B. Defining Modal Particles

Handout 4: Defining Modal Particles: denn

a) Various meanings of denn:

1. Coordinating conjunction (= ‘because’)
   
   Example (email):
   Ich werde jetzt versuchen alle deine Fragen zu beantworten, denn es freut mich, dass du so neugierig bist.

2. Temporal adverb (=dann, ‘then’) 
   
   Example (email):
   Nun denn, das war’s für heute.

3. Modal particle:
   • refers back to something previously stated or to the context of situation
   • renders a question more natural and friendly
   • emphasizes the interest of the speaker in the interlocutor’s response

b) Types of sentences in which the MP denn can appear:

   Only interrogatives, or questions (used to ask someone something):

   Examples (chat):
   Wie spät ist es denn jetzt bei euch?

(c) Examples of native speaker usage of the MP denn with commentary:

   Example (email):
   na, wie geht es dir denn heute? [...]
   Ah, du schwimmst. Wie oft machst du das denn?

   Commentary: In the first sentence, which is an email opening, denn refers back to a previous correspondence between Nina and Paula. In the second occurrence, denn refers back to the preceding sentence. Denn thus functions as a cohesive device, or connector. In both occurrences, denn also expresses friendliness and interest in the partner’s response.