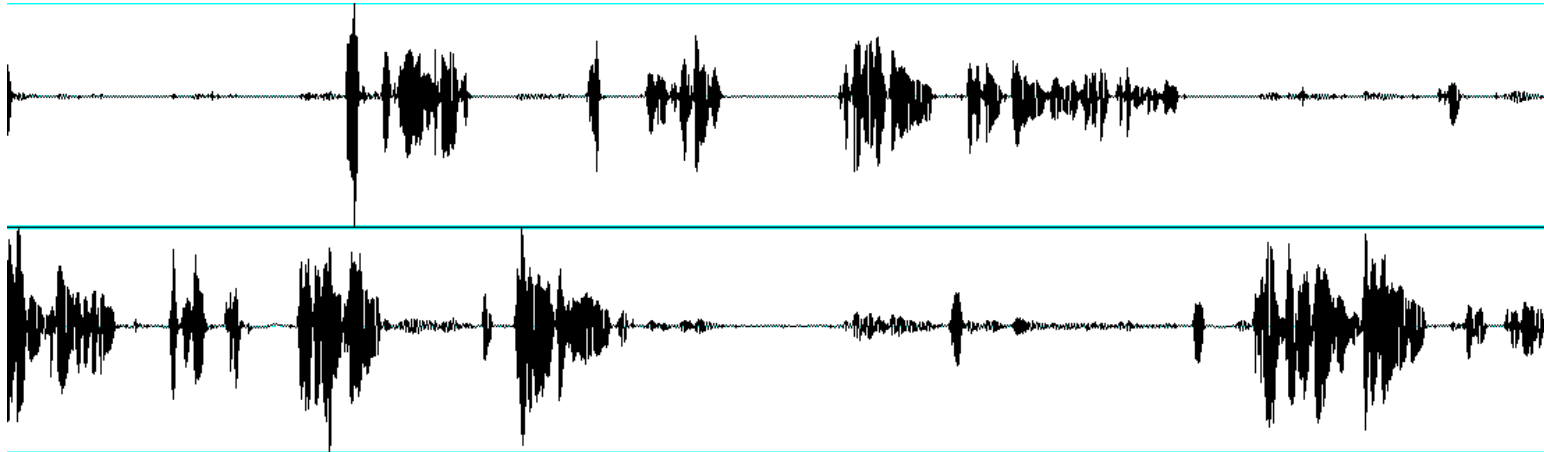
# Exploratory sub-corpus of the LANCHART corpus



21 conversations selected such that all the non-linguistic dimensions of variation in the LANCHART material would be present

- geographical location
- time of recording
- type of recording
- informant gender, social class and age
- relationship between informant and interviewer

# The dimension: Type of conversation



Solo interview, known

Solo interview, unknown

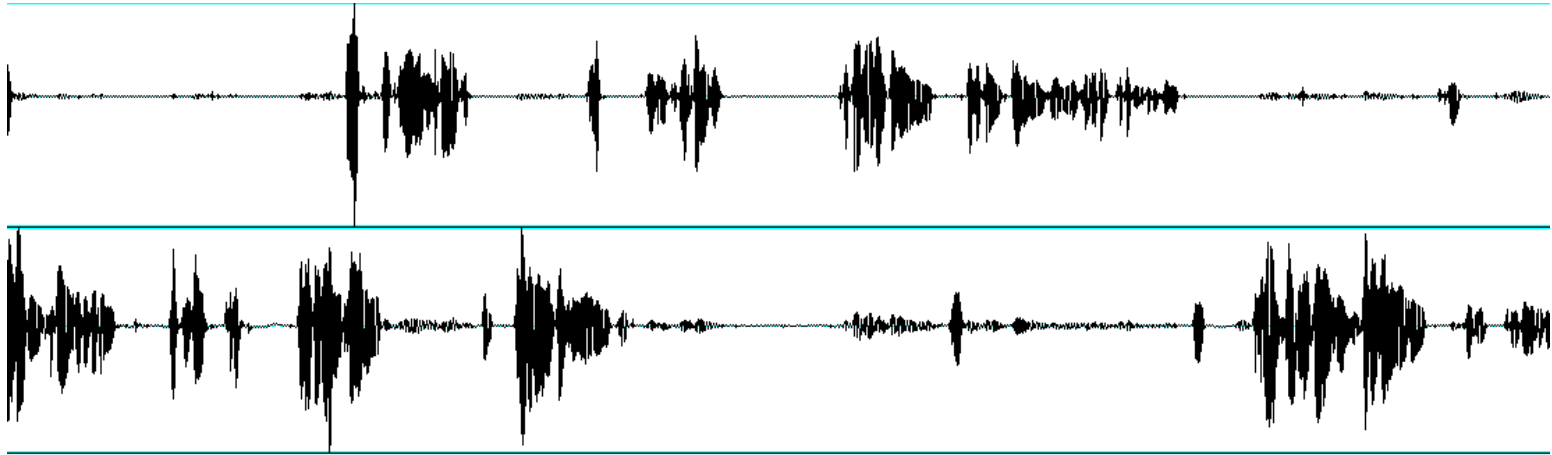
Peer group, known

Peer group, unknown

Peer group, no interviewer



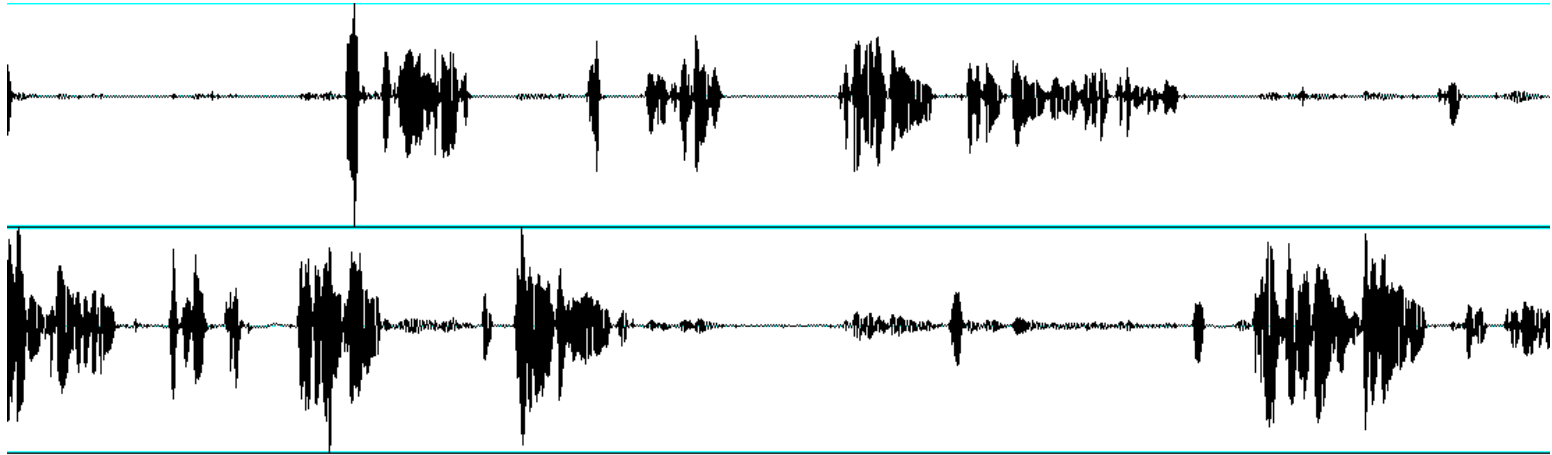
# The dimension of Activity type



Type of conversation

Activity type

# Activity types: What do we stage?



Type of conversation

Background information

Conversation

Activity type

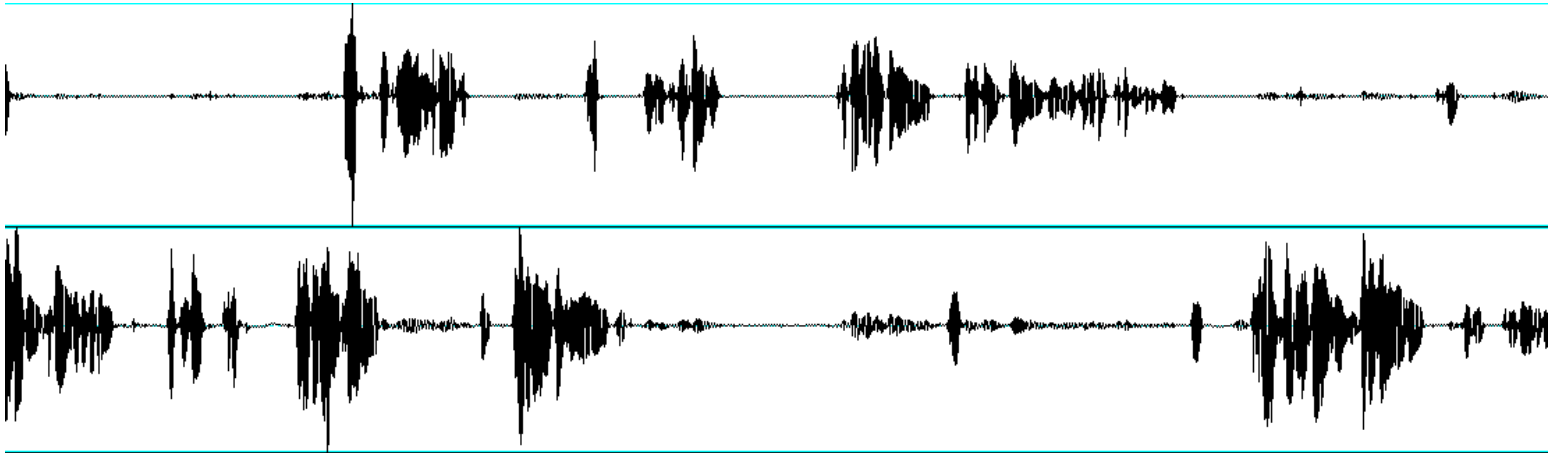
Conversation non-participant

Elicited speech

Language attitude data

Consent form

# Macro speech acts: Why macro?

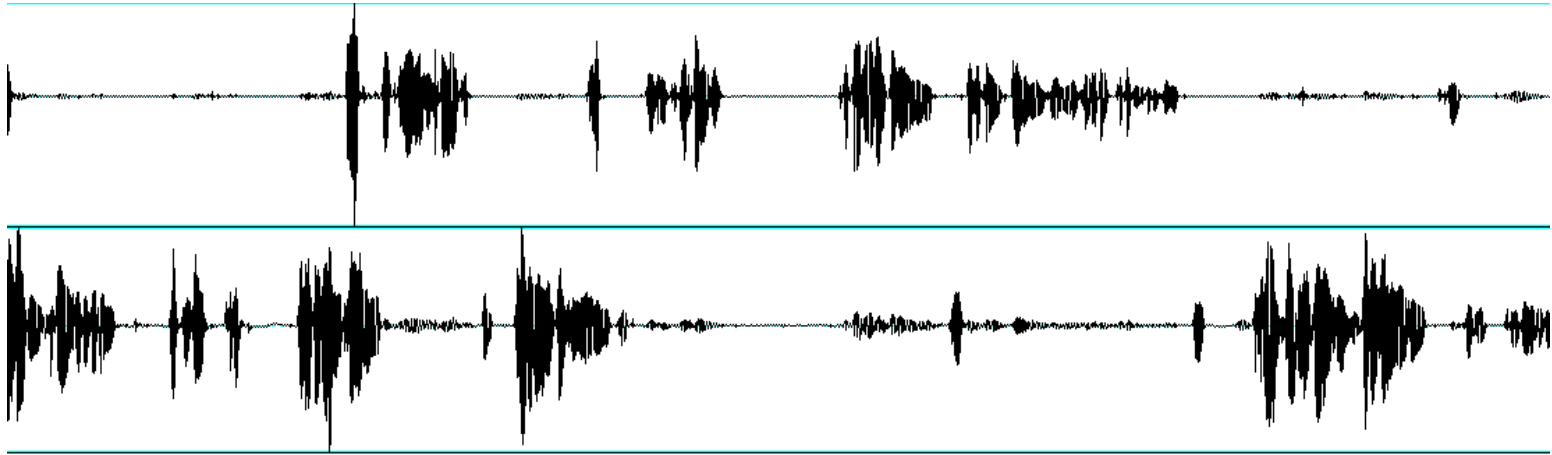


Type of conversation

Activity type

Macro speech act

# Categories of the Macro speech act dimension



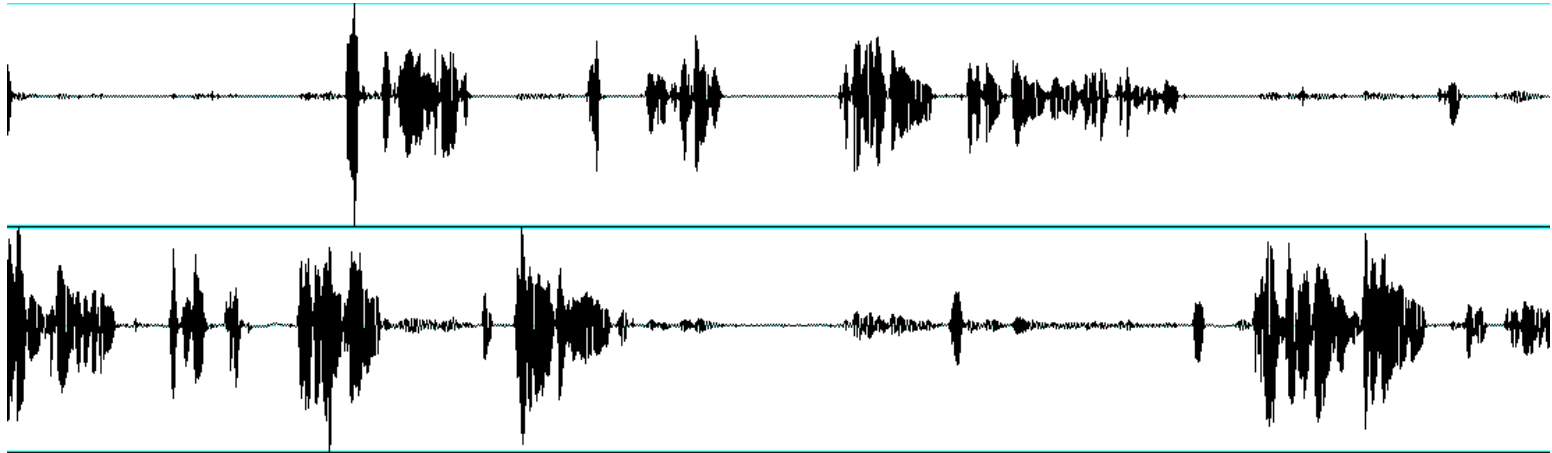
Type of conversation

Activity type

Exchange of: Knowledge Attitudes Emotions

Speech w. action Fictions

# Interaction



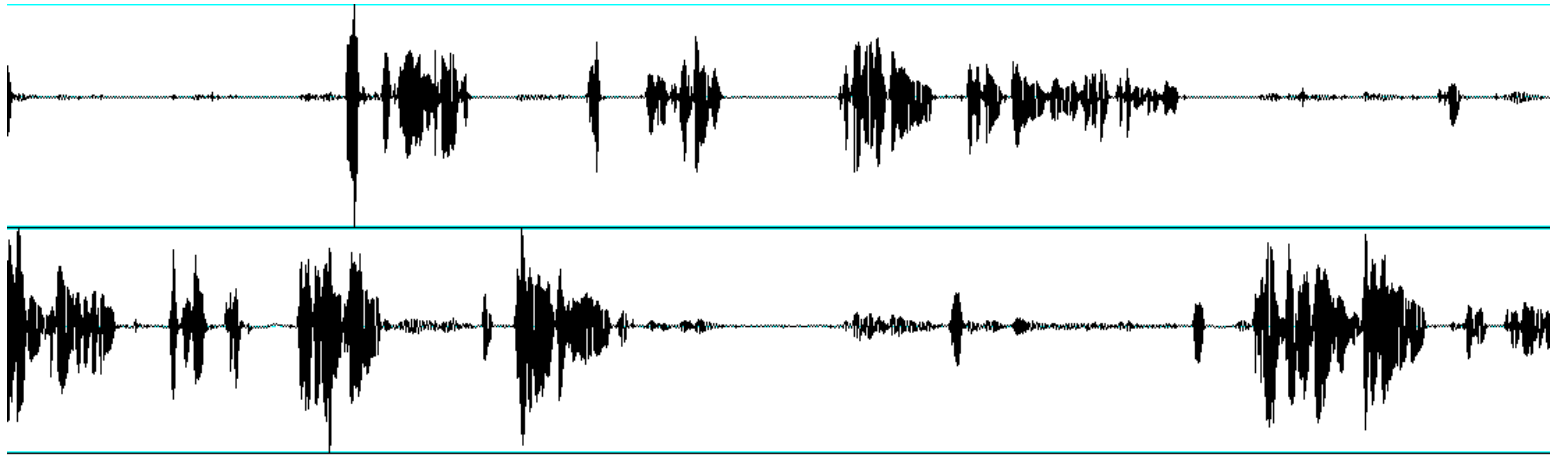
Type of conversation

Activity type

Macro speech act

Interaction structure

# Categories of Interaction



Type of conversation

Activity type

Macro speech act

Absence of  
asymmetry

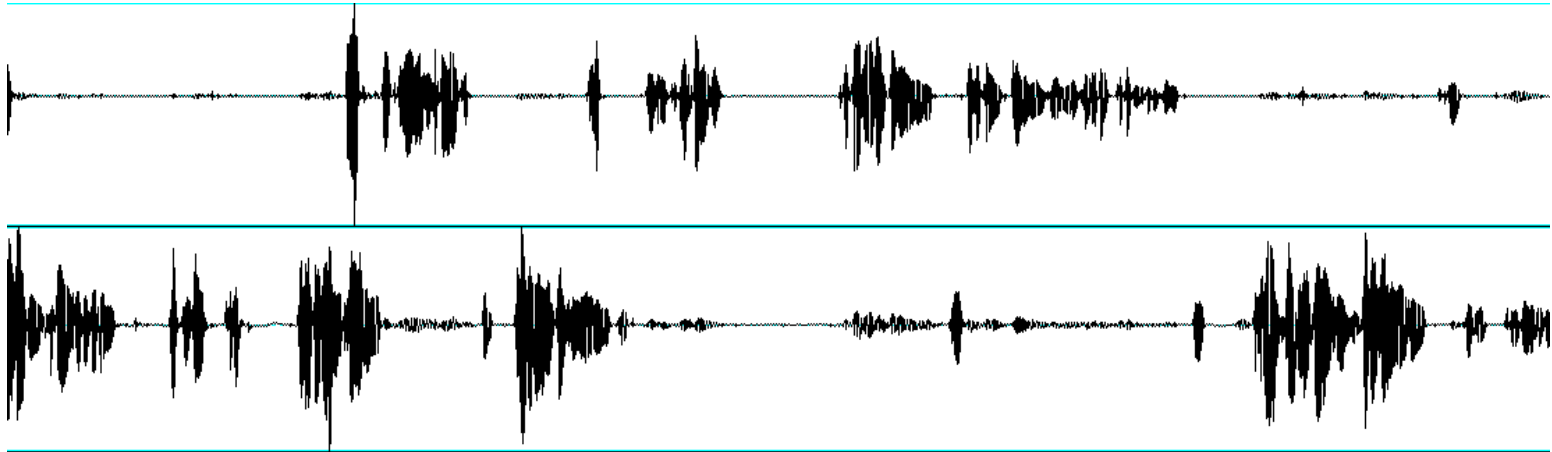
Reversal: Int. R;  
Inf. I

Inf.s taking over  
(Groups)

Fight for the floor

Monologue

# The Genre dimension



Type of conversation

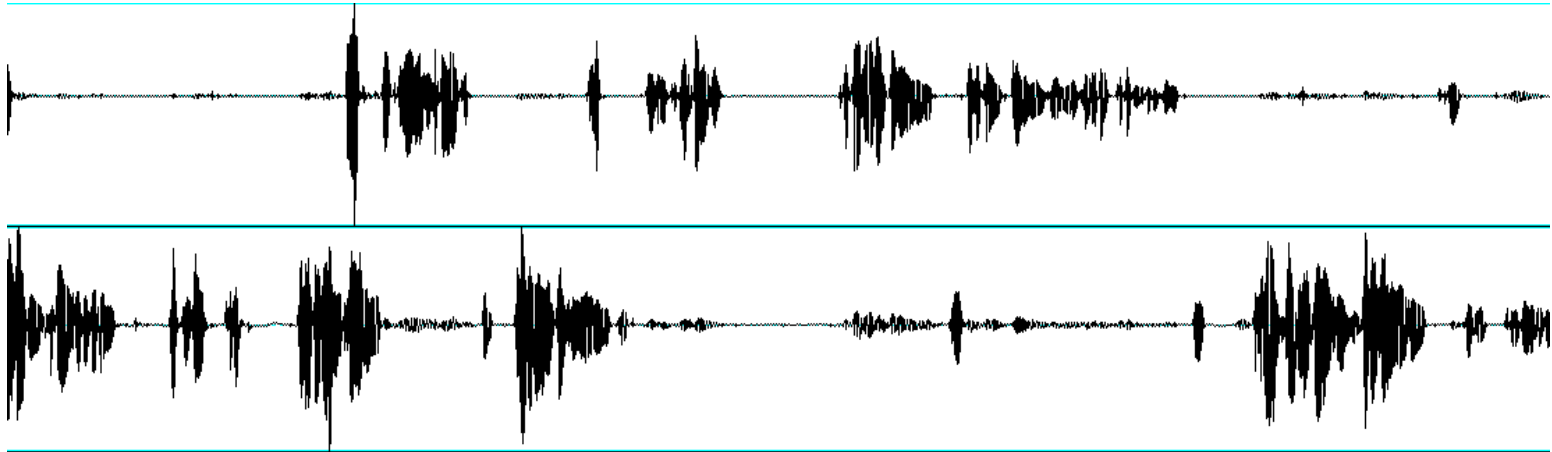
Activity type

Macro speech act

Interaction structure

**Genre**

# Categories of GENRE



Type of conversation

Activity type

Macro speech act

Interaction structure

Narratives	Specific account	General account	Soap box	Gossip	Confidences	Reflection	Jokes
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# Labovian Narratives

- Fixed questions put in – preferably – exactly the same way
- Supposed to elicit the vernacular – overcoming the observer’s paradox
- The reason being that the sociolinguistic monitor is neutralized by reliving a crucial moment in the informant’s life

# What about other types of epic stuff?

- General accounts: NOT a specific event and not necessarily experienced by the teller
- Specific accounts: NOT reportable stuff but has to be experienced by teller
- OBS! Interaction!
- The personal narrative , the general accounts and the specific accounts together make up *the narrative field*

# Relationships between categories

- The idea of having six dimensions which are in principle independent is to grasp the interaction between categories in the process of analysis:
- Monologue and the narrative field
- Monologues and the genre of Soap box
- Exchange of Emotions and the genre of Confidences

# Relationships inside categories

- What if a gossipy story is told as a personal narrative?
- What if a confidence is formed as a specific account?
- Our solution: Go for the rarest category! Do NOT use mixed categories!

# The special case of ENUNCIATION

In order to separate what the speaker 'says' on behalf of him- or herself from what s/he is not to be held responsible for because he or she is:

- Quoting another person
- Imitating or parodying another speaker
- Reading aloud what we have told him to
- Trying to repeat a sentence given as a stimulus as fast as he or she can

WE ANNOTATE SUCH PASSAGES WITH Ucil

- NB that the DCA annotations are solely based on the transcripts

# The Distribution of Discourse Contexts

- What categories are always present?
- Only the category of 'Exchange of knowledge' is present in all the materials. This is then our candidate for a 'neutral' category for comparison of all recordings. It seems that whenever an interview or group discussion is staged, there will be exchange of knowledge.
- This is used for controlling the phonetic analysis

# The DCA coding system

<b>ENUNCIATION</b>	Utterance(s) not the total responsibility of utterer (QILIR)			Utterance the responsibility of utterer (Other)				
<b>MACRO SPEECH ACT</b>	Exchange of Information (Inf)	Exchange of Emotion (Emo)	Exchange of Attitudes (Att)	Speech Accompanying Action (Act)	Exchange of Fiction (Fiction)			
<b>SPEECH EVENT</b>	Single person interview, interlocutors unknown to each other (SingleUkn)		Single person interview, interlocutors known to each other (SingleKn)	More than one interviewee, interlocutors unknown to each other (GroupUkn)	More than one interviewee, interlocutors known to each other (GroupKn)			
<b>GENRE</b>	Narratives (Narr)	General Account (GenAcc)	Specific Account (SpAcc)	Reflection (Refl)	Soap Box (SoapB)	Confidences (Conf)	Gossip (Gossip)	Other
<b>INTERACTION</b>	Absence of Asymmetry (14)	Monologue (18)	Reversal of Roles (15)	Struggle for the floor (16)	Informants taking over (17)	Other		
<b>ACTIVITY TYPE</b>	Conversation (Conv)	Background Interview (SocBackgInt)	Language Attitude Study (LAttStudy)	Consent Form (ConsForm)	Conversation with non-participant (ConvNonP)			

CHAPTER three

# **AN ANALYSIS OF THE DCA**



# An analysis of the DCA

- What everybody needs: What kind of speech event, what goes on inside it as a consequence of the field methods used and the data you want to collect; what is the relationship between interviewer and interviewee: the dimensions of ***Speech event and Activity Type (green on the handout)***

# Not so straightforward dimensions

- Genre and Macro Speech Act as complementing dimensions, one is partial (G), the other one is full (M)
- The categories inside the G dimension may be tailored to your needs
- Interaction: the categories are crucially dependent on the perception of the speech event as basically **an interview** (and what, I ask you, is that actually in your culture?)

# Is this really necessary?

Well, that depends of course...

- On the amount of data you have and the amount of resources for coding it
- On how different your old and new data really are
- On your focus: If it is on change you should be aware of the pitfalls of concluding from incomparable data

# Some results

The variable *du/man* and the DCs

“The analysis shows that all the six DCA variables are statistically significant with respect to explaining the variation in the data. In addition, all the fixed effects and interactions of the best model without the DCA variables are still chosen as significant in the new, more elaborate model. This means that the DCA variables influence the choice of generic pronoun even when taking into account that the use of *du* is changing during the period studied, that it is distributed unevenly with respect to geographical origin, gender, social class and age of the informant, and that the choice of pronoun is influenced by the syntactic function, the type of reference and whether it occurs in a conditional construction or not. In other words, such pragmatic factors as the type of interaction and the genre used by the interlocutors contribute significantly to determining the use of one variant rather than another.”

Jensen and Gregersen forthcoming: 13

CHAPTER four

**CONCLUSION**

# Minimal and ideal requirements

We always *need* metadata on:

- Field methods used (e.g. relationships between interviewer and interviewee), equipment used, ***type of speech event*** and ***activity types*** used during the recording

It would be *nice* in addition to have:

- Knowledge of how the research group conceptualizes the situational parameters (G and M) and the responsibility for utterances (E)

# The manual, the manual, the manual

- MAKE YOUR OWN MANUAL!
- Coding without a manual is not only foolish but downright counterproductive since no one may be expected to remember the countless crucial decisions taken during the coding process if they are not written down
- PUBLISH IT ON THE NET!
- There is no excuse for keeping the manual you have developed, a secret! Share it with everyone interested in your results!

# The LANCHART manual

- Go to [www.lanchart.hum.ku.dk](http://www.lanchart.hum.ku.dk)
- press on:
- publications
- press on:
- reports and manuals
- Look for manuals and you will find:
- [The Discourse Context Analysis \(DCA\) manual \(English version\)](#)



# References

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# Thanks

- To the Danish National Research Foundation for generous support to the LANCHART Centre 2005-2015
- To the group of 10 student assistants and 3 research assistants who developed the DCA
- To the many coders who practised it
- and
- To the audience for not falling asleep (or at least not snoring if you did)