Methodological Challenges in Developing a Multimodal Corpus for Modal Particle Research: The Case of RUMBase1

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Abstract

Despite being a long-standing topic in linguistics, modal particles remain a methodological challenge for research drawing on corpus data due to their context-dependence and polyfunctionality. These difficulties become especially salient in spoken discourse, where meaning is shaped by the interplay of verbal, prosodic, and embodied resources, suggesting that access to temporal and multimodal information is crucial for analysis. This gives rise to issues that cut across empirical, theoretical, methodological, and applied dimensions of study.

The presentation contributes to the ongoing methodological discussion by examining the development of RUMBase1, a multimodal corpus under construction within the international project *Rethinking Understanding Modal Particles* (RUM). Based on data from German Bundestag committee meetings and using the modal particle *schon* as a guiding case, the study explores how constraints associated with the phenomenon—such as polyfunctionality, the limited interpretability of lexical statistics, and the role of multimodal context—shape decisions in corpus design.

Adopting a process-oriented perspective, the talk addresses methodological issues that arise during corpus construction. It traces a path from constraints to requirements, examining how these motivate specific design choices, including multilayer annotation, time alignment, workflow organisation, and trade-offs between automation, annotation depth, and scalability. Examples illustrate how individual occurrences of *schon* participate in different multimodal configurations. The contribution aims to shed light on the mechanisms underlying methodological decision-making and to stimulate discussions of design, offering perspectives relevant to the development of multimodal corpora for the study of context-sensitive linguistic phenomena.

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