

MULTICULTURAL LONDON ENGLISH / MULTICULTURAL PARIS FRENCH

ACTIVITY FILE: DISCOURSE MARKERS / MARQUEURS PRAGMATIQUES

London English	Paris French
Sound file	Sound file
Extract 1 Weightlifting SP1: it's like (.) me yeah (.) I always just (.) I can just do weights for hours and like (.) no one in the class would be able to lift as much as me like you was there innit no one can lift as m- the teacher can't lift as much as me (..) and then like (.) I'll still be ready to do more (..) .	Extract 2 Altercation SP1: Il est, il est venu s'excuser mais Aude l'a encore rejeté il avait le seum ! SP2: x en fait (.) les filles elles venaient vers moi (..) et genre et genre je les ai vues arriver vers moi et tout (.) et après j'ai vu lui il arrivait (..) et genre je l'ai regardé comme ça (..) genre en mode "tu veux quoi" et tout . SP1: ah xx Scarface ? . SP1: et après x dès que j'ai vu qu'il allait ouvrir la bouche je fais "casse-toi" !

Discourse markers

'Discourse markers are important features of spoken language with many different functions. They usually perform several functions at the same time. Their overall function is to show the listener how to interpret what the speaker is saying (so they don't affect the literal meaning of what is being said)... some of their most typical functions:

- marking the beginning or end of a turn
- marking grammatical structure by being placed at the beginning or end of a clause, or at the start of reported speech
- marking information that is new to the discourse or marking the start of a new topic
- showing how the speaker feels about what they are about to say or about what they have already said
- checking that the listener is following
- creating solidarity with the listener
- appealing to the listener for understanding

Like intensifiers, there are often striking differences between the discourse markers that younger speakers like to use and those that older speakers use.'
 (from Spoken English Features*)

Examples:

Well – like – of course – yeah – right – oh.

Exemples:

Genre – façon – en mode – crari/krari - style
(Secova, 2013)

Discourse markers : cross-linguistic comparisons

The examples in the boxes above were recordings made with young people in London and Paris. What similarities and differences do you notice in the use of **like** and **genre** and how they are used? Look at the list of discourse marker functions above: which of these functions do you think occur in the quotes above?

Exploring the text

The quotes above have been chosen to illustrate particular discourse markers, however, in both the English and French transcripts, there are examples of very informal speech. These include both very informal words as well as sentence structures common in informal speech.

In pairs or a small group, read one of the texts. What are the speakers talking about? Identify unfamiliar words. How much can you guess from the context in which they are used?

Carrying out your own research

- 1) Search online for unfamiliar words and expressions and their meaning. How much can you find out about the context in which they are used?
- 1) Finding material to investigate: Listen to friends talking among themselves in informal settings, or prompt them to describe a recent event they have been involved in and note which discourse markers they use.
- 2) Listen to a conversation recorded in Paris by the MLE/MPF team and make similar notes (**sound file here**).

Analysing your data

What discourse markers are being used?

For each discourse marker consider who is talking, what they are talking about, what the context is (formal/informal). What non-verbal effects do you observe? Do some speakers use them more often than others? If there are older speakers in your sample, do they use the same discourse markers as teenagers?

Drama and writing

In a small group:

- 1) devise and record a short drama/dialogue to exemplify the use of discourse markers and some of the other informal features you have explored. What characters would use these expressions? In what circumstances? What opportunities are there to project a personal identity using mimicry, gestures and sound effects?
- 2) Choose one of the quotes above and write a very brief summary in formal English or in formal French of what the conversation is about.

Try these activities in either English or French or in a scenario that uses both languages.

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Online resources:

*<http://linguistics.sllf.qmul.ac.uk/english-language-teaching/spoken-english-features>
<http://www.teachingenglish.org.uk/knowledge-database/discourse-markers>