

Discourse markers and regional variation in French

A lexico-semantic approach

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This chapter examines several discourse markers (DMs) which are common in spontaneous Quebec French and which derive from verbs of perception/cognition (*coudon* 'hey, by the way', *écoute* 'listen') and temporal and consecutive markers (*pis* 'and, so, so what?', *alors* 'so', *(ça) fait que* 'so'). From a lexico-semantic point of view, regional variation – a not insignificant characteristic of DMs – results from the fact that an item whose meaning predisposes it to become a pragmatic item becomes pragmaticalized in one region but not necessarily in the other, or does not attain the same degree of pragmaticalization in one region as in another.

Introduction to the Field

Discourse markers

This paper investigates a category of words that are frequently used in speech, for example, *ben* 'well', *ok* 'ok', *t'sais* 'you know'. Various terms are used to describe such expressions, such as 'pragmatic markers', 'discourse particles' and 'discourse markers'¹. From among the many terms used, the more commonly-used 'discourse markers' (DMs) was chosen. DMs of the sort investigated here are not easy to

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describe since they are by nature oral and, in some cases, are not used uniformly by all French speakers. This means two things:

- Firstly, DMs are to a certain extent subject to regional or diatopic variation, which brings us to the heart of the problem that interests us here. Two different situations are referred to: on the one hand, the same signifier, depending on the region where it is used, does not always express (exactly) the same meaning; and on the other hand, different signifiers can be used in different regions with (approximately) the same meaning;
- Secondly, it is not always easy to obtain data from currently available corpora, therefore the extent of variation to which a number of DMs are subject on a synchronic level remains to be assessed. In the context of this paper, the focus will be, primarily, on the spontaneous use of French in Quebec².

DMs are generally defined according to a set of formal and semantic properties, such as their invariability (i.e., they have no inflection), the fact that they do not contribute to the propositional content of the statement in which they are used, and their predominantly optional status on a syntactic level (for a more detailed discussion of the properties generally associated with this class of words, see, for example, Dostie and Pusch 2007).

Most of the examples of Quebec French quoted in this study are from the Banque de données textuelles de Sherbrooke (BDTS). This data base, which contains over 30 million words, consists of oral and written texts (i.e., literary texts, interviews, television programmes, etc.) in Quebec French, most of which date from 1970. This paper focuses on the spoken texts, which comprise 10% of the texts in the data base overall. In some cases, where there were no attested examples in the BDTS of the usage examined, the example used was taken from overheard speech that has been transcribed³, and in other cases, the example used was constructed. Finally, the study contains a few examples taken from corpora of French spoken in France.

2. The markers that will be dealt with in this paper have been studied in previously published articles. Therefore, in the same order as they are introduced in this paper *coudon* and *écoute* in Dostie 2004a; *pis* in Dostie 2004b; and (*ça*) *fait que* in Dostie 2006. The detailed bibliographies contained in these articles pertaining to the research done for each of the paradigms considered will not be repeated here.

3. The scope of the paper does not allow detailed discussion of the circumstances and contexts in which these heard examples occurred – all are from spontaneous everyday conversation.

Pragmaticalization and semantic regularity

The term *pragmaticalization* was introduced by Erman and Kotsinas (1993) in a study of the marker *you know* in English and its functional equivalent in Swedish. The term refers to a process of linguistic change in which a full lexical item (noun, verb, adjective or adverb) or grammatical item (coordinator, subordinator, etc.) changes category and status and becomes a pragmatic item, that is, an item which is not fully integrated into the syntactic structure of the utterance and which has a textual or interpersonal meaning. Consequently, DMs often have a non-discursive equivalent on a formal level, i.e., they have the same form as a non-discursive item (e.g., *t'sais* DM, *t'sais* verb). This non-discursive equivalent usually points to the marker's source item, which has undergone a process of pragmaticalization.

It is not difficult to find examples to support the view that certain items with non-discursive meanings are likely to be used discursively. In a previous study on DMs derived from verb forms (*écoute* 'listen', *regarde* 'look', *mettons* 'let's suppose', *disons* 'let's say', etc.), cognitive verbs (*savoir* 'to know', *comprendre* 'to understand', etc.), reporting verbs (*dire* 'to say', *parler* 'to talk, to speak', etc.) and perception verbs (*écouter* 'to listen', *voir* 'to see', etc.) were observed to be particularly subject to becoming DMs (Dostie 2004a; see also Waltereit 2002 and Pusch 2007). What connects these verbs semantically is that they all have meanings related to the notion of 'cognition'. This phenomenon of affinity between meanings seems relatively widespread, as can be demonstrated with other semantic categories of words (Traugott 1999; Traugott and Dasher 2002; Beeching 2007). For example, items that express a positive evaluation like *bon* 'good' and *bien* 'well' are also susceptible to develop DM uses. This does not mean that all DMs come from such regular semantic categories (*tiens!* 'here!, look!, listen!, oh!' is atypical in this regard), but that such regularities do in fact occur frequently.

Pragmaticalization, semantic regularity and regional variation

If new meanings derive in a recognizable way from existing meanings, this suggests that there should be little likelihood of variation between regional varieties of French. Regional variation in DMs is rather common, however. How is it possible to reconcile the fact that, in certain cases, an attraction between meanings is liable to limit potential variation with the idea that, in other cases, there is clear variation between varieties of French? An example of this would be *coudon* 'hey, by the way' as it is used in (1), a DM frequently heard in Quebec French but unknown in European varieties of French. It is the same for *pis?* 'so (what)?, and?' in example (2), which is used in spontaneous Quebec French but seems marginal in European varieties of French, where the preferred usage is (*et*) *alors?* 'so (what)?, and?'.

- (1) B: À compter d'à soir, je veux juste parler de musique. *Coudon* Marie...
 A: Quoi donc?
 B: Ça fait plusieurs fois que je te le demande, mais il me semble qu'à soir tu devrais accepter. À soir on devrait sortir ensemble, je veux dire, juste aller prendre un verre, jaser un peu. Juste ça. Qu'est-ce que t'en dis? (BDTS)
 'B: Starting tonight, I just want to talk about music. *By the way*, Marie...
 A: What?
 B: I've asked you this several times before, but I think that tonight you should accept. We should go out tonight, I mean, just for a drink, to talk a bit. That's all. What do you say?'
- (2) A: Je vois pas pourquoi elle chiale, c'est son métier, faire le ménage: elle est concierge. Ça fait que je lui ai dit que, moi aussi, j'en avais une journée dans le corps.
 B: *Pis*? Qu'est-ce qu'elle a dit?
 A: Elle a encore chialé. (BDTS)
 'A: I don't know why she complains, it's her job to do the cleaning: she's the superintendent. So I told her that I had a hard day too.
 B: *So*? What did she say?
 A: She complained some more.'

From this point on, it will be suggested in this paper that an observable affinity between meanings can also, strangely enough, underlie a variation (i.e., the affinity will either limit potential variation or bring it about or motivate it). Indeed, one of the causes of variation observable in synchrony may be that a given item whose meaning predisposed it to become pragmaticalized may have become pragmaticalized in one region, but not necessarily in another; or even that a given item may not have attained the same degree of pragmaticalization across all regions. In other words, its development as a pragmatic item may be more or less advanced according to the regions where it is used. It is also possible that, in the case of a particular item, a process of pragmaticalization had begun in the past. This item could cease to be used in one variety of French but persist in another, perhaps in a much more pragmaticalized form.

To illustrate this hypothesis, in the remainder of the article, the usages of *coudon* 'hey, by the way' and *pis* 'so (what)?, and?' are discussed, as exemplified in (1) and (2). These markers, as previously mentioned, are frequently used in spontaneous Quebec French (Dostie 2004a, 2004b).

- *Coudon* 'hey, by the way' comes from the French imperative *écoute* 'listen' coupled with *donc* 'then'. The verb *écouter* 'to listen' is the source item of *coudon* and belongs to a paradigm that, as previously mentioned, has generated several

DMs, namely the paradigm of perception/cognitive verbs (e.g., *t'sais* 'you know' from *savoir* 'to know', *tu vois* 'you see' from *voir* 'to see', etc.).

- *Pis* 'so (what)?, and?' comes from *puis* 'and, then'. Its source item belongs to the paradigm of items with a temporal value, like *alors* 'so, then' and *là*. The source items are themselves often associated with a spatial (cf. *là*) or consecutive value (cf. *puis* and *alors* 'then').

Coudon and *pis* will be examined in parallel with other closely-related markers: *coudon* will be compared with *écoute* 'listen' and *pis* will be compared with *et* 'and' and *et alors?* 'so (what)?, and?'. This parallel examination will allow us to illustrate how a marker whose use is limited to certain regions or whose use differs according to regions can come to change the equilibrium of the micro-system into which it has become inserted. Consequently, the regional variation will involve not just one item in isolation but a whole set of markers.

The analyses presented below are based on a polysemous conception of meaning, and follow the methodology underlying lexico-semantic research based on Meaning-Text Theory (Mel'čuk *et al.* 1984–1999; Mel'čuk *et al.* 1995; Mel'čuk and Polguère 2007).

Markers which Derive from Perception/Cognition Verbs, and the Case of *Coudon* in Quebec French

The study of *coudon* and *écoute* will focus on the expressive or directive dimension associated with the different meanings of the markers, and on whether their use requires the presence of an interlocutor. It will demonstrate how the following properties are semantically significant:

- *Coudon* is a marker that is either directive or expressive, and does not always require the presence of an interlocutor;
- *Écoute* is a marker whose directive dimension is predominant and whose expressive dimension is sometimes apparent; it does, however, systematically require an interlocutor.

Coudon and *Écoute*

Coudon is a multifunctional marker with complex semantic content. In the uses presented below, it moves towards the zone covered by *écoute* 'listen'. It does not however constitute a functional equivalent, because as previously mentioned, unlike *écoute*, it is not always directed at someone.

Coudon1/Écoute1

The meaning of *coudon1* 'hey' as used in examples (3) and (4) is close to *voyons* 'hey, come on'. So the speaker in (3) could simply say *Coudon!* 'Hey!' in the same way one would say *voyons* 'hey' without having to add anything, and the idea of opposition to a situation that is deemed unacceptable would be understood. *Écoute1* would also allow the speaker to express an opposition to a situation, but it would always be directed at an interlocutor (more specifically, by calling on the interlocutor's cognitive abilities to make him/her change his/her behavior). Consequently, in the context described in (4), its use is deviant, which demonstrates that even if an expressive aspect is associated with this meaning the interactive dimension will dominate.

- (3) [Les enfants n'arrêtent pas de crier et le locuteur dit avec impatience:] *Coudon!* (Allez-vous vous taire?!) (Heard example) < *Écoutez!* >
 '[The children keep yelling and the speaker says impatiently:] *Hey!* (Will you please be quiet?!)'
- (4) [Le locuteur, qui est seul, ne parvient pas à ouvrir la porte d'entrée chez lui et il s'exclame sur un ton exaspéré:] *Coudon!* C'est quoi l'idée de barrer les portes?! (Constructed example) < **Écoute!* >
 '[The speaker, who is alone, is unable to open his front door, and he shouts out in exasperation:] *Hey!* What's the idea of locking the doors?'

Coudon2/Écoute2

Coudon2 'well' in example (5) refers to a situation that is self-evident to the speaker, like *écoute* 'listen' if it were used in this example. However, as in the preceding cases, the speaker will use *écoute2* to incite the interlocutor to behave in a particular way and make him/her think of something that would be considered 'normal/obvious'. *Coudon2* would instead be used by the speaker to bring to mind this notion of 'normality' or 'obviousness', to legitimize his or her behavior or point of view, etc. In (5), *coudon2* could be replaced by expressions like 'it is normal' or 'what else could I do' and, to a certain extent, with the marker *voyons* 'hey, come on'. With *coudon*, the following example is interpreted as follows: 'I gave her a small gift. This was a legitimate/normal gesture because it was Christmas.' *Écoute2* would add the following nuance: 'I gave her a small gift. *You must understand* that this was a legitimate/normal gesture because it was Christmas.'

- (5) Je lui ai fait un petit cadeau. *Coudon*, c'était Noël. (Constructed example)
 < *écoute* >
 'I gave her a small gift. *Well*, it was Christmas.'

*Coudon*³

Example (6) illustrates a further use of *coudon*. Here, *coudon* has the status of a word-sentence and expresses a certain resignation in the face of the inevitable in a given situation. It could be replaced with an expression such as ‘what can I do!’ in the sense that it translates the idea of powerlessness or resignation on the part of the speaker, who wants to persuade himself or herself to accept the inevitable. Using *écoute* is not possible here, because the speech act is purely expressive and not directed at a third party.

- (6) [B constate qu’il ne pourra pas terminer son travail pour l’heure souhaitée. Il conclut, pour lui-même, sur un ton résigné:] Bon ben *coudon*... Je finirai demain. (Heard example) < **écoute* >
 ‘[B realizes that he will not be able to finish his task on time. With a tone of resignation, he says to himself:] Well then, *what can I do*... I’ll finish it tomorrow.’

Summary

To sum up, the markers *coudon* and *écoute* are often used in comparable contexts, but they are never completely equivalent or interchangeable, even if they are derived from the same source item, i.e., the imperative form of the verb *écouter*, ‘Listen!’. This is reflected in the fact that *écoute* is still used in spontaneous Quebec French. *Écoute* can take on adjacent functions to those attributed to *coudon*, but these are never identical.

Conclusion: *coudon*

In conclusion, it is important to remember that the discourse collocation *écoute donc* ‘listen’ existed in the French spoken in France in the seventeenth century – that is, for the purpose of this argument, during the colonization of New France. For example, it is used in excerpt (7), which is from a seventeenth-century literary text. Subsequently, *écoute donc* functioning as a DM disappears almost completely from French corpora at the beginning of the twentieth century. The form *écoutez donc* appears regularly in parallel with *écoute donc* during this entire period, which suggests that the expression under examination had not yet attained a maximal degree of pragmaticalization before it gradually disappeared from hexagonal French.

- (7) Clarice: Lisette, tu remets le calme dans mon ame; mon soupçon se dissipe, et il fait place à ma flamme. Peut-être à tes discours j’ajoute trop de foi; mais Léandre aujourd’hui triomphe encor de moi.

Le Chevalier l'arrêtant. *Écoute donc*, ma sœur.

Clarice: Que me veux-tu mon frère?

Le Chevalier: Mets-toi dans un couvent, tu ne saurois mieux faire. (J.-F. Regnard, 1698, *Le distrait*) (Frantext)

'Clarice: Lisette, you bring calm back to my soul; my suspicions vanish and are replaced by my ardour. I may be lending too much faith to your words; but today Léandre is winning me over again.

The Knight stops her. *Listen*, my sister.

Clarice: What is it, my brother?

The Knight: Take thee to a convent; it would be best for you. (J.-F. Regnard, 1698, *The Absentminded Man*)' (Unofficial translation)

Finally, the extent to which an observable variation in DMs is linked to the issue of pragmaticalization: such a variation occurs principally because an item that has undergone the process of pragmaticalization may persist in one region, but not necessarily in another, and may continue to undergo a process of pragmaticalization. The process of pragmaticalization that began in France for *écoute donc* was not completed there, while it persisted to an extreme degree in Quebec French. This created a zone of variation. This variation, like many others, seems to be brought about, on a more abstract level of analysis, by some form of semantic regularity, which happens in particular with items prone to be pragmaticalized (that is, the source items). These items generally belong to the same semantic category. In the case at hand, it was observed that perception/cognition verbs were good candidates for pragmaticalization. All in all, the case examined here tends to show that, from a lexico-semantic point of view, pragmaticalization and the resulting DM variation do not occur in a random fashion.

Markers derived from temporal/consecutive items, and the case of *pis* in Quebec French

This paper will now focus on the case of *pis* 'and, so (what)' as it is used in Quebec French. One of the reasons this marker was chosen is that in some of its uses in France the tendency would be to say (*et*) *alors* 'so (what)' in unmarked everyday conversation. In the context of an analysis focussed on pragmaticalization and its relationship to variation in synchrony, it is quite interesting to note that *pis* and (*et*) *alors* have similar core senses, a temporal value and a consecutive value (as in the case of *puis* 'then'), presumably because what happened previously can naturally be considered to be the cause of what follows; this suggests, once again, that there

exists some form of semantic regularity or affinity between meanings, regardless of the regional variation in the terms which finally emerge.

The polycategorical marker pis

Pis belongs to two distinct grammatical categories in Quebec French: it is a coordinator, as in (8), or a DM, as in (9). The coordinator (*pis*1 'and') is also found in the French spoken in France, but seems to be subject to diastatic constraints (Laks 1983). *Pis*1 is, by contrast, widespread in Quebec French and used by all speakers regardless of social background. Similarly, the DM *pis*? 'so (what)?, and?', as in (9), seems very limited in the French spoken in France today. In similar situations, the preferred usage would be (*et*) *alors*? 'so (what)?'. In Quebec French, however, its use is widespread.

- (8) Je suis allée en Europe, cet été. J'ai ben aimé ça, *pis* (mon objectif) ça serait d'y retourner avec ma sœur... mon frère *pis* ma belle-sœur, *pis* la mère de ma belle-sœur. (BDTS)

'I went to Europe this summer. I really liked it, *and* I would like to go back with my sister... my brother *and* my sister-in-law, *and* my sister-in-law's mother.'

- (9) B dit à A, après les salutations d'usage: *Pis*? Tes examens? Ça s'est bien passé? <?Puis?> (Heard example)

'B says to A, after the usual greetings: *So*? Your exams? How did it go?

Example (9) shows clearly that *pis* is not simply a phonostylistic variant of *puis* when it is used as a DM, nor is it when it is used as a coordinator. Likewise, *puis* and *pis* are not equivalent in (10): *puis* would be spontaneously interpreted as a sequential indication, but *pis* would be interpreted as a close synonym of *ainsi que* 'as well as'. Thus, it is a word in its own right and should be examined separately.

- (10) Il va refaire le salon *puis* la cuisine. (Constructed example) <≠ *pis*>
'He will redo the living-room *then* the kitchen.'

The discourse marker pis?

When it is also a DM, *pis*? 'so (what)?, and?' is used in two ways: (1) the speaker may use it to inquire about what will follow, or (2) the speaker may use it to express disinterest in what he is being told. The paper will now elaborate on these two cases where, as previously mentioned, *et alors*? 'so (what)?, and?' would be more natural today in France (in everyday speech).

In (11), the speaker expresses interest in a subject with which both he and the interlocutor are familiar. Without the DM *pis?* ‘so?, and?’ (*pis?*2), the meaning of his query would change radically because there would no longer be a presupposition based on mutual knowledge between the two interlocutors. *Pis?*2 can be compared here to a marker like *finalement* ‘after all’, which, in the context presented in (11), would also serve to highlight the existence of an implicit subject known to both interlocutors.

- (11) B croise A et, une fois le rituel d’ouverture terminé, il lui demande: *Pis?* Êtes-vous allés au restaurant, hier soir? (Heard example)
 ‘B bumps into A and, after the usual greetings, asks him: *So?* Did you go to the restaurant last night?’

Example (12) demonstrates a second discursive usage of *pis?* ‘so (what)?, and?’ (*pis?*3). Here, the speaker uses the marker to stop the interlocutor in mid-discourse. He signals in this way that he does not particularly want to pursue the topic the interlocutor has just introduced, that it does not interest him, and that he does not want to find out more about it or hear what follows. Given that this *pis?*3, as in the preceding case, is uttered with a slight rise in tone, the speaker’s lack of interest is underscored by the brusque interruption and the ironic request for further information. This usage can be compared to rhetorical questions, in the sense that it contains an indirect affirmation. It could be interpreted as meaning: ‘It is useless to continue on the subject you have just embarked on.’

- (12) A: Mon chien est tombé à l’eau.
 B: *Pis* (après)? Tu vois pas que je suis occupé, là? J’ai pas le temps d’entendre tes histoires! (Constructed example)
 ‘A: My dog fell into the water.
 B: *So* (what)? Can’t you see I’m busy right now? I don’t have time to listen to your stories!’

Conclusion: variation in time and space

The coordinator *pis*1

According to analyses proposed by some language historians, coordinating conjunctions originate from items that expressed notions of space or time (Antoine 1958: 542). It would not be uncommon for these items to eventually lose their spatial or temporal values and become what Antoine called ‘neutral’ connectors. This phenomenon has been observed, for example, since the thirteenth century in the case of *puis* (Antoine 1958: 669), which would explain its natural association with certain items of temporal value, like *puis maintenant* ‘and now’, *puis après*

'then after', *puis ensuite* 'then', etc. (*puis* = 'and'). In this way, the development of *pis* as a neutral coordinator would be the final outcome of a process that had begun long ago with *puis*.

The Discourse marker pis? 2–3

It is likely that the discourse uses of *pis?* 'so?' come from the collocation *et puis?* '(and) so?'. Indeed, the form *et puis?* is found in Late Middle French texts, as in example (13) from the sixteenth century.

- (13) Alinadad, fils de Saul:

Et puis? Quelle nouvelle? S'il convient que du roy le conseil on revele. Est-il point arresté de marcher plus avant? (Louis Des Masures, 1566, *David fugitif*) (Frantext)

'Alinadad, son of Saul:

So? What news have you? If it is appropriate to reveal the King's counsel. Should we cease walking further?' (Louis Des Masures, 1566, *David fugitif*) (Unofficial translation)

The discourse function of *et puis?* is also found under the word *puis* in many old dictionaries (e.g., *Dictionnaire de l'Académie*, editions 1694, 1798) and more recent ones (e.g., *Trésor de la langue française* 1971–1994, *Petit Robert* 2008). What is more, the form *pis?* is not restricted to Quebec French. It has also been attested in the French spoken in France, as shown in example (14). It should however be added here that, in the few examples of this form found in Frantext, the marker is always coupled with *après*, whereas in Quebec French, *après* is optional in similar contexts. Moreover, the use of *pis après?* 'so (what)?' seems marked from a diastatic point of view in France. As mentioned before, *et alors?* in a neutral level of language, is generally preferred.

- (14) - Moi, j'ai pas plus de famille que toi. Personne, que Louise – qui n'est pas de ma famille vu qu'on n'est pas mariés. Moi, j'ai pas de condamnations en dehors de quéqu' bricoles militaires. Y a rien sur mon nom.
 - *Et pis après?* J'm fous.
 - J'vas te dire: prends mon nom. Prends-le, je te l'donne: pisqu'on n'a pas d'famille ni l'un ni l'autre. (Henri Barbusse, *Le feu*, 1916) (Frantext)
 ' - As for myself, I don't have any more family than you do. No one, except Louise – who isn't really family because we're not married. I don't have any convictions except for a few minor things when I was in the military. There's nothing on me.
 - *So (what)?* I don't really give a damn.

– I'm telling you: take my name. Take it, I'm giving it to you: since neither of us have any family.' (Henri Barbusse, *Le feu*, 1916) (Unofficial translation)

In investigating a case like *pis?*, it becomes clear that there is some kind of variation in form and meaning across different varieties of French in this subfield of DMs. However, when the meanings and uses of *pis?* in Quebec French are compared with certain uses of (*et*) *alors?*, it is evident that the two markers come from source items that belong to the same semantic field, that is, the temporal/consecutive field. This supports the argument that a certain form of semantic regularity underlies discourse uses of these terms.

Overall conclusion

By way of a conclusion to this study of markers originating from perception/cognition verbs on the one hand, and from temporal/consecutive items on the other, some observations can also be made regarding the marker (*ça*) *fait que* 'so' as it is used in Quebec French. That is, the marker *alors*, which is highly polysemous, is subject to competition in Quebec French not only from *pis?*^{2–3} but also, and perhaps even more so, from *ça fait que* and its short variant *fait que*, derived from the long form through a process of standard reduction (Dostie 2006). An example of this use is to be found in (15).

- (15) Il y a un de mes oncles qui a mis le pied sur un de mes disques (*ça*) *fait que* j'étais pas ben ben content. (BDTS)
 'There's this uncle of mine who stepped on one of my records, so I was not too too happy.'

The long form *ça fait que* is also attested in other varieties of French (in France, in Belgium, Acadian French, etc.). However, because no exhaustive description of the marker exists for these varieties of French, it is impossible at this stage to determine whether it is used in exactly the same way in all of these regions.

It has been suggested that the expression *ce qui fait que/c'qui fait que* '(the reason) why' is probably seriously competing with *ça fait que* in France. There is however a difference between the two expressions, since *ce qui fait que/c'qui fait que* is clearly less pragmaticalized. In fact, *ce qui fait que/c'qui fait que* would not be used in (16) – because this example shows a real use of a DM. Therefore, it seems that a zone of variation in the French spoken in the targeted discourse contexts reveals itself once again (i.e., in Quebec French (*ça*) *fait que* covers an area of usages usually covered elsewhere by *alors*).

- (16) *Fait que...? Qu'est-ce que t'en penses?* (Heard example)

'So...? What do you think?'

As such, it may be worthwhile in conclusion to point out that the source item of (*ça*) *fait que* – the verb *faire* 'to do' – cuts across the semantic class to which the source items *pis* (i.e., *puis*) and *alors* belong by the very fact that it is associated with the notion of consequence. These three source items evolved in such a manner that they came to express a certain number of close discursive meanings, and this represents another convincing case supporting the hypothesis proposed at the beginning of this article. The regional variation is motivated on some abstract level by some form of appreciable semantic regularity. Certain items are more disposed than others to develop discourse meanings and, therefore, to become pragmaticalized, but this does not mean that all of the items will become pragmaticalized, or that they will become pragmaticalized at the same moment in different regions where French is spoken, or that they will reach the same degree of pragmaticalization everywhere at a specific stage of their development. This is therefore one of the factors that contribute to regional variation from a lexico-semantic point of view in the field of DMs.

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Corpora

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- Frantext*. Texts dating from the sixteenth to the twentieth centuries, most of which are literary. (<http://www.frantext.fr>)