# Structural linguistic characteristics of podcasts as an emerging register of CMC

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## 1. Why study podcasts?

- Podcasts are a new audio-based medium
  - They facilitate the sharing and broadcasting of content to large audiences
  - They serve as both source of information and entertainment
  - They are marked by usage practices different from traditional radio
- Little is known about their structural linguistic characteristics
  - Which linguistic features are used in podcasts?
  - How do their linguistic characteristics differ from other registers?
  - Are they a newly emerging register of CMC?

## 2. Register variation

Registers result from linguistic variation in the **lexical and grammatical choices** that language users make in different **contexts of usage** (Biber & Conrad 2001).

➪ Explore this linguistic variation in podcasts by comparing them to other registers and situate them in a **space of linguistic variation**

## 3. Multi-dimensional analysis

The tool to study register variation is multi-dimensional analysis (MDA).

➪ Reduce a large number of linguistic features to a small number of dimensions

1. Count the frequency of linguistic features in texts
2. Analyse their co-occurrence patterns and correlate them to different registers
3. Interpret linguistic features in terms of their communicative functions in texts

## 4. Podcast transcripts as corpus

Our data samples 64 million words of **podcast transcripts** in English (Clifton et al. 2020) and 27 million words across 9 different **traditional spoken** and 10 **computer-mediated registers** of English. The podcasts cover topics like Arts, Business, Comedy, History, Science, or Sports.

| | |
|---|---|
| Podcasts | Spotify Podcasts Dataset |
| Traditional registers | British National Corpus, Santa Barbara Corpus of Spoken American English, The Pear Stories |
| CMC registers | Corpus of Online Registers of English |

## 5. Linguistic characteristics of podcasts

Podcasts emerge as a firmly **spoken register**. They combine features of **involved** and **on-line spontaneous** discourse with some features of **narration** and **informational language**.

➪ Reflects their versatile use as medium of information and entertainment

**Involved features**

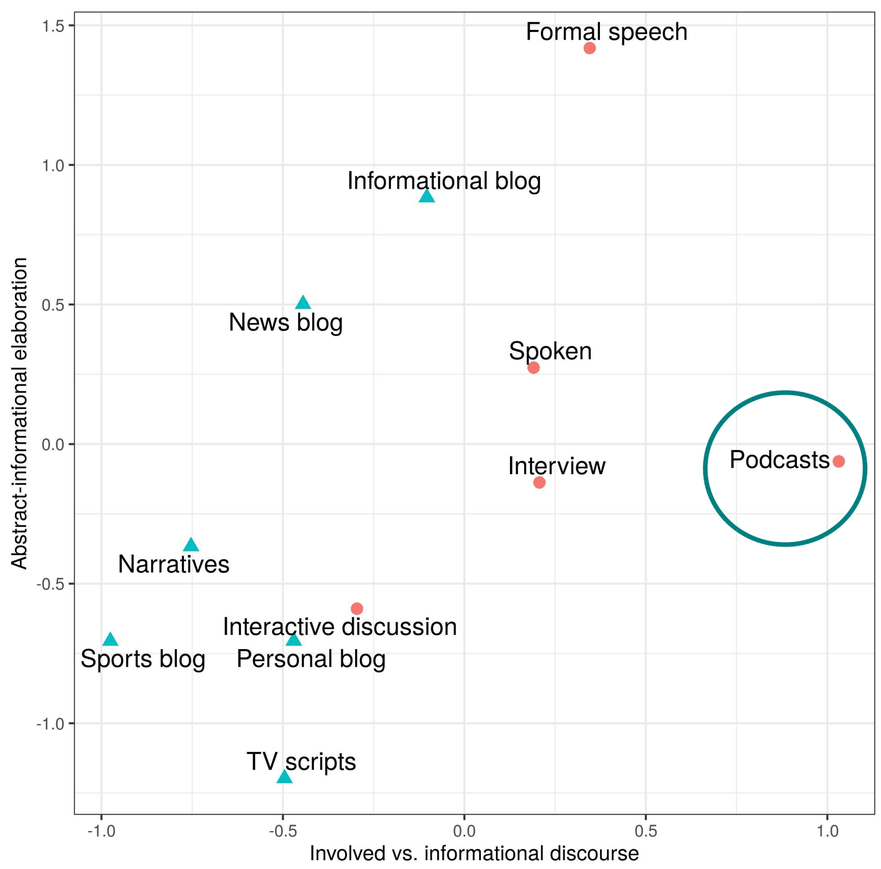
- Contractions, demonstratives, first and second person pronouns, present tense verbs, emphatics like *for sure*, private verbs like *feel*, *think*

**Narrative features**

- Past tense verbs, third person pronouns, and perfect aspect

**Informational features**

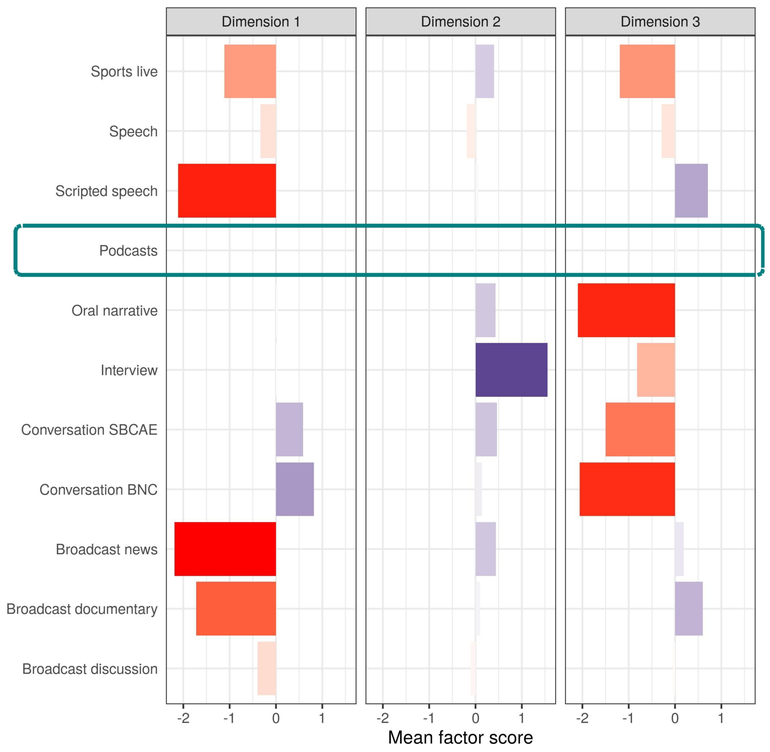
- Average word length, nouns, nominalisations (nouns ending, e.g., in *-ity* or *-tion*), attributive adjectives, passives, or conjuncts




Podcasts and registers of computer-mediated communication in CORE. Red dots index spoken, green triangles index written registers.

## 6. Podcasts are unique

- Podcasts are unlike any of the analysed spoken and written CMC registers
- If compared to other CMC registers, they come closest to interview
- Podcasts are also different from traditional spoken registers across all three dimensions
- On individual dimensions they share some features with the traditional spoken registers oral narratives, interviews and broadcast discussion
- Dimension 1: Involved vs. informational. Dimension 2: Narrative. Dimension 3: Abstract elaboration.




Podcasts and traditional registers of English. Colour intensity indicates strength of mean factor scores. Red bars indicate negative values; blue bars indicate positive values.

## 7. Examples

How are linguistic features used to create the conversational style of podcasts?

Involved features in **red**; narrative in **blue**; informational in **green**

> **That's** how **I** try to live now. Like **that's** how **I've kind of** grown up already like **I** grew vegetables and people **think that's** harder than it is [...]

> This conflict **led** to the **creation** of the 17th parallel [...].

> **but** the plague in the 6th century **evaporated**, **you know**, somewhere between a third or half of the Middle East population **was wiped out**. The Persian Empire **basically** went bankrupt **because** of the plague [...]

## 8. Conclusions & further information

Podcasts do not align well with any other register.

➪ Emerging register of CMC
➪ Some amount of internal variability due to its versatile purposes

Ongoing work

- Exploring the extent of register-internal variability in podcasts
- Describing the lexico-grammatical features of podcast subregisters

Paper, with references: