

# “C’EST ÇA RIGHT?”: SHIFTS IN DISCOURSE MARKER USE IN ONTARIAN LAURENTIAN FRENCH\*

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## 1. Introduction

Laurentian French has maintained a strong minority presence in Ontario for the last 300 years, with 568,335 native speakers currently making up 4.3% of the province’s overall population (Poiré 2010, Statistics Canada 2016). Though Ontarian Laurentian French (OLF) is spoken in both French-minority and majority towns and hamlets across the province, its proximity to English has greatly influenced its lexicon, phonology, and semantic and syntactic innovations, distinguishing it from other varieties of Laurentian French (Mougeon 2004). This influence extends to the use of both French and English discourse markers (DMs) in OLF conversation, a phenomenon that has been observed and described by multiple scholars (Poiré and Tennant 2016, Poiré 2010, Golembeski 1998). However, few of these scholars have explored the use of these DMs in depth.

The following study investigates English and French DM use in OLF discourse in the French-majority town of Hearst and the French-minority hamlet of Belle River. Using data collected from these two sites through the *Phonologie du français contemporain* (PFC, Durand et al. 2002) project, it explores three primary aspects of DM use:

1. How the use of English and French DMs in OLF conversation illustrates the influence of English on the variety,
2. How this use patterns in relation to age, location, and the context of the interviews,
3. What these patterns can tell us about current language shift, impacts of language contact, and loss of vernacular language use (VLU) in relation to OLF.

My analysis begins with an introduction to the historical and socio-political context in which OLF developed and the influence English has had on this variety. I then give a working definition of DMs as a lexical class and the role they play in conversation, followed by a detailed description of the PFC corpus sites from which I draw my data and the methodology I use to complete the analysis. I then address the three facets above, using recordings taken in both formal and informal contexts. I conclude my paper with a summary of the analysis, its greater implications, and a brief discussion on future research.

## 2. Laurentian French in Ontario

The following section details the unique history of the OLF’s development, including a brief description of the influence of English on these varieties.

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\*I would like to acknowledge Dr. Jeff Tennant and Dr. François Poiré for providing me access to the PFC data sets for Hearst and Belle River, respectively; without their generosity, this study would not exist.

## 2.1 The sociopolitical and historical situation

Immigration from Quebec to Ontario occurred in three primary waves: the first to Southwest Ontario during the mid-18<sup>th</sup> century, the second to the Eastern Triangle in the early 19<sup>th</sup> century and the final to Central and Northeast Ontario in the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries (Mougeon 2004). Due to these temporally and spatially discrete waves, varieties of OLF developed in relative isolation not only from the influence of external varieties, such as Acadian French spoken in New Brunswick or varieties of Laurentian French spoken in Quebec, but also in relative isolation from one another (Mougeon 2004). This isolation was further augmented by the ever-increasing presence of English, which throughout the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries became the primary language of economic, governmental, and educational institutions within Ontario as a province and Canada as a whole (Golembeski 1998). Laws put into place, such as Referendum 17, which prohibited the use of French as the medium of instruction in Ontarian public schools from 1912-1927, further restricted French services and led to increased language attrition (Golembeski 1998). A subsequent economic shift from agriculture to industry, as well as increased exogamy, further intensified this loss (Mougeon 2004).

It was not until the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century and the introduction of the Official Languages Act of 1969 that the situation began to shift (Heller 2002). Even with new protections in place, including increased accessibility to French services and education, the francophone population holds a minority position in the province. Despite this, towns and villages exist in the Northeast and the Eastern Triangle where a French majority is maintained (Poiré and Tennant 2016).

## 2.2 The linguistic impact

However, this history did more than just affect OLF's current sociopolitical context; it also affected its phonological, lexical, syntactical, and discursive development, resulting in a distinct variety that itself shows linguistic variation within the province. While OLF's isolation led to the maintenance of certain archaisms and the development of unique linguistic phenomena, including the use of *sontait* as opposed to standard *étaient* for the third person plural conjugation of 'to be', language contact led to an overt influence on lexicon through lexical borrowings, linguistic transfer, and the development of calques (Golembeski 1998). English lexical borrowings including nouns, such as *hockey*, *fun*, and *high school*, verbs that maintain French conjugation but use English roots, such as *driver*, 'to drive' and *retirer* 'to retire', adjectives including *first*, *back*, and *gross*, and DMs, like *right*, *well*, and *so*, are found in varying degrees across the province (Poiré and Tennant 2016). Linguistic transfer resulted in the increased use of lexical items that have a semantically parallel equivalent in English. This includes the use of *comme*, which directly translates to 'like', as opposed to *genre*, which has a more general translation to 'type' or 'kind' but is used in similar contexts, and the use of *puis*, a DM translating directly to 'then' or 'and', as opposed to *là*, which translates to 'there' and has no English equivalent when functioning as a DM (Golembeski 1998). Finally, calquing caused a shift in the syntagmatic distribution or meaning of certain words, again due to their lexical

counterparts found in English (Golembeski 1998). This includes such uses as *sur la radio*, which translates directly to ‘on the radio’, in the place of *à la radio*, a standard form with the same general meaning that directly translates to ‘to the radio’, and a repositioning of the adverb *juste*, ‘just’, before the verb, which parallels the use of ‘just’ in English but is ungrammatical in standard varieties of French (Golembeski 1998).

### 2.3 Greater implications of language contact

Though section 2.2 only offers a few examples of the impact of the English language on OLF’s lexicon and structure, scholars including Mougeon (2004), Golembeski (1998), and Chambers and Lapierre (2011) argue that the impact of language contact could have much more dire consequences on OLF varieties as a whole. In French-minority situations, English dominates public contexts, such as work environment, after-school programming, media, and community and social events. French speakers in these areas are continuously faced with contexts where English must be spoken, which results in French language restriction and the possible loss of VLU (Golembeski 1998, Chambers and Lapierre 2011). Heavy lexical borrowing, language transfer, and the use of calques can all indicate a decrease in language maintenance (Golembeski 1998). However, these borrowings and transfers can also be a signal of successful bilingualism (Golembeski 1998). Looking at changes in lexical borrowings, and increases in language transfer and calques, could shed light on the current state of local language varieties.

## 3. Discourse markers

With a clear understanding of OLF and its background, I now turn to a more in-depth look at DMs and how they may be an indicator of language variety maintenance and shift.

### 3.1 Significance and definition

Drawing on definitions given by both Crible (2018) and Sankoff et al. (1997), I define DMs as polyfunctional lexical items used to aid in negotiating and interpreting discourse. Sankoff et al. (1997) go on to state that though these lexical items originally hold semantic and syntactic meaning, this meaning is stripped when acting as DMs. This makes them highly interchangeable, context driven items that are often subject to phonological reduction and semantic bleaching (Vincent and Sankoff 1992). There are three primary types of DMs: punctors including words like *well*, discourse coordinators such as *so*, and interaction markers like *you know* (Sankoff et al. 1997, Vincent and Sankoff 1992). It is important to note that verbal pauses, such as *eah* or *um* are not included as types of DMs, though DMs can also function as verbal pauses or hesitations (Sankoff et al. 1997).

One unique trait of DMs is that they are acquired naturally through interaction; Sankoff et al. (1997) expand on this in the citation below:

“Discourse markers are of particular interest because they constitute an aspect of the language not taught in school. Because they are not subject to explicit instruction,

they are likely to be an accurate indicator of the extent to which a speaker is integrated into the local speech community.” (p. 193)

Not only can they indicate speech community integration, but many scholars interpret DM use as a signal of linguistic security, expressivity, and fluency (Canac-Marquis and Walker 2016, Sankoff et al. 1997). As such, they not only mark fluency in one language, but can also be an indicator of bilingualism or multilingualism for some individuals, and reflect one’s ability to fluidly move between two different speech varieties or languages in certain communities (Sankoff et al. 1997). Since DMs are picked up naturally through conversation, it follows that how they pattern could mark both fluency in OLF varieties and language shift that could be occurring within the variety.

### **3.2 Discourse markers in OLF**

The work of Mougeon and Beniak (1991), Golembeski (1998), and Canac-Marquis and Walker (2016) all attest to the use of English DMs in OLF conversation. These attestations parallel DM use I observed in communities located in Sarnia, Windsor, London, and Pain Court, where *so*, *right*, *anyway*, and other DMs types occur during interviews. Golembeski (1998) states that use of English lexical borrowings does not necessarily signal language shift. However, Mougeon and Beniak (1991) find that the use of English DMs, such as *so*, replaces the use of their French equivalent, in this case *donc* and *alors*. English DMs are also primarily used by speakers in situations of restricted and semi-restricted French language use (1991). Similarly, Chambers and Lapierre (2011) touch on the fact that language contact and community engagement, or lack thereof, can lead to loss of fluency in one’s local vernacular language.

English loanwords are not the only signal of influence; linguistic transfer and calquing may also impact the use of French DMs in conversation and signal language shift. As stated in section 2.2, linguistic transfer has increased the use of certain semantically parallel items, such as *comme*, or ‘like’, which functions as a discourse marker (Golembeski 1998, Sankoff et al. 1997). How French DMs pattern can be just as telling as the use of English DMs when investigating the future vitality of the variety.

## **4. Methodology**

### **4.1 Corpus**

This study draws on data taken from the Phonologie du français contemporain (PFC) corpus, which aims to document linguistic variation found within French language use and structure across the francophone world (Durand et al. 2002). Two of the corpus’ data collection locations are found in Ontario and vary in both demographic context and location. The first, collected by Poiré (2010), comes from the hamlet of Belle River located

within the greater Windsor area, where a 6.1%<sup>1</sup> French-speaking minority exists in an English-majority context (Statistics Canada 2016). The second, collected by Tennant (2016), comes from the town of Hearst, where an 88.5% majority of the population reports speaking French as their first language (Statistics Canada 2016).

The Hearst data consists of eleven participants ranging in age from eighteen to seventy-eight, including five females and six males. Though some participants were born in neighboring towns or cities, including Timmins, Kapuskasing, and Ottawa, all are current residents of Hearst. The Belle River data involves six participants ranging in age from seventeen to eighty-four, including four females and two males.<sup>2</sup> Again, though some participants come from other hamlets in the area including Stoney Point and Pain Court, all participants are current residents of Belle River, or Belle Rivière, located about thirty minutes from Windsor's city center. Though Belle River is a traditionally francophone-majority community, the recent economic shift away from agriculture has caused many residents to take jobs in the city, while the expansion of Windsor has increased the number of anglophone residents in this and many other surrounding hamlets.

For each participant, I had access to recordings of both a formal guided interview with the principal investigator and an informal open conversation between multiple participants. Guided interviews vary in length from nine to twelve minutes, and focus on the participants' linguistic and educational background, where the participant has lived and traveled, and their current employment position or course of study. The open conversations vary in length from ten to eighteen minutes and focus on information shared during the guided interview, though spontaneous topics also arose. In Hearst, the recorded open conversations were led by a local already acquainted with the participants. In Windsor, these open conversations were conducted by the primary investigator with multiple participants at one time, allowing for a more informal register. Due to the data available to me, the number of participants in each section of my study fluctuates. This is primarily due to lack of access to certain interviews, and lack of equal participation by corpus members in both the guided interviews and the open conversations.

The above description of the corpus illustrates how it will allow for comparison in regards to DM use by age, by location and demographic context (i.e., majority context vs. minority context), and by interview style and register (i.e., formal guided interview vs. informal open conversation).

## 4.2 Discourse marker analysis method

To begin my analysis, I count the total number of English and French DM tokens in both the guided interview and the open conversation of each participant. To identify which tokens function as DMs, I implement Sankoff et al.'s criteria, below (1997: 195-197):

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<sup>1</sup> This percentage includes speakers who marked multiple responses to the Statistics Canada question concerning first language/mother tongue.

<sup>2</sup> After initially basing my analysis on six participants from Hearst and Windsor respectively, I ultimately chose to expand the Hearst corpus to confirm this initial analysis. Access to additional participants was not available in regard to the Windsor corpus.

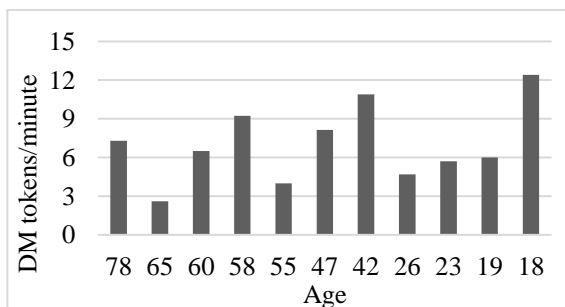
- a. “They do not enter into construction syntactically with other elements of the sentence,”
- b. “[t]he meaning of the sentence does not depend on their presence,”
- c. “[t]hey are subject to semantic bleaching” ... and “undergo greater phonological reduction than their source forms,” and
- d. “[t]hey are articulated as part of smoothly flowing speech production.”

As stated in section 3.1, not all tokens of the same type function as a DM. When identifying DM tokens, I only counted those that met the above criteria both in the audio recordings and written transcripts.

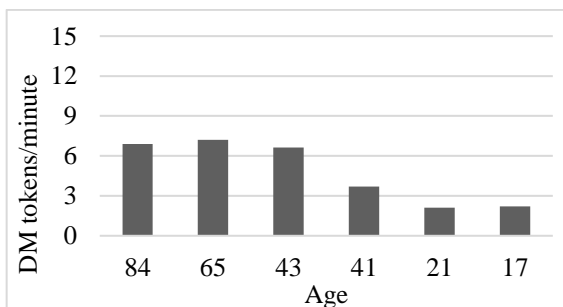
After counting the total number of tokens, I calculate the number of DMs per minute and DMs per 100 words. Calculating the number of DMs per minute again follows the analysis of Sankoff et al. (1997) which investigates DM use by anglophones living in Montreal as an indicator of linguistic fluency and ease in French. The DM rate of the participants in their first language (English) is compared to that in their second language (French), and the study ultimately finds that though an individual’s use of DMs is highly variable, and there may be outliers in the data, the average rate of DMs in a participant’s first language is between three to eight DM tokens per minute. Calculating the DMs per minute of the Hearst and Windsor data sets allowed me to assess whether the rates were within this range. Though Sankoff et al. (1997) do not specify whether DM rate per minute only includes the speech of the interviewee or also that of the interviewer, for my rates I only count those seconds when the interviewee is speaking, including overlapping speech.

That said, considering the range in individual speech rate and the difficulty of discerning between speakers during free-flowing conversation, I also calculated the number of DMs per 100 words. Crible (2018) uses this measure as opposed to DMs per minute, finding an average rate between five and seven DMs per 100 words. It is important to note that Crible’s (2018) identification of DMs differs from that of Sankoff et al. (1997); while Sankoff et al. approach DMs through the specific criteria listed above, Crible does not rely on a list of criteria and uses a less discriminatory definition.

To validate the use of DMs per 100 words, both measures are presented in the following graphs for comparison. Figures [1] and [2] present the rate of DM use per minute during the guided interviews in Hearst and Windsor, respectively:

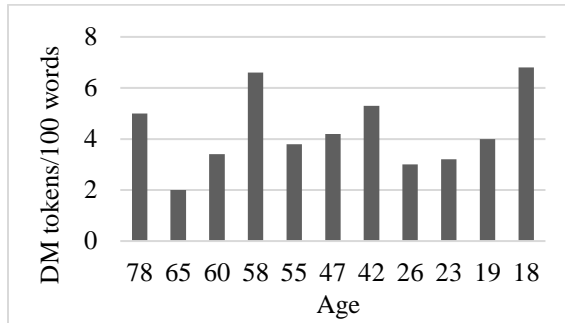


**Figure 1.** DM tokens/minute by age, guided interviews: Hearst

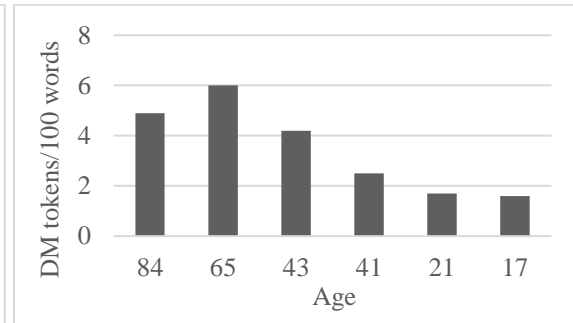


**Figure 2.** DM tokens/minute by age, guided interviews: Windsor

It's important to reiterate that DMs are highly variable and outliers exist in respect to Sankoff et al.'s (1997) standard of three to eight DMs per minute. This is apparent as the Hearst data includes three participants that exceed the upper threshold of eight DMs per minute. Though the average rates given in both studies are important, I will focus more on rate comparison within the data I am working with as opposed to in relation to Sankoff et al. (1997) and Crible's (2018) research. Figures [3] and [4], present the rate of DM use per 100 words:



**Figure 3.** DM tokens/100 words by age, guided interviews: Hearst



**Figure 4.** DM tokens/100 words by age, guided interviews: Windsor

Though the graphs shown in [3] and [4] do show a lower overall rate, with a maximum of seven DMs per 100 words as opposed to twelve DMs per minute, there is an undeniable correlation between the data shown here and that shown in figures [1] and [2], with the Hearst data showing high variability in both [1] and [3] and the Windsor data showing a tapering in DM rate correlating with participant age in both [2] and [4]. Though the rates shown here do not completely fall into the five to seven DMs per 100 word average given by Crible (2018), they do parallel the DM per minute standard rate given by Sankoff et al. (1997). This discrepancy can be explained in part by the different definitions used within the two studies when identifying DMs, described above.

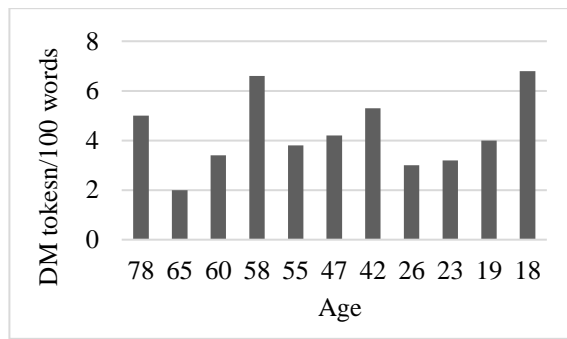
Having compared and validated these measures, the measure I implement for my analysis is that of DMs per 100 words; this allows for clear delineation between speakers during overlapping speech and negates the factor of individual speech rate.

## 5. Analysis

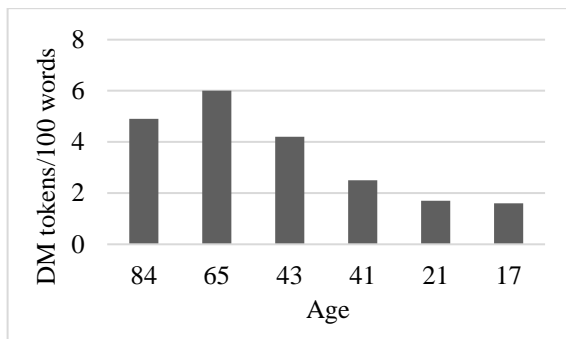
My analysis begins with DM use in the context of guided interviews, a context in which interviewees use a more formal register, followed by DM use in the context of open conversations, a context involving a more informal register. Within each context, I address overall DM rates, the number of tokens for each DM type by language, and how rate and type preference correlate with age and location.

## 5.1 Discourse marker use in guided interviews

Figures [3] and [4] are repeated below in [5] and [6] for convenience, again showing the information for DMs per 100 words during the guided interviews in both Hearst and Windsor:



**Figure 3b.** DM tokens/100 words by age, guided interviews: Hearst



**Figure 4b.** DM tokens/100 words by age, guided interviews: Windsor

As stated above, Figure [3b] illustrates that the Hearst data is highly variable with DM rates ranging from two to seven DMs per 100 words. Only one speaker, a 65-year-old female, drops below three DMs per 100 words, with the average resting at around 4.3 DMs per 100 words. This data shows no correlation between participants' DM use and age; the three participants with the highest DM rates are an 18-year-old male, 42-year-old female, and 58 year-old-male, confirming that age does not seem to be a factor in DM use in Hearst.

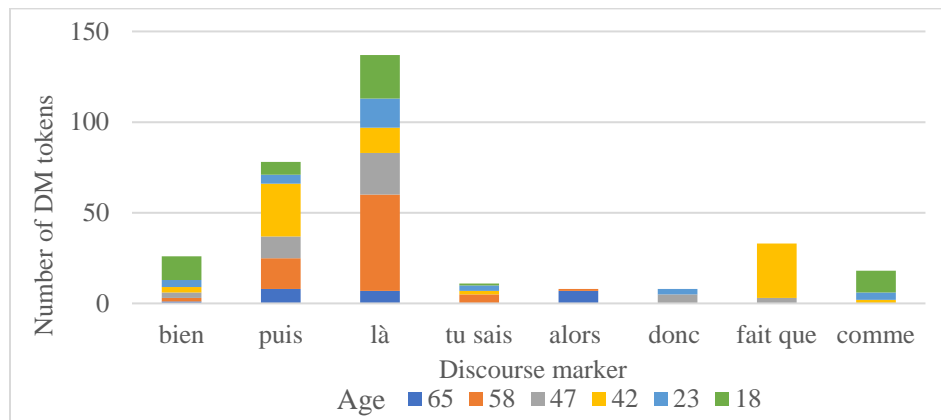
Turning now to the Windsor data, overall DM use is much lower, with an average of 3.6 DMs per 100 words. Here we do see a drop in DM use that seems to correlate with age; while the three older participants have rates ranging from four to six DMs per 100 words, the youngest participants have DM rates ranging from 1.5 to 2.5 DMs per 100 words. These participants include a 41-year-old male, a 21-year-old male and a 17-year-old female.

### 5.1.2 French discourse marker use in guided interviews

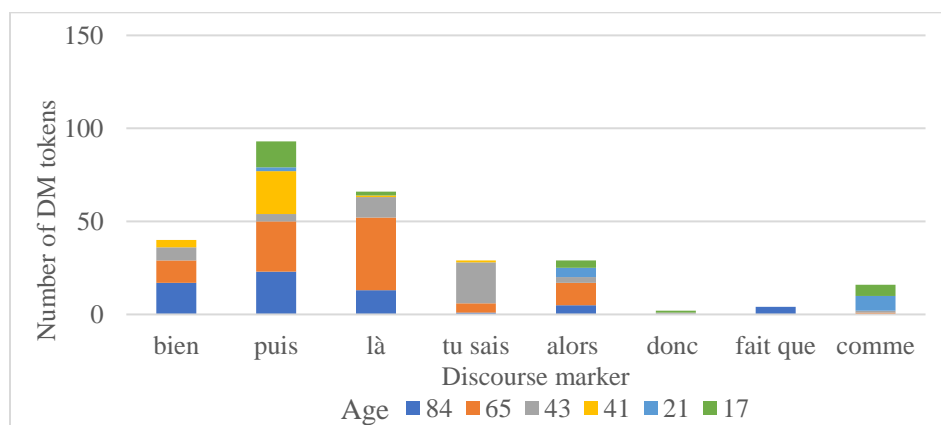
After calculating the DM rate for each participant, I look at which DM types are most frequently used and by whom. Of the twenty-one types present in the data, the most frequently used French DMs in both Hearst and Windsor include the following eight: *bien* - 'well', *puis* - 'and' or 'then', *là* - 'there', *tu sais* or *t'sé* - 'you know', *alors* - 'then', *donc* - 'so', *ça fait que* or *fait que* - 'so', and *comme* - 'like'. Figures [5] and [6] below show DM preference and use, where age is represented by shade with the oldest speakers at the base of each column and youngest speakers at the top.

Here, I have only included six speakers from each data site for the sake of comparison. I did not have access to the open conversation of the 78-year-old male from Hearst, which meant the oldest participant from this data set is a 65-year-old female. Otherwise, participants were chosen based on age and gender.





**Figure 5.** French DM use rate by age of speaker during guided interviews: Hearst



**Figure 6.** French DM use rate by age of speaker during guided interviews: Windsor

In both data sets, the two most frequently used DM types are *puis* and *là*, though participants in Hearst overwhelmingly prefer *là*, with 137 tokens of the DM compared to the sixty-six tokens in the Windsor data. Conversely, Windsor participants prefer *puis*, with ninety-three tokens compared to seventy-eight in the Hearst data. This is of interest as *là* translates to ‘there’, a word that is not used as a DM in English, where *puis* translates to either ‘and’ or ‘then’, both words that are often used as coordinators and DMs in English conversation. These differences in use signal evidence of higher English language transfer in Windsor, as the more frequently used DM types are used similarly in both languages. It is also of note that older speakers produce *là* more frequently than younger speakers, who focus more on the use of *puis*, and *alors*. This is not the case in Hearst, where *là* is used by all participants regardless of age and is in fact the preferred DM of the youngest speaker. The use of *là*, *puis*, and *bien* is illustrated in example (1):

- (1) H-58-M<sup>3</sup> : ...et **puis** euh, maintenant **bien** c'est la propriété de, de, de d'autres, **là**  
 '...and **then** uh, now **well** it's the property of, of, of, of others, (GDM)'

Another shift that may signal an increase in English language transfer is the rise in the use of *comme*, or 'like'; the younger participants use this DM type most frequently in both Hearst and Windsor, showing correlation with age. This shift is illustrated by excerpts (2) and (3) below:

- (2) W-84-F : Pas ma mère **par exemple**, parce que ma mère...  
 'Not my mother, **for example**, because my mother...'
- (3) H-23-M : **Comme**, je remarque surtout les plus jeu/, les, les plus jeunes à cette heure, **comme**, c'est vraiment anglicisé, **là**.  
 '**Like**, I've noticed that especially young people now, **like**, it's really anglicised, (GDM)'

The use of such DMs as *disons*, 'let's say', and *par exemple*, 'for example', are not included in Figures [5] and [6] above, as they are only minimally used by the oldest speakers.

### 5.1.3 English discourse marker use

English DMs are used minimally during the guided interviews in both locations. Only six English DM types appear in the twelve interviews: one each of *yeah*, *like*, *ok*, *so*, and *I guess*, and two tokens of *well*. Four of these tokens were used by the youngest generation, with two in the Windsor data and two in the Hearst data. The middle generation in Windsor used *so* and one token of *well*. Though there seems to be a correlation between English DM use, age, and location, there is not enough data available to draw any solid conclusions. Examples (5) and (6) illustrated the use of these DMs below:

- (5) W-21-M : ...euh, **well** dans l'hiver j'aime faire du ski...  
 '...uh, **well** in winter I like skiing...'
- (6) W-17-F : ...je fais des sports avec des motocyclettes euh, **like** four wheelers.  
 '...I do sports with motorcycles uh, **like** four wheelers.'

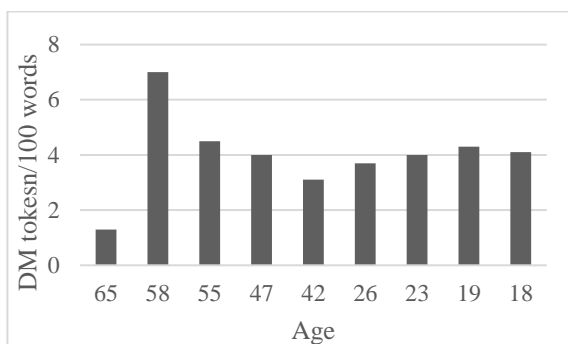
We can then see that though these DMs are present, their use is quite rare.

## 5.2 Discourse marker use in open conversation

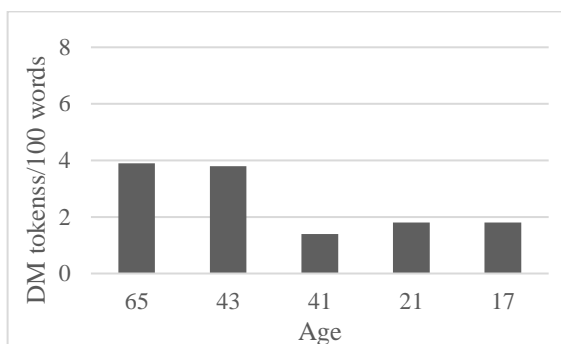
Figures [7] and [8] below show the rate of DM use per 100 words in open conversation. Due to the limited availability of recordings, I included all participants for this measure:

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<sup>3</sup> All speakers are identified by location (L), H for Hearst and W for Windsor, age (A) in Arabic numerals and gender (G), M for male F for female in the form L-AA-G.



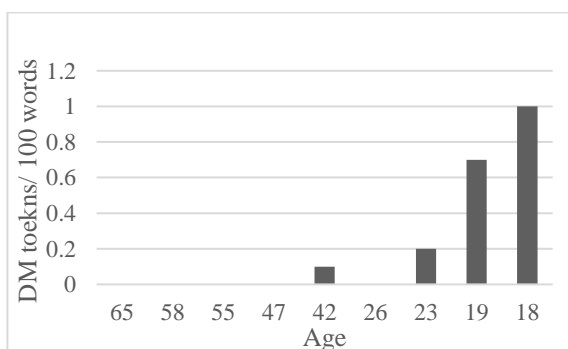
**Figure 7.** DM tokens/100 words by age, open conversation: Hearst



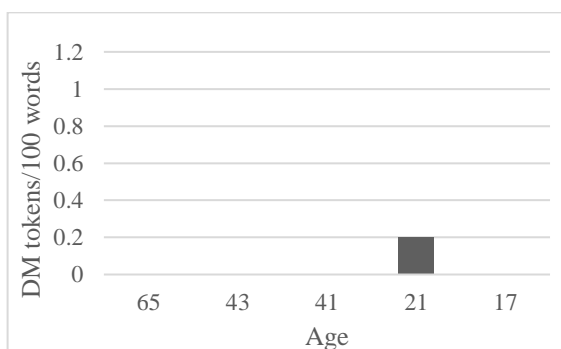
**Figure 8.** DM tokens/100 words, by age open conversation: Windsor

Here we can see that the DM rates shift when the context of the recording changes. However, though there is an overall leveling seen in Hearst, the average rate rests at 4 DMs per 100 words, only slightly less than the 4.3 rate seen in the guided interviews. Again, the overall DM rate is lower in Windsor, with an average of 2.5 DMs per 100 words and a drop in rate that correlates with age<sup>4</sup>. This shows that the context of the recording and the register participants use have an impact on DM use, though general patterns in each location parallel the data taken from the guided interviews. This decrease in DM rate can be explained by Vincent and Sankoff's (1992) observation that descriptive and analytical discourse often produce a higher rate of DMs. During the open conversations, participant responses were shorter, included more overlap, and didn't go into as much detail as during the guided interviews.

However, while this shift in context and participant register saw a slight decrease in DM production in French, it prompted an increase in the use of English DMs. Figures [9] and [10] show the English DM rate per 100 words in Hearst and Windsor, respectively:



**Figure 9.** English DM tokens/100 words by age, open conversation: Hearst



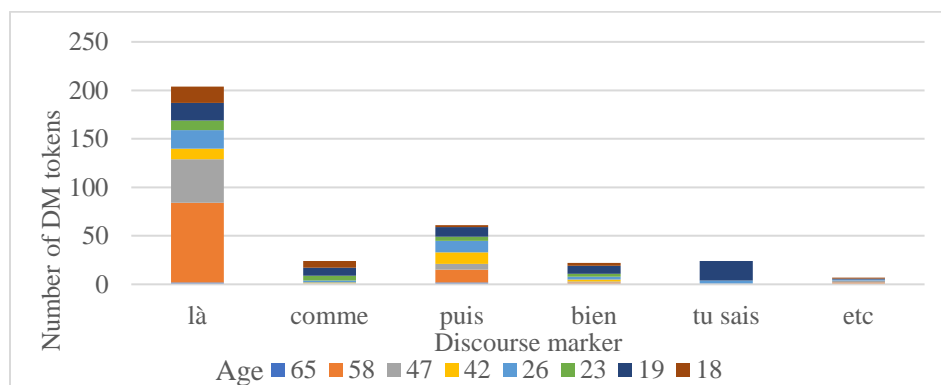
**Figure 10.** English DM tokens/100 words by age, open conversation: Windsor

<sup>4</sup> It is important to note that only five participants are included in graphs (13) and (15), as this was the data available to me at the time.

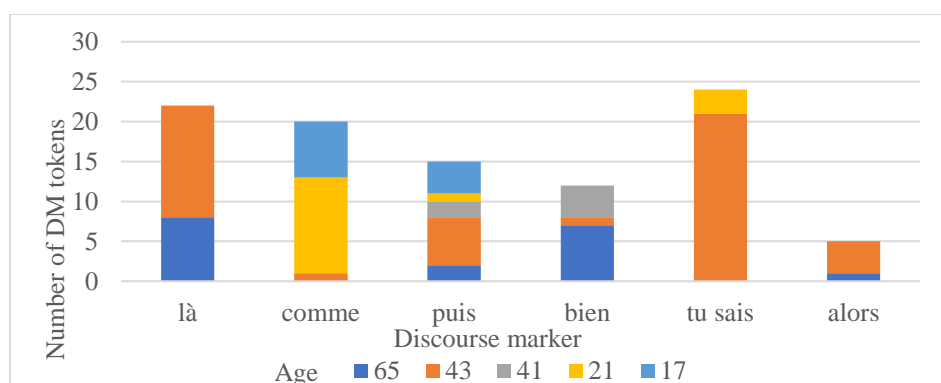
Here we see a different pattern in DM use that correlates once again with both age and location. By comparing the DM rates of the guided interviews with those of the open conversations, it is undeniable that the context of the recording plays a factor in participants' speech patterns in Hearst, where younger generations show an increase in English DM use. This increase, however, is not present in Windsor; in fact, English DM tokens decrease in relation to the shift in context.

### 5.2.2 French discourse marker use in open conversation

I now turn to the use of French DMs, specifically, during open conversation, and the patterning of DM types within this context. In total, there were nineteen DM types, with the most frequently used types including the following six: *bien* - 'well', *puis* - 'and' or 'then', *là* - 'there', *tu sais* or *t'sé* - 'you know', *comme* - 'like', and *en tout cas (etc)* - 'in any case' or 'anyway'; *en tout cas* is the only DM that appears more frequently in the informal context, with all other DMs included in both contexts. DM type preference is shown below in figures [11] and [12], again with the oldest speakers at the base of the columns and youngest speakers at the top.



**Figure 11.** French DM use rate by age of speaker during open conversation: Hearst



**Figure 12.** French DM use rate by age of speaker during open conversation: Windsor

As illustrated in these figures, *puis* and *là* continue to be the most frequently used DMs in Hearst, with 204 tokens of *là* and sixty-one tokens of *puis*. The use of *là* is illustrated in examples (7), below:

- (7) H-58-M : Oui ces années-là, **là**, oui, moi **là** je suis euh, mes racines sont, sont grosses, **là**, ici, **là**.  
 ‘Yeah, these years here, (GDM), yeah I (GDM) I am uh, my roots are are big, (GDM) here, (GDM).’

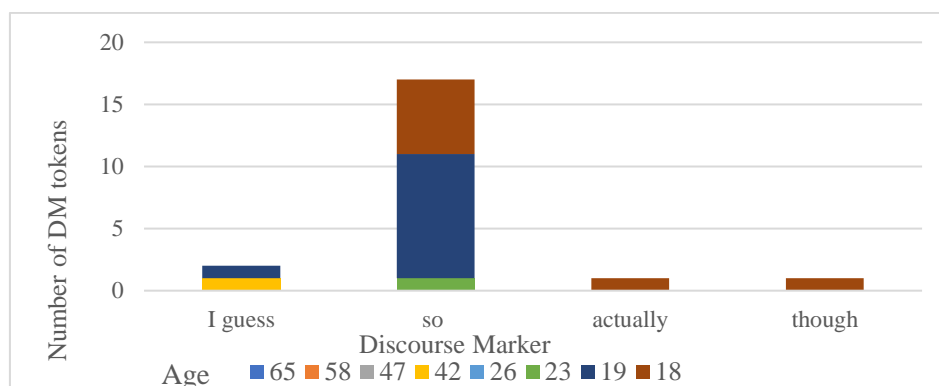
Though Windsor also shows a high frequency of both *là* and *puis*, with twenty-two and fifteen tokens respectively, there is a shift in preference, with twenty-four tokens of *tu sais* and twenty tokens of *comme* making these the first and third most frequent DM types. It is important to note that the two oldest participants are the only two who use *là* in the Windsor data, again signaling a generational transition away from this DM.

As in the guided interviews, younger participants in both Hearst and Windsor showed increased preference for the DM *comme*, with twenty-four tokens present in the Hearst data and twenty tokens present in the Windsor data. This again exhibits the influence of language transfer seen during the guided interviews.

### 5.2.3 English discourse marker use in open conversation

I will now address the use of English DMs in the informal context of open conversations, starting with the patterns present in Windsor. Surprisingly, the two utterances found in the Windsor data are *right* and *well*, two DMs that do not occur in the Hearst data. They were both uttered by a 21-year-old male. Again, as only five English DM tokens were present in the guided interview, compared to the two present here, the only conclusion that can be drawn at this point is that English DMs remain rare in Windsor, regardless of context.

Turning to English DM preferences within the Hearst data, it is important to look back to the graphs shown in Figures [9] and [10]. These graphs illustrate how the open conversation allows for an increased use of English DMs. These DMs include *actually*, *so*, *I guess*, and *though*, and their rates of use are illustrated in [13] below:



**Figure 12.** English DM use rate by age of speaker during open conversation: Windsor

It should be noted that the majority of these utterances, nineteen of the twenty-one tokens present in the Hearst data, are produced by the two youngest participants and consist primarily of the use of *so*. Examples of these DMs are illustrated in (8) and (9) below:

(8) H-19-F: ...il y a des activités pour les enfants, **tu sais**, tout ça, **so**.  
 ‘...there are activities for the kids, **you know**, all that, **so**.’

(9) H-18-M: ...je suis pas un nature boy, **là**, **so**.  
 ‘...I’m not a nature boy, (**GDM**), **so**.’

In both of these examples, the English DMs are immediately followed by continuous French speech after they occur.

## 6. Conclusion

The above analysis illustrates a correlation between DM use, participant age, location and demographic context, and stylistic context or register. This correlation points to the increasing influence of English language contact and transfer on the younger generations in both locations. However, the impact of this influence varies between the French-minority situation in Windsor and the French-majority situation in Hearst.

The data taken from Windsor shows that overall DM use is decreasing, with younger generations producing both fewer DM types and tokens in both the guided interview and the open conversation. When younger participants produce French DMs, they show an increasing preference toward DMs that have English equivalents, such as *comme*, signalling language transfer. Though English DMs are primarily used by the younger participants, they are rare. The fact that Windsor participants have overall lower DM rates and minimally use English DMs in open conversation may point to a lack of expressivity and linguistic security within the language. Of course, this could be due to the presence of an outsider during both the open conversation and guided interview, but more data is required to come to any definitive conclusions.

The DM use in Hearst seems fairly consistent, with a high level of variety across age groups, and only one participant showing a rate below three DMs per 100 words. Of course, language transfer exists in Hearst as well, with an increase in the use of *comme* as opposed to more traditional DMs including *par exemple* and *disons*, which have both virtually disappeared. However, English DM use plays a larger part in interview context and participant register, as is evidenced by the increase in English DM use during open conversations. The youngest generation exhibits an uptick in English DM use, though French DM use does not necessarily decrease to accommodate these switches. This may indicate high levels of bilingualism among these speakers, as there is an ease in transition and fluency in both formal and informal contexts.

The data sets I use are small, but they suggest some interesting implications. DM use clearly correlates with interview context, age, and demographic context and location. It is also clear that DM use is in the process of changing in both Hearst and Windsor, though in very different ways. Though more data is needed to come to more definitive conclusions,

investigating DM use clearly offers an interesting and rich perspective on language shift, contact, and maintenance, and can prove useful when investigating the vitality of a variety.

Though this initial study has shed light on the current situation in Ontario, much more work is needed. In the future, I would like to gain a deeper understanding of DMs as they are extremely variable, and would like to explore different approaches to DM analysis in greater depth. Having the opportunity to compare DM use in both English and French for younger generations could lead to some interesting insights about language contact, influence, and fluency in local linguistic varieties. Having more balanced data sets and access to complete interview records would also be beneficial to results.

In their studies, Sankoff et al. (1997) and Chambers and Lapierre (2011) gathered demographic information on their participants, including language of education, home, and other contexts. This allowed for a much more intensive analysis. I would like to incorporate this socio-demographic information in my own work on DM use in OLF and, in doing so, develop a more precise methodology.

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