

Discourse Markers in Athlete-Hosted Podcasts: An Analysis of Types and Functions in Spontaneous Speech

Gratia Sialagan¹

¹ Department, First author affiliation, Province, Country

 email: gratiaclarays@gmail.com

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ABSTRACT

Discourse markers play a vital role in spoken communication by helping speakers manage conversational flow, express attitudes, and maintain coherence. This study examines their types and functions in athlete-hosted podcast conversations. Using a qualitative descriptive design with document analysis, transcribed podcast data were analyzed to identify discourse marker types and explore their functions within spontaneous speech. A total of 2,013 discourse markers were identified. Six types emerged, each serving distinct pragmatic functions. Discourse connectives (39.90%) such as *and*, *but*, *also*, and *then* maintained coherence by linking ideas. Markers of information and participation (40.58%) like *you know*, *I think*, *I mean*, *yeah*, *like*, and *actually* expressed stance, clarified utterances, and engaged listeners. Information management markers (1.69%) such as *okay* and *well* indicated topic shifts or cognitive processing. Cause-result markers (8.44%) such as *because* and *so* explained reasoning and outcomes. Response markers (5.81%) including *yeah* and *woah* conveyed agreement or emotional reaction. Temporal/modal adverbs (3.57%) such as *now*, *tomorrow*, and *sometimes* marked time, while *probably* and *maybe* expressed uncertainty. This analysis confirms that each type of discourse marker contributes uniquely to achieving communicative goals in spontaneous speech. These findings demonstrate that athlete-hosted podcasts provide authentic and pragmatically rich spoken data, making them valuable for discourse analysis and language teaching. Future researchers are recommended to examine discourse marker usage in different context such as interview, tv shows, and debate.

Keywords: *Athlete Podcasts; Discourse Analysis; Discourse Markers; Podcast Analysis; Spoken Discourse.*

INTRODUCTION

Spontaneous conversation is a fundamental form of human communication that enables individuals to share information, express emotions, and build meaning in real-time. Unlike scripted speech, spontaneous dialogue is inherently dynamic, involving features such as pauses, repetitions, and fillers to maintain fluency and coherence. These features provide a valuable context for examining linguistic elements that support conversational flow. Among these elements, discourse markers play a key role in structuring spoken interaction beyond the sentence level, helping speakers navigate transitions, signal relationships between ideas, and manage listener expectations Schiffrin, (1987).

Discourse markers such as *and*, *but*, *so*, *well*, and *you know* are frequently used in spontaneous speech and have been analyzed across various communicative contexts, including interviews, presentations, and talk shows. However, limited research has addressed their usage in podcast communication, particularly in athlete-hosted podcasts. Podcasts offer a unique environment where speakers engage in unscripted, informal dialogue, often involving bilingual or multilingual communication. According to Harahap, (2020), podcasts are widely accessible digital audio formats covering diverse themes, including education and language, making them a valuable medium for linguistic inquiries. This study focuses on-hosted podcasts, where speakers often professional athletes engage in informal, yet content-rich discussions in English, sometimes blended with elements of their native languages. These conversations provide fertile ground for analyzing how discourse markers function to manage information, express stance, and maintain interactional coherence. Drawing on Schiffrin's framework, this study aims to identify the types and examine the functions of discourse markers in selected podcast episodes. Theoretically, the research contributes to discourse analysis by exploring how spoken language is organized in informal settings. Practically, it offers insights for podcasters, linguists, and communication professionals seeking to enhance engagement and clarity in spoken discourse.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Language is a complex and dynamic system for communication, comprising multiple components such as phonology, morphology, syntax, semantics, and pragmatics Finestack et al., (2020). It functions not only as a means of conveying information but also as a symbolic and social tool that reflects individual cognition and collective norms Kanaza, (2020). In spoken genres like athlete-hosted podcasts, language use becomes particularly spontaneous, allowing researchers to observe how speakers construct meaning in real time through pragmatic strategies such as discourse markers.

Discourse Analysis (DA) provides a useful framework for examining how language is structured across turns and contexts Fraser, (2021). Rather than

isolating grammar, DA explores how coherence, stance, identity, and interactional goals are managed through extended speech. This approach is particularly well-suited to the analysis of spoken discourse, which is inherently dialogic, fragmented, and context-sensitive (McCarthy, (1991); Richards & Schmidt, (2002)). Podcasts offer rich examples of unscripted speech in which discourse markers are employed to manage transitions, organize thoughts, and respond to others—core aspects of real-time interaction.

Spoken discourse differs significantly from written discourse, as it is often improvised, multimodal, and interactive. Stark et al., (2021) highlight that spoken language includes microstructural (e.g., syntax), macrostructural (e.g., cohesion), and interactional (e.g., turn-taking) features. These are evident in podcasts, where speakers use markers like *you know* and *I mean* to signal stance and clarify meaning, while also using paralinguistic cues to engage listeners. Such language use reflects not only the communicative purpose but also the speaker's social and emotional orientation (Fatmah et al., (2024)).

(Schiffrin, 1987) framework classifies discourse markers into six functional categories: (1) *Markers of Information Management* (e.g., *okay*, *well*) help signal shifts or manage attention; (2) *Response Markers* (e.g., *yeah*, *woah*) indicate agreement or emotional reaction; (3) *Discourse Connectives* (e.g., *and*, *but*, *then*) ensure coherence between ideas; (4) *Cause-Result Markers* (e.g., *so*, *because*) explain reasoning or outcomes; (5) *Temporal/Modal Adverbs* (e.g., *now*, *tomorrow*, *maybe*) show time reference or uncertainty; and (6) *Markers of Information and Participation* (e.g., *you know*, *I think*, *actually*) involve the listener and express stance. For instance, in the utterance “I was like... you know... just trying to stay focused,” *like* and *you know* operate as fillers that allow cognitive space while also softening tone and building rapport.

A wide range of studies have investigated discourse markers (DMs) across various genres, modes, and speaker profiles. Gabarró-López, (2020) examined two DMs in sign languages and observed their polyfunctional and language-specific usage, though the study was limited in scope and participant diversity.

In scripted media, Ussolichah et al., (2021) analyzed DMs in *Avengers: Endgame*, identifying frequent use of markers like *oh*, *so*, and *well*, while Hazem et al., (2021) emphasized the coherence-building function of DMs in literary texts—both studies constrained by pre-written dialogue. In more structured settings, Sari, (2023) explored DMs in scientific debates, and Farahani & Ghane, (2022) used a corpus-based approach to investigate markers such as *you know* and *I mean* in academic speech. These studies affirm the organizational and interpersonal roles of DMs, yet are often based on edited or formal speech with limited spontaneity.

Research in academic and learner discourse also reveals important insights. Ramadhani & Syarif, (2021) focused on student thesis presentations, noting overuse and first-language interference. Similarly, Sarira et al., (2023) and Arya, (2022) explored filler use and DM functions among EFL learners, highlighting pragmatic constraints and limited interactional depth. In more semi-formal domains, Annisa

et al., (2023) examined non-native speakers in talk shows and identified a diverse range of markers used for managing information and participation. Crible & Pascual, (2020) studied DMs in conversational repair across languages, but mostly within formal or cross-linguistic contexts. Collectively, these studies enhance our understanding of DMs but tend to focus on scripted, academic, or learner-based interactions.

Despite these contributions, little attention has been given to unscripted, informal discourse produced by native or near-native speakers in spontaneous settings. This study addresses that gap by focusing on athlete-hosted podcasts, a genre characterized by informality, real-time interaction, and public reach. These podcasts offer a fertile ground for observing how DMs are used not only to structure speech and ensure coherence but also to express stance, manage rapport, and reflect individual communication styles. The novelty of this research lies in its examination of naturalistic, domain-specific discourse by experienced public figures, offering new insights into how DMs function in hybrid communicative spaces that blend casual conversation with performative elements.

METHOD

This study adopts a descriptive qualitative approach aimed at providing a detailed and objective description of the characteristics and relationships within the phenomenon under investigation. According to Crible & Pascual, (2020), descriptive qualitative research focuses on delivering rich, direct explanations of social realities based on participants' perspectives without the use of statistical or numerical data. This method enables researchers to capture authentic experiences, perceptions, and motivations, thereby offering in-depth insight into social phenomena as they naturally occur. Urcia, (2021) supports this by emphasizing that qualitative research views reality as constructed through human interaction and shaped by individual interpretation, making it highly suitable for exploring lived experiences. Data sources for this study consist of three video podcasts featuring athletes: Carlos Sainz Jr. from the "F1 Beyond The Grid Podcast," Harry Kane from "The Rick Shiels Golf Show," and Roger Federer from "What Now? with Trevor Noah." These videos were selected due to their natural conversational settings and range in length from approximately 49 minutes to one hour, providing rich material for analyzing discourse markers used during the podcasts.

Data collection was conducted through Qualitative Document Analysis (QDA), a systematic approach to examining existing textual data to identify patterns, meanings, and context Urcia, (2021). The transcripts of the videos were downloaded from online sources, then carefully transcribed, segmented into paragraphs, and checked repeatedly against the videos to ensure accuracy. The analysis followed the framework proposed by Urcia, (2021), with Schiffirin's (1987) theory used to answer the research questions regarding discourse marker usage.

The process involved multiple viewings of the videos, transcription correction, and thematic coding to identify and interpret the types and functions of discourse markers as they naturally emerged from the athletes' spoken discourse. This method allowed for a comprehensive and ethical examination of the data, suitable for understanding how discourse markers operate in spontaneous athlete-hosted podcasts.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Here's the result types of discourse markers among these three athlete sports in table 1 below:

Table 1. Result Types of Discourse Markers

No	Types of Discourse Markers	Categories	Frequency				Total Combination
			Carlos Sainz	Harry Kane	Roger Federer	Total	
1	Marker of Information Management	Topic Change Markers (Oh, okay, well)	0	0	3	3	34 (1.69%)
		Topic Shift (Well, So)	0	4	5	9	
		Repetition/Confirmation (Right, Okay)	2	8	12	22	
2	Marker of Response	Agreement Marker (Yeah, Woah)	30	52	35	117	117 (5.81%)
		Acknowledgment Marker ("Uh-huh," "Right")	0	0	0	0	
3	Discourse Connective	Additive Connectives (And, Also)	243	166	224	633	804 (39.90%)
		Contrastive Connectives (But, However)	48	52	49	149	
		Sequential Connectives (Then, Next)	7	2	13	22	
4	Markers of Cause and Result	Causal Markers (Because, Since)	38	24	41	103	170 (8.44%)
		Resultative Markers (So, Therefore)	4	20	43	67	

5	Markers of Temporal Adverbs	Uncertainty/Estimation Markers (Maybe, Probably) Time-Sequence Markers (Now, Then, sometimes, later)	9	12	21	42	72 (3.57%)
			6	10	14	30	
6	Markers of Information and Participation	Elaborative Markers (Like, Actually) Participation Markers (You know, I think, I mean)	22	180	82	284	817 (40,58%)
			101	203	229	533	
Total			510	733	771	2014	2

An analysis of discourse markers in video podcasts featuring Carlos Sainz, Harry Kane, and Roger Federer reveals distinct patterns in how each speaker navigates and structures spoken discourse. A total of 2,014 discourse markers were identified, with Federer using the most (771), followed by Kane (733) and Sainz (510). The most frequently used category was Markers of Information and Participation, including elaborative elements like like and actually, as well as participation-focused markers such as you know, I think, I mean, and yeah. This category was particularly dominant in the speech of Kane and Federer, indicating a strong orientation toward self-expression, listener involvement, and conversational clarity. Notably, Kane's frequent use of participation markers underscores a preference for relational and inclusive communication, contributing to an accessible and personable speaking style.

Other prominent discourse markers included additive and connective elements like and and also, which were widely used by all speakers, with Federer showing the highest frequency. His use of contrastive (but, however) and sequential markers (then, next) further highlighted a well-organized, logically coherent speech style. Causal markers such as because, so, and therefore were most common in Federer's speech, reflecting a structured approach to reasoning likely shaped by experience in formal media settings. In contrast, Sainz and Kane exhibited a more intuitive speaking pattern with fewer causal linkers. Markers of response (yeah, uh-huh) and temporal adverbs (now, maybe, sometimes) appeared with moderate variation, especially among Kane, who often used them to signal agreement and maintain interactional flow. These findings suggest that discourse marker usage is shaped not only by individual personality and communicative habits but also by broader factors such as cultural norms, linguistic proficiency, and the informal, unscripted nature of the podcast genre.

DISCUSSION

This study examined the use of discourse markers (DMs) in athlete-hosted podcasts and compared the findings to previous research in various spoken discourse contexts. The analysis revealed that DM usage is shaped significantly by the level of formality, spontaneity, and the speakers' linguistic background. For instance, in contrast to Ramadhani & Syarif, (2021) investigation of thesis seminar presentations, where students frequently relied on elaborative (and) and inferential (so) markers—often repetitively or inaccurately due to limited communicative experience—athlete speakers such as Roger Federer and Harry Kane utilized a broader and more pragmatic range of markers like *you know*, *I mean*, and *like*. These markers were not only used to structure ideas but also to reflect opinions, manage discourse shifts, and engage the audience. Similarly, when compared to the scripted nature of movie dialogue analyzed by Ussolichah et al., (2021), the unscripted nature of podcasts fostered a more spontaneous and authentic application of markers such as *well*, *right*, and *anyway*, enhancing interactional naturalness.

Further comparisons with other studies reinforce these distinctions. Sari, (2023) research on science debates using Schifffrin's (1987) framework showed a strong presence of logical markers like *and*, *because*, and *so*, primarily for constructing arguments. Although these also appeared in the athlete podcasts, they were employed with greater flexibility to indicate reflection or soften conclusions, underscoring the impact of discourse goals on DM function. Annisa et al., (2023) noted inconsistent use of DMs among non-native speakers in televised interviews, often due to varying cultural and linguistic influences. In contrast, athletes in the present study, despite multilingual backgrounds, demonstrated a more consistent and fluent use of DMs, likely attributable to their regular exposure to global media discourse. Arya, (2022) findings on Thai university students further highlight this contrast, showing limited interpersonal DM usage and a focus on structural markers. Athletes, by comparison, used interpersonal and cognitive markers—such as *I mean*, *maybe*, and *you know* to express uncertainty, invite alignment, and enhance listener engagement. Overall, the findings illustrate that athlete-hosted podcasts serve as rich examples of spontaneous spoken interaction and underscore the pedagogical value of using authentic podcast material to foster pragmatic competence and communicative fluency in English language learning contexts.

CONCLUSION

This study investigated the types and functions of discourse markers (DMs) in athlete-hosted podcasts, revealing their integral role in organizing spontaneous speech, managing information flow, maintaining audience engagement, and expressing the speaker's stance or emotion. Frequently occurring markers such as *you know*, *so*, *like*, and *I mean* illustrated the informal and fluid nature of podcast conversations. The varying use of DMs among different speakers also reflected

individual speaking styles shaped by context, experience, and communicative intent. When compared to other spoken discourse genres such as academic presentations, scripted films, formal debates, and televised interviews—athlete-hosted podcasts exhibited a more diverse and flexible use of discourse markers. This spontaneity and authenticity suggest that podcasts represent a valuable resource for studying real-life interaction and hold significant pedagogical potential for enhancing learners' pragmatic competence and fluency in English.

Building on these findings, future research may explore discourse markers across a broader range of communicative contexts to deepen our understanding of their functions in spoken interaction. Investigating settings such as interview, tv shows and debate that could uncover how different goals, audiences, and speaker identities influence DM use. Moreover, analyzing how discourse markers contribute to emotional expression, speaker positioning, or cross-cultural pragmatics would offer further insights into their multifaceted role. Comparative studies involving speakers from diverse linguistic and cultural backgrounds, or cross-linguistic analyses of DM equivalents, could also enrich the field. Such extensions would not only validate the current findings but also contribute to a more comprehensive view of discourse strategies in global communication.

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