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On the equivalence and multifunctionality of discourse markers in language contact situations

1. Introduction[1]

This paper addresses the dynamics underlying the borrowing of discourse markers in language contact situations. More specifically, it discusses analyses by Salmons (1990), Goss and Salmons (2000), and Fuller (2001), who argue that English discourse markers have been borrowed in long-term contact into German-American dialects.[2] Consider, for example, the following data from Texas German, illustrating the use of the English discourse markers *well* and *you know*.

(1) Well, da sind Leute, gewehnlich was gutes Geld gemacht haben durch die Jahre.
     Well, there are some people, usually those who made good money throughout the
     years. (1-1-1-26)[3]

(2) Oh der war raus und hat tires gechanged, you know.
     Oh he was outside and changed tires, you know.' (1-114-1-8)

At the same time, German-American dialects are claimed to have lost much of the native discourse-marking system of German (Salmons 1990, Fuller 2001). The paper is structured as follows. In section 2 I summarize the main claims made by previous analyses of discourse markers in German-American dialects. Based in large part on data from a large on-line corpus of Texas German (Boas 2006, Boas et al. to appear), I offer a critical review of specific parts of the above-mentioned analyses. I argue that these analyses do not adequately address the multifunctionality of discourse markers in the two languages, which in turn leads to problematic conclusions about the status of English discourse markers and their German counterparts. Section 4 outlines an alternative approach for categorizing the multifunctionality of English and German discourse markers, thereby overcoming some of the problems faced by previous analyses. Finally, section 5 summarizes the paper and offers some suggestions for further research.

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[1] I thank my colleagues Lars Hinrichs and Marc Pierce for comments on an earlier version of this paper.

[2] For an overview of different research traditions on discourse markers in English and German linguistics, see Foolen (1996) and Hentschel and Weydt (2002).

[3] The numbers refer to the location of the example(s) in the Texas German Dialect Archive at http://www.tgdp.org. Please see Boas (2006) for more details.

2. Previous analyses of discourse markers in German-American dialects

Previous research on discourse markers (henceforth: DMs) in German-American dialects makes at least four specific claims about the dynamics underlying the integration of English DMs. First, English DMs are borrowed into German-American dialects due to long-term contact. For example, based on data from Gillespie County, Texas, and Dubois County, Indiana, Salmons (1990) shows that English DMs such as *well* have been borrowed into Texas German and Indiana German. Salmons (1990, 466–469) demonstrates that these DMs occur quite frequently, are phonologically (but not syntactically) integrated to a large degree, and are lexically distinct from German DMs. Fuller (2001, 367) reports similar results for Pennsylvania German, which "has been shown to be in the process of adopting an English-origin discourse-marking system."

The second claim concerns the status of German-origin DMs, especially the so-called modal particles (Modalpartikeln) such as *doch, mal,* and *ja.* Salmons (1990), Goss/Salmons (2000), and Fuller (2001) argue that these DMs drop out of use and are eventually lost because of the adaptation of English DMs. For example, Salmons (1990, 475) states that

> The nearly complete absence of modal particles and other native German discourse-marking strategies among German-English bilinguals obviates the need here for detailed treatment of German discourse marking,[...].

Similar observations are made by Goss/Salmons (2000, 482) regarding Wisconsin German and Texas German. They find a "drastic reduction or complete loss of the native discourse-marking system in a number of German-American dialects." Fuller (2001, 367) similarly contends that in Pennsylvania German "the German-origin DMs (...) are vestiges of a former discourse-marking system."

The third claim found in the literature is that German-American dialects develop a mixed DM system that resembles very closely the American English system. For example, Salmons (1990, 473) states "that language contact between German and English has resulted in a shared system of discourse marking including borrowed English surface forms. (...) These German Americans appear to have lost all but traces of the German system." Fuller (2001, 367) makes a similar observation for Pennsylvania German. She supports her observation with data from her Pennsylvania German corpus, which is based on interviews with 18 speakers, totaling approximately 36 hours of conversation. Consider Table 1, which shows the relatively low frequency of German-origin DMs such as *ja* and *mol* in Pennsylvania German, together with higher frequency DMs of both English and German origin.

The fourth and perhaps most interesting claim found in the relevant literature is that the dynamics underlying the development of discourse-marking systems in German-American dialects is highly systematic and follows general principles. Fuller (2001) adopts Matras' (1998) pragmatic detachability scale to account for the borrowing of English DMs and the simultaneous loss of German-origin DMs. She establishes three categories to explain the data in Table 1: (1) DMs that have counterparts in both languages such as *you know* and *weescht*; (2) DMs from English that do not have seman-

tic/pragmatic equivalents in German, such as *well*; and (3) German DMs that do not have semantic/pragmatic equivalents in English such as *mol*.[4]

Discourse marker	N	Discourse function
well	106	indicates that the subsequent utterance may not be what is expected by the hearer
so	193	links two utterances or assumptions causally
y'know	215	emphasis/focus; presents information as shared, creating common ground
weescht	154	emphasis/focus; presents information as shared, creating common ground
but	224	contrastive conjunction
aber	201	contrastive conjunction
ja	1	contrast and emphasis
mol	15	indicates the limited duration of the action referred to in the utterance

Table 1

Discourse Markers in PG and their discourse functions (Fuller 2001, 256)

Fuller's analysis is based on Matras' (1998) proposal that the donor language is often pragmatically dominant in language contact situations, which in turn leads to a mixed DM system, as in Pennsylvania German. In such situations the DM systems of the donor and recipient languages converge (see also Salmons (1990, 474–475) and Goss/Salmons (2000, 482)). An alternative result of language contact is the complete borrowing of the DM system of the donor language. According to Matras, three types of scenarios may account for the outcome of borrowing. First, the donor language is pragmatically dominant. Second, we find a situation in which the change leading to convergence is both gradual and gradational. Third, when there is a hierarchy of pragmatic detachability, in which those DMs that are at the top of the hierarchy (i.e., pragmatically more detachable) will be borrowed earlier (see Fuller 2001 for details). Based on Matras' approach, Fuller proposes that PG exhibits a gradual turnover from the DM system of the recipient-language to that of the donor language. She suggests that DMs high on the detachability scale (*well*) are borrowed more easily than those that are lower (*you know*) (cf. Table 1) (Fuller 2001, 363). With respect to the DMs that exhibit low frequency levels, Fuller argues that the

> German-origin DMs that persist in these PG data are vestiges of a former discourse-marker system. They are all low on the pragmatic-detachability scale, indicating that not only does pragmatic detachability lead to early borrowing, but it also may lead to early loss of a DM from the recipient language in a language-contact situation. (Fuller 2001, 367)

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[4] This section is based on Boas/Weilbacher (2009).

To test these four claims about the status of DMs in German-American dialects, Boas/
Weilbacher (2007) apply the proposals by Salmons (1990), Goss/Salmons (2000), and
Fuller (2001) to a large on-line corpus of Texas German (henceforth TxG). The corpus,
also known as the Texas German Dialect Archive (TGDA), is the result of the efforts of
the Texas German Dialect Project (TGDP) that has interviewed more than 300 fluent
speakers of TxG since 2001 (see Boas 2003, 2006, 2009 for details). For their study
Boas/Weilbacher (2007) searched the transcriptions of open-ended interviews with 60
speakers (totaling 305,429 TxG words) for the distribution of English and German
DMs.

One result of their study is that *you know* and its German counterpart *weisst
du/weisst(e)* occurs in similar pragmatic contexts in TxG as in Fuller's (2001) Pennsyl-
vania German data. At the same time, many of the other proposals by Salmons (1990)
and Fuller (2001) could not be replicated using TxG data from the TGDA. Regarding
the frequency of English and German DMs, Boas/Weilbacher (2007) found that TxG
you know accounts for an overwhelming 99.17% of the you *know/weisst(e)* tokens in
their corpus, compared to 58% *you know* tokens in Fuller's Pennsylvania German data.
This high frequency leads them to hypothesize that TxG *you know* may be more prag-
matically detachable than its Pennsylvania German counterpart. This, in turn, would
suggest that the turnover from the recipient language's discourse-marking system (that
of German) to that of the donor language (English) has progressed further in TxG than
in Pennsylvania German. Furthermore, Boas/Weilbacher (2007) demonstrate that Ger-
man-origin DMs such as *ja* and *mal*, which are supposed to have largely dropped out of
use in the German-American dialects investigated by Salmons (1990), Goss/Salmons
(2000), and Fuller (2001), appear with a surprisingly high frequency in their TxG cor-
pus despite their location at the very bottom of Matras' pragmatic detachability hierar-
chy (cf. Fuller 2001, 56). These observations lead Boas/Weilbacher (2007) to conclude
that Matras' (1998) hierarchy is not universally applicable to language contact situa-
tions, because it does not appear to make the correct predictions about the distribution
of bilingual DMs in TxG.

In a follow-up study, Boas/Weilbacher (2009) investigate proposals by Salmons
(1990), Goss/Salmons (2000), and Fuller (2001), who claim that German-origin DMs
are drastically reduced in German-American dialects. Using data from the TGDA,
Boas/Weilbacher compare the number of functions of DMs in Standard German based
on Weydt (1969, 1989), Weydt et al. (1983), and Hentschel (1986) with the number of
functions found in TxG. Their results are summarized in Table 2.

Discourse Marker	Number of tokens in TGDA	Number of speakers	Number of functions compared with Standard German
mal	115	26	3/3
halt	150	25	2/2
ja	142	19	2/4
eben	17	13	1/3
doch	108	38	3/4

Table 2

Summary of German-origin DM use by 60 TxG speakers (Boas/Weilbacher 2009, 11)

Table 2 demonstrates that the distribution of German-origin DMs in present-day TxG is different from Salmons' (1990) and Fuller's (2001) analyses of TxG and PG. That is, present-day TxG indeed exhibits a well-functioning, if somewhat limited system of German-origin DMs. For example, *halt* fulfills the same discourse marking functions in TxG as in Standard German, namely that of assertion, as in (3), and of prompting, as in (4):

(3)   Un – un ich wusste es halt nicht anders – you know.
      And I really didn't know any different, you know. (1-25-1-7)

(4)   Denn wo sie geheirat haben sie halt dann werdnse Amerikaner.
      Then when they married they actually become Americans. (1-51-1-15)

The fact that present-day TxG does not exhibit the drastic loss of German-origin DMs suggested by Salmons (1990) also indicates that it has not gone as far in the direction of the English DM system as described by Fuller (2001) for PG.[5] Based on these insights, Boas/Weilbacher (2009, 13-14) argue that perhaps the largest difficulty in analyzing the distribution of English and German DMs in German-American dialects is the problem of classification. In other words, how can one use a hypothesis with a uniform scale (pragmatic detachability) to explain the presence of DMs in German-American dialects when either the donor language (English) does not have straightforward translation equivalents (*ja, mal, doch, eben*), or the recipient language (German) lacks straightforward translation equivalents (*well*)? Is it possible to then still talk about "turnover"? These observations lead Boas/Weilbacher (2009, 14) to suggest that the study of bilingual DM systems should adopt a more inductive, bottom-up approach. First, each DM item should be analyzed in detail, and broad-scale generalizations about the principles of mixing between the DM systems of donor and recipient language should be made in a subsequent step.

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[5]   Boas/Weilbacher (2009) also point out another problem with previous accounts, namely that their corpora were significantly smaller than the data contained in the TGDA. Such a difference may well have led previous analyses to assume that certain German-origin DMs are no longer in use.

Since Boas/Weilbacher (2007, 2009) do not pursue their suggestions any further, the remainder of this paper describes some conceptual details of such an item-based approach. The argument will proceed as follows. First, I will critically investigate Fuller's (2001) claim that certain DMs do not have equivalents in other languages, e.g. *well*. The results from this discussion will form the basis of my main argument, namely that previous accounts have largely ignored the multifunctionality of DMs. Then, I propose a corpus-based methodology that allows for a more fine-grained lexical semantic analysis of DMs. Finally, I show in section 4 how this alternative methodology can be put to work by briefly discussing the coding scheme employed by Boas/Hinrichs (in progress) in their analysis of *well* in TxG.

3. Comparing English and German discourse markers

There are at least two main reasons why the results of previous analyses could not be replicated by Boas/Weilbacher (2007). The first is the fact that previous analyses have for the most part assumed that some DMs have no equivalents in other languages. The second is the absence of any detailed discussion of multifunctionality of DMs in English and German. I discuss each point below.

3.1 Equivalence of discourse markers
Regarding the question of equivalence, Fuller (1990, 351) suggests that the "DMs *well* and *so*, which are highly pragmatically detachable, have been borrowed into PG and do not have German-origin counterparts." She modifies this statement later, stating that "German equivalents are not found in these data; those found in Standard German include *na ja* and *also* (e.g. *Na ja, so ist es* 'Well, that's how it is' or *Also gut!* 'Well, good!')" (2001, 359). Similarly, she points out (2001, 358) that there are "German-origin DMs that appear in these data with no English counterparts (...) (*ja* and *mal*)." More specifically, Fuller (2001, 365) claims that "*ja* and *mal* are DMs that are not pragmatically detachable, and they do not have easy English equivalents that could replace them. They function primarily as markers of emphasis, and each one serves in a different context. Translation equivalents often do not employ DMs."

While Fuller's proposals appear straightforward, two points are problematic in her analysis. The first point concerns her claim that there are no straightforward translation equivalents of English and German DMs. However, such translation equivalents do exist, as already pointed out by Bublitz (1978, 192), who observes that "die Verwendungsweisen von *well* sind zahlreich, darin vielen Partikeln, auch den deutschen MP[n] ähnlich." Similarly, Johansson's (2006) corpus analysis of how *well* is translated into German and Norwegian yields a wealth of German translation equivalents, as Table 3 illustrates.[6]

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[6]   I have excluded Johansson's frequency count of the different German translations of *well*. Johansson also notes that the German correspondences include a good deal of omissions (null correspondences).

Discourse particles (DP)	Modal particles (MP)	DP + MP	Conjunc-tions	Adjec-tives	Adverbials	Interjec-tions or exclama-tions
also, also gut, also hör mal, also schön, ja, ja also, na, na ja (naja), na gut, na schön, na und?, nun, nun ja, nun gut, nu sag mal, tja	*eben, ja*	*na ... ja, na ja ... doch, na ja .... eben, na ja ... schön, nun ja ... eben, tja ... eben*	*aber, oder, und, und nun*	*gut, sehr gut, schön, sicher*	*auf jeden Fall, je-denfalls, bloss, da, dann, trotzdem*	*ach, ach wirklich, aha, gros-ser Gott, hm*

Table 3

Well in English original texts: German correspondences (cf. Johansson: 2006, 130-131)

Table 3 shows that there is a wealth of German equivalents which can be used to express the different meanings and functions of the English DM *well*. Note that Fuller only claims that she could not find the Standard German equivalents *na ja* and *also* in her corpus. However, she does not mention whether any of the other German equivalents occur in her corpus or whether she has searched for them. To see whether any German equivalents of *well* are used in other German-American dialects, I searched the TGDA. The results show that TxG speakers use German equivalents of *well* such as *na ja* in (5), *ja* in (6), *also* in (7), and *nun* in (8).

(5) Na ja ham mir Strom gegrigt.
     Well, we got electricity (then). (1-28-1-16)

(6) Na hab ich uhn Stelle gekriegt in Garage.
     Well then I got a job at a garage. (1-24-1-13)

(7) Also das dauerte dann so ne halbe Stunde.
     Well that took then about a half hour. (1-34-1-5)

(8) Nun meine Grossvater und Grossmutter die waren schon [...].
     Well, my grandfather and grandmother, they already were [...] (1-43-1-14)

The data above demonstrate that speakers of present-day TxG use a variety of German counterparts for *well* (while also using *well,* see Boas/Weilbacher (2009, 1)). This sug-gests that at least one German-American dialect has a relatively well-functioning system of German-origin DMs equivalent to *well,* a claim explicitly denied by Fuller (2001) for

Pennsylvania German. Similarly, Fuller's Pennsylvania German speakers apparently do not use German counterparts of English *so* (see above). However, TxG speakers employ German counterparts of *so* such as *deshalb* and *so dass*, as in (9) – (10). While I am not making any claims about Fuller's Pennsylvania German data, the TxG data clearly show that speakers of TxG employ German-origin counterparts of the English DMs *well* and *so*.

(9)   Deshalb dachte ich mir – hör ich einfach mal auf für heute.
       So I thought I'll simply stop for today. (1-27-1-28)

(10)   So dass se wussten wer de Unterschied war.
       So that they knew what the difference was. (1-7-1-3)

These TxG data demonstrate three important points. First, speakers of TxG employ German equivalents of *well*. As such, Fuller's (2001) claim regarding the non-availability of German counterparts of *well* in Pennsylvania German cannot be applied to TxG. Second, the availability of German counterparts of *well* calls into question the applicability of the pragmatic detachability scale to explain the borrowing of English DMs into TxG. In other words, if TxG speakers employ German counterparts of *well*, then the "competition" between *well* in Pennsylvania German and its German counterparts is no different than that between *you know* and *weescht*. Third, the availability of German counterparts of *well* calls into question the usefulness of the pragmatic detachability scale for explaining the dynamics underlying the borrowing of English DMs and simultaneous loss of German-origin DMs. Recall that Fuller, following Matras (1998), suggests that DMs that are pragmatically more detachable are borrowed earlier, thus leading to the loss of their German-origin counterparts. The continued presence of German-origin DMs in TxG that are counterparts of the supposedly highly pragmatically detachable *well* calls this finding into question.

I now turn to another claim found in the literature, namely that there are no English equivalents of certain German DMs in German-American dialects. Recall that Fuller (2001, 359) claims that "German-origin DMs [...] appear in these data with no English counterparts." This leads her to suggest that *ja* and *mal* are not pragmatically detachable, and that they do not have easy English equivalents that could replace them. According to Fuller, the non-availability of English equivalents explains the low status of German DMs with no English counterparts on the pragmatic detachability scale, which in turn explains why they are lost relatively early on. While it is often difficult to translate German DMs into other languages and they often pose problems for foreign language learners (see, e.g. Weydt et al. 1983 and König et al. 1990), there is in fact a full range of English equivalents corresponding to the meanings and functions of German DMs. This situation was first pointed out by Bublitz (1978), who notes that

> Die deutschen MPn sind zusätzlich verwendbare Ausdrucksweisen der Sprechereinstellung, die keine lexikalischen Entsprechungen im Englischen [...] haben. Es lassen sich keine englischen Partikeln nachweisen, deren semantische und pragmatische Strukturen denjenigen der deutschen MPn ähnelten oder ihnen gar gleich seien. Dies bedeutet nicht, dass Sprechereinstellungen nicht in beiden Sprachen völlig adäquat ausdrückbar sind; sie sind es, nur die dazu benötigten sprachlichen Mittel unterscheiden sich, geht man von den deutschen MPn aus.

Similarly, König et al. (1990, 1) point out that

> eine angemessene Übersetzung dieser Wörter, vor allem vom Deutschen ins Englische, bereitet zudem häufig erhebliche Schwierigkeiten. Trotz grosser Ähnlichkeiten zwischen dem Englischen und Deutschen in anderen Bereichen des Wortschatzes bestehen hier grosse Unterschiede zwischen den beiden Sprachen: im Inventar der zur Verfügung stehenden Ausdrücke, in den Bedingungen für ihre Verwendung und in den Strategien, die zum Ausdruck bestimmter Inhalte verwendet werden.

Despite these apparent difficulties, it is possible to find English translation equivalents of German DMs such as *mal* and *ja*. For example, König et al. (1990, 88-89) show that in its DM use *(ein)mal* is either employed to mark a request as unproblematic and easily fulfillable, or to mark an activity as unusual. Interestingly, they list three English translation equivalents for *(ein)mal*, namely *just* as in (11), a null translation as in (12), or a tag question as in (13).

(11a) Sieh dir das (ein)mal an!
  Just look at this!
(11b) Stell dir (ein)mal vor, er hat tatsächlich gewonnen!
  Just imagine, he's really won!

(12a) Kannst du mir (ein)mal fünf Mark leihen?
  Can you lend me five marks?
(12b) Kommst du (ein)mal kurz hierher?
  Could you come over (here) for a second?

(13) Das wäre doch (ein)mal einen Versuch wert.
  It would be worth a try, wouldn't it?

Similarly, there are English equivalents of the different meanings of *ja*. König et al. (1990, 145–146) list three different senses of *ja*, each with a range of different English translation equivalents. The first meaning of *ja* is used in situations when the speaker assumes that the hearer already has the relevant background information, or when the speaker updates that background information. According to König et al. the translation equivalents for this sense include *of course* as in (14), *you know* as in (15), *after all* as in (16), and *well* as in (17).

(14) Es ist ja bekannt, dass er trinkt.
  (Of course) it's well known that he drinks.

(15) Die Malerei war ja schon immer sein Hobby.
  (As you know) painting has always been his hobby.

(16) Fragen Sie Dr. B., er bearbeitet ja diesen Fall.
  Ask Dr. B, (after all) he is working on this case.

(17) Es ist ja bekannt, dass er trinkt.
  Well, we all know that he drinks.

According to König et al. (1990, 147), the second sense of *ja* is used in situations in which it should be clear that there is ample evidence for the content of an utterance. They point out that this sense of *ja* occurs in exclamative sentences and is typically translated into English with *well* (and modified by *really*) as in (18), *but* as in (19), or with a zero translation as in (20), among others.

(18) Ach, das ist ja interessant!
       Oh/well, that's (really) interesting!

(19) Es ist ja gar nicht so kalt!
       (But) it's not that cold!

(20) Das ist ja eine schöne Bescherung!
       That's a nice mess!

The third sense of *ja* identified by König et al. (1990, 148) concerns situations in which the speaker intends to add emphasis to an utterance. In these cases *ja* is stressed and can be translated into English with *don't (you) dare* as in (21), *be sure* as in (22), or *make sure (that)* as in (23).

(21) Mach das ja nicht noch mal!
       Don't you dare do that again!

(22) Geh ja vorsichtig damit um!
       Be sure to handle it carefully!

(23) Hast du auch ja die Tür abgeschlossen?
       Did you make sure you locked the door?

This brief overview of some English equivalents of German *mal* and *ja* has some important repercussions for Fuller's claims. First, there is a range of English equivalents corresponding to the meanings and functions of *mal* and *ja*. Note that these English equivalents are not always corresponding DMs as is the case with Pennsylvania German *you know* and *weescht*, for example. Instead, English sometimes employs certain multi-word expressions or grammatical constructions that fulfill the same communicative function.[7] Such a range of equivalencies is not unusual, as demonstrated by a range of other studies such as Fraser (2006), Johansson (2006), Östman (2006), and Willems/Demol (2006). Second, recall that one of the factors explaining the loss of German DMs such as *ja* and *mal* is the fact that they do not have English equivalents and are thus low on the pragmatic detachability scale (see Table 1 above). The fact that there are English equivalents means that we cannot apply Fuller's proposals to the analysis of TxG. The third point is a methodological one concerning the data. In searching the TGDA I did not find any English counterparts of German *mal* and *ja*. While this does

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[7] The claim that there are English and German equivalents should be taken with some caution. That is, total equivalence between words in languages is rather rare, as pointed out by Duval (2008, 282). See also Altenberg/Granger (2002) and Boas (2005) on the notion of translation equivalence and semantic/pragmatic factors influencing the interpretation of different senses of words in context.

not necessarily mean that speakers of present-day TxG do not use such English counterparts, it suggests that they have a definite preference for German *mal* and *ja*.

To summarize, I have shown that – contrary to Fuller (2001) – there are comparable English and German equivalents of DMs. If one is interested in applying Fuller's (2001) proposals regarding DMs in Pennsylvania German to TxG, the availability of such equivalents poses a number of empirical and theoretical problems. First, the fact that there are counterparts in the respective other language diminishes the explanatory power of the pragmatic detachability scale. If there are counterparts, the ranking of DMs on a scale such as in Table 1 above, supported by the assumed absence of equivalents in the other language, is inappropriate. More specifically, pragmatic detachability does not correlate with availability of a counterpart. Second, it remains to be seen whether the same mechanism, i.e. the pragmatic detachability scale, can be used simultaneously to explain both borrowing of English DMs and loss of German DMs in contact situations. Given the fundamentally different nature of mechanisms underlying borrowing and loss (cf. Haugen 1950, Thomason/Kaufman 1988, Wolfram 2002, Thomason 2003), this assumption remains questionable. Finally, since pragmatic detachability and existence of a counterpart in the respective other language do not seem to correlate, it is probable that each DM might exhibit its own idiosyncratic distribution. As already pointed out by Boas/Weilbacher (2009), the TxG data reveal a much different distribution of German DMs and their English counterparts than Fuller's Pennsylvania German data. This suggests that it is necessary to analyze each of the DMs on their own, together with their counterparts in the other language. In the following section I address this issue in more detail by investigating the range of meanings and functions of a select number of DMs.

3.2 Multifunctionality

One re-occurring question in the study of DMs is how to represent their meanings. Similar to on-going discussions about lumping or splitting of word senses (see, e.g., Fillmore/Atkins 1992, Kilgarriff 1997, Hanks 2000), researchers differ as to how to represent the meanings of DMs. Some analyses propose single core meanings of DMs (cf. Schourup 1985/2001, Schiffrin 1987, Fraser 1990), while others aim for identifying a range of clearly different uses, functions, or sub-functions (cf. Östman 1981 and Jucker 1993). Previous research on DMs in German-American dialects does not investigate these issues in much detail. For example, Salmons (1990, 462) simply points out that only "homonymic forms of the modal particles" are retained. Similarly, Fuller (2001, 256) acknowledges in passing that DMs may have a range of senses, as is illustrated in Table 1 above by the definition of the senses of *you know* and *weescht* as "emphasis/focus; presents information as shared, creating common ground."

The absence of a detailed investigation of the different senses and functions of DMs represents one of the biggest gaps in research on DMs in German-American dialects, because there are quite different interpretations of the meaning of a DM depending on a number of variables. Any discussion of DMs needs to take these differences into consideration to get a better understanding of what specific senses and functions of DMs are used in a given context. To begin, recall the discussion of the polysemy of *ja* by König et al. (1990) in section 3.1 above. Fischer (2000, 106–108), based on extensive analyses of large-scale corpora, provides an even more detailed discussion of the vari-

ous functions of *ja*, listing a total of eight: (1) take-up (e.g. giving feedback), (2) back-channel (signaling perception and understanding and supporting the other's turn), (3) framer (introducing a new topic and/or concluding the previous one), (4) repair marker (signaling the recognition of problems in the formulation process), (5) answer (signaling an agreement on a proposition), (6) action (referring to the non-linguistic task the speaker fulfills in this situation), (7) check (speaker would like to get feedback), and (8) modal (referring to the pragmatic pretext, something the speakers expect or that can be perceived). The array of different functions of *ja* identified by Fischer (2000) clearly shows that any investigation of DMs in German-American dialects should begin by addressing the different functions DMs. Only then is it possible to arrive at a more adequate analysis of DMs in language contact situations. Consider, for example, Fuller's (2001, 256) characterization of *ja* as contrasting an emphasis. She finds only one example of this use of *ja* in her Pennsylvania German corpus. A more detailed discussion of the different DM functions of *ja* could have set the stage for identifying more tokens of *ja* in her corpus, perhaps leading her to different conclusions.[8]

Boas/Weilbacher (2009) present a first step towards analyzing different functions of DMs in German-American dialects. As discussed in section 2, the authors base their analysis of German-origin DMs in TxG on the four main functions of DMs in Standard German identified by Weydt et al. (1983). For example, of the four main functions of *ja*, Boas/Weilbacher found 142 tokens illustrating two functions of *ja* in the TGDA. Based on theses corpus data the authors argue that while two functions of *ja* appear to have been lost in TxG, the two remaining functions are employed quite frequently by speakers of present-day TxG.

4. Multifunctionality and item-based approaches toward DMs in German-American dialects

Having discussed some of the issues surrounding equivalence and multifunctionality of DMs in German-American dialects I now turn to an outline of how to overcome them, based, in part on on-going work by Boas/Hinrichs (in progress). To understand the dynamics underlying the borrowing of English DMs and simultaneous reduction in use of German-origin DMs we need to make use of larger corpora, such as the TGDA. Based on such a large corpus, three steps are necessary. First, we need to identify the full range of senses and functions of English and German DMs. Second, we need to identify which senses of English DMs have actually been borrowed and which senses of German-origin DMs have been lost (see Boas/Weilbacher (2009) for a preliminary analysis of the latter). Based on these steps we can finally attempt to find an explanation for (1) why certain functions of English DMs were borrowed and not others, and (2) why certain functions of German-origin DMs were lost, but not others. Finding explanations for these points will likely necessitate a more detailed investigation into equivalence of different functions of English and German DMs as well as sociolinguistic variables such as gender, age, education, and fluency in English and German.

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[8]   Intonation and context are also relevant for how *well* is interpreted, see Bolinger (1989, 300–337).

A model of this type of investigation is being developed in Boas/Hinrichs' (in progress) analysis of *well* in TxG. Based on an extensive review of the literature, Boas/Hinrichs compiled a coding scheme that allows them to capture a broad range of functions of *well* in TxG. The authors employed concordancing software (WordSmith v. 5.0) to retrieve all corpus files in which *well* was used. Each token is then coded with an extensive set of variables, some of which are coded by hand, others automatically. The first set of variables captures the surrounding environment of *well*, i.e. whether it is surrounded by German or English words. The second set of variables measures the length of the surrounding passage in number of words. The third set classifies the syntactic position of *well* within an utterance. The fourth set of variables captures the different functions of *well*, including local, structural, dialogue, and other, non-DM usages. The fifth set captures prosodic modifications relating to pitch of the voice. The final set of variables captures the gender of the speaker.

With this range of variables, each token of *well* found in the TGDA is coded. An automated script by Hinrichs then analyzes the variables and determines which functions of *well* are used by speakers of present-day TxG. With this result at hand, Boas/Hinrichs (in progress) compare the different functions of *well* with their German-origin counterparts to determine why certain functions of *well* have been borrowed into TxG while others have not. Space limitations preclude me from discussing this analysis in greater detail.

5. Conclusions and outlook

In this paper I have shown that previous research on DMs in German-American dialects has a number of empirical and methodological drawbacks. I have argued that a larger corpus of recordings of speakers with German-American dialects, together with a more in-depth analysis of translation equivalents and multifunctionality may overcome these issues. The methodology employed by Boas/Weilbacher (2009), yielding first promising results regarding equivalence and multifunctionality shows that such an alternative method is in principle feasible. Obviously, future research is required to investigate the full range of functions and equivalents of English and German DMs in German-American dialects. The goals of this paper have been more modest: to point out the need for an alternative methodology and to briefly outline the coding scheme employed by Boas/Hinrichs (in progress) for their analysis of *well* in present-day TxG.

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