



**A Qualitative Analysis of Listening Assessment  
Material for German as a Foreign Language**

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## **A Linguistic Analysis of Listening Assessment Material for German as a Foreign Language**

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In recent decades, many scholars have recognized the relevant role played by listening activities in learning a foreign language (Rost 1994). The shift to more communicative teaching approaches in the 1970s has brought forth renewed interest for listening and researchers have started to advocate for more authentic language (Johnson & Morrow 1981). However, despite these developments, the language presented to learners is still “a poor representation of the real thing” (Gilmore 2007: 2). Furthermore, listening activities and assessment based on written texts are common in many language classrooms (Vandergrift & Goh 2012, Field 2013, Wagner 2016b, Wagner & Wagner 2016) and Ockey & Wagner 2018). While these claims can be considered valid for the teaching of English, little research has been conducted on the teaching of German as a foreign language. This study attempts to bridge this gap by analyzing the linguistic features of the assessment material used for elementary and intermediate classes at a Midwestern university in the USA. These activities are compared with the linguistic features found in similar recordings from the *Database of Spoken German* as a means to determine their degree of authenticity. The analysis reveals a similar scenario to the one described for English.

### **1. Introduction**

In recent decades, many scholars have recognized the importance of listening activities in learning a foreign language (Rost 1994). These studies have demonstrated that listening is a prerequisite for the acquisition of other important linguistic skills, such as speaking, reading, and writing (Cheung 2010). Furthermore, “language learners want to understand the target language speakers and they want to be able to access the rich variety of aural and visual L2 text available today via network-based multimedia” (Vandergriff 2007: 190). However, despite the increased visibility of listening in Second Language Acquisition (henceforth, SLA) research (Feyten 1991), listening activities are repeatedly neglected (Moyer 2006) and L2 learners are still exposed to text-oriented activities (Vandergrift & Goh 2012; Field 2013; Wagner 2016b; Wagner & Wagner 2016; Ockey & Wagner 2018). In the words of Gilmore (2007: 98), despite the positive advancements in SLA research that focuses on the relevance listening in the classroom, the language presented to learners is still “a poor representation of the real thing”. Gilmore advocates for more authentic language in classrooms for English as a

second and foreign language, arguing that textbooks lack adequate models for both spoken grammar and pragmatics, and usually present monologues or dialogs where turn-taking is highly predictable. Contrarily, authentic materials are likely to include a wider variety of lexical and grammatical features. Further, authentic recordings of casual conversation would expose learners to “useful models to illustrate how proficient speakers effectively manage discourse” (Gilmore 2007:102). Burket & Roitsch (2014: 193) have a similar complaint, arguing that students in many foreign language curricula lack exposure to authentic spoken language. Vandergrift and Goh (2012: 12) also argue that listening activities which are heavily influenced by reading and writing pedagogy are “still persistent in many second language classrooms”. The reasons behind such issue could be related to various factors, such as the occasionally hostile relationship between applied linguists and language practitioners, and the reluctance of publishers to make large changes in their products (Gilmore 2007: 112). Different scholars (Field 2013; Wagner 2016b; Wagner & Wagner 2016; Ockey & Wagner 2018) have compared phonological, lexical-grammatical, and discourse characteristics of authentic spoken English with the English used to assess listening comprehension. They all found that the language used in these tests lacks those typical traits of spoken English and that the material was mainly based on scripted and written texts.

The claims made by Gilmore (2007) and Vandergrift & Goh (2012), and the results obtained by Field (2013), Wagner (2016b), Wagner & Wagner (2016), and Ockey & Wagner (2018) refer to the teaching and assessment of English as a second and foreign language. However, the situation for other less studied languages could be quite similar, if not even worse. Very little research has been done on languages other than English. Therefore, by investigating German, this paper attempts to fill the gap in the literature and, in particular, the material used to assess listening skills in the chapter tests for elementary and intermediate levels at a Midwestern university.

The structure of this study is as follows. The first section opens with a discussion of the authenticity of the language used in second language material. The second section provides an overview of the typical linguistic features which are characteristic of authentic spoken German, while the third one describes the methodology used in the present study. The fourth section explores and compares the linguistic features which are present or absent in textbook audios presented to learners during assessment and in

authentic spoken monologues and dialogs from a German corpus. The final section contains conclusions and indications for further research.

## **2. Authenticity in the Second Language Classroom**

The debate over the role of authentic material in foreign language classrooms has gained renewed interest in the scientific community, especially starting from the 1970s with the advent of the communicative teaching approach (Savignon 1975; Gilmore 2007). Discussions over authenticity have brought forth different, and sometimes contrasting, definitions on what is meant by authentic language. Hence, today there is still very little agreement among scholars regarding the meaning of “authentic.” As reported by Gilmore & Wernicke-Heinrichs (2013), some scholars have resorted to criteria which go beyond the text itself for its definition. Some scholars consider criteria such as the interaction between students and teachers (Van Lier 1996), the personal judgment of the receiver/listener (Widdowson 1978; Breen 1985), the social situation of the classroom (Arnold 1991; Lee 1995; Guariento & Morley 2001; Rost 2011), and the adoption of a behavior similar to the community of the target language (Kramsch 1993). Other scholars have argued for a definition of authenticity by investigating whether the language is produced by native speakers (Porter & Roberts 1981; Little et al. 1989), or if the texts are produced by “real” speakers and intended for a real audience with a real message (Morrow 1977; Porter & Roberts 1981; Swaffar 1985; Nunan 1988; Benson & Voller 1997).

Gilmore (2007) opts for Morrow’s (1977: 13) definition of authentic language as “a stretch of real language, produced by real speakers or writers for a real audience and designed to convey a real message of some sort.” In this paper, I do not follow this definition of authenticity, nor any of those listed by Gilmore. On the contrary, I argue that authenticity for listening materials can be better defined by considering the specific linguistic features of the text itself. Traits of authentic language as found through the analysis of spoken language corpora could be accurately reproduced in the material specifically made for second language classes. Therefore, I define authenticity as the degree by which a given sample of language mirrors the language whose traits have been defined by the scholarly community as typical for authentic speech. This theoretical framework draws upon the first of the four types of authenticity in language teaching defined by Breen (1985), namely the authenticity of text used as input data for

learners. Breen (1985: 63) defines authentic any text that will allow students to discover and use those linguistic conventions of communication that a given text exploits. Consequently, those samples of language that present to the learners a more accurate representation of authentic speech will offer a higher number of examples of those linguistic and pragmatic conventions mentioned by Breen (1985). The adoption of such an approach to authenticity raises important issues on the features which characterize authentic language. In the following pages, I offer a brief account of these characteristics for spoken German, offering numerous examples, where the spelling and the transcription rules were kept as found in the original sources. In doing so, I draw upon the necessary tools to analyze the listening activities used in the classrooms of German as a foreign language.

### 3. Authentic Spoken German

Different scholars have argued that the syntax of spoken German is significantly different from the syntax of its written counterpart (Auer 2000; Fiehler et al. 2004). It has also been amply demonstrated that sentences in spoken language have a length which is under the average of those found in written texts and that speakers prefer to connect their sentences through parataxis using coordinating conjunctions such as *und* (and) and *aber* (but), avoiding subordination (Schwitalla 2012: 141). Empirical evidence has also shown that unrehearsed spoken dialogue is different from rehearsed speech (Stratton 2018: 2). In this regard, Werlen (1984: 230) distinguishes between informal and formal oral conversations. In the latter, speakers usually rely on formal greetings and farewells and specific wordings such as *ich bleibe dabei* (I remain of the opinion [that]) and *tut mir schrecklich leid* (I'm terribly sorry) to strengthen what was previously said (Werlen 1984: 249). Speakers in formal conversations also make use of phatic communication, such as in *schönes wetter heute* (beautiful weather today), and a specific wording at the beginning and end of their turn, such as *meiner meinung nach* (in my opinion), *so weit ich weiß* (so far as I know), and *so ist das* (so it is) (Schwitalla 2012: 178).

Independent of the type of conversation (formal vs. informal), scholars have repeatedly found in spoken conversations pauses, repetition, false starts, and the related reformulations with the reiteration of the reformulated parts which are often introduced

by interjections such as *ähm* or lexemes such as *oder* (or), *aber* (but), *nein* (no). Research in Conversational Analysis has additionally shown that overlaps between turns, i.e. when speakers fail to recognize the end of the utterances of their interlocutors, are also a common trait in authentic interactions. Analyses of spoken corpora have also highlighted that there are a number of utterances in which verbs or pronouns are omitted, especially in informal dialogues (Engel 1974: 101). Avoidance of the repetition of pronouns or parts of the verbal predicate, for instance, is one of the strategies that speakers use to direct the attention of the listeners to new information, also known as rheme or focus. A similar strategy can be found in answers where some pieces of information that are perceived as not informative by the speakers were also omitted. (Schwitalla 2012: 103).

Another typical feature of spoken German is the positioning of the verb directly after subordinating conjunctions such as *weil* (because), *dass* (that), and *obwohl* (although), and in relative sentences introduced by relative pronouns, instead of being in the final position (Weiss 2000: 307). The same was found very often in subordinate clauses introduced by verbs such as *sagen* (to say), *denken* (to think), *meinen* (to mean), *glauben* (to believe), and *hoffen* (to hope) (Weinhart 2002: 307). Scholars have also often observed the positioning of elements outside of the so-called left and right sentence brackets (*Satzklammern*). In left dislocation, speakers isolate the “topic” of the sentence putting it at the beginning of the sentence as in *die blondine dadrüber. Ich glaube ich habe dieses gesicht schon gesehen* (the blonde girl over there. I think I have seen her face before) (Selting 1995: 81).

Conversely, in right dislocation, native speakers put a relevant piece of information after the end of the sentence, as in *wo wir zum essen gegangen sind mein Kollege und ich* (where we went to eat, my colleague and I) (Schwitalla 2012: 114). A very similar process is *Ausklammerung* (placement outside the brackets), in which parts of speech which should go inside the sentential brackets are placed outside on the right, as in *weil es schwierigkeiten gibt mit dem pekingaufenthalt* (because there are difficulties with the stay in Beijing) instead of *weil es mit dem pekingaufenthalt schwierigkeiten gibt* (Uhmann 1997: 76). Interestingly, some scholars have also shown that speakers frequently use *dass*-subordinate clauses with no main clauses attached to them to express surprise, reproach, and wishes (Schlobinski 1992: 237).

Furthermore, in spoken language, demonstrative pronouns such as *die, der, dem,* and *denen* are preferred over personal pronouns when speakers want to emphasize their utterances (Rehbein 1992: 566). The use of the simple past for verbs such as *sein, haben* and modal verbs in spoken language has been attested by different scholars and is also indicated in prescriptive grammars (Schumacher 2005; Concu 2016).

Regarding the lexical features that distinguish written from spoken German, research has shown that for some frequent nouns, verbs and adjectives, there is a spoken counterpart for the “normal written form”. Some examples are the pairs *ami-Amerikaner* (American), *bammel-Angst* (fear), *kriegen-bekommen* (to receive), *gucken-sehen* (to see), *schmeißen-werfen* (to throw), and *belämmert-dumm* (stupid). Common for spoken German are also modal particles, such as *ja, doch, eben, mal, aber, endlich, halt, noch* and *eigentlich* (Heinrichs 2012: 38). These particles are widely used in spoken language, but they can also be found in written communication. Modal particles are also often used in combinations with adverbs such as *vielleicht* (maybe), *möglicherweise* (possibly), *glücklicherweise* (luckily), *leider* (unfortunately), *bestimmt* (surely), and *hoffentlich* (hopefully) (Schatte 1993:98). Conversations and informal interactions are often filled with expressions such as *was weiß ich* (for all I know), *so ein* and *so etwas* (something like), and *irgendwie* (somehow), which are used to express vagueness or uncertainty about the information conveyed (Schwitalla 2012: 161).

Gersbach & Graf (1984: 163) look at word formation and notice the use of prefixes as nouns and adjectives intensifiers as in *arsch-kalt* (very cold, lit. ass-cold); *tot-langweilig* (very boring, lit. dead-boring), *scheiß-Arbeit* (nasty job, lit. shit-job), *sau-blöd* (very stupid, lit. sow-stupid), and *stink-normal* (completely normal, lit. smelly-normal). Common are also suffixes such as *-er (ei)*, which give negative connotations to the nouns combined with them, as in *lauf-erei* in the sense of “too much walking” and *studier-erei*, with the meaning of “too much university-related activities”, and suffixes such as *-i* used normally as a means to refer to someone, as in *schapp-i* (someone who is worn-out) and in *hirn-i* (someone who is brainy) (Henne 1986: 210). According to Sievers (2011: 97), however, in today’s language only a dozen suffixes are still productive in German, such as the suffix *-ei*, while many of them have become unproductive, such as the suffix *-i*. The shortening of words like in *uni* for *Universität* (university) and *bib* for *Bibliothek* (library) is frequent in spoken German and is making its way into written media (Eroms 2002).

Spoken German makes also use of adjective intensifiers such as *voll*, *total*, *mega* and *echt*, as in *voll gut* (lit. full cool), *total nett* (totally nice), *mega cool* (mega cool), and *echt schön* (really beautiful/nice). These intensifiers can also appear before nouns accompanied by adjectives in predicative position as in *total die doofe Klasse* (totally stupid class) and *mega der lustige Tag* (very funny day) (Schmidlin et al. 2015).

Some other traits of spoken German are the apocope of the unstressed “e” at the end of the verb in the first person singular, such as *Ich hab’* (I have), the shortening and assimilation of final syllables in words in the indefinite articles (such as *’n* instead of *ein* and *’ne* instead of *eine*), and the assimilation of the pronoun *du* when preceded by verbs such as in *krigste* (lit. get you), *haste* (lit. have you), and *willste* (lit. want you) (Schwitalla 2012: 38).

At the discourse level, Schwitalla (2002: 157) identifies specific discourse particles, which are widely shared in the German-speaking community. Some of these particles are used by the speakers to ensure the attention of the listener, such as *hör mal* (listen) and *schau mal* (look) that appear at the beginning of a sentence, and *ne/nicht?* (no) or *oder?/gell?* (or), which are normally positioned at the end of the utterance. Some are used to introduce new ideas, such as *ach/ah* (oh), while others are used to show some sort of reaction, such as *ah ja?* (yeah?) and *na gut* (ok/it is alright). Other lexemes that can be classified as discourse particles are constructs such as *glaub ich* (I believe), *mein ich* (I mean), *also* (so), *übrigens* (by the way), *jedenfalls* (anyway), and *trotzdem* (still). Such discourse particles are typical for authentic spoken interactions, especially in informal context.

This brief overview has discussed relevant features which are characteristic of authentic spoken German defined here as “frei formuliertes, spontanes Sprechen [...] aus natürlichen Kommunikationssituationen” (Schank & Schoenthal 1976: 7) (freely formulated and spontaneous speaking [...] from natural communicative situations). Such features will be used as a means to analyze the language used in chapter tests for elementary and intermediate levels at a university in Indiana and for the comparison with recordings from the database of spoken German of the University of Mannheim.

#### 4. Methodology

The data in this study come from two sources. The first source is a collection of four listening activities played through computer speakers during the chapter tests in



elementary and intermediate German classes at a Midwestern university. The listening activities were produced by the publisher of the textbooks used in these courses (one for the elementary level and the other one for the intermediate one) and are available on instructor companion websites hosted by the publisher. The textbook extracts and the extracts from the corpus are of various types: one monologue, two informal dialogues, and one formal interview. The inclusion of these listening activities ensures a relatively comprehensive spectrum of spoken language samples and was driven by one reason. Since all these courses have different sections, and instructors can use materials that can substantially differ from one section to another, the choice of the audio used for tests ensure that all the students enrolled in these classes (and not just in a given section) are exposed to the same material.

The second source of data comes from the database for spoken German (*Datenbank für Gesprochenes Deutsch*) of the University of Mannheim. It is part of the spoken corpora program of the Institute of the German Language (*Institut für Deutsche Sprache*)<sup>1</sup>. The files, which are recordings of authentic conversations among Germans, were chosen because of their similar length and register to the ones used in the chapter tests, and come from the following corpora: “FR: Grundstrukturen: Freiburger Korpus” (Basic structures: Freiburg Corpus), and “DS: Dialogstrukturen” (Dialogue structures). When it was not possible to find recordings of the same or similar length, the comparison was made between files with the same register (formal or informal). Additionally, when the authentic material exceeded the length of the textbook activities for more than 00:40 seconds (marked with an \* in Table 1; the original length was indicated also in parenthesis), the file was analyzed for a reduced amount of time to ensure an approximate similar length. The following chart shows the length of each file and the total duration of the material used.

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<sup>1</sup> Available at <http://dgd.ids-mannheim.de> [01.11.2019].

Audio	Textbook activities	Corpus of Spoken German
102 – Monologue	01:00	01:36_FR 00034
102 – Informal dialogue	00:45	00:37_FR 00176
201 – Party	01:00	01:02_DS 00037* (02:09)
202 – Interview	01:10	01:48_FR 00156
Total Length	3:45	05:13

Table 1: Duration and Length

The files from the corpus were included as transcribed in the Database for spoken German of the University of Mannheim and the textbook activities were transcribed following the same conventions: pauses were marked by a series of dots (...), when they lasted less than 0.2 seconds; and by the word ((Pause)) (pause), every time they exceeded 0.2 seconds. Overlaps were transcribed in square brackets and false starts by a slash (/). Every turn was numbered starting from 01, and the speakers were identified as S1 (speaker 1) and S2 (speaker 2). To facilitate use for the readers, the following features have been highlighted in bold in the transcript: modal particles, discourse particles, and lexical items.

## 5. Limitations

The current study has some limitations. Firstly, it analyzes the material used at one specific university and, therefore, the results presented in the next pages cannot be considered as representative for the material used in other universities in the United States. Secondly, the author of this paper does not intend to provide any pedagogical implications directly related to the analysis discussed here. Instead, the arguments presented should be rather taken as references for teachers and instructors while choosing listening material to implement in the classroom.

## 6. Results

In this section, I present the analysis of the listening activities from the chapter tests and the recordings from the database of spoken German. Each extract from the textbook is immediately compared with its counterpart from the corpus.

### 6.1 Textbook Extract #1 – Monologue

The monologue extract from the textbook was played through computer speakers in the classrooms during the chapter exam in elementary German. Students were asked to complete a true or false activity. The speaker in this recording is sharing a life experience with a friend.

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01	<b>S1</b>	Alex (..) <b>also</b> das war so. Ich bin als Studentin nach Deutschland geflogen und habe in Tübingen studiert. (..) Und da hat es dann auch geblitzt (..) Ich habe meinen Traummann kennen gelernt (..). Er war so attraktiv. Sein Name war Stefan (..) Und er hat mich auch gleich in eine Kneipe eingeladen (..) mich und seinen <b>Kumpel</b> , Karl. Ich hab mich sofort in ihn verliebt. Ich meine natürlich Stefan, nicht Karl. Karl war eher ein ernster Typ (..) nett, aber vielleicht nicht so attraktiv (..) <b>Ja</b> , aber dann, im nächsten Sommer, bin ich wieder weggezogen, zurück nach Amerika. Aber ich hab Stefan dann eingeladen, mich in Amerika zu besuchen (..) Und er ist dann <b>auch</b> im Herbst gekommen (..) <b>ja</b> und dann, später, haben wir geheiratet.
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Figure 1: Informal Dialogue (*Vorsprung*)

From a syntactic perspective, this recording contains short sentences all connected by coordinating conjunctions. There is a total of ten short pauses, but not repetition or corrections. This recording does not present any instances in which verbs or pronouns are omitted. The tenses used are present, present perfect and the verb *sein* (to be) appears three times in the simple past. There was no omission of the *-e* ending in the verb used in the first person singular. From a lexical point, this activity contains the idiomatic expression *es hat geblitzt* (lit. there was a flash of lightning) in the sense of falling in love, and the word *Kumpel* (buddy) that can be ascribed to informal/spoken German, as well as and the particle *auch* (also) used once in the second to last line. There are also instances of discourse particles, namely the particle *ja*, which was used twice, and the particle *also* (so), used in the first line of the monologue.

### 6.2 Corpus Extract #1 – Monologue

The first file is taken from the corpus “Basic structures: Freiburg corpus”. It contains a narration of events that happened in the past.

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01	<b>S1</b>	<p><b>ja</b> das s <b>eigentlich</b> schwer etwas zu erzählen wir sind (..) von Marburg runter gekommen ((Pause)) auf der Autobahn ((Pause)) und ((Pause)) vor uns ist die längste Zeit ein (..) Lastwagen (..) hergefahren ((Pause)) . und der Fahrer (..) das war nicht ich (..) wollte also immer überholen und (..) hat sich also zu sehr auf <b>n</b> Rückspiegel konzentriert (..) und dann muß plötzlich der (..) Lastwagen die Geschwindigkeit verringert haben (..) jedenfalls hat sich (..) / eh sind wir ganz nah rangekommen und er konnte <b>grad</b> noch ausbiegen (..) und um den Lastwagen herumkommen (..) also Lebens gef eh/ gefahr war s vielleicht keine aber jedenfalls ziemlich nah an <b>nem</b> Unfall (..) das is ((Pause)) so gut wie die gefährlichste Situation die ich jemals erlebt hab.</p>
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Figure 2: Informal Dialogue II (*Basic structures: Freiburg corpus*)

All the sentences in this audio are connected by parataxis, except for one relative sentence in the fourth line. This monologue contains a high number of short pauses (13), pauses longer than 2 seconds (5), and false starts (2). It also presents a set of features which can be ascribed to spoken German. In the first sentence, we have the first example of *Ausklammerung*, in which the speaker does not place the past participle *runter gekommen* (to come down) at the end of the clause, a position which is occupied instead by the prepositional object *auf der Autobahn* (on the highway). In the sixth sentence, the speaker reformulates the sentence *jedenfalls hat sich* (lit. anyway it has itself) after a false start introducing a new one *eh sind wir ganz nah rangekommen* (we came very close), with a new subject in the second position as it follows on from the introductory adverb *jedenfalls*. The adverb *gerade* (here “just”) in the next sentence appears as *grad*, the indeterminate article in the accusative case before *Rückspiegel* (rear mirror) is shortened to *n*, and the same has happened to the indefinite article in the dative case in the second to last sentence, which is shortened to ‘*nem*. The speaker uses the present, the present perfect, and the verb *sein* in the simple past, as well as the modal verbs *wollen* (to want) and *können* (can) also in the simple past. This monologue contains one modal particle, *eigentlich* and one discourse particle, *ja*, in the first line.

### 6.3 Textbook Extract #2 – Informal Dialogue

The next textbook activity is an informal conversation between two friends and it was used for a chapter test for elementary German. The students were asked to complete a true or false activity.

- 01 S1 Tag, Anna!
- 02 S2 Grüß dich, Karl!
- 03 S1 Wie geht's dir heute?
- 04 S2 **Ach**, mir geht's nicht so gut.
- 05 S1 Was ist **denn**?
- 06 S2 Heute Morgen bin ich vom Rad gefallen.
- 07 S1 **Ach**, nein! Tut's dir noch weh?
- 08 S2 Ja, der rechte Arm tut mir weh.
- 09 S1 Sollst du nicht zum Arzt gehen?
- 10 S2 Nein, so schlimm ist es nicht. Morgen geht's mir bestimmt besser. Ich kann nur im Moment nicht so gut schreiben. Das ist alles.
- 11 S1 Na, vielleicht hilft dir jetzt eine Tasse heißer Tee. Hier, den Zitrontee habe ich gerade gekocht. Trink ihn aber mit der linken Hand.
- 12 S2 Danke schön, Karl.
- 13 S1 Bitte schön.

Figure 3: Informal Dialogue III (*Vorsprung*)

This dialogue contains short sentences but there are no pauses, repetitions, or overlaps. Some turns are longer than others, such as 10 and 11, in which the speakers use three sentences in one single turn. The speakers use present and present perfect and all the verbs in the first person singular maintain their *-e* ending. This interaction contains one modal particle *denn* in the question *was ist denn* (what is wrong?) in turn 05. The only discourse particles found were *ach*, used twice, once in turn (04), and once in turn (07).

#### 6. 4 Corpus Extract #2 – Informal Dialogue

The next audio is also from the Basic structures: Freiburg corpus and it consists of a phone conversation between two colleagues.

- 01 S1 [da bin]
- 02 S2 [ja ]
- 03 S1 Ich schon wieder.
- 04 S2 Ja
- 05 S1 ich **hab** mir das überlegt. es ist **doch** vielleicht viel besser wenn ich zu dir rein komme (..) ich sitze da in meinem Auto. und mir pfeift der Wind nicht um die Ohren
- 06 S2 **ach so** nein nein ich ich **fahr** gern ein bißchen
- 07 S1 **ach so ja** wenn du gerne fährst
- 08 S2 **na ja** eben [ **doch doch** ich möcht gern ein bißchen fahren]
- 09 S1 [ **ah so ja ja super** ] ich wollte dir nur sagen  
sonst wäre ich zu dir gekommen
- 10 S2 **och** (..) das ist **aber** auch sehr nett [ **ne** ]
- 11 S1 [ **nicht?** findest du?]
- 12 S2 [danke dass du ] / und **n** bißchen Bewegung (..)   
Bewe[gung]
- 13 S1 [genau]
- 14 S2 muß ich ha[ben]. Ich
- 15 S1 [ja]
- 16 S2 bin jetzt vier Wochen nur gegessen (..) das heißt vier **ja** vier Woc [hen **ja**]
- 17 S1 [gerne] **ja ja** gut dann  
bis glei [ch **ne**] ? [ja ]tschüß
- 18 S2 [Ja bis] ein Uhr **ni [cht?** ] (..) mit gemahlenem Kaff [ee]
- 19 S1 [ja] ja ja
- 20 S2 grüß dich
- 21 S1 bis dann

Figure 4: Informal Dialogue IV (*Basic structures: Freiburg corpus*)

Contrary to what was found in the textbook extract, this phone call conversation contains a significant number of overlaps (10), short pauses (5), and one false start with the subordinating conjunction *dass* (turn 12), promptly reformulated by the speaker. The turns are also of different lengths and in three different ones (03, 17, and 18) the speakers omit the verb, answering with a few words (*ich schon wieder* – it’s me again) or with a prepositional phrase (*Ja bis ein Uhr nicht? mit gemahlenem Kaffee* - yes, until 1pm, right? with ground coffee). There is only one dependent clause introduced by *wenn* (if), in which the verb is the final position, and there are two instances, in turn 05 and 09, in which the clauses are connected through coordinating conjunctions. The

conjugated verb is in the second position throughout the entire recording. The tenses used are present and present perfect. Additionally, this audio contains five modal particles, namely *doch* (three times), *eben*, and *aber*. The speakers also use a high number of discourse particles: *ach so*, expressing surprise, *na ja* combined with *eben*, expressing agreement with the previous statement, *ja* which conveys the engagement of the speakers to the conversation, *och* also conveying surprise, *ne?* (twice) and *nicht?* used at the end of the sentences (together with *findest du?*- do you think?) to emphasize the utterances and as a mean to capture the listener's attention. In turns 05 and 06 there are two verbs, *haben* (to have) and *fahren* (to go with a mean of transportation) that lose their unstressed *-e* ending.

### 6.5 Textbook Extract #3 – Party

The next recording is a phone call between two friends trying to make plans for the night. This audio was used as a “true or false” exercise for intermediate German.

- 01     **S1**   Hallo Julia, wie geht's? Wo bist du?
- 02     **S2**   Ich bin noch zu Hause und warte, dass Marie anruft. Sie ist auf einer Party und sie wollte mir sagen, wie es dort ist. Aber sie hat ihr Handy ausgemacht und ich erreiche sie nicht.
- 03     **S1**   Tim und ich, wir sind gerade vor dem Excelsior. Da ist heute Abend ein Konzert. Jetzt gehen wir gerade rein .. **Oh je**, es ist so laut hier. Ich **ruf'** gleich nochmal an und sage, wie es ist. Und dann kannst du **ja** nachkommen.
- 04     **S2**   Nein, auf ein Konzert habe ich heute keine Lust. Und auf dieses Warten am Handy auch nicht. Letzten Samstag habe ich den ganzen Abend nur telefoniert und am Ende war ich nirgends. Immer nur von einem Ort zum anderen bin ich gegangen und hatte das Handy am Ohr. Eigentlich finde ich diese Verabredungen, wo alles offen bleibt und jeder flexibel ist, ziemlich **blöd**.
- 05     **S1**   Julia, ich höre dich nicht mehr. Es ist **total** laut hier, aber **cool**. Also bis gleich. Ich **schreib'** dir eine SMS.

Figure 5: Informal Dialogue V (*Kaleidoskop*)

The sentences in this conversation, with no overlaps or false starts, are relatively short. There is only one short pause. There are three subordinating clauses, two in turn 2, one with *dass* and the other one introduced by *wie*, one in the last line of turn 03, both introduced by *wie* (how), and one relative clause in the last lines of turn 04 introduced by the relative pronoun *wo* (where). In these clauses, the verbs are in the final position. When the sentences are introduced by the adverbs *da* (here/there) and *jetzt* (now) in turn

03, and by the prepositional phrases *auf ein Konzert* (at a concert) or *auf dieses Warten* (of this waiting), the verb is in the second position. The forms of the verbs *anrufen* (to call with the phone) and *schreiben* (to text) in turns 03 and 05 lose their *-e* ending. The tenses used are present, present perfect and the verb *sein* is in the simple past. This conversation contains one modal particle, *ja*, and one discourse particle, *oh je*, expressing negative surprise, both in turn 03. In turn 03, there is also the adjective intensifier *total* combined with *laut* (loud).

### 6. 6 Corpus Extract #3 – Party

This audio is a phone conversation between two friends making final arrangements to meet. This file was taken from the corpus Dialogue Structures.

- 01 S1 hallo Karin  
 02 S2 hallo Wölfchen.  
 03 S1 na wie geht s **denn**  
 04 S2 gut (..) danke.  
 05 S1 hast du die Bowle schon angesetzt  
 06 S2 Ja.  
 07 S1 [mhm ]  
 08 S2 [**die** ruht] auf dem Balkon  
 09 S1 ja (..) wie lange soll sie **denn** noch ruhen  
 10 S2 das heißt also wann du kommen sollst.  
 11 S1 ja  
 12 S2 so gegen acht hab ich den andern gesagt.  
 13 S1 Gut (..) [ja ]  
 14 S2 [vor allen] dingen wirst du erstaunt sein wer noch kommt ich [denke].  
 15 S1 [eh ]  
 16 S2 daß es dich freuen wird  
 17 S1 **oh** es freut mich natürlich (Pause) ich weiß  
 18 S2 du weißt **bloß** nicht wer hm  
 19 S1 Bitte  
 20 S2 du weißt **bloß** nicht wer  
 21 S1 **äh** (..) **doch** ich weißt du ich kann mir das schon denken [**ne**]  
 22 S2 [**ja**] wer denn



- 23 S1 ich brauche nur deine Umgebung da unten abzugrasen **ne**
- 24 S2 [ aha ]
- 25 S1 [und äh] (Pause) äh ich hab mir gedacht (..) da in in diesen Häusern da wohnt **doch** eh (..) das Fräulein Meier **ja**
- 26 S2 **die** kommt aber nicht
- 27 S1 **die** kommt dann nicht.
- 28 S2 Nee
- 29 S1 und dann in den Häusern wohnt da noch Fräulein Schäfer.
- 30 S2 das wußt ich nicht
- 31 S1 [nee]
- 32 S2 [nee] **die** kommt auch nicht.
- 33 S1 **die** nicht
- 34 S2 [nee ]
- 35 S1 [ja dann] weiß ich es nicht wer.
- 36 S2 [**siehste**]
- 37 S1 da noch [in Frage käme].
- 38 S2 [**siehste** ]
- 39 S1 dann fehlt mir nämlich jeder logische Anschluß
- 40 S2 es ist **zwar** gar nichts Exquisites aber ich denke daß es jedenfalls (..) zum / zur zur Unterhaltung des Abends beitragen wird

Figure 6: Informal Dialogue VI (Dialogue Structures)

This recording has overlaps (10), long (2) and short (7) pauses, and repetitions (2). It contains also short turns, whereas turns 14, 21, and 25 contain two complete clauses, and turn 40 has three. There is one clause introduced by *wer* in turn 14, with the verb in final position. The subject in the third position is found in the sentences introduced by the time references *so gegen acht* (around eight), by the adverb *allerdings* (certainly), and by the prepositional phrase *in den Häusern* (in the houses). Both speakers in turns 22 and 33 omit the verbs in their questions. There is a passive form in the last turn used by the second speaker. The first person singular of the verbs *haben* (to have) in turn 12 and *wissen* (to know) in turn 30 lose their *-e* endings, while in turns 36 and 38 there are two examples of the assimilation of the pronoun *du* in the nominative case with the verb *sehen* (to see). These speakers show a preference for the demonstrative *die* over the personal pronoun *sie* (she) in turns 08, 26, 27, 32, and 33. This recording has a total of ten modal particles, *denn* used three times, *bloß* and *doch* used twice, and *aber*, *schon*

and *zwar* used once. The speakers make large use of discourse particles: *ja* (except for the *ja* in turn 6) at the beginning and at the end of a sentence, *na* to initiate the conversation, *äh aha* to confirm understanding, and *eh* to signalize hesitation. *Ne* is used twice at the end of the sentences in turns 21 and 23 by the same speaker to indirectly request confirmation. Interestingly, in turn 21 this speaker uses the pronoun *du* (you) in-between two sentences.

### 6.7 Textbook Extract #4 – Interview

The last activity from the textbook analyzed in this section is a formal interview, and it was used as a “true or false” activity in chapter tests for intermediate German.

- |    |    |   |
|----|----|---|
| 01 | S1 | Frau Lopez, ich schreibe einen Artikel darüber, wie sich Ausländer hier in Deutschland fühlen. Sie sind <b>doch</b> Spanierin, <b>nicht wahr</b> ?  |
| 02 | S2 | Nein, ich komme aus Argentinien und studiere jetzt seit zwei Jahren hier in Mainz.  |
| 03 | S1 | Warum wollten Sie gerade in Deutschland studieren?  |
| 04 | S2 | Ich möchte Deutschprofessorin werden, wenn möglich an der Universität in Buenos Aires.  |
| 05 | S1 | Und wie gefällt es Ihnen hier in Deutschland?   |
| 06 | S2 | Am Anfang, als mein Deutsch noch nicht so gut war, gab es manche Probleme. Ich fand die Leute manchmal ein bisschen kühl.   |
| 07 | S1 | Was für Situationen gab es da zum Beispiel?   |
| 08 | S2 | Zum Beispiel, wenn ich am Bahnhof ein Ticket kaufen wollte oder jemanden nach dem Weg fragte, waren die Leute manchmal ungeduldig und ihre Antworten ziemlich kurz.   |
| 09 | S1 | Und wie sind Ihre Nachbarn?   |
| 10 | S2 | Ach, die sind eigentlich sehr nett. Und inzwischen habe ich sogar gute Freunde im Haus. Nur am Anfang haben die Kinder Dinge gesagt, wie „Warum sprichst du so komisch?“ Doch das sagen sie schon lange nicht mehr. |
| 11 | S1 | Was finden Sie wichtig, wenn man ins Ausland geht?  |
| 12 | S2 | Ganz wichtig ist, dass man schnell die Sprache lernt. Dann ist es einfacher sich auch an die Kultur und die Menschen zu gewöhnen.   |
| 13 | S3 | Haben Sie vielen Dank für das Interview, Frau Lopez.  |

Figure 7: Formal Dialogue VII (*Kaleidoskop*)

This interview starts with the interviewer addressing the speaker by and concluding with a formal farewell. Further, it does not contain any pauses, repetitions, corrections, or overlaps between participants, even though the absence of overlaps could be explained by the register, since it is a formal interview. Some sentences are connected through subordinating conjunctions, such as the ones introduced by *als* (as) in turn 06, *wenn* (if)

in turn 8, and *dass* (that) in turn 12. The verb in these sentences is always in the final position. The subject in the third position appears in the sentences introduced by prepositional phrases such as *am Anfang* (at the beginning) or by the adverb *dann* (then). The audio contains three modal particles, namely *eigentlich* (actually) in turn 10, and *doch* (x2) in the first and tenth turn. There are two discourse particles, *nicht wahr* (lit. not true?) at the end of the interviewer's first question, and *ach* to introduce an information that, from the perspective of the interviewer, would be probably judged as unexpected by the interviewer (based on the information in the two previous turns).

### 6. 8 Corpus Extract #4 – Interview

The final recording is a formal interview, taken also from the Basic Structures: Freiburg corpus. The speakers discuss crimes such as robbery, and property security.

- 01 S1 Herr Zimmermann sichern Sie ihr Eigentum. so oder ähnlich war schon häufig das Motto des kriminalpolizeilichen Vorbeugungsprogramms. das lässt darauf schließen, dass ihnen diese Form der Kriminalität Eigentumsdelikte am meisten zu schaffen macht, stimmt das?
- 02 S2 ganz ohne Frage. über sechzig Prozent aller bekannt gewordenen Straftaten sind Diebstähle. darum setzen wir auch dort mit den vorbeugenden Maßnahmen ein
- 03 S1 Ja. haben Sie jetzt im neuen Jahr schon **n** Überblick? wie sich die (..) die Eigentums kriminalität im vergangenen Jahr entwickelt hat
- 04 S2 **nun** wir haben noch keine endgültigen Zahlen. es hat gerade begonnen das Jahr. aber, wenn ich die ersten sechs Monate dieses Jahres vergleiche mit neunundsechzig, haben wir wieder eine Zunahme der bekannt gewordenen Kriminalität festzustellen und vor allen Dingen auf Kosten der Diebstahls kriminalität. es sind über siebenundsechzigtausend Straftaten mehr im ersten Halbjahr siebzig als im Halbjahr davor
- 05 S1 ja man hat manchmal das Gefühl die Ganoven sehen sich **ja** auch ums und die wissen auch, wie sie am besten mit den Mitteln der Technik ihr Handwerk ausüben können, das heißt die die Kriminalpolizei muss auch immer auf dem neuesten Stand sein um die Leute zu beraten, stimmt das?
- 06 S2 ja wir bemühen uns natürlich sehr darum. wir haben mit den Firmen enge Kontakte, die derartige Alarmgeräte und Warngeräte herstellen, und ich meine, dass der Besuch der Beratungsstellen auch zeigt, dass immer mehr von der Bevölkerung **doch** Anteil nehmen an diesen Dingen und sich von uns beraten lassen

- 07 S1 Ja Stichwort Beratungsstellen gibt es genügend davon in der Bundesrepublik?.
- 08 S2 es könnte vielleicht ein paar mehr geben. wir haben über fünfzig im ganzen Bundesgebiet bei allen Landeskriminalämtern bei den meisten Großstadtkriminalpolizeien. aber ich glaube **doch**, dass gerade in den letzten Jahren durch die intensive Aufklärung der Bevölkerung der Besuch so stark zugenommen hat, dass die Dienststellen verstärkt werden mussten und wir eigentlich noch mehr Beratungsstellen draußen im Lande [brauchten ],
- 09 S1 [weiterhin Früchte trägt], man kann den Erfolg zwar nicht messen nicht zählen. aber sicherlich die Publikation hilft dazu beitragen, daß die Leute ein bißchen mehr aufpassen, ihr Eigentum zu sichern, schönen Dank Herr Zimmermann.

This interview, like the file from the textbook, starts with the interviewer addressing the speaker and ends with a formal farewell. There is also one overlap between turn 08 and 09 but no false starts or repetitions. It displays very long turns which are connected with almost equal frequency through parataxis and hypotaxis. However, while the dependent clauses are here also introduced by subordinating conjunctions such as *dass* and *wenn*, in turns 04 and 06 (the second *dass*-sentence in the latter) the verbs *vergleichen* (to compare) and *nehmen* (to take) used with *Anteil* (part) are not in final position as they should be. The instances in these turns are clear examples of *Ausklammerung*. Turn 04 is also interesting because of the instance of right dislocation in the first line. *Das Jahr* (the year), which is attached at the end of the sentence *es hat gerade begonnen* (it as just started), clarifies the antecedent of the neuter pronoun *es* (it) in the nominative case. Although the verb is almost everywhere in the second position, in the second line of turn 09, the subject is found after the adverb *sicherlich* (certainly), in a position that should have been occupied by the verb. A total of three modal particles were utilized in this text: *ja* and *doch* (used twice). This interview has also two discourse particles, namely *nun* at the beginning of the turn 04, and *ich mein* (I mean) in the second line of turn 06.

## 7. Discussion

The comparison of the listening assessment material used for elementary and intermediate German level tests carried out in this study provides some insights about the language presented to learners in the chapter tests to assess students' listening skills. At the syntactical level, the extracts for the German classes have a significantly low number of pauses, no repetitions, false starts or overlaps, whereas the files from the

database contain a higher number of instances of such elements. Although both the listening activities and the recordings from the database show a similar frequency distribution for coordination and subordination, the length of the turns in the authentic recording was significantly shorter than the ones used in the classrooms. The only exception was the formal interview from the database, in which some turns contained complex sentences formed by one or more dependent and relative clauses. Deviances from the standard position of the verbs in main and subordinate clauses were found only in the recordings from the database, as well as turns with no verbs or pronouns, in which the speakers answered only with two words or with a prepositional phrase. Cases of right dislocation and *Ausklammerung* were found only in the second type of data. Demonstrative pronouns in place of personal pronouns were notably higher in the recordings from the database, since only one instance was found in the listening activities used for the chapter tests. The use of tenses such as present, present perfect, and simple past in both types of data was very similar. With regard to the lexical elements, the words *Kumpel* (buddy) and *blöd* (stupid) were found in the first type of data, together with the use of the adjective intensifier *total*. Conversely, the recordings from the corpus of the University of Mannheim encompass words such as *gucken* (to see), *super*, and the combination of the intensifier *richtig* and the adjective *cool*, as well as some forms of the verb conjugated in the first person singular without the unstressed *-e* ending. These extracts also contain two instances of the assimilation of the pronoun *du* (du) with the verb conjugated in the second person singular (*siehste*), as well as occurrences of the use of the contracted form of the indefinite articles. Instances of modal particles were found in both type of recordings; however, the number in the recordings from the database is significantly higher than the one in the listings for the German chapter tests.

Similar to what was found for the modal particles, a higher number of discourse particles were found in the recordings from the database of German spoken language. The speakers in these five audio files used indeed a wide variety of such particles to carry out distinct functions, such as showing surprise, hesitation, and interest in what the other participant was saying. Further, the recordings show how the speakers used discourse particles such as *ne?/nicht?* at the end of the sentences as a means to demand a deeper attention from their listeners.

Overall, the recordings from the database display a broader mixture of traits which are typical of authentic spoken German unlike the listening activities used for the tests of the elementary and intermediate levels. These features range from the syntactic organization of words in the turns to the lexical and discourse elements used while speakers are engaging in spontaneous interactions. Inversely, the listening activities did not display such variation. These findings suggest that the listening activities used in the chapter tests contain samples of aural speech that can be labeled as not authentic and far from authentic spoken German. Additionally, the analysis of this study provides support for Vandergrift & Goh (2012), Field (2013), Wagner (2016b), Wagner & Wagner (2016), and Ockey & Wagner (2018), who claimed that, as discussed in the introduction, listening activities heavily influenced by reading and writing pedagogy are extremely common in many second language classrooms. The activities analyzed in this study disregard, in fact, those traits of spoken German that scholars have defined as typical for authentic speech. Overall, this study reveals a similar scenario to the one described by Gilmore (2007) for English, at least as far as the type of language used to assess listening skills at this institution is concerned.

## **8. Conclusion and Directions for Future Research**

The results from the present study have shown that the language presented to the learners appears to be less than authentic, since it lacks several linguistic features which are characteristic of spoken German. As recently reported by Gilmore, different studies have shown that authentic material gives learners the opportunity to focus on a larger variety of features than textbooks do. The present study has also demonstrated that the recordings from the Database of Spoken German contain a mixture of syntactic, lexical, and discursive traits that were for the most part missing from the listening activities implemented in the classrooms. Gilmore (2008) compared the potential of authentic material versus textbook material for the development of communicative competence. His studies found that the group that received authentic samples of texts made statistically significant improvements compared with the control group in different types of competence. Belz & Viaktina (2008) also found that the inclusion of samples of speech by native speakers, together with the implementation of pedagogical pragmatic, meta-pragmatic, and form-focused instructions, had positive effects on the acquisitions of the German modal particles and *da*-compounds. In more general terms, the use of

authentic material has been proven to have a significant impact on the teaching of German at different levels. Abraham & Schiestl (2017), for instance, show that the use of authentic material for the teaching of varieties of German improved the capacity of learners to recognize Austrian, German and Swiss varieties. Vandergrift & Goh (2012) suggest the implementation of a “metacognitive” pedagogical approach, according to which students are made aware of the auditive processes and are encouraged to develop different strategies to improve their performances. The sequence they propose supports not only listening comprehension, but also specific metacognitive processes such as prediction, verification, monitoring, problem-solving, and evaluation, enhancing “the learners’ knowledge about learning to listen”. In light of this consideration, scholars such as Lightfoot (2016) recommend the implementation of authentic material in the classroom that is probably similar to the files from the Database of Spoken German. This study has indeed showed that the material used to assess listening comprehension does not contain many of traits of spoken German.

The findings of this study also suggest the need to conduct similar analyses across languages since, as mentioned in the introduction, very little research has been carried out on languages other than English. The present study bridged a gap in the literature by reporting its use in the German setting at a US university for beginner levels. Furthermore, this study focused only on the activities used in the chapter tests, while more extensive research on listening for German as a foreign language could also incorporate those listening activities used as homework or class exercises.

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## **Keywords**

Listening; Assessment; Second Language Acquisition; Authenticity;

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