

Modal Particles and Discourse Markers
in Luxembourgish Emails, Plays, and Filmscripts:
a Corpus-Based Approach

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Abstract

Purpose – The purpose of this study is to investigate modal particles and discourse markers in Luxembourgish through a study of a Luxembourgish email word-corpus, and a Luxembourgish word-corpus of plays and film scripts.

Design/methodology/approach – This study uses an approach based on the pragmaticalisation of words with propositional meanings into pragmatic markers with non-propositional uses. The polysemy of modal particles, discourse markers, and their propositional counterparts, which are found in a corpus of Luxembourgish emails and a corpus of Luxembourgish plays and film scripts, is analysed with a concordancer.

Findings – Apart from the modal particle *alt*, pragmatic markers with Germanic origins have propositional counterparts. Those with French origins only have non-propositional meanings. *Zwar* is found to have modal particle usage, which is absent from German. *Ma* is the most commonly used discourse marker in Luxembourgish and seven different uses can be identified.

Research limitations/implications – The research focuses on the study of two word-corpora under 500,000 words. Based on integrating a qualitative and quantitative analysis of modal particles and discourse markers, it offers a model for future research on pragmatic markers in Luxembourgish.

Originality/value – Modal particles have been intensely investigated in German and Dutch, and discourse markers have been examined in French, English, and other languages. However, academic literature concerning Luxembourgish, dictionaries and learning materials have largely ignored pragmatic markers until this present study, which analyses frequencies of modal particles and discourse markers, their propositional and non-propositional distributions, and their pragmatic features. The study will be of particular interest to both linguists and persons involved in Luxembourgish language learning.

Keywords - Luxembourgish (Lëtzebuergesch); modal particles; discourse markers (discourse particles); pragmatics; corpus linguistics; pragmaticalisation; grammaticalisation