

# Anything *man* can do, *dude* can do, too

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**Abstract:** This paper investigates the use and meaning of the English discourse particles *man* and *dude*. Discourse particles are defined as “linguistic items that function on cognitive, expressive, social, and textual domains” (Schiffrin 2018:54). Additionally, they are “syntactically both optional and simple” (McCready 2009:671). While there has been substantial research investigating cross-linguistic patterns of discourse particles and expressives, few accounts have focused on generational nuances within these analyses. Academic understandings of *man* (published in 2009 by a then 35-year-old McCready), and current uses of *man* and *dude* by young speakers appear to differ. While the analysis in 2009 may have been accurate for the time, the distribution and use of the particle *man* has declined in the last ten years and is increasingly replaced by *dude*. This paper proposes an analysis of *dude* following McCready’s (2009) analysis of *man* and posits that *dude* shares many features of *man*.

**Keywords:** discourse particles, dude, man, generational change

## 1 Background

In 2009, McCready published a paper entitled “What man does”, which offers an analysis of the discourse particle *man* and concludes that, depending on sentence positioning and intonation, it can add emotion and/or intensification to a given utterance. McCready states that *man* behaves differently than other particles and other similar terms, as seen in the examples below:

- (1) a. John came to the party, dude.
- b. John came to the party, girl.
- c. John came to the party, bro. (McCready 2009:720)

McCready agrees that these particles behave similarly to sentence-final *man* but deems them appropriate only when addressing “individuals of a particular gender” (2009:720). While this may have been the case ten years ago, in recent years the particle *dude* has transcended gender boundaries, particularly for younger speakers. What once would have been achieved by the particle *man* appears to have shifted towards being achieved by *dude*. In exploring this shift, this paper seeks to apply McCready’s tests of *man* as a particle towards *dude* in order to assess the similarities and differences.

Past research has defined *dude* as a “general address term for a group (same or mixed gender)” (Kiesling 2004:282). The term carries information about the speaker and listener’s relationship, indexing effortlessness and *cool solidarity*, a term defined by Kiesling as a way for the speaker to index a simultaneous stance of “solidarity (camaraderie) and distance (nonintimacy)” (2004:286), which are usually at odds with each other. McCready (2009)’s analysis of *man* focuses on sentence-initial and sentence-final examples, and as such, this paper will also be concerned with sentence-initial and sentence-final examples of *dude*. The paper will be broken into two sections — the first focuses on sentence-initial *dude*, and the second on sentence-final *dude*. The paper will conclude with implications and opportunities for further research.

## 2 Applying McCready's *man* tests to sentence-initial *dude*

Existing research on the particle *man* has shown that it has different functions in different positions. McCready (2009) demonstrates that sentence-initial vs. sentence-final *man* play different roles. Sentence-initial *man* exhibits emotion, often surprise, and offers intensification, while sentence-final *man* strengthens the action performed by the sentence.

The following section will review McCready's tests which diagnose sentence-initial *man* as contributing emotion and intensification.

### 2.1 Vocativity test

While *man* could be used as a way to address someone (vocatively), McCready (2009) clarifies that the uses of sentence-initial *man* under analysis are not necessarily vocative. *Man* does not "require an addressee [in order] to be usable" (McCready 2009:674), and examples given in McCready's analysis are monologues. While a vocative reading is always available, it is not necessary for understanding. This holds true even in today's uses of *man* — its readings seem almost wistful, as if the speaker is addressing no one in particular, as seen in the example below:

- (2) Optional vocative reading of *man*:

Man, I can't believe I forgot to pay that bill.

In this example, *man* can be used vocatively, as if the speaker is addressing themselves, but can also be used as a way for the speaker to lament or express regret to an addressee.

*Dude* can also be used in a monologue, but intuitively it seems that the speaker is addressing themselves. This is seen in the example below:

- (3) Optional vocative reading of *dude*:

Dude, I can't believe I forgot to pay that bill.

In this example, *dude* would traditionally (pre-2000's) have been used as a vocative; the speaker would have used it to address someone else. However, today, it appears to be in a transitional place, a discourse particle that originated from a vocative place and has since evolved. In this example, *dude* does not have to be used with another speaker present — one could imagine a young person saying this to themselves, alone in a room. In this way, it is almost as if the speaker is saying to themselves "Dude, I can't believe you (I) forgot to pay that bill".

Contrasted with a typical address term, such as a name, *dude* appears to behave more like *man*, as can be seen in the example below:

- (4) Contrast of *man* and *dude* with an address term:

- a. Man, I can't believe you're going out tonight.
- b. Dude, I can't believe you're going out tonight.
- c. John, I can't believe you're going out tonight.

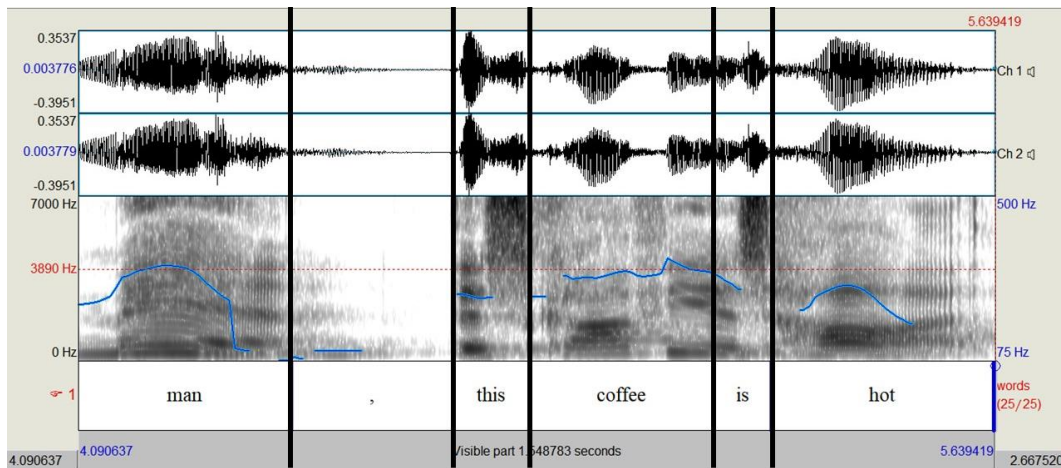
In the example above, *man* and *dude* are used to soften any potential judgement, invoking stances of cool solidarity between speaker and addressee. The use of a name in this context may feel exceptionally (and strangely) professional and distanced between friends. Notably, though, *man* feels wistful, as if the subject is saying it to themselves, whereas *dude* feels more vocative. In this

way, it is as if the three terms can be laid out among a spectrum of vocativity, with an address term being the most vocative, *man* being the least vocative, and *dude* falling somewhere in between.

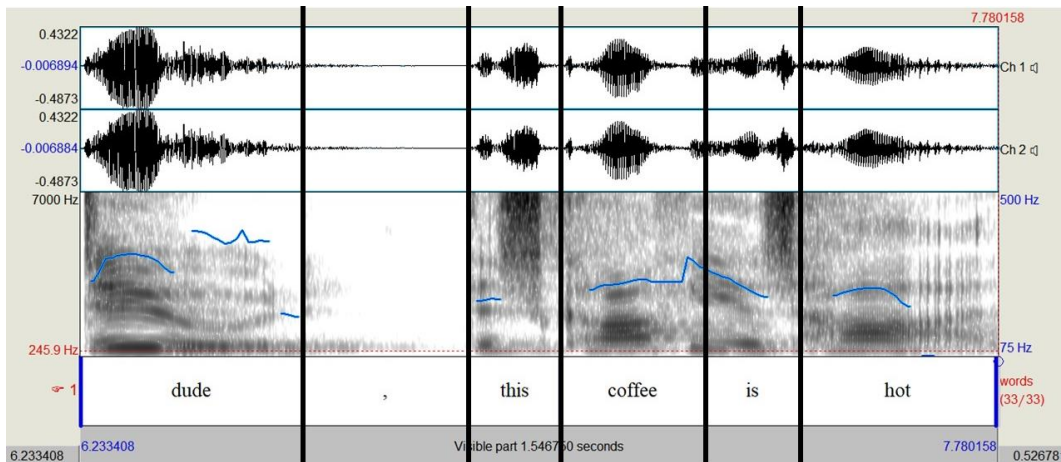
For the purposes of this analysis, examples of *dude* will be monologues, with the assumption being that if any vocative readings arise, they refer to the speaker addressing themselves. In this way, *dude* does not behave exactly like *man*, but still seems less vocative than a typical address term.

## 2.2 Intonational pattern test

Sentence-initial *man* is analyzed in McCready (2009) as having two types of intonational patterns: comma intonation and integrated intonation. Comma intonation separates the particle from the rest of the sentence using a pause, as can be seen below in Figures 1 and 2.

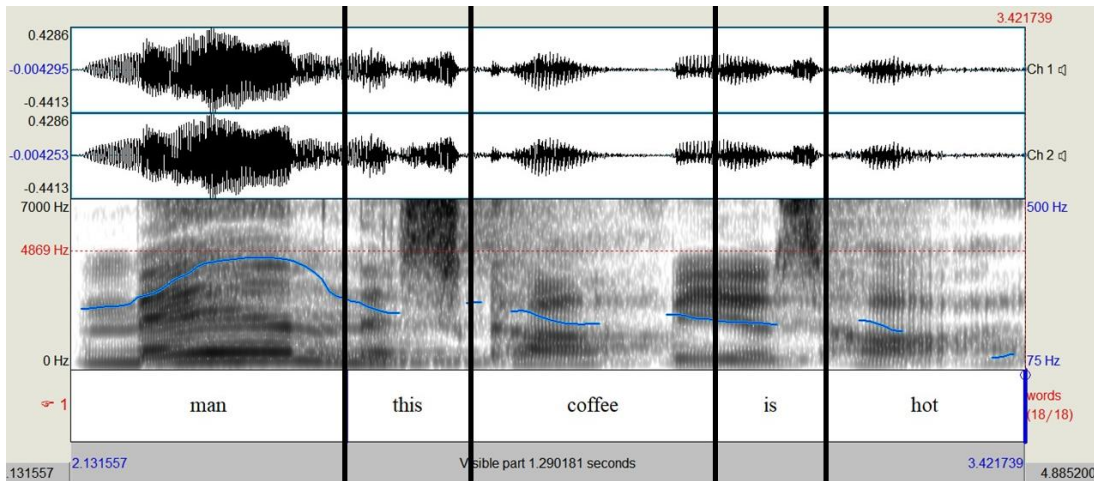


**Figure 1:** *Man, this coffee is hot* with comma intonation; spectrogram produced in Praat

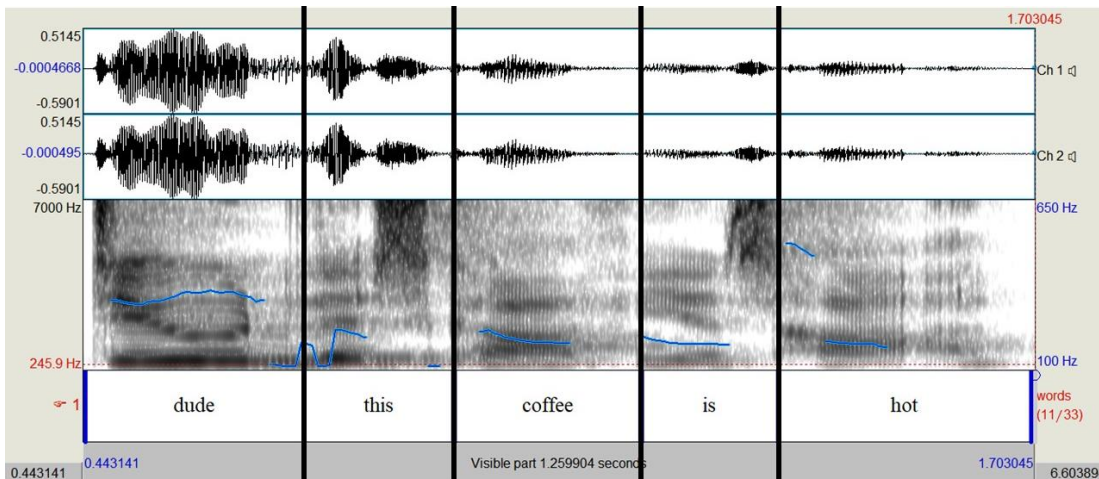


**Figure 2:** *Dude, this coffee is hot* with comma intonation; spectrogram produced in Praat

Both spectrograms above have a pause between the sentence-initial particle and the rest of the sentence, in what is called comma intonation. This differs from integrated intonation, in which the particle and the rest of the sentence are spoken with no comma-like break between them. An example of this can be seen below in Figures 3 and 4.



**Figure 3:** *Man, this coffee is hot* with integrated intonation; spectrogram produced in Praat



**Figure 4:** *Dude, this coffee is hot* with integrated intonation; spectrogram produced in Praat

As with *man*, the particle *dude* is felicitous in both comma and integrated intonation patterns, therefore satisfying the intonation test. Henceforth, when providing examples meant to be produced with integrated intonation, the comma will be omitted.

Interestingly, exaggerated intonation is often associated with *dude* more than *man*, and *dude* appears to have a larger range of acceptable intonation varieties. This is often stereotyped as a characteristic of a “young, surfer dude” or “California valley” type of speaking pattern in popular media portrayals, as seen in the image below.



**Figure 5:** The many intonational patterns of *dude*. This image was created using art taken from a Zits comic (Scott & Borgman 2017), coupled with spectrograms produced in Praat. The intonation was determined by asking three Native English speakers how they would pronounce each variation of *dude* based on the comic provided. Intonation was recorded by the author and then confirmed again using the Native English speakers. Note the vowel quality (high front /u/, characteristic of young speakers) and pitch variation.

As illustrated in the image, *dude* is popular for its exaggerated and drawn-out intonation, in ways that *man* is not. Surely these effects could be achieved using *man*, but *dude* is particularly famous for these intonations. It may be that these acceptably (and almost expected) exaggerated intonations allow *dude* to achieve higher degree modification, and in some cases, it appears to convey additional meaning based on intonation pattern alone. In certain contexts and with certain intonation, *dude* can mean anything from “look out!” to “you just said something dumb”. This is explored in the examples below:

(5) Use of *dude* to convey that the speaker has done something dumb:

A: Turn left!

*B turns right.*

A: Dude. [neutral intonation, similar to the first image in Figure 5]

In the example above, person A only needs to say *dude* in order to convey that something funny or dumb has occurred. It is as if they are saying “dude [I can’t believe you just did that]”. However, *man* does not convey the same information based on intonation alone, as seen in example (6):

(6) Use of *man* to convey that the speaker has done something dumb:

A: Turn left!

*B turns right.*

A: #Man. [neutral intonation, similar to the first image in Figure 5]

In this example, *man* doesn’t convey the same information, and seems almost out of place. It appears that *dude* allows for a wider range of acceptable inferences to be made based off of how the speaker says the word, a quality that *man* lacks. Of course, further research is needed in order to analyze these different intonation patterns, but this appears to be a quality unique to *dude*.

### 2.3 Gradability and degree modification test

McCready (2009) posits that *man* can actually coerce gradability from an otherwise neutral sentence. Take the example below:

(7) Coerced gradability: *man*:

a. Man, we drank beers last night. (comma intonation)

b. Man we drank beers last night. (integrated intonation)

In this example, the sentence in (7b) pronounced with integrated intonation implies drinking more beers than the example in (7a). Is it possible for *dude* to coerce gradability in this same way? An example is given below:

(8) Coerced gradability: *dude*:

a. Dude, we drank beers last night. (comma intonation)

b. Dude we drank beers last night. (integrated intonation)

Both of the above intonation patterns are acceptable, and it appears to elicit the same effect of having more to drink in (8b) than in (8a). However, in this case, *dude* appears to have a strong vocative quality which would perhaps not be necessary in the *man* reading. It is hard to imagine a

scenario in which the example in (8b) would not be vocative, but it is equally hard to imagine a scenario in which the equivalent situation with *man* would also not be vocative, though this may be a generational difference or unpopular intuition. Regardless, *dude* appears to function as *man* does with regards to gradability.

## 2.4 Expressive-ness test

An expressive is a word which is “revealing of the perspective from which the utterance is made” (Potts 2007). Potts proposes six characteristics of expressives: (i) independence, (ii) non-displaceability, (iii) perspective dependence, (iv) descriptive ineffability, (v) immediacy, and (vi) repeatability. McCready applies these tests and finds that *man* satisfies many of them, concluding that “sentence-initial *man* is expressive in nature” (2009:683). The following section will assess how *dude* performs under these criteria.

### 2.4.1 Independence

Independence is defined by Potts as “expressive content [which] contributes a dimension of meaning that is separate from the regular descriptive content” (2007:166). In this case, the *regular descriptive content* relates to the regular truth conditions of the sentence. In other words, does the use of *dude* affect or change the truth conditions of a sentence?

McCready analyzes *man* by confirming that “direct denial only applies to at-issue semantic content” (2009:682) and concludes that it satisfies this component — direct denial applies to the truth conditions of the sentence, not to the use of *man*. This can also be seen with *dude*, as evident by the example below:

(9) Direct denial:

A: Dude, this coffee is hot!  
B: No!

In the example above, the denial *no* refers to the truth conditions of the sentence (the coffee not being hot), rather than denying the use of the term *dude*. In fact, there is no way for a conversation partner to “deny” the use of the term *dude*, leading to the conclusion that it satisfies the independence criterion, just as *man* does.

### 2.4.2 Non-displaceability

Potts states that expressives “predicate something of the utterance situation” (2007:166). In this case, the expressive dimension talks about the current speaker’s opinions at the present time, without being able to carry over into another time period. Like *man*, *dude* conveys information about the speaker’s attitudes at the time of the utterance.

### 2.4.3 Perspective dependence

Perspective dependence is the idea that the emotion conveyed by expressive content is evaluated as coming from a particular perspective, usually the speaker’s (Potts 2007). This gives the listener an idea of the speaker’s opinions. This is especially relevant in McCready (2009)’s analysis of *man*, which can convey the speaker’s feelings on an otherwise neutral sentence, as seen in the example below.

(10) Perspective dependence test: *man*:

Man, George Bush won again.

(McCready 2009:675)

In this example, the context of who utters the sentence matters in order to convey positive or negative attitudes. Intonation plays a role in this perception, but the conveyed attitude changes based on who uttered the phrase. This is true of *dude*, as seen below:

(11) Perspective dependence test: *dude*:

Dude, George Bush won again.

Just as with *man*, the listener must know the speaker's political opinions in order to understand the positive or negative emotions associated with this phrase. However, this is arguably a poor test, as the bare phrase *George Bush won again* without *man* or *dude* would also need perspective dependence in order to convey speaker attitudes, so this quality cannot necessarily be attributed to the particles doing the work. As mentioned before, *dude* uses a variety of different intonation patterns. Nonetheless, it appears that *dude* functions as *man* in this regard.

#### 2.4.4 Descriptive ineffability

Descriptive ineffability refers to the uniqueness of an expressive — that speakers are “never fully satisfied when they paraphrase expressive content using a descriptive [or] non-expressive term” (Potts 2007:166). McCready's analysis omits this criterion, conceding that it is “difficult to find a satisfying paraphrase” (2009:682). It is also important to point out that Geurts argues that descriptive ineffability is found “all over the lexicon” and should therefore not “draw the line between descriptive and expressive language” (2007:210). While this may be true, it is still a relevant factor — many descriptive adjectives can be easily described, yet expressives feel less accessible to straightforward translation. Following this, *man* and *dude* feel particularly ineffable in this sense — there are nuances behind their intonation and connotation that can carry subtle changes in meaning and tone. As slang has expanded, so have the nuances behind the meaning of each term. Young speakers today would likely use *dude* before *man*, and even at the time of writing, it seems that *dude* has fallen out of rotation and has been replaced by *bro* or *fam*, though these terms are used exclusively as address terms and require an addressee. Regardless, *dude* appears to function as *man* does here.

#### 2.4.5 Immediacy

Expressives achieve their intended attitude as soon as they are uttered — in this way, they behave much like performatives. McCready (2009) argues that *man* achieves this, and, similarly, it appears *dude* does as well — perhaps even in a stronger way than *man*. *Dude* has achieved cultural significance and is widely present in popular media, particularly in portrayal of teenagers and young men. Its use has immediate connotation and implication.

#### 2.4.6 Repeatability

Repeatability states that repetition of the expressive item strengthens the emotive content, rather than rendering it redundant (Potts 2007). McCready (2009:683) argues it would be “rather odd” to repeat the particle, but this appears to be a generational difference. While it would be strange to say



something like *Man, man, man* the way one could understandably repeat a swear word, the particle could be reasonably inserted in sentence fragments. This is illustrated in the example below.

(12) Repeatability examples:

- a. Damn, the coffee, damn, it's hot, damn!
- b. Man, the coffee, man, it's hot, man!
- c. Dude, the coffee, dude, it's hot, dude!

In these examples, the use of *man* and *dude* here convey urgency or even panic and would need to be accompanied by appropriate rising tone. Interestingly, if read in a neutral tone, these examples seem to need some 'like' particles, as if the speaker is speaking slowly or gathering their thoughts in true "surfer dude" style. Both examples have a strong vocative reading in this example, though, which may be why it was not proposed by McCready (2009). For the purposes of this analysis, both *man* and *dude* are able to pass the repeatability test.

### 2.4.7 Results of the expressive tests

The results of the all the expressives tests are summarized below.

**Table 1:** Results of the expressives tests

Test	<i>man</i> (McCready 2009)	<i>dude</i>
2.4.1 Independence	✓	✓
2.4.2 Non-displaceability	✓	✓
2.4.3 Perspective dependence	✓	✓
2.4.4 Descriptive ineffability	n/a	✓
2.4.5 Immediacy	✓	✓
2.4.6 Repeatability	n/a	✓

Based on the results of the expressives tests, it is reasonable to analyze both *dude* and *man* as having some type of expressive quality. In this way, sentence-initial *dude* functions the way *man* does in McCready (2009)'s analysis.

### 2.5 Summary: sentence-initial *dude*

After applying the *man* tests on *dude*, it is clear that they share many similarities. The results of the tests have been summarized in the table below:

**Table 2:** Results of the sentence-initial tests

Name	Does <i>dude</i> function as <i>man</i> ?
2.1 Vocativity	Not quite. While a vocative reading is not necessary, it intuitively still seems more accessible than a non-vocative reading.
2.2 Intonation patterns	Yes! In fact, <i>dude</i> may accept more exaggerated intonation.
2.3 Gradability / degree modification	Yes! Greater exaggeration in intonation patterns potentially allows for more degree modification than <i>man</i> .
2.4 Expressiveness	Yes! <i>Dude</i> appears to have expressive qualities just like <i>man</i> .

Based on these results, it is clear that sentence-initial *dude* functions quite similarly to *man*.

### 3 Applying McCready's *man* tests to sentence-final *dude*

The following section will review McCready (2009)'s tests which diagnose sentence-final *man* as contributing emotion and intensification. Importantly, sentence-final *man* and *dude* are both vocative — they require an addressee.

#### 3.1 No truth-conditional effects

Crucially, sentence-final *man* has no truth-conditional effects.

(13) Truth condition test: *man*:

- a. It's raining.
- b. It's raining, man. (McCready 2009:703)

In the above example, McCready (2009) points out that there is no situation in which (13a) is true but (13b) is false, or vice versa. This rings true for *dude* as well, as can be seen in the example below.

(14) Truth condition test: *dude*:

- a. It's raining.
- b. It's raining, dude.

This example demonstrates that, like *man*, *dude* does not contribute to the overall truth conditions of the sentence. There is an overall strengthening effect in these otherwise neutral sentences which will be explored by the second test.

#### 3.2 Imperatives

While *man* may not contribute to the truth conditions of a sentence, it can strengthen a sentence's emotional content or meaning. The strengthening properties of sentence-final *man* are best demonstrated using imperative commands, as in the following example:

(15) Imperative commands: *man* test:

- a. Go buy some sandwiches.
- b. Go buy some sandwiches, man. (McCready 2009:703)

According to McCready (2009), the sentence in (15b) appears to be more forceful or commanding than the sentence in (15a). While the truth conditions and overall request remain the same, the use of the *man* particle strengthens the command component of the imperative. The same can be said of *dude* in the following example:

(16) Imperative commands: *dude* test:

- a. Go buy some sandwiches.
- b. Go buy some sandwiches, dude.

The sentence in (16b) appears to strengthen the command as in the *man* examples but appears somehow gentler. It has the dual effect of strengthening the command while still sounding kind. This is due to the effect of cool solidarity conveyed by *dude* (Kiesling 2004). This is explored further in Section 4. *Dude* clearly serves to strengthen the commanding effect of imperatives.

### 3.3 Integrated intonation in questions

Sentence-final *man* can be pronounced with integrated intonation in question form, unlike sentence-initial *man*. This example is demonstrated below:

(17) Integrated intonation in questions: *man*:

- a. Man, what did you do last night? (sentence-initial *man*, comma intonation)
- b. #Man what did you do last night? (sentence-initial *man*, integrated intonation)
- c. What did you do last night, man? (sentence-final *man*, comma intonation)
- d. What did you do last night man? (sentence-final *man*, integrated intonation)

Again, it is important to stress that even in McCready (2019)'s analyses, these are vocative situations which require an addressee. McCready treats (17b) as infelicitous, but this is an interesting generational difference, as (17b) sounds acceptable in 2019. Despite this difference in intuition, the tests have been applied to *dude* below:

(18) Integrated intonation in questions: *dude*:

- a. Dude, what did you do last night? (sentence-initial *dude*, comma intonation)
- b. Dude what did you do last night? (sentence-initial *dude*, integrated intonation)
- c. What did you do last night, dude? (sentence-final *dude*, comma intonation)
- d. What did you do last night dude? (sentence-final *dude*, integrated intonation)

These cases seem felicitous, though it should be noted that a difference in intuitions on the *man* tests may confound this result. Regardless, it does appear that *dude* allows for integrated intonation in question form.

### 3.4 Summary: sentence-final *dude*

The table below summarizes the findings of the sentence-final tests:

**Table 3:** Results of the sentence-final tests

Name	Does <i>dude</i> function as <i>man</i> ?
3.1 No truth-conditional effects	Yes! As with <i>man</i> , <i>dude</i> does not affect the truth conditions of a sentence.
3.2 Imperatives	Yes! <i>Dude</i> strengthens an imperative command, just as <i>man</i> does.
3.3 Integrated intonation in questions	Yes! <i>Dude</i> allows for integrated intonation in question form.

The results of the sentence-final tests indicate that *dude* functions as *man* does in sentence-final position. This is most likely due to its vocative roots, and the natural reading of addressing someone at the end of a sentence.

## 4 Implications

Ultimately, it seems that *dude* and *man* share similar qualities of particles, particularly for speakers of a younger generation. It appears that *dude*'s use is on the rise, and it has shifted from being exclusively an address term to functioning in some ways as a particle. While *dude* may have originated as a term used for communication between men, it has since expanded for use between people of any and all gender orientations. This may be due to younger generations' views of gender, which tend to be more lenient towards gender non-conformity. Kiesling (2004) offers an interesting analysis of the role of *dude* in establishing bonds between men. An excerpt can be found below:

Masculine solidarity and heterosexism thus delimit a narrow range of ratified, dominant, and hegemonic relationships between American men, since masculine solidarity implies closeness with other men, while heterosexism entails nonintimacy with other men. *Dude* allows men to create a stance within this narrow range, one of closeness with other men (satisfying masculine solidarity) that also maintains a casual stance that keeps some distance (thus satisfying heterosexism).

(Kiesling 2004:283)

Increasingly, young people tend to reject heteronormativity and traditional gender roles, which may have effects on the social connotations of *dude*. While old speakers view this as a lazy term used between young men, young people have rejected the 'masculine' but kept the 'solidarity', resulting in a term that still indexes age and relationship status, yet which can be used with any gender. In this way, *dude* has shifted from a term among men to a term used by all, much the way *man* did. It has begun to adapt properties of particles, solidifying its place in young peoples' vernacular as a multi-purpose term.

Further research is needed to track the frequency of use and intuitions of young native speakers, in order to get a better idea of their distribution in English.

## 5 Conclusion

In conclusion, it appears that *dude* is functioning in some ways as *man*, at least for younger speakers. More research is needed in order to gain a consensus on the intuitions for these terms. It is clear, though, that *dude* has shifted from its use as plainly an address term and may still be in the process of undergoing this transition into a particle. Time will tell — *dude*, one day it might overtake *man* as the go-to particle!

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