Overlap and Discourse Markers in Multi-Party Synchronous Voice-Based Computer-Mediated Communication

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This thesis investigates the relevance of discourse markers (DM) to overlapping talk produced in synchronous voice-based computer-mediated communication (SVCMC). During the COVID-19 pandemic, SVCMC has become a popular form of communication. It is notorious for its dependency on technological variables and its vulnerability to overlap, and conversation analysts agree that avoiding overlap is one of the primary goals of the human turn-taking system. Since avoiding overlap is difficult in SVCMC, and DMs can contribute to turn-taking, the question is if DMs can help the speakers to avoid and resolve overlap in SVCMC.

The purpose of the present study is to examine the conversational environment of SVCMC and the use of DMs in terms of turn-taking and Schegloff's overlap resolution device (ORD). There is an evident scarcity of modern SVCMC corpora. Therefore, an SVCMC corpus containing the transcripts of a Dungeons & Dragons role-playing session was compiled. There are five speakers in the corpus: two native speakers of American English and three speakers of English as a foreign language. Methodologically, corpus-illustrated linguistics is applied to the data to exemplify the technological variables, the occurrences of overlap, and the use of DMs within the SVCMC transcripts.

Based on the analysis, this thesis argues that multi-party SVCMC conversations take place in a unique conversational environment defined by technological variables including the volume level of the speakers, hardware issues, the lack of physical co-presence, and delay. They hamper SVCMC, contributing to its vulnerability to overlap. However, the transcripts illustrate that SVCMC speakers can utilise turn-initial, turn-medial, and turn-final DMs to manage turn-taking and to resolve problematic overlap. DMs as turn-initial turn-takers help the speakers recognise the risk of overlapping talk, and DMs as turn-final turn-yielders show to the overlapping speakers where their turns end. Furthermore, this study claims that DM combinations, DMs as markers of incipient speakership, and repeated DMs can contribute to resolving problematic overlap, and hence added to Schegloff's ORD.

As such, this thesis provides preliminary findings on how SVCMC speakers adapt to the overlap-related constraints of SVCMC environments linguistically. They are based on a single corpus, and future research should confirm or challenge them. Potential areas of interest are the differences between native and non-native uses of DMs, the frequency of DMs in SVCMC, and SVCMC settings different from a roleplaying session. Furthermore, the horizons should be broadened by monitoring the effects of the technological variables and by studying hybrid forms of CMC consisting of audio-visual and textual elements.

Keywords: overlap, turn-taking, discourse markers, computer-mediated communication, computer-mediated discourse, overlap resolution device, conversation analysis, spoken English

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

CA	Conversation Analysis
CMC	Computer-Mediated Communication
CMD	Computer-Mediated Discourse
ORD	Overlap Resolution Device
PM	Pragmatic Marker
SVCMC	Synchronous Voice-Based Computer-Mediated Communication
TCU	Turn-Constructional Unit
TRP	Transition-Relevance Place

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1 INTRODUCTION

During the COVID-19 pandemic, an unprecedented number of conversations have taken place online. Computers have become the standard medium of communication in virtually every field of life. The idea of studying how online communication differs from face-to-face communication is by no means a linguistic novelty, but earlier research has largely focused on its text-based forms such as e-mails, chats, and SMS (Jenks and Brandt 2013, 230–231). Text-based forms of online communication have not disappeared at all, but the order of the day are hybrid computer platforms combining audio-visual and textual conferencing, e.g. Zoom and Microsoft Teams. Sometimes the textual and visual components of such platforms are not utilised, in which case the remaining audio-only communication is known as *synchronous voice-based computer-mediated communication* (SVCMC). There, the speakers cannot see each other but can talk concurrently—even on top of each other. This thesis explores how five participants manage the organisation of their conversation in an SVCMC environment: an audio-only Zoom call.

SVCMC is notorious for its technological limitations manifesting in occurrences of more than one person talking at a time, i.e. *overlap*. Since the 1970s, overlap has received much linguistic attention (cf. e.g. Sacks, Schegloff, and Jefferson 1974; Schegloff 2000; Jefferson 2004; Konakahara 2015; Seuren et al. 2021). The consensus of conversation analysts is that speakers generally try to avoid disturbing overlap (cf. e.g. Sacks, Schegloff, and Jefferson 1974, 706–708; Jefferson 2004, 46; Kurtić, Brown, and Wells 2013, 721; Levinson and Torreira 2015, 4–5). However, achieving this goal in SVCMC is more difficult than in face-to-face communication because SVCMC does not include a visual component that helps the speakers recognise the risk of overlap (cf. e.g. Jenks and Brandt 2013, 246; Oloff 2013, 153–154). Furthermore, SVCMC is dependent on technological variables such as bad quality hardware, unstable internet connection, and delay (cf. e.g. Seuren et al. 2021[1]). In sum, SVCMC is vulnerable to overlap because it relies on the sense of hearing and the quality of the employed technology.

Nonetheless, there are but a handful of studies analysing overlap in SVCMC, and their data are often drawn from the field of education (cf. e.g. Jenks 2014; Granena 2016; Jung et al. 2019). Moreover, Jenks and Brandt (2013, 230–231) have observed that most of the earlier

[1] Seuren et al. (2021) analyse video-mediated online interaction instead of pure SVCMC, but there is no reason to believe that the technological limitations only apply to contexts containing a visual component.

SVCMC studies focus on telephone settings and do not include an analysis of transcripts. Since COVID-19 has compelled people around the world to resort to SVCMC for purely social purposes, and the SVCMC technology evolves constantly, it is time to compile a modern multi-party SVCMC corpus. In this case, it contains the transcripts of a Dungeons & Dragons roleplaying session. Thus, this paper aims at filling a part of the gap in the SVCMC literature by analysing the overlap occurring in the transcripts of a modern multi-party SVCMC conversation.

Since SVCMC lacks the visual component that would help the participants avoid overlap, it is reasonable to believe that SVCMC speakers compensate for the want of visual cues by other means. Successful management of turn-taking contributes to avoiding overlap (Sacks, Schegloff, and Jefferson 1974, 703–704), and expressions known as *discourse markers* (DM) are connected to turn-taking (cf. e.g. Schiffrin 1987, 312; Jucker and Ziv 1998, 1; Maschler and Schiffrin 2015, 191; Degand and Bergen 2018, 65). For example, DMs can aid the participants in predicting if the current speaker is going to keep on talking (Rasenberg, Rommers, and Bergen 2020, 13) and in maintaining the right to their turn (Müller 2005, 9). My SVCMC corpus contains DMs in abundance which is in accordance with Crible's (2018, 207) observation that DMs are most frequent in informal spoken registers such as conversations. It thus appears that DMs as frequent expressions in my corpus deserve attention; DMs could be one of the linguistic elements compensating for the lack of visual cues in SVCMC.

As DMs form "a broad, extremely heterogeneous class of items with fuzzy boundaries" (Fischer 2014, 288), their closer treatment is best left for a later section. Here, suffice it to say that my inspiration to analyse DMs in SVCMC comes partly from an extract in Jenks' (2014, 53–54) SVCMC data where the conjunction *and* presumably refrains the hearer from producing overlap. Jenks categorises *and* as a conjunction, but the semantic context[2] makes this categorisation functionally incomplete, favouring the interpretation that the conjunction *and* signals the speaker's intention to continue talking and should be analysed as a DM (Schiffrin

[2] Extract from Jenks (2014, 53). It appears that SydneyLove uses the prolonged *and* (line 2) to think of what to say instead of primarily using it to connect words or sentences:

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(2)
1g—Skypecast
00:45—00:59
1     SydneyLove:     my name's sydney love from south korea
2                     a::nd. (0.5) nice to meet you.
3                     (1.1)
4     Dukes:          you're from austria, is it?
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1987, 147). This implies that DMs such as *and* can help the speakers avoid overlap in SVCMC.

Since the function of DMs in SVCMC has not been studied before, I must return to Schiffrin's questions of "where" and "why" that marked the beginning of DM research (Schiffrin 1988, 313). Additionally, due to the lack of studies exploring modern multi-party SVCMC, its special context including the technological variables affecting turn-taking deserves illustration. To find out whether the role of DMs in SVCMC differs from their role in other contexts of discourse, my research questions are:

(1) When overlap occurs in SVCMC, which DMs are used and where?
(2) What is their function in terms of overlap and how is it defined by the technological context of SVCMC?

These questions involve the identification of the occurrences of overlap and the DMs around them and enable a comparison of my data to what is already known about overlap, DMs, and the language use in SVCMC.

Based on the literature referred to in this section, this thesis argues that SVCMC conversations take place in a unique conversational environment where the communication is hampered by technological variables. These variables make SVCMC particularly vulnerable to overlap, but I claim that SVCMC speakers can utilise DMs to manage turn-taking; DMs can help the hearers recognise the risk of overlapping talk in that they signal if the speaker is going to start, continue, or stop talking. As such, DMs can resolve problematic overlap, and hence they can be added to Schegloff's tools for resolving overlap (cf. Schegloff 2000). Thus, this thesis provides preliminary findings on how SVCMC speakers can adapt to the overlap-related constraints of SVCMC environments linguistically.

As both overlap and DMs occur frequently in my SVCMC data, this thesis is built on a theoretical basis consisting of literature on turn-taking and overlap (section 2), the context of SVCMC (section 3) and DMs (section 4). Section 4.3 contains the list of expressions considered DMs in this thesis, and section 5.3 narrows down this list based on the frequency of the individual expressions in my corpus. In other respects, section 5 presents my data collection process, the transcription system applied to the data, and the corpus-illustrated method guiding the analysis. The argumentation in the analysis section (section 6) is supported by transcribed extracts from my SVCMC corpus illustrating the SVCMC variables affecting the conversation, the position of DMs when overlap occurs, and the role of DMs in minimising

and resolving problematic overlap. Finally, section 7 summarises my findings including the reflection on their limitations. Suggestions for further research on the topic are also incorporated into section 7. Section 8, followed by the bibliography, concludes the thesis.

2 TURN-TAKING AND OVERLAP

Wherever people talk to each other, no matter the language used, they alternate between speakers (Cowley 1998, 552; Levinson 2016, 6). This phenomenon known as *turn-taking* is unique to human beings (Levinson 2016, 10–12), and the practice to get it right begins at an early age as Melis et al. (2016, 993) observed in infants performing problem solving tasks. The cornerstone of the linguistic research on turn-taking was published in 1974 by Sacks, Schegloff, and Jefferson. They noticed that speakers share the tendency to avoid *gap* and *overlap* by generally allowing only one speaker to talk at a time and by coordinating who gets to speak and when (Sacks, Schegloff, and Jefferson 1974, 706–708). According to Levinson and Torreira (2015, 3), gaps can be defined as the silent time between speakers, i.e. the time it takes for the next speaker to initiate a turn after the current speaker has finished talking. Overlap, the term central to this thesis, refers to "simultaneous talk" or talk by "more than one at a time" (Schegloff 2000, 3, 7). However, as Schegloff (2000, 4–5) remarks, the terms only apply to single conversations: if there are many conversations taking place in the same space, people from different conversations may naturally talk in overlap with each other.

Avoiding simultaneous talk requires an idea of where turns begin and end. Turns do not consist of sentences alone; instead, the rather clumsy but established term is *turn-constructional unit* (TCU), i.e. "sentences, clauses, phrases, and individual words" (Clayman 2013, 151). TCUs contribute to turn management in that the hearers use them to determine when it is appropriate to begin or try to begin an utterance (Sacks, Schegloff, and Jefferson 1974, 721). The ends of TCUs are called *transition-relevance places* (TRP) because that is where the transition from the current speaker to the next speaker may happen (Sacks, Schegloff, and Jefferson 1974, 703). However, speaker-transition is not a random process: the participants contribute to the selection of the new speaker in two ways. Firstly, the current speaker may name the next speaker, yielding the floor to that person. Secondly, someone including the current speaker may decide to *self-select*, i.e. initiate a turn unprompted (Sacks, Schegloff, and Jefferson 1974, 703–704). As for the hierarchy of the two alternatives, the latter usually only occurs if the former does not; the speakers tend to self-select only if the next speaker has not been named (ibid.).

Since the 1970s, the principal observations by Sacks, Schegloff, and Jefferson presented above have been tested and are still largely held true (Gardner 2008, 271). However, some criticism has been expressed. For example, Heldner and Edlund (2010, 563–565) question the

notion of speakers trying to avoid gap and overlap as their quantitative data seldom contain speaker-transition without any gap or overlap. Whilst reasonable, this criticism overlooks the fact that already Sacks, Schegloff, and Jefferson (1974, 706–708) are aware that brief overlap in speaker-transitions is frequent. Furthermore, overlap is the rule rather than the exception when two or more speakers start to talk simultaneously (Levinson and Torreira 2015, 3). Therefore, only longer occurrences of overlap are unusual (Schegloff 2000, 24–25). In sum, overlap should not be treated as a rarity even though speakers generally prefer to avoid it. One should also notice that the argumentation of Heldner and Edlund is based on their quantitative data including gaps and overlaps as short as ten milliseconds (Heldner and Edlund 2010, 562). Levinson and Torreira (2015, 4–5) caution that such precision is "not […] realistic of human performance", the common measure of gaps and overlap being in the order of 150–250 milliseconds. In other words, Heldner and Edlund partly refer to gaps and overlap that the speakers cannot orientate themselves to because they do not notice them.

Whilst voices such as those of Heldner and Edlund represent the scholarly goal of testing and polishing the turn-taking system, the very existence of such a system has been challenged, too. Cowley (1998, 546) claims that the idea of a turn-taking system "detaches conversations from relationships, motives, reasons, and concurrent events". The core of Cowley's argumentation lies on the assumption that the turn-taking system has been accepted as the key factor explaining "how humans connect" (Cowley 1998, 552–553); he is afraid that the "ill-chosen metaphor" of turn-taking reduces the complexity of human communication to a set of assumed rules (Cowley 1998, 554). However, regardless of the original aim of Sacks, Schegloff, and Jefferson, the turn-taking system must not necessarily be viewed as a model **explaining** the choices of individual speakers; rather, it can be understood as a model **describing** the organisation of conversation as it is manifested in the transcripts. Therefore, I do not believe that the "abandonment of the turn-taking metaphor" is a necessity (Cowley 1998, 567). Instead, critical comments such as those of Cowley rightly remind of the danger of reducing human communication to linguistic models. Still, models, including the pertinent terminology, are useful tools for the description of communication. As the turn-taking system originally presented by Sacks, Schegloff, and Jefferson is the prevailing model describing how speakers alternate, it is used as a point of reference in my analysis.

2.1 (Non-)Problematic Overlap

Not all occurrences of overlap are necessarily experienced as problematic by the speakers. According to Schegloff (2000, 5–6), there are four non-problematic forms of overlap that are "non-competitive" and as such of little interest for my analysis. They include *terminal overlaps,* i.e. brief forms of overlap occurring when the current speaker is clearly about to finish and the next speaker initiates slightly before the current speaker stops. *Continuers* include expressions such as *uh-huh* and *mm-hm* that the hearer can use to show that they are listening actively. The third form of non-problematic overlap, *conditional access to the turn*, means that the speaker willingly invites the hearer to fill in when e.g. searching for a word. Even if this happens in overlap, it produces no conversational problems for the participants. Finally, *chordal* or *choral talk* refers to things that are intended to be done simultaneously, e.g. laughter and collective greetings. These four forms of non-problematic overlap may frequently occur in conversations without hampering the communication.

However, whether these forms of overlap are non-problematic or problematic ultimately depends on the speakers; if the overlap causes trouble and the speakers are compelled to repair the damage, that occurrence of overlap should be labelled problematic (Schegloff 2000, 5–6). I will exemplify this with continuers. Gardner (2001, 13–14) uses the term continuer as one of the alternative terms for *response tokens* and includes e.g. *yeah*, *oh*, *right*, *okay*, and *alright* in that category in addition to *uh-huh* and *mm-hm* mentioned above. According to Gardner (ibid.; cf. also Lo 2015, 22) continuers (or response tokens) that usually signal acknowledgement or agreement can also "indicate incipient speakership", i.e. signal the willingness to speak and to take over the floor. It follows that continuers can be used to contest someone else's right to speak which can be experienced as problematic by the participants. This example reminds that the non-problematic nature of terminal overlaps, continuers, conditional access to the turn, and chordal or choral talk is context dependent. Nevertheless, their special position should be considered whenever analysing overlap.

2.2 Overlap Resolution Device

Self-selection naturally includes the risk of simultaneous self-selection when two or more speakers start to talk at the same time. This results in overlap that must be resolved. Normally, Sacks, Schegloff, and Jefferson (1974, 704) grant the right to speak to the person who self-selects first, but if the self-selection is simultaneous, this rule is of little help. In such

cases, Schegloff's *overlap resolution device* (ORD) "provides a procedure for arriving at a solution" (Schegloff 2000, 44–45). The preceding quote highlights the descriptive nature of the ORD; instead of determining who of the simultaneous speakers gets to continue talking, it describes the different alternatives they have. One of the goals of this thesis is to examine if DMs could be added to the ORD in SVCMC. According to Schegloff (2000, 17), speakers normally finish the TCUs they have initiated. Therefore, stopping mid-TCU indicates that overlap was the reason for stopping (Schegloff 2000, 4). Indeed, stopping is the easiest solution to overlap, but problems can still arise if both—or all—of the speakers stop, resulting in silence that also calls for a solution (Schegloff 2000, 20). Of course, the most natural solution to silence is that someone initiates again.

However, if at least two speakers choose not to stop, the result is one of the rare instances of a "floor fight", i.e. an extended overlap during which the speakers may resort to "competitive production" in their competition for the conversational floor (Schegloff 2000, 21). Levinson and Torreira (2015, 3) summarise the ORD as follows: "When there is competition to maintain the floor […], this is often negotiated on a syllable by syllable basis, with e.g., deceleration, increase of intensity, and repeated syllables or words, until one speaker drops out." Of course, if there are more than two competitors, it is not enough if only one speaker gives up; it would be more accurate to say that only one speaker can remain. Note also that there is a difference between the terminology applied in the preceding quote and Schegloff's original paper; Schegloff (2000, 19) analyses *beats* instead of syllables, but since he is unable to define the difference between beats and syllables, they can be used interchangeably. Nevertheless, simultaneous self-selectors do not pay attention to turns but to smaller units resembling syllables (Schegloff 2000, 45). This implies that overlap is not necessarily resolved at the end of TCUs.

The following table summarises the relevance of section 2 for my analysis. First, problematic forms of overlap must be identified and separated from non-problematic forms of overlap. Second, extended competition for the floor can be avoided if all but one speaker stops talking. If the simultaneous talk is extended, Schegloff's ORD describes the measures the competitors can resort to:

Table 1 Resolving problematic overlap (according to Schegloff 2000)

PROBLEMATIC OVERLAP	→	COMPETITION FOR THE FLOOR	→	OVERLAP RESOLUTION DEVICE (ORD)
1. Usually long rather than brief. 2. Calls for resolution, i.e. reparation of the damage. 3. Indicated e.g. by stopping mid-TCU. 4. Excludes the following forms: *terminal overlap, continuer, conditional access to the turn, chordal/choral talk*.		If the simultaneous speakers continue simultaneous talk instead of withdrawing, the result is competitive production requiring a solution.		1. The speakers-in-competition operate based on syllables. 2. They can use e.g. intensity and repetition in their attempt to claim the right to the turn. 3. Goal: only one speaker remains.

This section discussed the turn-taking system suggested by Sacks, Schegloff, and Jefferson, adopting its terminology to describe the management of the conversation in my corpus. Furthermore, the special forms of non-problematic overlap were distinguished from problematic overlap that can lead to competitive production, i.e. floor fights that the competitors can resolve with the means described in the ORD. The next section displays the observations of earlier research about the conversational environment of SVCMC.

3 SYNCHRONOUS VOICE-BASED COMPUTER-MEDIATED COMMUNICATION

The aim of this section is to outline the defining features of SVCMC that have an impact on all SVCMC communication. An understanding of them is crucial for my analysis because language is affected by its context of use. According to Schiffrin (1987, 3), language not only occurs in a context but is also sensitive to it. Furthermore, the purpose of language is communication for which it is also designed (ibid.). This implies that if the context changes, so, too, the design of language must adapt to successfully pursue its communicative goals. It follows that an understanding of the context is essential for any study of language use; the context of the data must be discussed before any reasonable claims of the language use can be made.

SVCMC is a sub-field of *computer-mediated discourse* (CMD) that studies the language used in conversations mediated by digital communication devices such as computers (Herring and Androutsopoulos 2015, 127). CMD, in turn, belongs to the broader field of theoretical and empirical analysis of human interaction known as *conversation analysis* (CA) (Maynard 2013, 11). A term often used interchangeably with CMD is *computer-mediated communication* (CMC) even though CMC is an interdisciplinary field with less focus on language use alone (Herring and Androutsopoulos 2015, 127). For the sake of clarity and to emphasise the interdisciplinary nature of communication mediated by computers, this study favours the term CMC.

The *medium* of CMC can consist of textual, visual, and audio elements including any melange of these, and in terms of *temporality*, the communication can be synchronous or asynchronous. In my paper, the medium is audio-only, i.e. the participants cannot see each other or write to each other, and the temporality is synchronous, i.e. the parties can communicate simultaneously (Jenks 2014, 34–35). Therefore, instead of CMC, the context of the language use in my data is synchronous voice-based computer-mediated communication (SVCMC). Terminologically, SVCMC is a relatively transparent term, but alternative terms do exist. Those include e.g. *voice-based CMC* (cf. Granena 2016) and *computer-mediated social interaction* (CMSI; cf. Jenks 2014). Compared to these, SVCMC (cf. Bueno Alastuey 2011) describes my data more accurately because SVCMC cannot be confused with text-based or asynchronous forms of CMC.

The earlier focus of the field causes some terminological ambiguity. Jenks and Brandt (2013, 230–231) point out that text-based forms of CMC such as SMS, chats, and e-mails have received most of the attention of CMC research. Indeed, in their eight-year-old paper, they refer to SVCMC as a "less popular form" of CMC (Jenks and Brandt 2013, 228), indicating that text-based forms were the norm. It should not come as a surprise, then, that the scope of many of the somewhat older CMC studies does not reach beyond text-based CMC and that the term CMC[3] refers exclusively to its text-based forms in those studies (cf. e.g. Hancock and Dunham 2001; Tanskanen and Karhukorpi, 2008; González-Lloret, 2011; Jordan et al. 2012; Herring, Stein, and Virtanen 2013; Shakarami, Hajhashemi, and Caltabiano 2016). This accentuates the importance of terminological transparency and the need for more clearly defined SVCMC research.

Since the publication of the studies referred to above, even the nature of SVCMC has changed. Sukrutrit (2011, 72), referring to the SVCMC software of that time, mentions the anonymity of the participants as one of the defining characteristics of SVCMC. Apparently, the participants could often hide their identity behind nicknames. Similarly, Jenks and Brandt (2013, 231–233) study a form of SVCMC that is very different from its modern standards: in their study, the participants were mostly unacquainted to each other and could move freely between voice chat rooms, constantly entering and leaving conversations. In both studies, the platform used by the interactants was Skype (Sukrutrit 2011, 72; Jenks and Brandt 2013, 231), a software since then widely replaced by others such as Microsoft Teams, Zoom, and Discord. Since SVCMC today is used in all fields of life including professional meetings, casual family dinners, and gaming amongst friends, it is safe to say that neither anonymity nor moving freely between voice chat rooms are defining characteristics of SVCMC anymore.

Despite the recent development of SVCMC software, some features of SVCMC remain unchanged and still affect all SVCMC communication. The most axiomatic variable is the lack of physical co-presence. According to Jenks (2014, 59), the fact that SVCMC speakers cannot use "body positions, gaze, and hand gestures" results in overlapping utterances. In contrast, Levinson (2016, 6) insists that the turn-taking system "works with equal efficiency without visual contact" due to factors such as prosody that help the speakers in managing turn allocation. However, there is further proof of the significance of body behaviour for knowing

[3] Alternatively, CMD or—as in Tanskanen and Karhukorpi (2008)—*computer-mediated interaction*.

when it is appropriate to speak (cf. e.g. Cowley 1998, 555; Schegloff 2000, 15; Goodwin 2000, 1498–1499; Hancock and Dunham 2001, 94; Jenks 2009, 23; Oloff 2013, 153–154). It appears, then, that even though prosody is one of the tools utilised by the speakers to allocate turns (cf. e.g. Kurtić, Brown, and Wells 2013, 724–725; Jenks 2014, 55, 155), the absence of physical co-presence impedes SVCMC. Indeed, Jenks and Brandt (2013, 246) demonstrate that SVCMC participants have no information on who is truly present in the conversation. The speakers must therefore "constantly negotiate who is able and willing to talk" (ibid.). To illustrate this, Jenks (2014, 62–63) provides an SVCMC extract where the person who has been given the turn to speak does not say anything at all.

Further factors unchanged by time include e.g. the various background noises that can disrupt SVCMC, the differences in the audio settings integrated to the software, and delay. Firstly, according to Jenks (2014, 156), sudden background noises can interrupt the conversation and cause one of the participants to attend to something in their physical surroundings. This bears resemblance to face-to-face conversations where e.g. a suddenly ringing telephone can disturb the communication. Secondly, a characteristic difference between SVCMC and face-to-face communication is the bearing of the software on the volume: in face-to-face communication, the volume of individual speakers depends mostly on the intensity of their voice and on the physical distance between the speakers and hearers. Most importantly, the participants can adapt to these variables. SVCMC platforms, on the other hand, may offer less possibilities for individual adjustments of the output and the input volume. Indeed, Jenks (2014, 87) sees "experimental" SVCMC software as a possible solution to audibility issues. Thirdly, SVCMC can always be affected by delay, causing the participants to hear each other's speech later than it is initiated by the speaker. Whilst background noises and delay of a various degree are an issue present in virtually all SVCMC platforms, the audio settings and the matter of volume depend on the software.

The data of most SVCMC studies is drawn from the field of foreign language learning. Even though SVCMC is commonly used in foreign language learning especially during the COVID-19 pandemic, the focus of such studies is often on the utility of SVCMC for language learning purposes instead of the linguistic features of SVCMC language use; for example, Bueno Alastuey (2011), Granena (2016), and Jung et al. (2019) argue that using SVCMC can benefit foreign language learning. One of the few exceptions is Christopher Jenks who has conducted ground-breaking studies on the linguistic context of SVCMC even

though his data have been collected in foreign language learning settings, too. Nonetheless, much of Jenks' work is dedicated to overlap in SVCMC instead of the purely educational implications of SVCMC learning environments. Jenks has confirmed that the speakers in SVCMC orientate themselves to TCUs instead of syntactically complete sentences (Jenks 2014, 55) and that SVCMC follows the one-speaker-at-a-time rule (Jenks 2014, 58). This is in line with the practices of face-to-face communication addressed in the previous section. It also sets SVCMC apart from text-based forms of CMC where TCUs are not relevant for turn-taking (Jenks 2014, 81–82) and the one-speaker-at-a-time rule does not apply because overlap does not prevent successful communication (Cech and Condon 2004, 2; Jenks 2014, 87–88). In SVCMC, however, overlap can have severe communicative consequences: Jenks and Firth (2013, 229–232) demonstrate that avoiding overlap is crucial in SVCMC where only one person is expected to talk at a time lest the conversation be disrupted.

Jenks' data demonstrate that SVCMC participants can deal with overlap both *explicitly*, e.g. by naming the people who should be allowed to speak next, and *implicitly*, e.g. by abstaining from speaking, thus yielding the floor to others (Jenks 2014, 86). The implicit ways of dealing with overlap are perhaps the most significant discovery made by Jenks and his co-authors in terms of managing SVCMC turn allocation. According to Jenks (2009, 24) SVCMC participants utilise *strategic pauses* to implicitly give each other time and space when overlap occurs. A speaker who stops talking after noticing overlap signals to the others that they are not fighting for the floor. The unfortunate side effect is that several parties may decide to re-initiate speaking simultaneously following such a pause, thus effectively causing repeated overlap (Jenks 2009, 25; Jenks 2014, 56–57). In his book summarising much of his work on the topic, Jenks aptly describes this twofold role of strategic pauses in SVCMC[4]:

> [T]he findings revealed how CMSI participants use pauses to deal with overlapping utterances, but also showed that prolonged spells of silence can lead to simultaneous talk. This finding demonstrates that pauses in CMSI act as both an affordance and a constraint. (Jenks 2014, 155)

By now it should be clear that SVCMC is a well-defined yet relatively little studied context of language use distinct from face-to-face communication and other forms of CMC.

[4] Note that Jenks uses the abbreviation CMSI (computer-mediated social interaction) when referring to SVCMC in this quote.

As I demonstrated in this section, some findings of previous SVCMC studies have not endured a decade due to the rapid development of the SVCMC technology and the fluid social ways of using SVCMC. Since SVCMC today is arguably more popular than ever, it deserves renewed attention. My corpus represents the current uses of SVCMC as the participants are acquainted with each other, the context (i.e. gaming) is a typical leisure activity, and the platform (i.e. Zoom) is currently in widespread use[5]. A closer discussion of my corpus follows in section 5. In this section, I pointed out that communicative language use adapts to the context: the context influences language use. And yet, apart from the role of strategic pauses, not much is known about how turn-taking is managed in SVCMC even though it is evident that SVCMC is particularly vulnerable to overlap due to the lack of visual cues. In the following section, I will explain how certain words and brief expressions known as discourse markers can contribute to turn-taking and why they should be introduced to the field of SVCMC.

[5] In April 2020, Zoom reported that the software had over 300 million meeting participants (cf. https://blog.zoom.us/90-day-security-plan-progress-report-april-22/). However, a single user can be a participant in multiple meetings; the company does not share the number of daily users.

4 DISCOURSE MARKERS

The scholarly findings presented in this section will hopefully make understandable Crible's (2017, 100) observation that DMs are "feared by students (and others) as a complex object of study". This complexity originates from the fact that even though there is no shortage of DM research, a consensus on the definition of the term DM or on which lexical items count as a DM has not been established. Furthermore, scholars not only use a wide variety of alternative terms for DMs but also disagree on what kind of pragmatic functions they fulfil (cf. e.g. Jucker and Ziv 1998, 1–2; Fraser 2009, 294; Fischer 2014, 271; Maschler and Schiffrin 2015, 203; Crible 2017, 100–105). To put it briefly: there is no universal or even an English list of DMs that most scholars would be happy to accept.

This section does not seek to suggest a comprehensive definition for DMs, to compile an exhaustive list of English DMs, or to summarise their varying functions. In fact, it would be bold of me to claim that I could even do so, given the conclusion by established scholars that an all-embracing definition of DMs seems unattainable (cf. e.g. Fischer 2014, 288; Maschler and Schiffrin 2015, 203; Crible 2017, 119). Nevertheless, any analysis of the DMs in my corpus requires an understanding of the prototypical qualities of the words and expressions that can be categorised as DMs in English. Starting with a terminological issue (4.1), this section proceeds to a comparison of the key scholarly findings defining DMs (4.2) with a particular focus on their turn-taking-related functions (4.2.3). As a result of this survey, section 4.3 proposes that Crible's list of spoken English DMs is a non-exclusive premise for my selection of DMs for the analysis.

4.1 TERMINOLOGICAL AMBIGUITY

Before comparing the different scholarly DM definitions, one terminological issue merits a brief discussion: the difference between *pragmatic markers* (PM) and DMs. Fraser (2006, 189–190; cf. also Fraser 2009, 294) uses PM as an umbrella term for different kinds of markers including DMs, and for him, some of the words often analysed as DMs are PMs. Hansen (2006, 28), too, is in favour of viewing the term DM as a hyponym of the term PM; Hansen's DMs maintain "transactional coherence" whereas her PMs maintain "interactional coherence". It seems that both Fraser and Hansen see functional similarities between PMs and DMs but want to separate them and other pragmatic classes. Consequently, their definition of DMs excludes expressions that other scholars count as DMs. For example, Aijmer (2011,

231–232) describes *well* as a PM without defining the term PM; she accepts PMs as an established part of the "conversational grammar". Similarly, Fraser's PMs contain e.g. *now* and *well*—words viewed by many other scholars as DMs (Fraser 2009, 297; Fraser 1996, 338). Unfortunately, this causes terminological ambiguity.

Fischer (2014, 271) proposes that the term DM should serve as the umbrella term instead of other competing terms including PM and *discourse particle*. According to her, "there are no reliable formal or semantic criteria to distinguish between different discourse markers", and drawing too clear-cut lines between functionally similar pragmatic categories hinders the analysis of DMs due to their characteristic multifunctionality (ibid.). In other words, she questions the validity and the usefulness of such suggestions as Fraser's distinction between DMs and *discourse structure markers*, another hyponym of Fraser's PMs (cf. Fraser 2009, 296–297). Crible (2017, 101–102), too, even though she uses PM as a hypernym of DM and other pragmatic classes, is cautious in terms of the PM–DM juxtaposition. She suggests that markers "are rather on a continuum" on which their behaviour depends on the context of use (Crible 2017, 101), and since the same markers can perform different functions, she regards Hansen's PM–DM distinction as "too restrictive" (Crible 2017, 104). It should be clear by now that talking about PMs or DMs includes the danger of confusing functionally similar classes with each other.

Until a universally accepted categorisation exists, each scholar must decide which of the terms to use. Müller (2005, 3) opts for the term DM although she argues for the justification of both terms because markers serve both interactional (pragmatic, hence PM) and textual (discourse, hence DM) functions. This reminder of the multifunctionality of DMs echoes Fischer's points presented above. Fischer (2014, 286) argues for a category "as broad as possible", lest some qualities of DMs remain concealed. As it appears that there is no right or wrong answer to the PM–DM debate, this paper, accompanying Schiffrin, Müller, Fischer, and others, systematically uses the term DM because it appears to be the most common and versatile term (Jucker and Ziv 1998, 2). I am inclined to adopt a non-restrictive set of DMs in this paper because narrowing down the class of DMs as much as Fraser and Hansen do could preclude the analysis of some fascinating marker-related phenomena in my data. Now that the terminological issue has been addressed, the following section approaches the definition of DMs in more detail.

4.2 Definitional Ambiguity

Any analysis of DMs occurring in a dataset requires a specification of which lexical items count as DMs. Due to the lack of scholarly consensus, it can only result from a comparison of alternative and competing approaches. One of the first attempts to define the category of DMs was Deborah Schiffrin's 1987 book. Starting with an operational definition, she analyses the use of eleven DMs in her data: *oh, well, and, but, or, so, because, now, then, I mean, y'know* (Schiffrin 1987, 31). She does not argue for the exhaustiveness of this set of expressions; as further representatives of the category, she names some perception verbs, location deictics, adverbials, interjections, the verb *say*, expressions of "meta-talk"[6], and quantifier phrases (Schiffrin 1987, 327–328). This list, albeit limited and vague, gives a general idea of the broad variety of lexical items that can be categorised as DMs.

Schiffrin's first theoretical definition of DMs opened the floor for a multifaceted debate on its accuracy. Resulting from her analysis, Schiffrin's suggestion contains e.g. the following criteria: DMs must be "syntactically detachable from a sentence", "commonly used in initial position of an utterance", and must have "either […] no meaning, a vague meaning, or […] be reflexive" (Schiffrin 1987, 238). Her conclusion is that DMs are "a subclass of indexicals", i.e. deictic expressions, which explains their multifunctionality (Schiffrin 2006, 335) and the dependency of their meaning on the context of use (Schiffrin 1987, 315; cf. also Schiffrin 2006, 337). To summarise her view, Schiffrin's DMs are syntactically optional and independent, mainly utterance-initial, and semantically vague multifunctional deictic expressions. Since the publication of Schiffrin's book, a debate has evolved e.g. around the syntactic, semantic, and functional qualities of DMs, each of which is addressed below.[7]

4.2.1 Syntax

There is some considerable variation in the scholarly views regarding the syntactic status of DMs. This can be explained by the richness of the class of DMs; as DMs cover a mass of syntactic classes, their syntactic status varies (Müller 2005, 3). For example, Lewis (2006, 44) urges scholars to include DMs in any syntactic analysis because they are subtypes of e.g. sentence adverbials and conjunctions and blames syntactic models for not including space for

[6] E.g. what I mean is.

[7] The phonological aspect has also been discussed, but phonology is not a commonly suggested or accepted defining criterion for DMs (Müller 2005, 5).

DMs. Similarly, Redeker's (2006, 342) wide definition of DMs[8] insists that DMs are not necessarily optional or syntactically independent unlike Schiffrin claims. According to Redeker's functionalist view, syntactically non-independent lexical items such as conjunctions and adverbials can function as DMs (Redeker 2006, 342); thus, DMs are not always syntactically optional. Hansen (2006, 26–28) agrees that removing a DM can alter the meaning of an utterance because lexical items from different syntactic categories may fulfil the DM function.

Since other scholars represent alternative viewpoints, the question remains whether syntax should be considered a key characteristic of DMs. Contrary to the views presented above, Müller (2005, 5–6, 27) and Crible (2018, 35) agree with Schiffrin that DMs are syntactically optional. Maschler (2009, 7), too, argues that DMs, forming their own syntactic category, are "**maximally detached** [sic] from the discourse they frame", i.e. independent elements. As these scholarly arguments represent fundamentally different conclusions, it seems reasonable to relate to Müller's (2005, 4) comment that Schiffrin's criterion of syntactic independence has not been accepted as a defining feature of DMs. Consequently, I will leave the continuation of the syntactic debate to papers specialising on the definition of DMs; the matter of syntax is not accepted as a defining feature of DMs in this thesis.

Unlike the status of DMs within syntactic models, their position within turns and utterances is a matter of little dispute. Fraser (2009, 300) agrees with Schiffrin that all DMs can occur in segment-initial position, but he adds that some DMs can appear in medial or final position as well. He also proves that two DMs can occur together as a combination (Fraser 2009, 317). Maschler and Schiffrin, reporting on Maschler's standpoint, claim that DMs are most commonly in turn-initial position but can also occur turn-medially (Maschler and Schiffrin 2015, 194–196). Redeker (2006, 355), adds the turn-final position to this list whilst referring to the varying positional preferences of different DMs. Finally, Müller (2005, 27) argues that DMs can occur at the start, in the middle, or at the end of discourse units. It is noteworthy that scholars seem to orientate to different kinds of units of talk when referring to the position of DMs: Schiffrin talks about utterances, Fraser about segments, Maschler and Schiffrin about turns, and Müller about discourse units. However, analysing the differences of these terms would stray this thesis from the topic; instead, it seems safe to presume that DMs often initiate turns but can also be found in turn-medial and turn-final position.

[8] Redeker (2006, 340) prefers to use the terms *discourse operator* and *discourse particle* to separate different functional uses of DMs.

4.2.2 Semantics

Semantically, most scholars are unanimous in claiming that the discourse context defines the meaning of DMs. As stated above, Schiffrin views DMs as semantically vague indexicals whose meaning depends on the context. Müller (2005, 27) shares the opinion that DMs carry little meaning of their own. According to Fraser (2009, 297–299) and Lewis (2006, 45), the meaning of DMs becomes evident in the semantic relationship between the segment containing the DM and the surrounding discourse segments. Likewise, Maschler (2009, 1; cf. also Maschler and Schiffrin 2015, 194) argues that there are three semantic categories of DMs: those referring "to the text itself, to the interaction among its speakers, or to the cognitive processes taking place in their minds". In other words, Fraser, Lewis, and Maschler claim that DMs do not have a clear semantic meaning if they are separated from the textual and the interpersonal context.

Some scholars put more emphasis on the semantics of DMs. Lewis (2006, 44, 49–52) argues that DMs do have a conventional meaning and that they are most likely polysemous due to internal lexical semantic change that has taken place in English. Crible (2017, 117) and Hansen (2006, 24) support the polysemy interpretation, and Redeker (2006, 342) proposes that DMs may contain truth-conditional semantic content. However, these views are also bound to the context of the discourse. For example, Lewis (2006, 44–46) talks about the **discourse-relational** meanings of DMs such as *well* and *actually*; the semantic meanings she attributes to DMs are based on "rhetorical relations" such as elaboration, justification, and retreat. In short, even though Lewis argues for the conventional semantic meaning of DMs, that meaning is context dependent as it expresses relations between the discourse elements.

In conclusion, whilst the semantic emphasis of the scholars varies, none of them claims that DMs as a class or as individual lexical items have a single meaning or even an uncomplicated set of meanings. Instead, their meaning can only be analysed in the discourse context. Maschler and Schiffrin (2015, 204) point out that whether an expression counts as a DM or not may even depend on the data because the speakers and the context define the discourse and the need for using markers. One should bear in mind that the meaning of context reaches beyond the language: for example, Redeker (2006, 341) and Hansen (2006, 25) point out that DMs are affected by the real-world context, i.e. the concrete situation in which the discourse takes place. This includes the medium of communication which in this case is SVCMC. In

sum, the semantic meaning of DMs is formed in the discourse context and cannot be specified prior to the analysis.

4.2.3 Functions

There seems to be a strong consensus that DMs are multifunctional (cf. e.g. Fischer 2014, 271). Furthermore, many scholars would agree with Maschler (2009, 7) that DMs are a primarily functional class (cf. e.g. Schiffrin 1987, 315; Jucker and Ziv 1998, 1; Hansen 2006, 28; Redeker 2006, 341; Lewis 2006, 44; Fraser 2009, 303; Maschler and Schiffrin 2015, 204–205; Crible 2017, 99, 105). Redeker's standpoint illustrates the emphasis on multifunctionality particularly well: she does not view DMs as a word class but speaks instead of "a functionally sufficiently homogeneous class of coherence-oriented marker **uses**" (Redeker 2006, 341; emphasis added). In the preceding quote, Redeker captures the idea that the focus of DM research should not be on the categorisation of certain lexical items as DMs but on the functional variety of those lexical items.

Another important aspect of Redeker's quote is the reference to coherence. Cuenca (2013, 193) argues that "connecting at text level" is the prototypical function of DMs. According to Hansen (2006, 25), DMs have a "metadiscursive" function: they "provide instructions to the hearer" as for how to make the utterance coherent in relation to the surrounding discourse. Consequently, for Hansen, coherence is the primary function of DMs. Similarly, Maschler (2009, 7) lays stress on the "metalingual" function; from her interactional linguistics perspective, it is the single most important criterion of a DM (Maschler and Schiffrin, 2015, 194). What this meta element implies is that DMs are not as attached to the world outside of language as they are to the text and the speakers (ibid). That is, DMs are multifunctional and serve the purpose of textual and interpersonal coherence.

According to Müller's list of the functions of DMs[9] (Müller 2005, 9), many of them are closely linked to turn-taking and overlap: they include e.g. initiating discourse, prefacing responses and reactions, and aiding the speaker to hold the floor. For example, Rasenberg, Rommers, and Bergen (2020, 13) demonstrate that DMs may allow the hearer to predict what the speaker will say next, i.e. whether the speaker is going to continue or not. This is a key observation supported by Maschler and Schiffrin (2015, 197) who confirm that DMs often

[9] Müller's list is based on Brinton, Laurel J. 1990. "The Development of Discourse Markers in English." In *Historical Linguistics and Philology*, edited by J. Fisiak, 45–71. Berlin: Mouton de Gruyter.

occur "at a point of speaker change", i.e. at a TRP. TRPs by their nature are points linked to speaker-transition, and hence prone to contain overlap. Combined, the observations of Rasenberg, Rommers, and Bergen and Maschler and Schiffrin mean that DMs can both be affected by overlap and help the speakers avoid it. Aptly, Fischer (2000, 134) remarks that the way in which DMs contribute to turn-taking depends on their meaning in the given context. This implies that the turn-taking function of DMs cannot be analysed without a consideration of the discourse context.

An example of DMs contributing to turn-taking is *and*—one of the most common DMs in spoken and written forms of English that often occurs at TRPs (Crible 2020, 795; cf. also Crible 2018, 207–208). In terms of turn-taking, *and* is a marker of "speaker-continuation" that can be used to fight for the floor when the speaker's talk is threatened by someone else's talk (Schiffrin 1987, 141–144; cf. also Schiffrin 2006, 322). In other words, *and* signals that the current speaker is not yet done talking. Crible (2017, 118; cf. also 2020, 801) complements the function of *and* as a signal of speaker-continuation with e.g. shifting the topic or opening a new turn or a sequence within the same topic. Consequently, *and* is a prime example of a DM that has a turn-taking function.

Another example of DMs related to turn-taking are DMs in final position. Based on their Dutch data, Degand and Bergen (2018, 67) claim that "utterance-final DMs function as turn-yielders" that open the floor to the hearer in text-based CMC and in face-to-face communication. Of course, this gives reason to assume that turn-final DMs can function as turn-yielders in SVCMC as well. Studies such as Degand and Bergen (2018) encourage the analysis of DMs in different contexts and the comparison of those contexts to each another. Still, the most important implication is that not only the choice of a particular DM has functional consequences: the position, too, affects the functions of DMs. For example, Degand (2014, 170–173), analysing a French dataset, shows that the French DMs *donc* and *alors* are more likely to be related to turn-taking in turn-final than in turn-initial position. Therefore, the position of the DM can be the functionally decisive criterion.

4.3 Selection of Discourse Markers

In order to proceed to the analysis, some conclusions must be drawn, and a set of DMs must be chosen even though the scholarly knowledge of DMs is neither linear nor cumulative (Maschler and Schiffrin 2015, 203). Since the publication of Schiffrin's 1987 book, the dis-

cussion on DMs has expanded so rapidly that it is easy to relate to Crible's (2017, 100) comment that "the actual picture shows a rather confusing patchwork of interesting yet conflicting approaches to [DMs]". At the same time, the survey of DM literature above observed some common DM features that many scholars would accept. This subsection summarises these overarching features and argues that Crible's DM definition including her list of spoken English DMs corresponds to them.

Firstly, most scholars would agree with the recent evaluation by Rasenberg, Rommers, and Bergen (2020, 11) that DMs are "notoriously polyfunctional". Secondly, a recurring topic is the relevance of the context of use that covers the language, the speakers, and the real-world surroundings of the discourse. Thirdly, DMs can occur in initial, medial, and final position, although the initial position seems to dominate. Finally, related to the context, there is the matter of coherence: DMs appear to maintain textual and interpersonal coherence by building bridges between turns and within utterances and by "negotiat[ing] relations between speaker and hearer" (Maschler and Schiffrin 2015, 196). No matter if one considers DMs syntactically independent or semantically vague, they are multifunctional and context dependent tools that maintain coherence and hence understanding within conversations.

Until now, little has been said about which lexical items count as DMs. This is intentional because there is no mutual agreement on this matter. Nonetheless, some lexical items must be accepted as DMs for the purposes of the current analysis. My primary concern is not to adopt a too restrictive group of DMs lest my analysis overlook some fascinating phenomena. Due to the conflicting scholarly definitions, the multifunctionality of DMs, and the importance of the context of use, it seems best to look for a set of expressions that is not too restrictive and that occurs frequently in my data. This is justified by the aim of this paper to gain some preliminary results on the relationship between overlap and DMs in SVCMC. I hope that choosing a relatively large number of DMs for the analysis minimises the risk of including too many lexical items of questionable DM status.

Crible has developed her own corpus-based definition of DMs. According to her, DMs are "a grammatically heterogeneous, syntactically optional, polyfunctional type of pragmatic marker" that include the speaker's comment on the broader conversation and the context (Crible 2018, 35; cf. also Crible 2017, 106). Grammatically, she considers them fixed-form, i.e. grammaticalized (Crible 2017, 106). Functionally, she divides them into four groups serving at least 30 different functions, e.g. opening and closing, contrast, emphasis, turn-taking,

and topic-shifting (Crible 2018, 47; cf. also Crible 2017, 107). Referring to my survey of the DM literature in section 4.2, the questionable criteria in Crible's definition are syntactic optionality and the status of PMs as the hypernym of DMs. However, as discussed in section 4.2.1, syntax is not considered a defining feature of DMs in this thesis, and the criterion of syntactic optionality does not exclude central DMs such as conjunctions and adverbials. As for the PM–DM hierarchy, section 4.1 clarified that Crible sees markers as a continuum and is sceptical of a too strict distinction between them. Therefore, Crible's definition does not appear too narrow or restrictive for the purposes of my analysis.

Based on the above criteria and a study of her corpus, Crible proposes a list of spoken English DMs:

> Actually, although, and, and so on, anyway, as, as you know, because, but, equally, even though, finally, first of all, firstly, for example, hence, however, I mean, if, if you like, if you will, in fact, in other words, indeed, kind of, nevertheless, now, oh, okay, on the other hand, or, right, say, secondly, shall we say, so, sort of, still, then, therefore, though, well, what, whereas, while, yeah, yet, you know. (Crible 2017, 108)

Just the glimpse into the DM literature afforded in this main section advises to treat this list with caution because it attempts to introduce certainty to a highly disputed field. Still, for the purposes of studies such as the one at hand, it provides a practical list of expressions to look for in my data. Comparing this list to the literature discussed in this thesis so far, it contains all DMs analysed in Schiffrin's 1987 book (see 4.2), the continuers *yeah*, *okay*, and *right* (see 2.1), and, importantly, the DMs *well* and *now* that e.g. Fraser would not accept as DMs (see 4.1). Therefore, Crible's list hardly represents a restrictive perspective and serves as a starting point for the analysis of my data.

This section has demonstrated that DMs are a topic surrounded by scholarly debate. Before moving on to describing my data and methods, I would like to conclude this background section with a consoling quote encouraging to overcome the fear of complexity and the unsolved definitional questions:

> Because the functions of markers are so broad, any and all analyses of markers – even those focusing on only a relatively narrow aspect of their meaning or a small portion of their uses – can teach us something about their role in discourse. (Maschler and Schiffrin 2015, 205)

5 DATA AND METHODS

This section is divided into three subsections: 5.1 describes the data collection process, a result of which is my personal corpus of transcripts, 5.2 presents the transcription system applied to the recordings, and, finally, 5.3 concerns the methodological approach to the corpus. Additionally, 5.1.1 briefly addresses the implications of Dungeons & Dragons for the conversation in my corpus.

5.1 DATA COLLECTION

In the absence of modern SVCMC corpora, I chose to record a Dungeons & Dragons role-playing session in an SVCMC environment. Thus, the data represent the purely social application of SVCMC technology. The recordings were made in the Autumn of 2020, and they consist of 4 hours and 20 minutes of continuous spoken interaction between five participants. However, they were not analysed or transcribed in their entirety. In the game, the players were engaged in so called combat for roughly 90 minutes. During combat, the rules of the game override the natural turn-taking system, forcing the players to follow a strict turn order.[10] Therefore, the parts containing combat were not analysed. Moreover, as the analysis focuses on occurrences of overlap, the parts not containing noticeable overlap were of little value in this research setting. Identifying the occurrences of overlap in the remaining almost three hours of interaction resulted in 117 *thematically coherent stretches of talk* consisting of a series of turns and marked by shifts of topic (cf. Schegloff 2007, 251). Transcribed, these stretches contain over 9000 spoken words. Thus, my corpus consists of these 117 transcripts.

Analysing SVCMC interaction between as many as five participants is not very common in CA because conversations between more than two people are considered more complex than interaction between two parties in terms of the management of the conversation (Sidnell 2010, 23). Sidnell refers to telephone conversations, a form of audio-only communication comparable to SVCMC. Specialising on more modern forms of SVCMC, Jenks (2009, 26) agrees that "projecting when it is appropriate to talk" is increasingly difficult in multi-

[10] Combat refers to situations where the adventurers fight against fictional foes usually acted by the dungeon master. Combat is an important part of the game; the adventurers can die in combat which would result in an untimely end of the narrative. When combat starts, each of the adventurers rolls the dice which determines the turn order for the duration of the combat. The dungeon master then asks the adventurers to describe their in-combat actions (e.g. attacking a foe, casting a spell, or attempting to flee) in that turn order. Thus, combat principally consists of successive monologues by the adventurers that the dungeon master comments on, and the turn-taking system is of little relevance.

party SVCMC environments. However, Lowry et al. (2006, 655–656) argue that CMC has the potential to facilitate co-operation in large groups. Furthermore, as the COVID-19 pandemic has compelled groups of all sizes to communicate remotely, I deemed it more representative of the current SVCMC issues to record a session between five participants than only two. Even if the phenomena within the interaction are complex, multi-party SVCMC deserves scholarly attention due to its popularity.

The recordings were made using a modern and common computer platform for audiovisual and textual conferencing: Zoom. The speakers participated from their homes, and the connection was protected by the University of Turku. My personal role was limited to that of an observer. Before the recording began, web cameras were switched off to prevent the participants from seeing each other; in addition, using the textual chat function of Zoom was prohibited, creating a pure SVCMC environment. Zoom does not allow for the individual adjustment of other speakers' output volume; the speakers can only adjust their personal input and output volume. This is relevant for the communication because it follows that the hearers cannot increase a speaker's volume in relation to other speakers. Hence, speaker A can be louder than speaker B for all participants regardless of their settings if speaker A has set their input volume higher than speaker B or if there are differences in e.g. the quality of their hardware or the proximity of their microphone to their speech organs. Thus, as discussed in section 3, the lack of visual cues and the limited possibilities of adjusting volume belong to the main factors distinguishing my dataset from e.g. face-to-face communication.

Working with the data includes some ethical considerations. Prior to the role-playing session, all participants were given an information sheet requesting their informed consent for recording the Dungeons & Dragons session, analysing the recordings, discussing the results in conferences, and publishing them in this thesis. To prevent them from adjusting their behaviour, I did not reveal to them the exact aims of my study or which parts of the interaction I intended to analyse. The recordings were saved on my private password protected computer's hard drive and not shared with anyone in any form. After the recording session, the participants had the right to withdraw from the project at any stage—luckily, they did not wish to do so. In the transcripts, their identity is protected by the following pseudonyms: GM (game master[11]), Cyril, Luke, Mia, and Eve. Of these, Mia and Eve are native speakers of American English unlike the GM, Cyril, and Luke, whose first language is Finnish. In the running text,

[11] The official Dungeons & Dragons term is dungeon master, i.e. DM, but this thesis prefers the abbreviation GM to avoid confusion with discourse markers (DM).

all five are referred to as adventurers when describing the events within the game. Finally, the recordings will be deleted after this thesis has been approved and no changes can be made to it. These ethical arrangements protect the interests and the identity of the participants.

5.1.1 Context of Dungeons & Dragons

The discourse context of the recorded conversation differs from e.g. casual conversations or work-related meetings, possessing some features of both. Dungeons & Dragons is a role-playing game that relies upon the players' imagination and story-telling skills. From the perspective of CA, it is relatively loosely structured and free-form as the players have the liberty to speak as they wish. Thus, it resembles casual conversation. However, the role of one of the players, the dungeon master, is comparable to the role of a chairman. Usually, the dungeon master creates the fictional setting of the game, describes it to the others, and controls that the game is played in compliance with the rules. The other players create and act their own fictional and imaginary characters for the duration of the session. These characters possess magical powers that enable them to cast spells. Much of the plot results from improvisation, and the players do not follow a script; they might decide to do something different than the dungeon master had planned. Nevertheless, they are likely to listen to the turns of the dungeon master closely because the dungeon master is in a position of some authority. Moreover, the participants must pay attention to the rules of the game whilst planning their speech. Consequently, a recording of a Dungeons & Dragons session is likely to bear resemblance to both casual conversations and more structured discourse contexts, e.g. contexts including a chairman.

5.2 TRANSCRIPTION

This thesis is a typical CA study as it involves transcribing (Sidnell 2010, 23). Cowley (1998, 557–558) is undoubtedly right in reminding that transcripts are not equal to actually occurring speech because transcripts, no matter how accurate, can never fully capture the nuances of spoken language—not to even mention the context and the world the speakers are a part of. Nevertheless, the representation of spoken language in written form is a difficult task, and transcripts, despite their shortcomings, are the best way to attempt it. According to Sidnell (2010, 28), transcriptions should include all details needed for "understanding and explaining" the way participants talk, and since the present thesis deals with overlap and DMs in

SVCMC, my transcripts focus on illustrating the overlap and the DMs occurring in my SVCMC data.

Indeed, the goal of gaining a preliminary understanding of the relevance of DMs for turn-taking in SVCMC does not require a highly detailed phonetical transcript of the conversation. Instead, the transcription system mostly follows regular orthography and is loosely based on Schegloff (2000, 59–63) and Jenks (2014, 45–47), the biggest simplification being that the durations of pauses and hesitations are omitted. Identifying overlap and DMs does not require the indication of the duration of pauses and hesitations. Moreover, as discussed in section 3, Jenks has aptly demonstrated how SVCMC speakers use strategic pauses for turn management. Therefore, concentrating on the duration of the pauses would likely not expand the scholarly knowledge on overlap in SVCMC. The table below illustrates the simplified transcription system applied in this thesis:

Table 2 Transcription symbols and their meaning

SYMBOL	MEANING
[left square bracket	Overlapping talk begins. Usually comes in pairs on two successive lines; the utterances on top of each other overlap.
] right square bracket	Overlapping talk ends. Usually comes in pairs on two successive lines. The speech following the right square bracket is no longer in overlap, whether on the upper (first speaker continues) or the lower (second speaker continues) line.
= equal sign	Turn continued by the same speaker on a line separated from the first line of that turn by another speaker.
: colon	Noticeable elongation of a sound by the speaker. Does not indicate the exact length of the stretched sound.
– en dash	Speaker hesitates considerably and/or reformulates. Does not indicate the length of the hesitation.
(*italics*) bracketed text in italics	Indicates sounds other than speech, e.g. (*laughs*), and passages where it is impossible to perceive what the speaker is saying (*inaudible*).
<u>word</u> underlined text	Indicates the speaker's particular emphasis of a lexical item, usually an entire word.
pause	Indicates a noticeable pause between speakers that clearly leaves the floor open for self-selection.
? question mark	Indicates a question; rise of intonation is considered a question.
! exclamation mark	Indicates increased intensity of volume.

5.3 CORPUS-ILLUSTRATED LINGUISTICS

My paper is empirical in its nature which is the standard in CA (Sidnell 2010, 22). Instead of using invented examples, it works with an audio recording of actual, naturally occurring speech. This has significant benefits compared to relying on invented examples; as Sidnell (2010, 20–21) points out, imagination even at its best cannot come up with all the things people say and the ways in which they say them. Hence, using invented examples means running the risk of ignoring real linguistic phenomena. The naturally occurring speech of my recordings is captured in the transcripts analysed in the next section. They form my personal corpus, in this case "a collection of spoken […] texts" systematically designed for linguistic analysis (Weisser 2016, 23). The question remains how to methodologically approach the corpus.

My analysis is best described as *corpus-illustrated linguistics*. The term refers to introspectively extracting examples from the natural data to descriptively confirm or question the existence of a linguistic phenomenon (Glynn 2014, 23; cf. also Luodonpää-Manni and Ojutkangas, 2020). Even though corpus-illustrated linguistics has been criticised for its reliance on intuition and the absence of statistical analysis, it is considered an established usage-based approach to language (Tummers, Heylen, and Geeraerts 2005, 234–235). Given the preliminary nature of this study in outlining the connection between overlap and DMs in SVCMC, corpus-illustrated linguistics appears both reasonable and practical. Once the knowledge on the phenomenon increases, other methods can be applied to test previous observations and to deal with the subject in greater statistical depth.

In my paper, corpus-illustrated linguistics included the following steps. Having recorded the conversation, I identified all occurrences of overlap and transcribed them. To gain a better understanding of the surrounding discourse affecting the overlap, I organised the transcripts in the 117 thematically coherent stretches of talk mentioned in section 5.1. However, as illustrated in section 2.1, the most important forms of overlap are problematic and call for a solution until only one speaker remains. Therefore, I distinguished occurrences of non-problematic overlap from problematic overlap. Then, to narrow down Crible's list of English DMs introduced in section 4.3, I checked the frequency of each of those DMs in my corpus. It turned out that eighteen of them do not occur in my corpus at all and that twelve of them occur less than ten times in total. In contrast, there are ten Crible's DMs that occur between ten and fifty times in my corpus, and eight DMs occur over fifty times. To gain a broad and representative view on the DMs in my data, I chose to include the latter two groups in my

analysis. Table 3 contains these eighteen most frequent DM types including the number of tokens appearing in my corpus:

Table 3 DM types and tokens chosen for the analysis

Type	Tokens	Type	Tokens
yeah	153	*what*	48
and	142	*as*	38
okay	87	*right*	39
so	78	*then*	32
well	72	*I mean*	24
if	57	*say*	17
oh	58	*actually*	12
but	52	*because*	11
or	49	*now*	11

Having chosen the DMs, I highlighted all DM tokens using **boldface** to facilitate my analysis. Finally, I studied the 117 transcripts closely to confirm whether the DMs and their functions are related to overlap in my SVCMC corpus. The next section illustrates the results of this process, providing 23 transcripts to illustrate my findings.

6 ANALYSIS

This section is dedicated to the analysis of my SVCMC corpus. In his discussion of the ORD, Schegloff (see section 2.2) does not address the status of different lexical items in overlap management. My analysis examines the relationship between DMs and overlap in SVCMC including the question of whether DMs could be added to the ORD in SVCMC. To contextualise my corpus with concrete examples, section 6.1 illustrates that modern multi-party SVCMC is a unique conversational environment to which the participants must adapt. Section 6.2 concentrates on the significance of the turn-internal position of DMs in terms of their turn management functions, and 6.3 suggests that three different DM uses complement Schegloff's ORD in my corpus. The transcripts are numbered (1)–(23), and all occurrences of the DMs chosen for analysis (see section 5.3) are in **boldface**.

6.1 SVCMC VARIABLES

Prior to the analysis of the DMs in my corpus, the evident SVCMC variables defining the conversational environment of my data are briefly illustrated. The aim is to outline some of the factors separating my modern multi-party SVCMC corpus from e.g. written forms of CMC or face-to-face communication. An understanding of these factors is necessary for the correct interpretation of the turn-taking-related phenomena in my data. As the point of view of section 3 is mainly theoretical, the arguments in this section are strictly based on my SVCMC transcripts.

The first of these factors is the matter of volume addressed in section 3. If someone's volume is low in SVCMC, that speaker's voice is difficult to hear for all participants. In my recordings, Mia's volume is seemingly lower than that of most of the other participants:

(1)
GM: The moon is pretty bright during the night-time **and** the sand itself reflects the moon, **so** it's not super dark here in the night=
Cyril: Mm.
GM: = in the desert.
Cyril: **Yeah**.
GM: Just for your consideration. [**But**]
Mia: [That is] helpful, thank you. I [will] still=
GM: [**What**]?
Mia: = volunteer to take the first watch.

Cyril: **Yeah, I mean**, I guess it doesn't really – **so** – wait, **so** Lo is first? **What** race is Lo by the way?

When Mia thanks the GM for enlightening the adventurers on the illumination in the desert, the GM does not hear what she said which is evident in his use of *what*, referring back to Mia's *that is helpful, thank you*. One might feel inclined to explain this by the overlap, but such an explanation seems implausible as only the semantically relatively empty *that is* is in direct overlap. Consequently, Mia's low volume level is the probable reason for the audibility issue. One should also observe that in Zoom, Mia's low volume remains low in relation to the other speakers for all participants (see section 5.1).

Another factor complicating the communication is the hardware. Naturally, the microphone is at the core of SVCMC: if the user opts for using the push-to-talk function, they might press the push-to-talk button too late or release it too early; if the user opts for the voice activity function, the microphone might fail to recognise their voice for various reasons.[12] Both issues may result in e.g. speech cut short or broken speech cut in pieces as in the following extract. The adventurers perceive a bird in the sky, and both Luke and Cyril show interest to it, resulting in a floor fight and the intervention of the GM:

(2)
Luke: Uhm, **what** is that?
Cyril: That is a hunting hawk. **And if** <u>that</u>'s here – it could be wild, **but** it could be leading someone to us.
GM: Uhm: – **actually**, with twenty-four perception you notice that it has a little message tied to its leg.
Cyril: **Okay** – [uhm:]
Luke: [Uhm:]
Cyril: Hmm.
Luke: Would I [know of]
Cyril: [I – uhm:] – (*loud noise using the vocal cords, the tongue, and the lips*)
Luke: [(*inaudible*)]
Cyril: [How f] – how far up is it?
GM: Uhm – let's let Luke speak.
Cyril: **Okay**.
Luke: The name hunting hawk, would I know that it is another name for a blood hawk?
GM: **Well**, would you?
Luke: **Well:** – maybe?

[12] Push-to-talk means that the user must press a specific button to activate their microphone and release the same button to deactivate it. In Zoom, this button is the spacebar by default. Voice activity means that the user allows the software and the hardware to determine when to activate and deactivate the microphone. This function is based on the voice the microphone 'hears', i.e. registers.

GM: (*laughs*)
Luke: **Yeah**, su(*inaudible*) be(*inaudible*) he's a well-read individual. [**So:** I]
GM: [**Okay**], **yeah**.
Luke: **Yeah**.

During his partly inaudible utterance on the third to last line, Luke's volume level shows considerable variation. As a result, a part of his speech becomes completely inaudible. The reason for this is clearly of technological nature; it must be due to his microphone or, alternatively, some instability in his internet connection. The microphone is the more likely explanation because the sound is uninterrupted but of varying volume. The same pattern is repeated in Luke's speech elsewhere in the recordings. In addition, Luke's voice, like that of Mia, is relatively low in terms of volume, which can be seen in the middle of the above transcript where Luke's voice becomes inaudible in overlap. A combination of low volume and capricious hardware hampers Luke's communication in general, putting Luke in an unequal position compared to the other participants. Since the above transcript originates from the final 40 minutes of the over four-hour session, the intervention of the GM (*let's let Luke speak*) indicates that the GM has paid attention to this inequality and prefers to favour Luke instead of Cyril. The fact that the GM has the authority to explicitly distribute turns is due to his chairman-like position referred to in section 5.1.1.

In addition to the microphone issues defined by the push-to-talk or the voice activity functions, a user can of course remain muted and thus inaudible by accident.[13] Presumably not all such cases are visible in the data as one of the participants might initiate a turn but never be heard due to being muted. It is possible that they do not even notice it themselves or that the moment to initiate that turn has already passed. Either way, if they do not unmute themselves and re-initiate, their attempt to speak is not audible in the recordings and thus not visible in the transcripts. However, the transcripts include a couple of instances where being muted is addressed explicitly. In the following extract, the GM would like everybody to contribute to the discussion, but Eve (whose in-game name is Feefee) remains silent:

(3)
Cyril: **If** we let them live, we are sentencing other innocents to death. **And** I crack my whip at the entangled one.
GM: Uhm – does anyone want to: prevent this action somehow?

[13] For example, depending on their hardware, the user can manually mute their microphone, i.e. turn it off indefinitely. Unmuting requires a separate action.

Cyril: **Yeah**.
Luke: No, I won't.
Mia: No.
pause
GM: Feefee?
pause
GM: I think you're muted, Feefee.
Eve: Yes, I'm **so** muted, goddamnit I'm struggling! [(*laughs*) Sorry!]
Mia: [(*laughs*)]
GM: [(*laughs*)]
Eve: I wanted to use gust to try to like – push his whip just slightly off target.

A third and final frequently occurring SVCMC-specific variable lies in the relationship between the SVCMC environment in which the conversation takes place and the physical surroundings of the individual participants. The participants cannot know what happens in the background of the others although some events are audible. For example, Mia's doorbell and her phone are heard ringing in the recordings, and on one occasion, she expresses the need to attend to something in her physical presence. The others are left waiting for her return but do not stop playing. Instead, the GM confirms if Mia is back when her contribution is expected. Mia's absence and the need to confirm if she is back echo Jenks' observation in section 3 that SVCMC speakers must consider that not everybody is constantly able and willing to talk:

(4)
GM: Is Mia back?
Mia: Sorry, I'm back, yes. [Uhm:]=
GM: [**Okay**].
Mia: = I might have to leave again, just – they're fixing a hole in the wall.
Eve: [**Oh** good].
GM: [**Okay**] – **oh yeah**. Those are important to be fixed.

This section has demonstrated that the conversational environment the transcripts originate from is affected by several variables separating it from e.g. face-to-face communication or text-based forms of CMC. Such variables range from the volume level of the speakers to hardware issues—e.g. using the push-to-talk, the voice activity, and the mute functions—and to the physical surroundings of the speakers. It cannot be stressed enough that most likely not all of these issues are audible in the recordings. As SVCMC lacks the visual dimension, some events relevant for explaining the communication may always remain invisible. The findings of this section facilitate the understanding of modern multi-party SVCMC environments

when analysing SVCMC transcripts and recordings. Now that this understanding has been established, the analysis will focus on the research questions concerning overlap and the DMs in my data.

6.2 Position of Discourse Markers

Based on the analysis of my corpus, overlap can affect all the DMs chosen for analysis, and the only visible variation is related to their position within the turn. I was not able to discern any clear pattern that would make one of the DMs more vulnerable to overlap than the others *per se*. It therefore appears that the position of the DM, not the difference between the individual DMs, is the most important defining factor in terms of overlap. Section 6.2.1 is of a general nature; it exemplifies occurrences of DMs in all three turn-internal positions in my corpus including their relevance to the matter of overlap. Thus, it concerns my first research question: the identification and the position of DMs when overlap occurs in SVCMC. In contrast, sections 6.2.2 and 6.2.3 turn towards the second research question addressing the function of DMs in terms of overlap in SVCMC; they concentrate on illustrating how turn-initial turn-takers and turn-final turn-yielders can contribute to the turn management in SVCMC by preventing and minimising problematic overlap.

6.2.1 Turn-Initial, Turn-Medial, and Turn-Final Discourse Markers

My corpus includes examples of DMs in all three possible positions: turn-initial, turn-medial, and turn-final. The following extract contains the first two types that are also the most common:

(5)
GM: Ozanne says yes, maybe you all go ahead while we wait here, see **what** this: is: ab:out.
Cyril: Yes, [Ozanne], do you have a horn of some kind – that **if** they start attacking=
GM: [**If**]
Cyril: = you can alert us to come back.
GM: Uh:. A horn. [**Well**, no].
Cyril: [Something:] loud.
GM: Uh, I can yell pretty loud. [**And:** these]=
Cyril: [**Well**, that'll] do.
GM: = these canyons, they should echo quite a bit.
Cyril: True, true, true.

The GM's *if* is interpreted as turn-initial even though the turn as such is never completed. One could also argue that the *if* is turn-medial, but Cyril's *yes* separating the GM's first turn from his *if* and the semantic-pragmatic completeness of the GM's first turn support the interpretation that the *if* represents recurring self-selection rather than continuation of the previous turn. Two lines below, the GM's *well* is turn-medial whereas Cyril's *well* on the third to last line is turn-initial. Finally, the GM's stretched *and:* is intended as turn-continuation and is thus turn-medial. Notice that all four turn-initial and turn-medial DMs are directly affected by overlapping talk.

The observation that turn-initial and turn-medial DMs are often in overlap is not particularly surprising when one recalls the meaning of TRPs presented in section 2. As overlap often results from simultaneous self-selection, and turn-initial and turn-medial DMs frequently appear at TRPs, i.e. places suitable for speaker-transition, turn-initial DMs can readily appear in overlap with turn-medial DMs. For example, in extract (5) above, when the GM asserts that he can yell loudly, he arrives at a TRP. However, he chooses to hold on to his turn with the turn-medial DM *and* that signals speaker-continuation. Cyril's simultaneous self-selection, i.e. his choice to show that the GM's answer is satisfactory, is not surprising as yelling loudly is the alternative solution the GM provides to Cyril's initial request of blowing into a horn of some kind. Nor is it out of the ordinary that Cyril initiates with a DM because DMs are most common in turn-initial position. In sum, turn-initial and turn-medial DMs are vulnerable to overlap because they occur at TRPs where speaker-transition and simultaneous self-selection typically take place.

There are considerably less turn-final DMs in my corpus, but extract (6) includes a typical use of a DM to end the turn; Luke's turn-final *right* signals that he has nothing more to add. In the game, Luke's fictional character offers to cast a light-bringing spell to improve visibility in the dark:

(6)

Luke:	**Yeah**, do you need something to aid your sight? I can poof poof poof poof –
	and I [cast da]=
Cyril:	[(*inaudible*) con]centrate that, don't [you]?
Luke:	= [dan]cing lights. **Right**.
GM:	**Well**, the camp does include a bonfire **because** it gets extremely cold in the night in the desert.

Luke's turn-final DM *right* refers to Cyril's question on the preceding line. Despite the beginning of Cyril's turn being inaudible probably both due to the overlap and a microphone-use-related issue (see section 6.1), it is obvious that he reminds Luke about the rules of the game, implying that Luke's intention to cast a spell called dancing lights should be reconsidered under the circumstances.[14] Thus, Luke's *right* effectively ends his turn as he notices that his intentions—the very motivation for initiating a turn—have been questioned by Cyril.

The fact that the turn-final *right* is not in overlap in extract (6) is typical of my corpus. In fact, my transcripts contain examples of only the DMs *right*, *then*, *yeah*, *okay*, *what*, and *oh* in overlap in turn-final position. To further complicate the matter, in the case of *right*, *yeah*, *okay*, *what*, and *oh*, many of such occurrences are turns made of nothing but the DM. These DMs can constitute turns independently, in which case they appear in turn-initial and turn-final position simultaneously. This is exemplified by the following extract where Cyril and the GM negotiate how Cyril's fictional pet monkey should approach a suspicious tent the adventurers have encountered:

(7)
GM: Uhm – like stealthily, **or**?
Cyril: **Yeah** – still – **as** we're going past it, **right**? **So** [can] Trugtug the – the monkey=
GM: [**Yeah**].
Cyril: = just sort of go **and** – since it's a tent he can just probably like – like maybe open it up a little bit? To: see [inside].
GM: [Uhm] – **well**, you can roll stealth for [Trugtug].
Cyril: [**Okay**].

The GM's *yeah* on the third line and Cyril's *okay* on the last line both stand alone in their respective turns. The turns are not interrupted or incomplete; they simply do not require any other components than the DMs. This is typical for continuers in general and as such not puzzling at all. Nevertheless, the extract illustrates that such DMs are special in terms of their turn-internal position in that the very same token may count as turn-initial and turn-final at the same time.

This subsection has exemplified that my SVCMC corpus contains DMs in turn-initial, turn-medial, and turn-final positions. Of these, the turn-final position is the rarest and often of

[14] In the context of Dungeons & Dragons, the verb *concentrate* refers to using certain spells of some duration, only one of which can be active at a time. Thus, the spell Luke would like to use is a limited resource, and Cyril points out that Luke should not use it in this situation.

twofold character: independently occurring DMs are turn-initial and turn-final at the same time. As regards the question of which DMs are particularly associated with overlap, it appears that there are no relevant patterns observable in my corpus. Instead, the position of the DM defines the probability of it occurring in overlap: turn-initial and turn-medial DMs are vulnerable to overlap due to their position at a TRP where speaker-transition tends to take place, whereas turn-final DMs are relatively seldom directly affected by overlap. The following subsections analyse the functions of turn-initial DMs and turn-final DMs in greater detail.

6.2.2 Turn-Initial Turn-Takers

As DMs often appear in turn-initial position, it follows that they are the first clear audible signal of an initiated turn. Based on my corpus, this is true particularly of SVCMC where inhalations can seldom be heard, and physical gestures can never be seen. Therefore, turn-initial DMs have great potential for minimising overlap; they create an opportunity for the competitive speakers to take strategic pauses, giving each other space to talk. The next extract where the adventurers establish the status of their caravan and beasts of burden demonstrates this well:

(8)
GM: You have four raptors.
Cyril: **Oh**, we have four! Nice, **okay**. **So**, we got three carts **and** four raptors.
Okay. [Uhm:]
Mia: [That's not] too bad.
GM: [**Yeah**]=
Cyril: [**Yeah**], that's not too bad.
GM: = Ozanne looks [over] **and** says: **well**, yes – uhm – a single raptor can pull=
Cyril: [**So**]
GM: = a cart. It will be: slower, **but** I know they're capable of it.
Mia: **Well**, do we want to – I do have – uhm – a way to distribute water to us.

Extract (8) above contains a total of five turn-initial DMs, and all of them can help the speakers avoid overlap. Following the GM's initial turn, Cyril self-selects with *oh*. At a TRP, Mia produces some brief overlapping talk, and after her turn, Cyril and the GM initiate with *yeah* simultaneously. This gives them both the opportunity to hold back and give each other space to talk. This time, it is the GM who withdraws for a moment, allowing Cyril to finish his utterance with *that's not too bad*. After that, the GM continues by describing what the fictional character Ozanne says during which Cyril attempts to initiate a turn with the DM *so* in overlap with the GM's talk. However, Cyril withdraws immediately. The GM then

finishes his turn, and Mia self-selects with the DM *well*, initiating a new topic. Whilst Cyril's *oh* and Mia's *well* are not surrounded by overlap, the GM's *yeah* and Cyril's *so* prove that turn-initial DMs can give the simultaneous speakers some valuable time to react to overlap, thus effectively contributing to resolving a budding floor fight before it escalates.

Similarly, in the following extract, the turn-initial DMs *well* and *so* allow the speakers to consider whether to engage in competitive production or not. The adventurers, approaching a town, are threatened by hostile goblins but have managed to defeat the immediate peril, chasing off the only remaining goblin:

(9)
GM: **And then** in the morning you could=
Cyril: Mm.
GM: = arrive into the town.
Mia: Yes, [I think] pushing on **as** far **as** possible would be – advantageous.
Cyril: [**Well**]
Luke: Yes.
Eve: [Uh-huh].
Luke: [I have] – suspicion that: this night won't be rested easy.
Mia: Mm. Indeed.
GM: [**So**, you'll]
Cyril: [**So** you mean] pursue the goblin more? **Or**?
GM: [You] lost the goblin.
Luke: [**Well]**=
Cyril: [**Oh], yeah**. Yes, yes, yes, yes.
Luke: = [**yeah**].

On three occasions in the above extract, a DM initiates an incomplete turn, i.e. the speaker withdraws after uttering a turn-initial DM. The first of these is Cyril's *well*, uttered in overlap with Mia. The second one is the GM's *so* in overlap with Cyril's *so*; it is the GM who withdraws, allowing Cyril to finish. Finally, Luke's turn-initial *well* on the third to last line initiates an utterance he never completes. Instead, he lets the GM who self-selects simultaneously finish. Apparently, Luke had the same intention as the GM to point out that pursuing the goblin would be a wasted effort because he uses the continuer *yeah* to agree with the GM's comment that the goblin cannot be found. Thus, the turn-initial DMs *well* (Cyril), *so* (GM), and *well* (Luke) all include the alternative for the speaker to withdraw in the case of overlap.

A third extract illustrates that the speakers are not obliged to adhere to the signal of the turn-initial DM that the speaker is about to continue. Here, the adventurers try to examine whether the figures they see in the distance are living creatures or not. Notice how Cyril withdraws after his own turn-medial *well* at the end of the first line but does not do so after initiating simultaneous talk following the GM's turn-initial *well*:

(10)
Cyril: **Well**, that doesn't look – natural. It's like they're statues **or** something. [**Well**]
Mia: [Mm]=
Mia: = I can't do an arcana check with my rat stats, can I?
GM: **Well**, [**I mean what** do you want to:] see?
Cyril: [You're a druid, **so** you can].
GM: **Like**, how – **wha** – **what** are you looking for with it?

Based on the transcript, it is impossible to say why Cyril withdraws when Mia initiates simultaneous talk but chooses to initiate competitive production simultaneously with the GM a few lines below. The fact that Cyril's own turn-medial *well* at the end of the first line is in overlap with Mia's *mm* whilst the GM's *well* is not in overlap does not explain the different outcome. It appears that Cyril's *well* gives him and Mia the chance to briefly evaluate the situation in terms of competitive production just as the GM's *well* does between the GM and Cyril. However, the DM neither obliges either of the speakers to stop nor to continue. Engaging in competitive production seems to be a choice beyond the function of turn-initial DMs.

The arguments presented in this subsection demonstrate that turn-initial DMs can function as a signal of incoming speech, thus providing the participants with the opportunity to withdraw or to continue talking. Therefore, turn-initial DMs can prevent problematic overlap by encouraging one of the potential competitors to hold back. However, this does not exclude the possibility for other lexical items than DMs to function similarly in preventing problematic overlap. Simultaneous speakers can choose to withdraw and give each other space regardless of the word they initiate with. Nevertheless, the extracts above illustrate that since DMs frequently appear in turn-initial position, they are often the lexical item that functions as the first signal the participants hear in SVCMC. This first signal may determine if competitive production emerges.

6.2.3 Turn-Final Turn-Yielders

In 6.2.1, I addressed the rarity of turn-final DMs in my corpus. However, in 4.2.3, there was a reference to the turn-yielding function of turn-final DMs in text-based CMC and face-to-face communication. Therefore, it is reasonable to assume that they have this function in SVCMC, too. If turn-initial turn-takers signal that the speaker initiates a turn, turn-final DMs supposedly signal that the speaker has finished the turn, i.e. is willing to yield the floor. Thus, turn-final DMs can contribute to the distribution of turns like the turn-initial DMs discussed in the previous subsection. The extracts in this subsection illustrate the capability of turn-final DMs to facilitate turn-transitions on the one hand and their potential to mislead speakers on the other hand.

Overall, turn-final DMs are seldomly affected by overlap in my data, and there are certainly more occurrences of non-problematic terminal overlap than problematic overlap at the ends of turns. In this extract, the GM reminds the adventurers of some earlier events to help them contextualise a message they have received:

(11)
GM: You: uhm – you did hear: the goblin **say** that the: – that the smart leader is called the Grand Pook.
Cyril: **Oh:**, the goblin said. **Yeah**. **Right**. I think –
[I think the hobgoblin also said that the:] – that we're entering the area of the:=
GM: [**And:** the hobgoblin who – also stopped you:]
Cyril: = Grand Poo **or** whatever.
Eve: Uh-huh.
GM: **Yeah**.
Cyril: Maybe. [(*inaudible*)]
Eve: [**So** did this] come from the: – people we just paid for safe passage? [**Or:**]?
Cyril: [I think] it was the goblin – that we saw that sent the message.

Following the GM's reminder of the significance of the name Grand Pook, Cyril starts to recall some of the hints the GM gave the adventurers at an earlier stage of their journey. However, Cyril and the GM quickly find themselves in a floor fight when the GM initiates overlapping talk. A likely explanation for this is Cyril's use of the DM *right* on the third line. If Cyril did not continue talking, *right* would be a perfectly reasonable turn-final DM that could have prevented the floor fight. It might be that the GM interprets it that way, self-selecting briefly after Cyril's *I think*. However, because Cyril does continue, *right* is a mis-

leading DM that causes the GM to initiate overlapping talk. As for why the GM initiates despite Cyril's continuation with *I think*, the delay present in SVCMC could constitute a part of the explanation. On the second to last line, there is one more turn-final DM: Eve's *or* that signals the end of her turn and leaves the floor open for Cyril. Note, however, that Cyril does not have to wait for this signal as Eve's question is already semantic-pragmatically complete without her *or*. The resulting overlap is brief non-problematic terminal overlap. In sum, extract (11) is further proof of the multifunctionality of DMs and the complexity of turn management: depending on the context, the behaviour of the speakers, and the SVCMC variables such as delay, turn-final turn-yielders can help the speakers recognise ends of turns, and hence prevent overlap, but do not necessarily do so.

The following extracts further illustrate the difficulties turn-final DMs face when attempting to prevent problematic overlap. If the turn-final DM itself appears in problematic overlap, it cannot prevent the overlap the way turn-initial DMs do since the overlap has already been initiated by the time the turn-final DM is uttered. Nonetheless, even when uttered in problematic overlap, turn-final DMs can contribute to turn management in a meaningful way. In extract (12), the adventurers discuss and consult the rules of the game on whether a spell called silence can be used under the circumstances:

(12)
Mia: I was going to **say** I could cast silence – uhm – **but** it only lasts up to about ten minutes.
GM: **And** it's stationary.
Mia: **Oh**!
Cyril: No, you can use it on an item, I think.
GM: **Oh**, you can? [**Well**, that's cool].
Cyril: [I think **so**]. I think you can. I think! [I'll] just check.
Mia: [Mm:].
Cyril: Centered on a point you choo:se. Mm. Mm mm mm mm [mm].
Mia: [**Yeah**]. It doesn't seem [super clear].
Cyril: [**Yeah**, I guess] it's <u>not</u> an item.
Mia: Uh-huh. [Alright. **Well**, never mind **then**].
Cyril: [**Okay**, maybe we'll just] – **yeah**. Never mind. **Yeah**.
Mia: It was almost a good idea.

The turn-final DM is Mia's *then* affected by problematic overlap between Mia and Cyril on the third and second to last lines. Even though the overlap does not result in an extended floor fight, it causes Cyril to stop mid-TCU and to interrupt his turn with the turn-medial

yeah. However, Mia's turn-final *then* can hardly be interpreted as a cause or as a resolution of the overlap. Nevertheless, it closes Mia's turn which is noticed by the competitor, Cyril, in his repetition of the words *never mind* that he clearly has registered despite the overlap. The next extract in which the adventurers have shot down a hawk carrying a message shows a similar pattern:

(13)
GM: **And:** you see a slightly burned hawk who has a message on its fee – foot.
pause
Eve: [**What**'s the message, **then**]?
Cyril: [The killer can take] the: message.
GM: Uhm, **yeah**. When you: read – **or:** – open the message, it's in: – like – crude writing – common, however.

Eve's turn-final DM *then* finishes her question about the content of the message. Consequently, it yields her turn much like Mia's *then* in the earlier extract. Although Eve's turn-final *then* is in overlap, it cannot be explained by the choice of the DM or by its position: the overlap is caused by Eve's and Luke's simultaneous self-selection following the pause that leaves the floor open. Thus, Eve's turn would have been in overlap with that of Cyril regardless of the turn-final DM. Still, it closes Eve's turn and reinforces its status as a question; indeed, the GM proceeds to answer the question after Cyril is done talking. Furthermore, Cyril's extended *the:* following the overlap indicates that he prolongs the *e* strategically, listening for cues regarding Eve's willingness to continue. In other words, he decelerates in line with Schegloff's ORD (see section 2.2). It is likely that once Cyril has identified and processed Eve's turn-final *then*, he is convinced of his right to continue.

This subsection has illustrated the potential of turn-final DMs to successfully function as turn-yielders even when they appear directly in problematic overlap. Furthermore, they can mislead the hearers to initiate overlapping talk if the current speaker chooses to continue after uttering a seemingly turn-final DM. This confirms that turn-final DMs can function as turn-yielders in SVCMC, too. However, turn-final DMs are a rarity in my corpus, and most of them are not affected by overlap at all or appear in non-problematic terminal overlap. This is typical as their position directly preceding a TRP is vulnerable to terminal overlap but not to simultaneous self-selection as the utterer of the turn-final DM already holds the turn.

In sum, section 6.2 has demonstrated that the position of the DM instead of the choice of the DM is the defining factor in terms of overlap in my corpus. Therefore, the position of the DM within the turn can affect the problematic overlap as was seen in the cases of turn-initial turn-takers and turn-final turn-yielders. The next section, 6.3, focuses on three specific DM uses that can be added to Schegloff's ORD in my SVCMC corpus.

6.3 Discourse Markers and the Overlap Resolution Device

This section continues the exploration of how the functions of DMs are connected to overlap in SVCMC. I argue that DMs have the potential to contribute to Schegloff's ORD under three specific circumstances: when they are used as a DM combination (6.3.1) or as markers of incipient speakership (6.3.2), and when a DM is repeated (6.3.3).

6.3.1 Discourse Marker Combinations

Several extracts from my data illustrate that some DMs used in combination with another DM can help the speaker win a floor fight, thus resolving the problematic overlap. In extract (14), the adventurers negotiate who should keep watch whilst the others are asleep, and Eve ends up in a fight for the floor with both Mia and Cyril:

(14)
Cyril: I guess Cyridel doesn't see in the dark, **so** I would probably take the: first **or** the last watch. **So** that I would have at least <u>some</u> sight.
Mia: Need to think this through.
GM: [(*laughs*)]
Eve: [(*laughs*)] [I] also: can't=
Mia: [**Well**]=
Eve: = **well** [**<u>actually</u>**] I think I can=
Mia: = [(*inaudible*)]
Eve: = I don't know, [I]
Cyril: [**Yeah**] gnomes have – have good night vision.
Eve: I see, I see, I feel like I should **but** I'm not seeing it on here, maybe I'm [just]
Cyril: [I'm] pretty sure gnomes [(*inaudible*)]
Eve: [<u>Especially</u> **as**] a rock gnome [I feel] like=
Mia: [**Yeah**]
Eve: = I ha:[v:e night vision].
Cyril: [**Yeah** definitely you've] got it.
Eve: **But** – like – I can take middle of the night shift.

After the non-problematic chordal or choral talk, i.e. the simultaneous laughter, Eve and Mia self-select simultaneously; Eve with the singular first-person pronoun, Mia with the DM *well*. Following brief strategic pauses, they resort to competitive production. However, Eve wins the ensuing floor fight with the DM combination *well actually*, laying particular emphasis to *actually*. It is noteworthy that the DM *actually* is the word that drowns Mia's speech, rendering it inaudible. Thus, Mia withdraws, and Eve is allowed to keep on talking. Cyril interrupts her with his turn-initial *yeah*, but even his voice becomes inaudible in overlap with Eve's talk. This is plausible as Eve's volume level is particularly high even though that of Cyril is not very low either. Despite repeated overlap, Cyril and Eve manage to communicate meaningfully, but Mia never returns to the floor other than with the non-problematic continuer *yeah* on the fourth to last line. In another extract, Cyril's DM combination wins the floor for him in a similar fashion:

(15)
Cyril: **Well**, let's see this treasure first.
GM: **Okay**, follow me!
Luke: Uhm – are we really sure about this?
Mia: Not [at all].
GM: [(*inaudible*)]
Cyril: [(*inaudible*)] on my feats.
GM: [(*laughs*)]
Mia: [(*laughs*)] **So**, I'll – I'll shapeshift into a rat. Despite [the:] uncertainty.
Cyril: [I]=
Cyril: = I'll put – uhm – how long does speak with animals last **so** I can talk to you? Ah, it's ten minutes. You said it's like a five-minute walk, **right**?
GM: **Yeah**. [At least (*inaudible*)]
Cyril: [**Okay, <u>so</u>** after] like – after we're – soon, when we're close to the: dune, I'll just put speak with animals on **so** I can talk to the rat **and** he can – Lo can talk back.
Eve: Are we all going, **or** should we stay – some people stay with the: caravan?

The beginning of the extract illustrates the difficult context of SVCMC; Mia, the GM, and Cyril talk in overlap but only Mia's utterance remains audible despite her usually low volume level. Cyril's talk appears to be disturbed by a problem of technological nature, and the GM is likely to speak less intensively than normally because Luke's question does not concern the GM as much as the fellow adventurers. Following the simultaneous laughter, Mia initiates with the DM *so*, and Cyril self-selects after Mia's first TRP. Cyril's question ending in the turn-final DM *right* is directed to the GM, but instead of listening to his complete an-

swer, Cyril initiates competitive talk with the DM combination *okay, so*. He lays emphasis on *so*, and the GM's speech becomes inaudible. On the last line, Eve presents a new perspective to the conversation, and the GM never returns to his partly inaudible answer.

By contrast, in extract (16), a floor fight never really emerges because Cyril's determined DM combination grants him the floor:

(16)
GM: You start squeaking.
Cyril: **Okay, so**, I'll start squeaking **and say** you see, this creature cannot be left unchecked.
pause
Mia: U: [hm]
Cyril: **[But yeah**]. [I'll continue to] follow him.
Mia: [(*laughs*)]
Mia: I will squeak – uhm – in a neutral way where I'm not going to disagree. **But** I'm not agreeing either.

On the second line, Cyril uses the DM combination *okay, so*, but there is no competition for the floor or overlapping talk. After the pause that follows, Mia is clearly about to initiate an answer with her unfilled pause *u:hm*, but Cyril rushes ahead with his DM combination *but yeah* to further describe the actions of his fictional character. The DMs cause Mia to withdraw for a moment until she apparently laughs at the in-game situation where her character is a rat and Cyril's character has the ability to communicate in rat language (i.e. squeak). In the final turn, Mia provides Cyril with an answer to his original comment on the creature they are discussing.

The extracts in this subsection indicate that DM combinations can bear particular significance during competitive production and in preventing a floor fight. Based on extracts (14) and (15), it appears that the determined use of a DM combination, especially if the second DM is emphasised, is a powerful tool for winning a floor fight. Furthermore, extract (16) suggests that initiating with a double DM may cause the competitor to withdraw before the floor fight even emerges. Consequently, DM combinations could be added to the ORD in SVCMC as a means to resolve problematic overlap.

6.3.2 Markers of Incipient Speakership

Another repeatedly occurring phenomenon in my corpus is the use of continuers such as *yeah* and *okay* as markers of incipient speakership in floor fights. On the surface, they appear to signal mere affirmation and understanding similarly to other continuers such as *uh-huh*. On multiple occasions, however, they express the willingness to speak: to take over the floor. The following extract illustrates this function of *yeah* and *okay* well:

(17)
Cyril: Can: we insight this creature? (*laughs*)
GM: **What** are you trying to ascertain? Let's [not] – uhm=
Luke: [Huh]
GM: = [just] call out=
Cyril: [**Yeah**].
GM: = **what** [skill you] want=
Cyril: [**Yeah, okay**].
GM: = to roll, [just tell me] **what** your character=
Cyril: [**Okay, yeah**].
GM: = [does, please].
Cyril: [**Okay, so**] – **so** I'm just wondering **if** this is an actual deal that we're going into with this creature?

When the GM presents his request, Cyril repeatedly uses the DMs *yeah* and *okay* in overlap with the GM's talk. His motivation appears to be beyond the role of an active listener; Cyril's DMs signal that he has already understood the message of the GM and would like to carry on by continuing himself. This intention is eventually manifested in his turn-initial DM combination *okay, so* on the last line. The reason why Cyril seemingly does not feel the need to listen to the GM's turn closely is that Cyril is familiar with the rules of the game: when he asks about using *insight* and the GM asks what he is trying to ascertain, Cyril already understands that he must be more specific. In other words, instead of listening to the GM's request to *tell me what your character does*, Cyril would impatiently like to proceed to doing just that already.

Extract (18) contains similar uses of *yeah* and *okay* as markers of incipient speakership in overlap. Here, a series of four *okay*s and one *yeah* by Cyril leads to Cyril's attempt to take over the floor:

(18)
GM: Cyridel knows that that would leave you with a whole bunch of dead raptors **and** a whole bunch of cargo scattered in [sand].
Cyril: [Ah, **okay**]. **So** it's <u>that</u> intense. A:lright.
GM: It's [a <u>wall</u>] of: – sandstorm=
Cyril: [**Okay**].
GM: = that's:=
Cyril: **Okay**.
GM: = coming towards you. [It looks <u>brutal</u>], heh.
Cyril: [**Okay:**, alright].
GM: This is [no] big – no – like – little thing.
Cyril: [**Yeah**].
Cyril: Alright, uhm
Eve: Should we just follow his lead **and** go to the alcove? **Or** [whatever]?
Luke: [Yes, I] – I will take note of **what** – uhm – Ozanne is doing **and** try to coax some of the sand raptors also – towards the alcove.

On the first line, the GM describes to Cyril what his fictional character Cyridel knows about the urgency of the in-game situation, i.e. an approaching sandstorm. The GM then initiates a lengthy description of the lethality of the sandstorm, but Cyril's repeated use of *okay* and *yeah* indicates that he has little interest in listening to the description. Instead, he attempts to initiate a turn with *alright, uhm*. However, Eve manages to initiate her own turn when Cyril is pondering what to say, and Cyril does not return to the floor for a while. In other words, even though Cyril does not win the floor in the end, his *okay*s and *yeah* are signals of incipient speakership.

The aspect that makes these markers of incipient speakership so fascinating in terms of overlap is that they produce non-problematic overlap whilst preventing problematic overlap. Firstly, the overlap produced by Cyril's markers in (17) and (18) above is brief, and hence does not hinder the current speaker's talk (see section 2.2). Secondly, Cyril does not attempt to initiate competitive production beyond those markers before he believes that the GM is done talking. In other words, instead of initiating a floor fight, Cyril's markers serve temporary withdrawal; they signal to the other participants that he is likely to initiate a turn once the current speaker has finished. Therefore, markers of incipient speakership give the current speaker time and space to reach a TRP whilst cautioning other potential next speakers not to initiate a turn directly after that since the user of those markers is likely to do so.

Extract (19) where the GM and Cyril end up in a floor fight following Mia's question on the first line contains slightly different uses of *yeah* as a marker of incipient speakership:

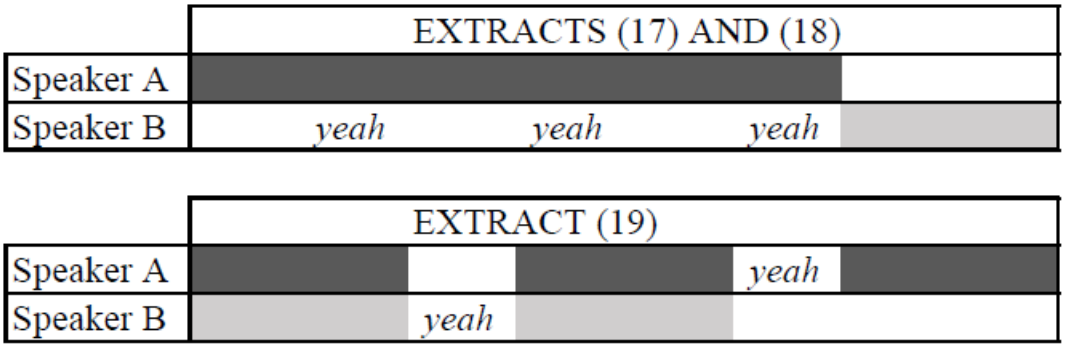
(19)
Mia: Do we have to navigate the fog on the other side **now**?
GM: The fog is [just like – a few]=
Cyril: [I could just – **yeah**]. I can just [like make it]=
GM: = [tens of feet] – **yeah**.
Cyril: = make it – **yeah**. I can just make it go away. **If** I stop concentrating.
pause
Cyril: **But yeah**, I guess it will just – wee!
Mia: [(*laughs*)]
GM: [(*laughs*)] [**Well**, you]=
Luke: [(*inaudible*)]
GM: = [go back] from the: – to the caravan **and** tell Ozanne – uhm=
Luke: [(*inaudible*)]
Cyril: **Yeah**. **Yeah**. [**Well**, we have secur]
GM: = [**and** your caravan starts] – starts going through – canyon.

As the overlap emerges on the second and third lines, both Cyril and the GM stop mid-TCU, indicating that the overlap is the reason for stopping (see section 2.2). Cyril's first *yeah* on the third line, still in overlap with the GM, signals that Cyril would prefer to continue himself because he has an answer to Mia's question. The GM takes a short strategic pause to give Cyril space but continues his utterance with *tens of feet* in repeated overlap with Cyril. Now the GM uses *yeah*, expressing that he understands that Cyril can get rid of the fog. Since the GM now withdraws, the interpretation that this *yeah* is a continuer is plausible. In contrast, Cyril's second *yeah* preceding the pause once again implies incipient speakership as Cyril then finishes his turn, resulting in the pause.

What makes these uses of *yeah* different from extracts (17) and (18) above is that they are uttered by the competitors alternately and combined with a strategic pause (see section 3). Thus, they contribute to resolving overlap by giving the competitors time to consider who should be allowed to continue instead of prolonging the competitive production. At the same time, they signal to the competitor that their point has been understood and that the utterer of the marker would like to keep on talking in their stead. Therefore, they are markers of incipient speakership that can be added to the ORD as a competitive tool that can be utilised until only one speaker remains. The final two *yeah*s on the second to last line in extract (19) emphasise this function: Cyril signals that he understands what the GM wants to say, and he

indeed proceeds to initiate competitive production with *well* simultaneously with the GM's *and*. Table 4 illustrates the difference between the use of the markers in extracts (17) and (18) on the one hand and extract (19) on the other hand:

Table 4 Simplification of two uses of *yeah* as a marker of incipient speakership



yeah represents markers of incipient speakership.

In the first scenario in table 4, the markers used by speaker B are in brief non-problematic overlap with speaker A's talk until speaker B finally takes over the floor. Thus, the series of markers uttered by B ultimately leads to B's turn. In the second scenario, the speakers are in problematic overlap, and the markers used by them are a part of the negotiation for which of the speakers should be allowed to continue. This negotiation is concluded when speaker B withdraws. In conclusion, the second scenario contains problematic overlap and **no** temporary withdrawal unlike the first scenario containing non-problematic overlap and temporary withdrawal.

In the extracts above, *yeah* and *okay* are used in overlap and floor fights, but the incipient speakership function can operate meaningfully outside overlap, too. The next and final extract of this subsection illustrates that the DM *okay* as a marker of incipient speakership can also contribute to completely avoiding overlap. In extract (20), the adventurers are about to join a caravan pulled by raptors when Mia's doorbell is heard ringing via her microphone:

(20)
GM: Uhm – **yeah** – **actually**, all of you can basically take whatever spot you want in the caravan. The – uhm – the: raptors go at basically [a human] walking speed.
Mia: [*doorbell rings*]
GM: [**Oh**].
Mia: [**Oh**], sorry. I think: some maintenance people are here, sorry.
GM: **Okay**.
Eve: **Okay**. Even though they're like walking speed, **because** I'm **so** tiny **and** I'm

being a gnome, can I ride one of the raptors?
GM: [(*laughs*)]
Eve: [(*laughs*)]

The most relevant DM in this context is Eve's *okay* following that of the GM because their uses of the same DM serve different purposes. When Mia apologises for her doorbell ringing and for the maintenance business she must attend to, the GM's *okay* is a continuer even though it is not in terminal overlap with Mia's speech. Similarly, Eve's *okay* is a continuer, but at the same time it is also a marker of incipient speakership which becomes evident when Eve continues her turn by returning to the fictional role-playing world. This way, markers of incipient speakership can signal to the others that the speaker is about to continue. Of course, the GM could have continued as well, in which case his *okay* would also have marked incipient speakership. This highlights the multifunctionality and the context dependency of DMs and the difficulty of outlining any definitive categories of DMs in terms of overlap.

The extracts in this subsection have illustrated that the continuers *yeah* and *okay* can also function as markers of incipient speakership in different situations. Furthermore, their role in terms of problematic overlap varies in this function. When signalling temporary withdrawal, they produce non-problematic overlap but prevent problematic overlap. However, if they are combined with strategic pauses in competitive production, they mark the desire to continue without temporary withdrawal. Finally, markers of incipient speakership can function as turn-initial turn-takers, thus preventing overlap altogether (see section 6.2.2).

6.3.3 Repeated Use of Discourse Markers

As discussed in section 2.2, repetition is one of the conversational strategies related to the ORD. My corpus suggests that DMs belong to the lexical items that the speakers can repeat in the hope of winning the floor. In extract (21), Cyril repeats the DM *but* three times before Mia withdraws from the floor fight. Here, the adventurers negotiate whether the in-game circumstances fulfil the conditions for using a specific spell:

(21)
Eve: At least it makes it difficult terrain:. **But** that [could]=
Cyril: [Mm].
Eve: = [maybe help].
Cyril: [**If** it's loose] earth, **but** it's like – it's structure. [It's not] loose earth, **right**?
Eve: [Mm].
Mia: [**What** about those (*inaudible*)]
Cyril: [**But** – **but** I'm – **but** I was thinking] – no wait, it's ten-feet range. I was thinking **if** we could get you up there, could we make some rocks fall on them?
Mia: Mm.
Eve: Mm:.

On the fourth line, Cyril initiates overlapping talk with the DM *if*, ending his turn with the turn-final DM *right* that leaves the floor open. However, Cyril decides not to wait for an answer; he holds on to the floor when Mia also initiates a turn which results in competitive production. Cyril persistently repeats his turn-initial DM *but* with increasing urgency until Mia's voice becomes inaudible and she withdraws. Therefore, it is fair to suggest that Cyril's repeated use of the DM *but* is the tool that wins him the floor. This pattern is repeated in the next extract where Mia and Cyril are trying to feel if the weather is windy:

(22)
Mia: **Oh**. How long does the fog last?
Cyril: An hour. **If** there is no strong wind.
Mia: Can I lick my finger **and** stick it up in the air to see **if** I sense that there is strong wind [around at the moment]?
Cyril: [I can **actually** probably] druid craft **and** know that, too.
Mia: **Oh**!
Cyril: **Because** druid craft says that I can know the – the weather for twenty-four hours – damn! This would have [been useful]=
Mia: [(*laughs*)]
Cyril: = I would've used that to: [always] know the next –=
Luke: [Uh-huh].
Cyril: = **well** – **well**, I suppose a sandstorm isn't weather **if** it's [based on the: – like – city:]
GM: [Uhm, it was – it was an effect] by the cloud.
Cyril: **Yeah**, [**yeah, yeah, yeah**].
GM: [**Bu – but:**], there's – there's no – uhm – strong wind **right now**, [there's]
Cyril: [**Okay**], **so** the fog will stay.

After Mia has expressed her intention to investigate how strong the wind is, Cyril initiates competitive production, explaining how his character could do the same thing and how this ability, had he realised it early enough, would have been useful at an earlier point of the

adventure. It is noteworthy how the GM eventually returns to the question of the strength of the wind with the DM *but* that he repeats in overlap with Cyril's repeated *yeah*s. The two *but*s, first of which the GM does not finish, effectively grant him the opportunity to confirm that the wind is not strong.

A final example of the repeated use of DMs is the following extract where the repetition is not as urgent as in the two previous extracts. Prior to this communication, the GM has invited Mia's character to enlighten the others on the background of some creatures the adventurers just saw:

(23)
Mia: Uhm: – **yeah**, those were some cloud giants.
Cyril: Cloud giants.
Mia: Not a particularly friendly group, **if** I recall correctly.
GM: [**Well**]
Mia: [Pretty] sure I have friends who got stranded on one of those clouds sometime.
pause
GM: [**Well**]
Cyril: [Makes] – makes one seem even smaller – [than] all this vastness of sand.
Mia: [Correct]=
Mia: = there are many forces of good **and** evil at play in this desert.
Cyril: Nod, nod.
GM: We should press on.
Cyril: Yes, we should. [Hopefully] the: – uhm – the storm hit the goblins **as** well.

When Mia has informed the others of the unfriendly disposition of the cloud giants, the GM attempts to return to the floor with *well*. He self-selects simultaneously with Mia and withdraws to let her finish, after which the conversation briefly pauses. The GM clearly waits if Mia opts to continue again because he re-initiates with a second *well* following the pause—this time simultaneously with Cyril. On the second to last line, the GM finally returns to the floor, urging the adventurers to continue their journey. The two *well*s of the GM form a part of his strategy to enter the conversational floor, but they are not as effective as the DMs repeated quickly after one another in extracts (21) and (22). This indicates that taking time between the repeated DMs diminishes their turn-taking capacity. Furthermore, one should observe that the GM does not repeat *well* a third time when he finally takes over the floor on the second to last line. Therefore, the repetition of DMs is not a prerequisite for gaining the right to a turn; it is but one of the alternatives offered by the ORD.

7 DISCUSSION

Broadly speaking, this thesis had two main objectives expressed in the introduction: to illustrate the uniqueness of modern multi-party SVCMC as a conversational environment and to conduct a preliminary analysis of the overlap-related functions of DMs in SVCMC. This section discusses the results presented in the previous section; topics included are the nature, the extent, and the reliability the phenomena I observed in my corpus. Lastly, this section contains ideas for future research projects on SVCMC, overlap, and DMs.

As argued in the introduction to this thesis, I observed in section 6.1 that modern multi-party SVCMC is a conversational environment defined by technological variables and the lack of physical co-presence to which the speakers must adapt their language use. Firstly, extracts (1) and (2) indicate that adjusting the output and the input volume levels of the speakers individually could prevent audibility problems. This confirms Jenks' remark that adding audio-related features to the SVCMC software can facilitate SVCMC communication (see section 3). However, no matter how developed or experimental the software would be, such features would not remove the obstacles of capricious hardware and the operation of the microphone that hamper Luke's communication in extract (2). Furthermore, the option of muting the microphone is prone to human error and can result in halting the conversation like in extract (3). Secondly, extract (4) exemplifies how Mia's absence forces the others to communicate whether she is available to speak or not, and extract (20) contains a ringing doorbell that halts the conversation, disconnecting the role-players from the fictional world. Thus, the lack of physical co-presence and sudden background noises can disturb SVCMC conversations (see reference to Jenks in section 3). Finally, extract (11) contains an indication of delay possibly affecting the GM's decision to initiate overlapping talk. Removing these variables from SVCMC is a challenging task of technological nature, and their presence contributes to the uniqueness of the linguistic context of SVCMC.

Of course, these variables relate to the defining characteristic of SVCMC, i.e. the lack of physical co-presence including visual cues. As pointed out in section 6.1, not all the issues related to the variables discussed above are visible in my corpus. Since SVCMC lacks the visual dimension, some events relevant for explaining the communication may always remain invisible. For example, I cannot know if one of the participants attended to something else than the roleplaying session in their physical presence or attempted to say something whilst

being muted—and nor can the other participants. SVCMC relies solely on what can be heard. To gain further understanding on how these variables affect e.g. the motivation and the concentration of the participants, a different kind of a research setting is required. Observing the participants visually, monitoring their hardware and software use, and interviewing them after the recordings have been made could provide further insight into their behaviour and suggestions for how to improve SVCMC environments to facilitate communication. Creating experimental SVCMC software (see reference to Jenks in section 3) is undoubtedly a challenging task of interdisciplinary nature which highlights the benefits of the term CMC compared to CMD (see section 3). Linguists alone cannot resolve the problems caused by the lack of physical co-presence in SVCMC.

In addition to the variables defining modern SVCMC communication, this thesis aimed at achieving preliminary results on the bearing of DMs on overlap. My first research question regarding DMs was: which DMs and where are used when overlap occurs in SVCMC? Unfortunately, I discovered no visible patterns explaining which DMs are more related to overlap than others in my corpus. Instead, as demonstrated in section 6.2.1, all DMs can be linked to overlap, and the position of the DM is the defining factor. As expected, DMs occur in all three positions in my SVCMC corpus: turn-initial, turn-medial, and turn-final (see section 4.2.1). Furthermore, they can be affected by problematic overlap in all these positions as seen in extracts (5) and (12). However, turn-final DMs are not as common and not as often in overlap as turn-initial and turn-medial DMs which corresponds to previous research discussed in section 4.2.1. Actually, only the DMs *right*, *then*, *yeah*, *okay*, *what*, and *oh* occur in overlap in turn-final position. Moreover, in such cases, the DM often forms the turn alone and is thus turn-initial and turn-final at the same time.

The explanation for why turn-initial and turn-medial DMs are more vulnerable to overlap than turn-final DMs is a combination of the TRP (see section 2) and the functions of DMs in different positions. TRPs, i.e. the ends of TCUs, are the most likely locations for speaker-transition, and hence the current speaker and the next speaker may talk in overlap around TRPs if the transition is not seamless. DMs occur frequently in turn-initial and turn-medial position, broadly signalling initiation—like the turn-initial *well*—and continuation like the turn-medial *and* (see section 4.2.3). It follows that when the current speaker arrives at a TRP, they can signal speaker-continuation with a turn-medial *and* in overlap with the next speaker's self-selection initiated with *well*. A prime example of this is extract (5). Even though

turn-final DMs also occur at TRPs, the fact that they precede the TRP accounts for their tendency to be affected by non-problematic terminal overlap rather than problematic overlap (see section 2.1); even if the next speaker initiates in overlap with the current speaker's turn-final DM, the current speaker's message has been finished and presumably understood due to the semantic vagueness of DMs (see section 4.2.2 and the DM *or* in extract 11).

The second research question addressed the function of DMs in terms of overlap and how it is defined by the context of SVCMC. As stressed in sections 4.2.2 and 4.2.3, the meaning and the functions of DMs are context dependent, and since my analysis proved that SVCMC is a special communicative context, studying the functions of DMs in SVCMC falls on fertile ground. As stated in section 1, DMs can facilitate the avoidance of overlap: turn-initial turn-takers (see 6.2.2) and turn-final turn-yielders (6.2.3) provide the speakers with helpful cues that enable the avoidance of problematic overlap in the lack of physical co-presence (see section 3). The extracts in section 6.2.2 raise the question of how relevant turn-initial turn-takers are for the emergence of competitive production. Extracts (8) and (9) indicate that turn-initial DMs, much like the strategic pauses observed by Jenks (see section 3), allow the potential competitors to weigh if they should withdraw, but (10) demonstrates that they do not necessarily prevent competitive production. Here, one is rightly reminded of Cowley's criticism discussed in section 2; the complexity of human communication cannot be reduced to a set of rules, e.g. a rule that turn-initial DMs would always prevent problematic overlap.

Section 6.2.3 argues that turn-final DMs can act as turn-yielders which corresponds to earlier findings on text-based CMC and face-to-face communication (see section 4.2.3). Moreover, extracts (12) and (13) indicate that they operate in this function even when they appear in problematic overlap. However, as demonstrated by extract (11), the marker that the hearers interpret as a turn-final turn-yielder can prove out to be turn-medial if its user decides to hold on to their turn. Hence, DMs resembling turn-final turn-yielders can mislead the SVCMC participants. Naturally, the findings in 6.2.2 and 6.2.3 do not rule out situations where the speakers use other lexical items than DMs in similar functions. Consequently, as in the case of turn-initial turn-takers, turn-final turn-yielders should not be considered a necessity for successful turn management: they are but one of the tools available to SVCMC participants.

Additionally, I discovered three different DM phenomena that supplement Schegloff's ORD presented in section 2.2: DM combinations (6.3.1), DMs as markers of incipient speakership (6.3.2), and the repeated use of DMs (6.3.3). Extracts (14) and (15) in section 6.3.1 exemplify how a combination of two DMs, especially if the second one is emphasised, is an effective tool for winning a floor fight, thus resolving the overlap, and extract (16) shows that a DM combination can also prevent overlap which is reminiscent of the function of turn-initial turn-takers. However, based on my corpus, little can be said about the strength of DM combinations compared to other means of competing for the floor. Other matters concern the differences between DM combinations (e.g. *well actually* compared to *okay so*) and the relevance of emphasising the second DM element in terms of the outcome. Nonetheless, it appears that DM combinations can be interpreted as notably urgent signals by the competitors.

Section 6.3.2 argues that non-problematic continuers such as *yeah* and *okay* can also act as markers of incipient speakership in at least two different ways. As in extracts (17) and (18), they can give space to the current speaker and signal temporary withdrawal to potential next speakers. Thus, markers of incipient speakership can produce repeated non-problematic overlap whilst preventing problematic overlap. On the other hand, as in extract (19), they can be used in the middle of floor fights alternately and together with strategic pauses, in which function they signal the willingness to continue talking immediately without temporary withdrawal. This difference illustrated in table 4 verifies the earlier observation discussed in section 2.1 that response tokens including continuers can count as either problematic or non-problematic overlap. Moreover, the different uses of *okay* in extract (20) emphasise the multifunctionality and the dependency of DMs on the textual and interpersonal context addressed in sections 4.2.2 and 4.2.3. This confirms that the meaning of DMs can even depend on the data as suggested in section 4.2.2. These preliminary findings highlighting the various functions of continuers and markers of incipient speakership will hopefully prompt future research to direct more attention to them in CMC contexts.

Lastly, extracts (21)–(23) in section 6.3.3 complement Schegloff's ORD by illustrating how DMs can count as the repeated lexical item used to resolve problematic overlap. Furthermore, it appears that repeating the same DM at a rapid pace is more effective than leaving space between the DMs. However, in the analysis of extract (23), I also observed that repeating a DM is not a prerequisite for winning a turn. Therefore, it might be that repeating DMs bears no greater significance than repeating any other lexical item; further research on this

phenomenon could focus on comparing the effectiveness of repeated DMs to that of other lexical items in floor fights. Although the exact relevance of the three DM phenomena observed in section 6.3 remains unclear, this thesis has demonstrated that DMs can contribute to the concrete linguistic means the speakers can use to resolve problematic overlap in SVCMC. In the absence of visual cues, the significance of DMs in terms of turn-taking is likely to be increased as they belong to the frequent audible signs present at TRPs where potential next speakers are inclined to initiate turns.

There are some concerns that affect the generalisability of my findings. Above all, these concerns stem from the nature of my data. Firstly, not all speakers in my corpus are native speakers of English. Two of them speak American English as their first language, whereas three are native speakers of Finnish for whom English is a foreign language. The differences between native and non-native use of English DMs have been addressed in the literature (cf. e.g. Müller 2005, Aijmer 2011, Lo 2015), and the fact that non-native speakers might e.g. overuse certain DMs compared to native speakers prevents me from evaluating how DMs generally contribute to overlap in native compared to non-native contexts. Secondly, the context of Dungeons & Dragons discussed in section 5.1.1 possesses characteristics of both casual conversations (e.g. it is relatively free-form) and more structured conversations (e.g. the dungeon master resembles a chairman). As seen in extract (2), the GM has the authority to distribute turns explicitly (see section 3), and none of the other participants attempts to explicitly resolve a floor fight in my corpus. Consequently, my corpus is neither representative of casual everyday conversations nor structured professional meetings, both of which belong to the broad spectrum of the common uses of SVCMC during the COVID-19 pandemic. Thus, the findings based on my Dungeons & Dragons corpus might not apply to other corpora.

Further concerns are due to the technological limitations of my research design and the statistical limitations of corpus-illustrated linguistics. The speakers participated from their homes, and I had no access to technological information such as the stability of the participants' respective internet connections, the degree of delay affecting the SVCMC conversation, or the audio settings and the quality of the hardware used by the speakers. Thus, it is impossible for me to say if the GM's choice to initiate overlapping talk in extract (11) can be explained by delay or if the inaudible fragments of speech present in numerous extracts, e.g. extract (6), are due to inadvertent mistakes in the use of the push-to-talk function, or capri-

cious hardware. To discover the significance of each of these SVCMC variables would require a laboratory-like research setting where the observers are able to monitor these diverse factors. Furthermore, as indicated in this section and in section 5.3, applying statistically more refined methods than corpus-illustrated linguistics to SVCMC corpora could yield more detailed results on e.g. the frequency of DMs in different contexts.

Bearing these limitations in mind, my findings can guide the way for future research on SVCMC, overlap, and DMs. Quantitative studies could e.g. explore the frequency of individual DMs in SVCMC compared to face-to-face communication; this would clarify to what extent SVCMC participants adapt their language use to the SVCMC environment. Furthermore, pure SVCMC does not cover the whole range of topical CMC forms: hybrid forms containing audio-visual and perhaps even textual elements (e.g. a Zoom meeting where the cameras are turned on and the chat function supplements the communication) no doubt constitute a conversational environment with the potential to produce unique communicative features. Lastly, there is an evident lack of large-scale SVCMC corpora which undoubtedly slows down the progress of SVCMC research and might even undermine the scholarly eagerness to study SVCMC. Therefore, SVCMC and other corpora including spoken CMC would be a most welcome addition to the field.

8 CONCLUSION

The SVCMC corpus compiled for this thesis has shown that modern multi-party SVCMC constitutes a communicative context in which the conversation, albeit meaningful, is hampered by the lack of physical co-presence and the dependency on technological variables. These variables comprise the volume level of the speakers including the adjustments allowed by the software, the operation of the hardware and the microphone activation settings, and the disturbances caused by sudden events and background noises in the physical presence of the speakers. These special characteristics of multi-party SVCMC indicate that the causes and the solutions to problematic overlap can lie beyond the traditional turn-taking system originally suggested by Sacks, Schegloff, and Jefferson. Furthermore, they give reason to believe that the functions of DMs in the context of SVCMC can differ from their functions in different contexts.

My SVCMC corpus contains overlap in abundance, and non-problematic and problematic overlap occur in it regardless of whether DMs are used or not. Therefore, the use of DMs *per se* does not appear to permit or to prevent overlap. It would be more accurate to say that whilst DMs are but one of the tools available to SVCMC speakers, they have the potential to send signals that can prevent overlap on the one hand and help the speakers resolve overlap on the other hand. For example, turn-initial turn-takers such as *well*, *so*, and *yeah* allow the competitors and the hearers to consider withdrawing and holding back during floor fights, whereas turn-final turn-yielders such as *right* and *then* communicate that the speaker is willing to yield the floor. Ultimately, the speakers and hearers decide if they want to adhere to these signals, and DMs can even prove to be misleading if used or interpreted wrong.

The analysis in section 6.3 illustrated that DMs can contribute to Schegloff's ORD as DM combinations, markers of incipient speakership, and repeated DMs. DM combinations function as a signal of urgency in floor fights, and hence can win the floor to the speaker using a combination of two DMs especially if the latter DM is emphasised. Markers of incipient speakership such as the continuers *yeah* and *okay* can function in two ways: as a repeated signal of temporary withdrawal, thus producing non-problematic overlap whilst preventing problematic overlap, or as a signal of willingness to talk without temporary withdrawal when used amid competitive production and combined with strategic pauses. In both cases, their function is not limited to maintaining the role of an active listener; instead, markers of incipient speakership contest the conversational floor. Finally, DMs such as *but* and *well* can be

repeated during floor fights much like other lexical items. The question remains whether DMs in this function are more effective than other repeated words. Nevertheless, these findings complementing the ORD indicate that DMs are closely related to turn-taking and managing overlapping talk in SVCMC where overlap is arguably a greater risk than in face-to-face communication.

It should be emphasised that the results of this thesis are in many ways preliminary. Future research can concentrate on a broad range of different areas, e.g. the comparison of SVCMC to other popular and hybrid forms of CMC, or the differences between the frequency and functions of DMs in different contexts. Of course, the observations presented in this thesis should be critically evaluated by studying them individually and comparatively, resulting in verification, alteration, or abandonment. Like the fictional journey experienced by the speakers in my corpus, studying constantly evolving CMC is an adventure. Although the journey of the adventurers eventually came to an end, CMC research is likely to be continued for a long time. Thus, I deem it fitting to conclude this thesis with one final extract characteristic of SVCMC. Fittingly, the words uttered here compose the last seconds of the recordings where I (abbreviated JN), too, express my gratitude to the adventurers. May Eve's words act as a spur for further research on how SVCMC participants adapt to this special conversational environment:

DM: You have completed the journey along the Blackstone road. And that's what we all – have for today.
Luke: Yeah!
Cyril: Yay!
JN: Woo! Nice [one]!
Mia: [Well] done!
pause
Eve: I was muted again.

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APPENDIX 1: FINNISH SUMMARY

Päällekkäispuhunta ja diskurssipartikkelit usean osallistujan yhtäaikaisessa tietokonevälitteisessä ääniviestinnässä

1 Johdanto

Koronaviruksesta johtuvat poikkeusolot ovat kasvattaneet tietokonevälitteisen viestinnän suosiota ympäri maailman. Aiempi kielitieteellinen tutkimus on keskittynyt pääasiassa kirjoitettuun tietokonevälitteiseen viestintään, kuten sähköposti- ja tekstiviesteihin (ks. Jenks & Brandt 2013, 230–231), mutta nykyisin suosiossa ovat hybridimuotoiset audiovisuaalista ja kirjoitettua viestintää yhdistävät tietokoneohjelmat, kuten Zoom ja Microsoft Teams. Aina kuvayhteyttä ja chattia ei kuitenkaan käytetä, jolloin jäljelle jää pelkkä ääni; tällöin puhutaan *yhtäaikaisesta tietokonevälitteisestä ääniviestinnästä*. Siinä puhujat eivät näe toisiaan, mutta voivat puhua päällekkäin. (Jenks 2014, 34–45.)

Tämä tutkielma tarkastelee, miten englannin kielen puhujat hyödyntävät *diskurssipartikkeleita* vuorotellessaan yhtäaikaisessa tietokonevälitteisessä ääniviestinnässä. Ajankohtaisten korpusten puutteessa samalla selvitetään, minkälaiset teknologiset muuttujat vaikuttavat yhtäaikaiseen tietokonevälitteiseen ääniviestintään. Näitä tarkoituksia varten nauhoitettiin ja litteroitiin viiden puhujan välinen Dungeons & Dragons -roolipeliseikkailu, joka muodostaa systemaattisesti lingvististä tutkimusta varten kerätyn puhutun kielen *korpuksen* eli aineiston (Weisser 2016, 23). Korpukseen sovellettavaa tutkimusmenetelmää voi parhaiten kuvata *aineistoesimerkein tuetuksi*, sillä korpuksesta poimitaan kielellisiä ilmiöitä havainnollistavia esimerkkejä introspektiivisesti (ks. esim. Glynn 2014, 23; Luodonpää-Manni and Ojutkangas, 2020).

Diskurssipartikkeleiden tiedetään vaikuttavan vuorotteluun (ks. esim. Schiffrin 1987, 312; Jucker & Ziv 1998, 1; Maschler & Schiffrin 2015, 191; Degand & Bergen 2018, 65), mutta niiden merkitystä yhtäaikaisessa tietokonevälitteisessä ääniviestinnässä ei ole tutkittu. *Päällekkäispuhunnan* välttämistä pidetään yhtenä vuorottelun päätavoitteista (ks. esim. Sacks, Schegloff & Jefferson 1974, 706–708; Jefferson 2004, 46; Kurtić, Brown & Wells 2013, 721; Levinson & Torreira 2015, 4–5), mutta toisaalta

tiedetään, että päällekkäispuhunnan välttäminen yhtäaikaisessa tietokonevälitteisessä ääniviestinnässä on erityisen vaikeaa, koska visuaalisten elementtien puute hankaloittaa päällekkäispuhunnan riskin tunnistamista (ks. esim. Jenks & Brandt 2013, 246; Oloff 2013, 153–154). Aineistossa esiintyy runsaasti päällekkäispuhuntaa ja diskurssipartikkeleita, ja niiden välisen yhteyden selvittämiseksi muotoillut tutkimuskysymykset ovat:

(1) Mitä diskurssipartikkeleita käytetään, kun yhtäaikaisessa tietokonevälitteisessä ääniviestinnässä esiintyy päällekkäispuhuntaa, ja missä diskurssipartikkelit sijaitsevat päällekkäispuhuntaan nähden?
(2) Mikä on diskurssipartikkeleiden tehtävä suhteessa päällekkäispuhuntaan, ja miten yhtäaikaisen tietokonevälitteisen ääniviestinnän teknologinen ympäristö vaikuttaa siihen?

Nämä kysymykset tähtäävät päällekkäispuhunnan ja diskurssipartikkelien tunnistamiseen ja mahdollistavat aineiston vertaamisen aiempaan kirjallisuuteen päällekkäispuhunnasta, diskurssipartikkeleista ja yhtäaikaisesta tietokonevälitteisestä ääniviestinnästä. Oletuksena on, että yhtäaikainen tietokonevälitteinen ääniviestintä muodostaa ympäristön, jossa teknologiset muuttujat vaikeuttavat kommunikaatiota ja aiheuttavat päällekkäispuhuntaa. Toisaalta puhujien oletetaan voivan käyttää diskurssipartikkeleita vuorottelun sujuvuuden takaamiseksi ja päällekkäispuhunnan ratkaisemiseksi. Siten diskurssipartikkelit voitaisiin lisätä Schegloffin esittämiin päällekkäispuhuntaa ratkaiseviin työkaluihin (ks. Schegloff 2000).

Tutkielman aiheen taustoituksessa perehdytään vuorottelua ja päällekkäispuhuntaa, yhtäaikaista tietokonevälitteistä ääniviestintää ja diskurssipartikkeleita koskevaan kirjallisuuteen. Tämän jälkeen esitellään aineisto ja menetelmät, mitä seuraa tulosten havainnollistaminen aineistoesimerkein. Lopuksi pohditaan tulosten merkitystä ja yleistettävyyttä.

2 Vuorottelu ja päällekkäispuhunta

On tunnettu tosiasia, että ihmiset vuorottelevat keskustellessaan (Levinson 2016, 6). Kielitieteissä aihetta tutkivat ensimmäisten joukossa Sacks, Schegloff ja Jefferson vuonna 1974 julkaistussa tutkimuksessaan. Vaikka heidän ehdottamaansa vuorottelujärjestelmää on kritisoitu perusteellisestikin (ks. esim. Cowley 1998; Heldner

& Edlund 2010), sitä pidetään yhä pääpiirteissään pätevänä (Gardner 2008, 271; vrt. myös Levinson & Torreira 2015, 3–5). Sacks ym. (1974, 706–708) havaitsivat, että puhujilla on taipumus pyrkiä välttämään pitkiä taukoja ja päällekkäispuhuntaa koordinoimalla, kenen vuoro on puhua. Tämä edellyttää kykyä tunnistaa, missä puhujien vuorot alkavat ja päättyvät eli mistä vuorot koostuvat.

Vuorot koostuvat *vuorojen rakenneyksiköistä*, jotka eivät aina ole virkkeitä: virkkeiden lisäksi niihin kuuluvat lauseet, lausekkeet ja yksittäiset sanat (Clayman 2013, 151). Tällaisten rakenneyksiköiden lopussa sijaitsevat nk. *vuorojen väliset siirtymätilat*, joissa puhujan vaihto tyypillisesti tapahtuu. Sacksin ym. mukaan vuoro siirtyy ensisijaisesti siten, että nykyinen puhuja nimeää seuraavan puhujan, ja toissijaisesti siten, että joku (ml. nykyinen puhuja) turvautuu *itsevalintaan* eli valitsee itsensä seuraavaksi puhujaksi. Jos useampi kuin yksi puhuja käyttää itsevalintaa yhtäaikaisesti, vuoro kuuluu sille, joka ehti aloittaa ensiksi. (Sacks ym. 1974, 703–704.) Cowley on kuitenkin oikeassa varoittaessaan, ettei vuorottelua voi varauksetta yksinkertaistaa säännöiksi (Cowley 1998, 554). Puhujien on nimittäin mahdollista kamppailla oikeudestaan vuoroon puhumalla tietoisesti päällekkäin (Schegloff 2000, 21).

Päällekkäispuhunta ei aina häiritse kommunikaatiota. Schegloffin (2000, 5–6) mukaan on olemassa neljä ongelmatonta päällekkäispuhunnan muotoa: *päällekkäispuhunta vuoron lopussa* (engl. terminal overlap), *jatkajat* eli aktiivisen kuulijan käyttämät ilmaisut (engl. continuer), *kuulijan kutsuminen mukaan* esimerkiksi täydentämistä varten (engl. conditional access to the turn) ja *yhtäaikaiseksi tarkoitetut puhunnan muodot*, kuten nauru (engl. chordal/choral talk). Nämäkin voivat kuitenkin häiritä kommunikaatiota, jos puhujat niin kokevat ja joutuvat korjaamaan päällekkäispuhunnan aiheuttamia ongelmia (Schegloff 2000, 5–6). Joka tapauksessa päällekkäispuhunnan ongelmallisuus tai ongelmattomuus on huomioitava analyysissa.

Kun ongelmallista päällekkäispuhuntaa esiintyy, Schegloffin *päällekkäispuhunnan ratkaisemisen malli* (engl. overlap resolution device; ORD) kuvaa puhujien käytettävissä olevia keinoja (Schegloff 2000, 44–45). ORD:n mukaan vuorostaan kamppailevat päällekkäispuhujat kuuntelevat toistensa puheen tavuja ja voivat esimerkiksi hidastaa puhettaan, korottaa ääntään ja toistella tavuja tai sanoja, kunnes vain yksi puhuja on jäljellä (Levinson & Torreira 2015, 3). Toisin sanoen päällekkäispuhuntaa analysoitaessa on kiinnitettävä huomiota ensi sijassa ongelmallisiin

päällekkäispuhunnan muotoihin, jotka johtavat kamppailuun vuorosta. Sen jälkeen on selvitettävä, käyttävätkö puhujat jotain ORD:hen kuuluvista keinoista ratkaistessaan päällekkäispuhuntaa. Tässä tutkielmassa tarkastellaan, voiko diskurssipartikkelit lisätä ORD:n keinoihin yhtäaikaisessa tietokonevälitteisessä ääniviestinnässä.

3 Yhtäaikainen tietokonevälitteinen ääniviestintä

Kielenkäytön kontekstin ymmärrys on tärkeää, koska kielenkäyttö mukautuu konstekstiinsa (Schiffrin 1987, 3). Tietokonevälitteisessä viestinnässä kontekstia määrittävät kommunikaation *väline* ja sen *ajallisuus*; yhtäaikaisessa tietokonevälitteisessä viestinnässä väline on ääni ja ajallisuus on yhtäaikainen, jolloin puhujat vain kuulevat toisensa, mutta voivat puhua päällekkäin (Jenks 2014, 34–35). Aiempi tutkimus on keskittynyt pääasiassa kirjoitettuihin tietokonevälitteisen viestinnän muotoihin (Jenks & Brandt 2013, 230–231), ja monissa vanhemmissa tutkimuksissa tietokonevälitteinen viestintä käsitteenä viittaa pelkästään kirjoitettuun viestintään (ks. esim. Hancock & Dunham 2001; Tanskanen & Karhukorpi, 2008; González-Lloret, 2011; Jordan ym. 2012; Herring, Stein & Virtanen 2013; Shakarami, Hajhashemi & Caltabiano 2016). Niinpä yhtäaikaisen tietokonevälitteisen ääniviestinnän tarkoin määritellylle tutkimukselle on tarvetta.

Yllä mainittujen käsitteellisten seikkojen lisäksi osa aiemman tutkimuksen havainnoista on jo vanhentunut. Esimerkiksi Sukrutrit (2011, 72) pitää anonymiteettia eli nimimerkkien taakse piiloutumista yhtenä yhtäaikaisen tietokonevälitteisen ääniviestinnän määrittävänä piirteenä. Samaan tapaan Jenks ja Brandt (2013, 231–233) tutkivat viestintää, jossa osallistujat eivät tunne toisiaan ja voivat liikkua vapaasti äänikeskusteluille tarkoitetuissa chat-huoneissa siirtyen keskustelusta toiseen. Lisäksi molemmissa tutkimuksissa käytetty ääniviestinnän alusta oli Skype (ibid.), jonka rinnalla nykyisin käytetään mm. Microsoft Teamsia, Zoomia ja Discordia. Koronaviruksen aikana yhtäaikaista tietokonevälitteistä ääniviestintää hyödynnetään esimerkiksi työpaikkojen kokouksissa ja arjessa perheen kesken, joten lienee turvallista todeta, että anonymiteetti ja chat-huoneiden välillä liikkuminen eivät enää ole yhtäaikaista tietokonevälitteistä ääniviestintää määrittäviä tekijöitä.

Suuri osa yhtäaikaisen tietokonevälitteisen ääniviestinnän tutkimuksesta on toteutettu kielenoppimisen ympäristöissä, jolloin huomion keskipisteessä ovat sen hyödyt ja haitat opetustilanteissa (ks. esim. Bueno Alastuey 2011, Granena 2016 ja Jung ym. 2019). Poikkeuksen muodostaa Christopher Jenks, joka on opetustilanteissa kerättyyn aineistoonsa tukeutuen havainnut, että Sacks ym. (1974) ehdottamat vuorottelusäännöt pätevät pitkälti myös yhtäaikaisessa tietokonevälitteisessä ääniviestinnässä (Jenks 2014, 55–58). Lisäksi Jenks ja Firth (2013, 229–232) havainnollistavat päällekkäispuhunnan välttämisen tärkeyttä, kun viestinnän sujuvuus nojaa pelkkään ääneen.

Kenties tärkein Jenksin tuloksista on havainto, jonka voisi lisätä Schegloffin ORD:hen. Jenksin mukaan (2009, 24) puhujat käyttävät *strategisia taukoja* antaakseen toisilleen tilaa päällekkäispuhunnan sattuessa yhtäaikaisessa tietokonevälitteisessä ääniviestinnässä. Vaikka strategiset tauot auttavat vuorottelussa, niiden riskinä on päällekkäisen itsevalinnan uusiutuminen, kun useampi kuin yksi puhuja itsevalitsee strategisen tauon päätteeksi (Jenks 2009, 25; Jenks 2014, 56–57). Jenksin havainnot osoittavat, että yhtäaikainen tietokonevälitteinen ääniviestintä muodostaa kontekstin, jonka piirteisiin puhujat mukautuvat mm. strategisilla tauoilla. Samaan aikaan yhtäaikainen tietokonevälitteinen ääniviestintä on suosittu viestinnän muoto, jota ei ole tutkittu perinpohjaisesti.

4 Diskurssipartikkelit

Pienet sanat ja ilmaisut, jotka tunnetaan diskurssipartikkeleina[15], vaikuttavat vuorotteluun (ks. esim. Schiffrin 1987, 312; Jucker & Ziv 1998, 1; Maschler & Schiffrin 2015, 191; Degand & Bergen 2018, 65). Diskurssipartikkelien tutkimuksen pulma on, että tutkijat ovat erimielisiä mm. siitä, mitä diskurssipartikkelit ovat, miksi niitä kutsutaan ja minkälaisia pragmaattisia tehtäviä niillä on (ks. esim. Jucker & Ziv 1998, 1–2; Fraser 2009, 294; Fischer 2014, 271; Maschler & Schiffrin 2015, 203; Crible 2017, 100–105). Niinpä tämän tutkielman aineiston analyysi edellyttää tiettyjen ilmaisujen

[15] Engl. myös discourse marker. Kansainvälisesti diskurssipartikkelien joukkoon luetaan muitakin kuin partikkeleita. Tässä tutkielmassa käytetään systemaattisesti termiä diskurssipartikkeli, vaikka kaikki luokkaan kuuluvat ilmaisut eivät ole partikkeleita.

hyväksymistä diskurssipartikkeleiksi ja toisaalta toisten ilmaisujen hylkäämistä, mikä toteutetaan kirjallisuuskatsauksen avulla.

Osa tutkijoista rajaa diskurssipartikkelien joukkoa terminologisin perustein erottamalla diskurssipartikkelit muista vastaavia pragmaattisia tehtäviä toteuttavista sanoista. Esimerkiksi Fraserin (2009, 297; vrt. myös Fraser 1996, 338) mukaan sanat *now* ja *well* eivät ole diskurssipartikkeleita vaan nk. *pragmaattisia partikkeleita* (engl. pragmatic marker), vaikka monien muiden tutkijoiden mukaan ne ovat diskurssipartikkeleita. Crible (2017, 101, 104) huomauttaa oikeutetusti, että erilaiset partikkelit muodostavat jatkumon ja että diskurssipartikkeleiden erottaminen muista partikkeleista johtaa liian poissulkevaan määritelmään. Laajan määritelmän puolesta puhuu myös Fischer, joka varoittaa, että suppea näkökulma saattaa jättää joitakin diskurssipartikkelien ominaisuuksia katveeseen (Fischer 2014, 286). Siksi Fraserin kaltaisia terminologisia erotteluja ei tehdä tässä tutkielmassa, vaan pragmaattiset partikkelit luetaan diskurssipartikkeleiksi.

Toiset tutkijat keskittyvät diskurssipartikkelien syntaktisiin, semanttisiin ja funktionaalisiin ominaisuuksiin. Tämä sai alkunsa Deborah Schiffrinin vuonna 1987 ilmestyneestä kirjasta, jossa hän analysoi englannin diskurssipartikkeleita *oh, well, and, but, or, so, because, now, then, I mean* ja *y'know* (Schiffrin 1987, 31). Diskurssipartikkelien syntaktisten ominaisuuksien osalta on todettava, että tutkijat edustavat perustavanlaatuisen erilaisia mielipiteitä. Osa pitää diskurssipartikkeleita syntaktisesti valinnaisina (ks. esim. Schiffrin 1987, 238; Müller 2005, 5–6; Maschler 2009, 7; Crible 2018, 35), kun taas toiset pitävät osaa niistä syntaktisesti pakollisina (ks. esim. Lewis 2006, 44; Redeker 2006, 342; Hansen 2006, 26–28). Siksi niiden asemaa syntaksissa ei voi pitää määrittävänä kriteerinä (Müller 2005, 4). Sen sijaan tutkijat ovat yhtä mieltä siitä, että diskurssipartikkelit voivat esiintyä vuorojen alussa, keskellä ja lopussa (ks. esim. Redeker 2006, 335; Müller 2005; 27), joskin ne sijaitsevat tavallisesti vuorojen alussa (Maschler & Schiffrin 2015, 194–196).

Semanttisesti tutkijoiden konsensus vaikuttaa olevan, että diskurssipartikkeleilla ei ole yksiselitteistä merkitystä. Fraserin (2009, 297–299) ja Maschlerin (2009, 1) mukaan diskurssipartikkelien merkitys ilmenee niitä ympäröivästä puheesta eli kontekstista. Nekin tutkijat, jotka esittävät diskurssipartikkeleilla olevan vakiintuneita merkityksiä (ks. esim. Lewis 2006, 44, 49–52; Redeker 2006, 342), tunnustavat

kontekstin määrittävän diskurssipartikkelien semantiikkaa. Niinpä semanttinen merkityskään ei yksinään riitä diskurssipartikkeleita määrittäväksi kriteeriksi, koska diskurssipartikkelien merkitys riippuu kontekstista ja siten vaihtelee.

Diskurssipartikkelit vaikuttavat olevan polyfunktionaalisia (Fischer 2014, 271), ja Maschlerin (2009, 7) mukaan diskurssipartikkelien funktiot eli tehtävät ovat tärkein luokkaa määrittävä tekijä. Tämän tutkielman kannalta olennaisimmat tehtävät liittyvät vuorotteluun ja päällekkäispuhuntaan. Niitä ovat esimerkiksi keskustelun avaaminen, vastausten ja reaktioiden aloittaminen ja nykyisen puhujan pitäminen äänessä (Müller 2005, 9). Maschlerin ja Schiffrinin (2015, 197) mukaan diskurssipartikkelit esiintyvät usein vuorojen välisissä siirtymätiloissa, ja Rasenberg, Rommers ja Bergen (2020, 13) ovat todenneet, että diskurssipartikkelit auttavat kuulijaa tunnistamaan, aikooko nykyinen puhuja jatkaa vai ei. Fischer (2000, 134) kuitenkin muistuttaa että diskurssipartikkelien vaikutus vuorotteluun riippuu niiden kontekstisidonnaisesta merkityksestä. Toisin sanoen diskurssipartikkelit ovat polyfunktionaalisia, kytkeytyvät usein vuorotteluun ja saavat tehtävänsä niiden esiintymiskontekstissa.

Kirjallisuuskatsauksen pohjalta voi todeta, että Criblen määritelmää diskurssipartikkeleille voi käyttää lähtökohtana diskurssipartikkelien tutkimuksessa. Criblen mukaan diskurssipartikkelit ovat kieliopillisesti heterogeenisia, syntaktisesti valinnaisia ja tehtäviltään monipuolisia ilmaisuja, joilla puhuja voi kommentoida keskustelua ja sen kontekstia laajalti (Crible 2018, 35; vrt. myös Crible 2017, 106). Vaikka mm. syntaktinen valinnaisuus on kiistanalaista, sen käyttö kriteerinä ei poissulje tyypillisiä diskurssipartikkeleita, kuten konjunktioita ja adverbiaaleja. Criblen ehdottamat puhutun englannin diskurssipartikkelit ovat:

> Actually, although, and, and so on, anyway, as, as you know, because, but, equally, even though, finally, first of all, firstly, for example, hence, however, I mean, if, if you like, if you will, in fact, in other words, indeed, kind of, nevertheless, now, oh, okay, on the other hand, or, right, say, secondly, shall we say, so, sort of, still, then, therefore, though, well, what, whereas, while, yeah, yet, you know. (Crible 2017, 108)

Vaikka Criblen listaan on suhtauduttava varauksellisesti, koska se vaikuttaa pyrkivän tuomaan varmuutta epävarmalle kentälle, se tarjoaa hyvän lähtökohdan

diskurssipartikkelien valitsemiselle analyysiin. Criblen lista sisältää esimerkiksi kaikki Schiffrinin kirjassa analysoidut diskurssipartikkelit, jatkajat *yeah*, *okay* ja *right* ja esimerkiksi Fraserin poissulkemat sanat *well* ja *now*. Niinpä sitä ei voi pitää liian kapeakatseinena tai poissulkevana tämän tutkielman tarkoituksiin.

5 Aineisto ja menetelmät

Tätä tutkielmaa varten koottiin yhtäaikaisen tietokonevälitteisen ääniviestinnän korpus syksyllä 2020. Nauhoitus toteutettiin Zoom-ohjelmalla, ja puhujat osallistuivat kotoaan käsin. Yhteyttä suojasi Turun yliopiston Zoom-lisenssi. Kamerat pidettiin pois päältä, ja tekstipohjaisen chat-toiminnon käyttö kiellettiin. Puhujilta oli etukäteen kysytty lupa Dungeons & Dragons -seikkailun nauhoittamiseen, ja heillä oli mahdollisuus vetäytyä hankkeesta myös nauhoitusten jälkeen. Heille ei kerrottu, mihin nauhoitusten osiin tai kielenkäytön piirteisiin tutkimus keskittyy. Nauhoitteet tallennettiin salasanalla suojatulle yksityistietokoneelle, eikä niitä jaettu kenellekään. Osallistujien nimet anonymisoitiin pseudonyymeilla, ja nauhoitukset tuhotaan, kun tämä tutkielma on hyväksytty niin, ettei siihen voi tehdä enää muutoksia. Näillä eettisillä toimenpiteillä suojataan osallistujien intressejä ja henkilöllisyyttä.

Keskustelukontekstina Dungeons & Dragons ei täysin vastaa arkisia keskusteluja eikä strukturoituja keskusteluja, kuten kokouksia. Yhtäältä roolipelaajien keskustelu on vapaamuotoista, koska kuka tahansa voi puhua mitä tahansa ja milloin haluaa, mutta toisaalta nk. pelinjohtajan (engl. dungeon master) rooli muistuttaa puheenjohtajaa. Pelinjohtaja nimittäin luo fiktiivisen maailman, jossa pelaajien fiktiiviset hahmot seikkailevat, ja valvoo, että peliä pelataan sovittujen sääntöjen puitteissa. Pelaajat voivat kuitenkin vaikuttaa juoneen, sillä tapahtumat perustuvat improvisaatioon. Pelaajia sitovaa käsikirjoitusta ei ole, vaikka pelinjohtaja onkin tavallisesti hahmotellut seikkailun kulkua etukäteen; pelaajat voivat poiketa pelinjohtajan suunnitelmista. Joka tapauksessa pelaajat usein kuuntelevat pelinjohtajaa tarkkaavaisesti ja keskittyvät pelin sääntöihin suunnitellessaan puhettaan.

Nauhoitusten yhteiskesto on noin neljä tuntia kaksikymmentä minuuttia, mutta niitä ei litteroitu tai analysoitu kokonaisuudessaan. Tutkimuskysymykset keskittyvät päällekkäispuhuntaan, joten vain päällekkäispuhuntaa sisältävät katkelmat litteroitiin.

Lisäksi transkriptioiden ulkopuolelle jätettiin kohdat, joissa pelaajien hahmot olivat fiktiivisessä taistelussa (engl. combat), koska taistelujen aikana vuorottelu ei ole luonnollista vaan perustuu pelin sääntöihin, joiden mukaan pelinjohtaja jakaa puheenvuorot. Lopulta transkriptioita kertyi 117, ja ne sisältävät yli 9000 puhuttua sanaa. Transkriptiot eivät ole foneettisesti perusteellisia, sillä Sidnellin (2010, 28) mukaan transkriptioiden tulee sisältää vain keskustelun ymmärtämisen ja selittämisen kannalta olennaiset seikat, jotka tässä tapauksessa liittyvät diskurssipartikkeleiden ja päällekkäispuhunnan havainnollistamiseen. Niinpä transkriptiot perustuvat löyhästi Schegloffin (2000, 59–63) ja Jenksin (2014, 45–47) transkriptiojärjestelmiin. Merkittävin yksinkertaistus on, että taukojen ja epäröintien pituutta ei merkitä. Transkriptiot noudattavat pääsääntöisesti tavallista englannin ortografiaa.

Menetelmältään tämä tutkielma on empiirinen, mikä on *keskustelunanalyysille* tyypillistä (Sidnell 2010, 22). Tutkimus on aineistoesimerkein tuettu, mitä pidetään vakiintuneena kielitieteen menetelmänä, vaikka sitä on kritisoitu intuition korostuneesta merkityksestä ja tilastotieteellisen elementin puutteesta (Tummers, Heylen & Geeraerts 2005, 234–235). Konkreettisesti analyysi eteni niin, että päällekkäispuhuntaa sisältävät katkelmat tunnistettiin ja litteroitiin. Sitten ongelmallinen päällekkäispuhunta erotettiin ongelmattomasta, minkä jälkeen transkriptioista etsittiin Criblen listalla olevat diskurssipartikkelit. Niistä kahdeksantoista yleisimmin esiintyvää (yli kymmenen esiintymää kullakin) valittiin analyysiin. Diskurssipartikkelien esiintymät **lihavoitiin** transkriptioissa. Lopulta analyysia havainnollistaviksi esimerkeiksi valikoitui 23 transkriptiota 117 transkription joukosta. Esiintymistiheytensä perusteella analyysiin valitut Criblen diskurssipartikkelit ovat: *yeah, and*, *okay*, *so*, *well*, *if*, *oh*, *but*, *or*, *what*, *as*, *right*, *then*, *I mean*, *say*, *actually*, *because*, *now*.

6 Tulokset

Aineistoesimerkein tuetusta analyysista ilmenee, että korpuksen puhujien keskustelua häiritsevät useat teknologiset muuttujat. Jos puhujan äänenvoimakkuus on alhainen, muut puhujat eivät kuule häntä hyvin varsinkaan päällekkäispuhunnassa (transkriptio 1). Mikrofonin toimintaan ja käyttöön liittyvät ongelmat voivat katkaista puhujan puheen ja tehdä siitä vaikeasti ymmärrettävää (transkriptio 2). Toisaalta mikrofoni voi olla epähuomiossa kytketty pois päältä, mitä muut puhujat eivät välttämättä huomaa. Jos he

huomaavat sen, heidän on pakko keskeyttää keskustelunsa ja pyytää puhujaa käynnistämään mikrofoninsa (transkriptio 3). Äänenvoimakkuuden alhaisuuden ja mikrofoniongelmien seuraus voi olla, että joku puhujista jää keskustelussa taka-alalle. Lisäksi yhtäaikaisen tietokonevälitteisen ääniviestinnän muuttujiin kuuluvat fyysisen läsnäolon puute ja yllättävät taustaäänet. Läsnäolon puutteessa puhujat eivät voi olla varmoja, ovatko kaikki heistä oikeasti paikalla ja valmiita puhumaan (vrt. Jenks & Brandt 2013, 246). Aineistossa esiintyvät taustaäänet, kuten ovikellon pirahdus, keskeyttävät toisinaan keskustelun ja pakottavat jonkun puhujista poistumaan paikalta (transkriptio 4).

Vastauksena ensimmäiseen tutkimuskysymykseen aineistosta ilmenee, että diskurssipartikkelin valinta ei ole päällekkäispuhuntaa määrittävä tekijä. Sen sijaan niiden sijainti vuoron sisällä kertoo, miten todennäköisesti päällekkäispuhuntaa esiintyy. Aineistossa esiintyy vuoron alussa ja keskellä (transkriptio 5) sekä lopussa (transkriptio 6) sijaitsevia diskurssipartikkeleita. Näistä viimeksi mainitut ovat harvinaisimpia eivätkä esiinny yhtä usein päällekkäispuhunnassa. Vuorojen lopussa päällekkäispuhunnassa voivat sijaita vain *right*, *then*, *yeah*, *okay*, *what*, ja *oh*, ja silloinkin ne saattavat olla yhtä aikaa vuoron alussa ja lopussa, koska kyseinen vuoro koostuu pelkästä diskurssipartikkelista (transkriptio 7). Vuoron alussa ja keskellä sijaitsevat diskurssipartikkelit ovat usein päällekkäispuhunnassa johtuen niiden sijainnista vuorojen välisessä siirtymätilassa, jossa päällekkäistä itsevalintaa esiintyy (transkriptio 5). Vuoron lopussa sijaitsevat diskurssipartikkelit ovat useimmiten ongelmattomassa päällekkäispuhunnassa, koska vuoronsa loppuun saapuva puhuja on tavallisesti lopettamassa puheensa.

Toiseen tutkimuskysymykseen liittyvät ensinnäkin vuoron alussa ja lopussa sijaitsevat diskurssipartikkelit. Vuoron alussa sijaitsevista diskurssipartikkeleista havaittiin, että ne voivat estää ongelmallista päällekkäispuhuntaa, koska niiden kuuleminen antaa puhujille mahdollisuuden harkita vetäytymistä ja puhumista (transkriptiot 8 ja 9). Toisaalta transkriptio 10 havainnollistaa, että puhujat voivat alkaa kamppailla vuorosta riippumatta vuoron alussa sijaitsevista diskurssipartikkeleista. Vuoron lopussa sijaitsevista diskurssipartikkeleista todettiin, että ne voivat viestiä puhujan halusta luopua vuorostaan samaan tapaan kuin kasvotusten tapahtuvassa viestinnässä (transkriptiot 12 ja 13; vrt. Degand & Bergen 2018, 67). Toisaalta ne voivat

olla myös harhaanjohtavia, jos nykyinen puhuja päättääkin jatkaa puhumista (transkriptio 11).

Toiseksi puhujat voivat hyödyntää diskurssipartikkelien yhdistelmiä, jatkajia ja diskurssipartikkelien toistoa kamppaillessaan vuorostaan. Niinpä nämä kolme voidaan lisätä Schegloffin ORD:hen yhtäaikaisessa tietokonevälitteisessä ääniviestinnässä. Transkriptiossa 14 ja 15 vuorostaan kamppaileva puhuja käyttää diskurssipartikkelien yhdistelmää (*well actually* ja *okay so*) sanoista jälkimmäistä painottaen, mikä peittää alleen kilpailevan puhujan puheen ja saa tämän vetäytymään. Toisin sanoen diskurssipartikkelien yhdistelmä ratkaisee päällekkäispuhunnan siten, että niiden käyttäjä voittaa puheenvuoron itselleen. Lisäksi transkriptiossa 16 diskurssipartikkelien yhdistelmä estää ongelmallisen päällekkäispuhunnan syntymisen.

Jatkajat voivat aineistossani ilmaista orastavaa puhujuutta eli halua puhua (vrt. Gardner 2001, 13–14). Esimerkiksi jatkajien *yeah* ja *okay* toistaminen voi ilmaista muutakin kuin aktiivista kuulijuutta: transkriptioissa 17 ja 18 puhuja käyttää niitä ilmaisemaan, että haluaisi nykyisen puhujan lopettavan päästäkseen itse puhumaan. Toisin sanoen jatkajat voivat tuottaa ongelmatonta päällekkäispuhuntaa samalla kun estävät ongelmallista päällekkäispuhuntaa; niiden käyttäjä voi ilmaista vetäytyvänsä tilapäisesti, kunnes nykyinen puhuja lopettaa. Toisaalta transkriptiossa 19 puhujat yhdistävät jatkajia ja strategisia taukoja antaen toisilleen aikaa ja tilaa, mutta samalla he ilmaisevat, että haluaisivat itse puhua. Kilpailu jatkuu, kunnes toinen puhujista vetäytyy. Niinpä jatkajat voivat myös tuottaa ongelmallista päällekkäispuhuntaa ilman tilapäistä vetäytymistä. Esiintyessään vuoron alussa jatkajat voivat myös estää päällekkäispuhuntaa (transkriptio 20).

Sanojen ja ilmaisujen toistaminen on yksi Schegloffin ORD:n keinoista ratkaista päällekkäispuhuntaa, ja aineistossa on esimerkkejä siitä, miten puhujat voivat toistaa diskurssipartikkeleita tässä tarkoituksessa. Toistaessaan esimerkiksi diskurssipartikkelin *but* nopeasti peräjälkeen puhuja ilmaisee haluavansa puhua, mikä voi saada muut vetäytymään (transkriptiot 21 ja 22). Toisin sanoen diskurssipartikkelin toistaminen voi ratkaista kamppailun vuorosta. Toisaalta transkriptiossa 23 havaitaan, että jos diskurssipartikkelin toiston väliin jää aikaa, toisto ei ole yhtä tehokas keino voittaa vuoroa, ja että diskurssipartikkelin toisto ei ole edellytys vuoron saamiselle. Yhtä kaikki

diskurssipartikkelien toisto on yksi keinoista, jotka voi lisätä ORD:hen yhtäaikaisessa tietokonevälitteisessä ääniviestinnässä.

7 Pohdinta

Tuloksista käy ilmi, että yhtäaikaisessa tietokonevälitteisessä ääniviestinnässä esiintyy diskurssipartikkeleita vuorojen alussa, keskellä ja lopussa ja että niiden sijainti on päällekkäispuhunnan kannalta ratkaisevampi tekijä kuin diskurssipartikkelin valinta. Vuorojen välisten siirtymätilojen luonteesta johtuen vuoron alussa ja keskellä sijaitsevat diskurssipartikkelit ovat useammin ongelmallisessa päällekkäispuhunnassa kuin vuoron lopussa sijaitsevat diskurssipartikkelit.

Vastauksena toiseen tutkimuskysymykseen aineistosta ilmenee, että diskurssipartikkelit voivat aiheuttaa, estää ja ratkaista ongelmallista päällekkäispuhuntaa kontekstista riippuen. Vuoron alussa sijaitsevat diskurssipartikkelit voivat toimia merkkinä alkavasta puheesta ja estää muita potentiaalisia puhujia aiheuttamasta päällekkäispuhuntaa. Vuoron lopussa sijaitsevat diskurssipartikkelit voivat puolestaan ilmaista puhujan aikomusta päättää vuoronsa, mikä kertoo kuulijoille, että vuoro on siirtymässä. Väärinymmärrettynä vuoron lopussa sijaitsevat diskurssipartikkelit voivat kuitenkin myös aiheuttaa päällekkäispuhuntaa, jos nykyinen puhuja ei lopetakaan. Schegloffin ORD:hen voi lisätä kolme diskurssipartikkelien käyttöä: diskurssipartikkelien yhdistelmän, jatkajat orastavan puhujuuden merkkeinä ja diskurssipartikkelien toiston. Näin käytettynä diskurssipartikkelit voivat ratkaista ongelmallista päällekkäispuhuntaa.

Tämän tutkielman tuloksia ei tule varauksetta yleistää koskemaan muita yhtäaikaisen tietokonevälitteisen ääniviestinnän korpuksia. Aineistoni kaikki puhujat eivät ole natiiveja eivätkä ei-natiiveja englannin puhujia, ja äidinkielen puhujien tiedetään käyttävän diskurssipartikkeleita eri tavalla kuin vieraan kielen puhujien (ks. esim. Müller 2005, Aijmer 2011, Lo 2015). Lisäksi Dungeons & Dragons poikkeaa arkisista keskusteluista siksi, että pelinjohtaja on eräänlainen puheenjohtaja, ja toisaalta esimerkiksi strukturoiduista kokouksista siksi, että puhujilla on lähtökohtaisesti vapaus puhua milloin haluavat. Teknologisia muuttujia koskevien havaintojen yleistettävyyttä haittaa puolestaan se, ettei puhujien laitteistoa, internet-yhteyden vakautta ja asetuksia

voitu monitoroida. Näistä puutteista johtuen teknologisten muuttujien luonteesta ja merkityksestä ei voi tehdä liian kauas meneviä johtopäätöksiä ilman lisätutkimusta.

Rajoitteistaan huolimatta tutkielman havainnot voivat toimia pontimena jatkotutkimukselle. Kvantitatiivinen tutkimus voisi keskittyä esimerkiksi yksittäisten diskurssipartikkelien esiintymistiheyteen yhtäaikaisessa tietokonevälitteisessä ääniviestinnässä verrattuna muihin viestinnän muotoihin. Kvalitatiivinen tutkimus voisi tutkia havaittuja diskurssipartikkeleiden käyttöjä, kuten jatkajia orastavan puhujuuden merkkinä, tarkemmin – joko havainnot vahvistaen tai niitä kyseenalaistaen. Lisätutkimusta kaivataan myös muista suosituista yhtäaikaisen tietokonevälitteisen viestinnän ääntä sisältävistä muodoista, kuten audiovisuaalisia ja kirjallisia elementtejä yhdistelevistä hybridimuodoista (esim. Zoom-kokous, jossa kamerat ovat päällä ja chat-toimintoa saa käyttää). Lopuksi on todettava, että yhtäaikaisen tietokonevälitteisen ääniviestinnän korpuksista on pulaa, mikä voi hidastaa alan tutkimusta. Tuoreille ja laajoille korpuksille olisi käyttöä.