Vague category markers as turn-final items in Irish English

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Corpus pragmatics and Irish English: Vague category markers as turn-final items

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ABSTRACT: This paper takes a corpus pragmatic approach to the analysis of Irish English by focusing on the organisation of turn-taking in two connected, though distinct, varieties of world Englishes, Irish English and British English. The aim of the research is two-pronged: on the one hand, we explore how naturally occurring conversation is organised in the two varieties for comparative purposes, seeking to understand in a more nuanced way how confluence in turn-taking is achieved in everyday interactions. In doing so, we contribute to the understanding of the similarities and differences between the varieties more generally, foregrounding the distinctiveness of Irish English in the pantheon of world Englishes. We also aim to contribute to the more pan-varietal enterprise of understanding the intricacies and complexities of everyday interaction, how deceptively basic interactional flow is achieved through the manipulation of small, interpersonally loaded items, turn initial and turn final, with the focus here on turn final items. We use two complementary corpora of naturally occurring spoken interaction, the Limerick Corpus of Irish English (LCIE), and a sample of

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the Cambridge and Nottingham Corpus of Discourse in English (CANCODE), and a corpus-based discourse analytic approach to explore turn-taking, its sequential organisation and pragmatic characteristics.

INTRODUCTION

This paper focuses on a genre of interaction that is both ubiquitous and taken-for-granted, casual conversation. Moreover, it proposes to foreground aspects of the structure of Irish English (IrE) conversation using samples of IrE collected as part of the Limerick Corpus of Irish English project (hereafter LCIE: Barker and O'Keeffe 1999; Farr et al. 2004; see also Kirk, this volume) by comparing it with a sample of another standardized variety, British English (BrE). There are a number of intersecting theoretical and analytical concerns which are implied for this research, to wit: the nature of the structure of casual conversation, and its validity as language data for analysis; the extent to which putative conversational structure is consistent or divergent across varieties of English, as well as the extent to which varieties of English can be compared at this level and how; and, finally, possible analytical frameworks and routes for examining in clear and systematic ways how aspects of conversation in any variety of a language are structured.

The first concern – the structure of casual conversation and its validity as data for the analysis – can be rather quickly dispatched at this stage. From the early 1960s on, research in what came to be known as conversation analysis (CA) has consistently demonstrated using detailed transcriptions of naturally occurring conversation what its originator, Harvey Sacks, referred to as 'order at all points' (Hutchby and Wooffitt 2008: 19). Conversation analytic

research has repeatedly underscored the necessity of taking a nuanced view of everyday conversation as an ostensibly simple and yet subtle, elaborate dance; how, as Firth distils it, 'ordinary, interactive talk must properly be viewed as a locally and delicately accomplished achievement, and that the "normal" and "routine" appearance of talk are the result of the participants' ceaseless and contingent application of complex though methodic practices' (1996: 237-238). This is one of the macro-levels at which the present research is situated: the description of spoken language data samples from IrE and BrE, and the assumption of order and patterning in the ways in which the talk itself (in this case, casual conversation) is structured. We combine insights from the published literature on conversation analysis with the qualitative and quantitative tools of corpus analysis, involving both automated and manual analyses, to investigate a specific analytical unit, the turn, in IrE and BrE. The concept and salience of the turn is discussed in detail in TURN ARCHITECTURE below.

While we have been referring generally and rather unproblematically to casual conversation, or everyday, interpersonal talk, the term *talk-in-interaction* is preferred by conversation analysts more generally (see Schegloff et al. 2002) as a more comprehensive term. It takes in precisely the type of everyday conversation amongst friends, family and close acquaintances at issue in the present study, but also interaction in institutional contexts, where the exigencies of the context shape and are shaped by the interaction itself (see Drew and Heritage 1993, for example). Of course, while multiple aspects of context influence unfolding interaction, a more immediate initial concern for the present study is a question prompted by the work of numerous researchers (whether or not they are working in a 'world Englishes' paradigm): the underlying order of everyday talk-in-interaction notwithstanding, does it follow that all varieties of English share similar conversational conventions?

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Sidnell (2001) reports on the turn-taking system in conversations in a Caribbean English creole (CEC), for example, refuting claims that these conversations are stereotypically "contrapuntal" or "anarchic" (when compared with turn-taking conventions for "American English"). Within his description and discussion of the characteristics of turn-taking in CEC, he reframes the issue as a question of the extent of variability in these conventions across communities and societies. Conventions in turn-taking, who has the right to speak, attitudes to silences, for example, or to conversational phenomena like overlapping and simultaneous speech clearly differ across cultures (Kachru and Smith 2008). Tannen (1984, 1985), for example, describes the equation of simultaneous (or overlapping) talk with high involvement style in New York Jewish culture, hence a positive rather than a negative value placed on simultaneous speech; Mushin and Gardner (2009) analyse the complexities of the nature of conversational silence in Australian Aboriginal talk-in-interaction, in which they report on what a 'comfortable silence' actually is and means in this context. Variation across conversational genres and cultures clearly takes place at a number of different levels. Broader sociocultural conventions create sociopragmatic conventions, and situational exigencies create complexes of pragmalinguistic choices no matter what speech communities are in question. In fact, the nature of conversational sub-genres can impact on features of conversation such as sequentiality, as Rühlemann and Gries (2015) have shown in relation to conversational storytelling.

So, while we hold these complexes of variation in mind (the sociocultural context, "national" varieties, variation in modes and genres, in ever decreasing circles) in order to compare the nature of the British and Irish conversation samples we take from the corpora introduced below, and make sense of how they are similar or different, we need to drill down further. To do so, we interrogate in detail how turns are constructed and managed.

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Specifically, we focus on vague language as a turn management resource, noted by a variety of researchers as an important factor in the smooth coordination of turns in conversational interaction (cf. Aijmer 2002; Channell 1994; Cutting 2007; Ruzaitė 2007; Pichler and Levey 2010; Sabet and Zhang 2015). There is a substantial literature on vague language more generally, and we extrapolate from this the published work which picks up on the functional and relational work done using vague language. Particularly, we focus on the literature which does so by analysing naturally occurring conversation in different contexts as data. This allows us to focus on the pragmatics of turn architecture in Irish and British English.

Focussing on the pragmatics of Irish English is in keeping with new paradigms in the research (Barron and Schneider 2005; Schneider and Barron 2008; Vaughan and Clancy 2011; Barron, this volume). As with many other varieties, it has primarily been positioned socially and historically, and then distinguished at phonological, grammatical and lexical levels within broad dialectal descriptions (e.g. Filppula 1999; Hickey 2007; Kallen 1997, 2013). However, as Stadler (2013) categorically asserts, fully embracing the animating spirit of the world Englishes paradigm (viz. Bolton et al. 2011; B. Kachru 1992; Seargeant and Tagg 2011) means descriptions at these levels, while essential, are incomplete without a focus on conventions of use at localised, socio-pragmatic levels. In addition, our research addresses the scholarly neglect with relation to pragmatic comparisons of varieties of the same language suggested by Schneider (2012), by focussing on two of the levels of comparison for pragmatic variation he suggests: the interactional and the organisational. We turn now to the organisational aspects of conversation, and focus on the idea of the turn and linguistic behaviour at turn boundaries more specifically.

TURN ARCHITECTURE

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Ever since the early days of studies of turn-taking such as those of Duncan (1972) and Sacks et al. (1974), which elaborated conventions of turn construction and turn allocation, there has been, on the part of conversation analysts, considerable interest in the phenomena that occur at turn boundaries. These include studies of turn-openers, turn-closings, overlaps and actions that effect turn extension or continuation, or turn-closings which are simply followed by silence or 'lapses' (e.g. Goodwin 1986; Jefferson 1986, 2004; Gardner 1998; Schegloff 2000; Clayman and Raymond 2015; Hoey 2015). Allied to these preoccupations have been studies of turn co-construction between and among speakers (Lerner 1996; Clancy and McCarthy 2015). These phenomena may be seen as part of a general effort to explicate what we will term 'turn architecture' (after Seedhouse's (2004) "interactional architecture"). In recent years, corpus linguists have been able to contribute quantitatively underpinned insights into some aspects of turn construction (see *Taking a turn* below), insights which, by and large, have confirmed the conclusions of conversation analysts who often work with discrete, fragmentary extracts of talk subjected to fine-tooth-combed analysis. This synergy of perspectives has proved to be a rich resource for a wide range of investigations, where the tools of corpus linguistics have been applied to large-scale collections of conversational extracts (e.g. McCarthy 1998) and, vice-versa, where the methods of conversation analysis have been used to analyse large-scale corpora (e.g. Mulder and Thompson 2008). The present paper offers a corpus-informed contribution to the exploration of turn construction by looking at a specific selection of multi-word items which seem noticeably frequent just prior to speaker change. Our claims will be initially on the basis of the frequency of occurrence of those items at turn-closures but will be supported by qualitative interpretation of the most plausible pragmatic functions of such items in creating the space for another speaker to

contribute. Crucially, in carrying out the present study, our data also enable us to make intravarietal comparisons concerning such items between IrE and BrE conversational data.

Taking a turn

Sacks et al. (1974) were concerned with how speakers organise and regulate turn-taking. Among the key concepts which they elaborated was that of the transition relevance place (TRP), which represents a possible point of completion as interpreted by the listener(s), who may then take over the turn. However, the key word here is completion, and 'taking over the turn' is itself a complex notion. It is widely recognised that there exists a cline from backchannel acknowledgements such as *mm, uhuh* and so on, through minimal and not so minimal responses such as *yeah, right, I see, that's true* (Fries 1952: 49; Yngve 1970; Duncan and Niederehe 1974; Duncan 1974; Schegloff 1982, 1987; Jefferson 1984; Goodwin 1986; Tottie 1991; Zimmerman 1993; McCarthy 2002, 2003) which occur without yielding the turn, to full possession of the speaker role and extended contributions.

Important in the exegesis of the cline of phenomena at the turn boundary have been corpus-based studies of turn-openings, which enable us to see how often listener response at a TRP consists of a backchannel utterance, a non-minimal response or an extended turn (Tao 2003; McCarthy 2010; Iyeiri et al. 2011; Evison 2013). In the present case, where we are primarily interested in what we shall refer to as *triggers*, that is to say items which seem prone to effecting speaker reaction, we also consider contributions by the listener as they react to the trigger; such contributions assist in facilitating qualitative pragmatic interpretation of the several functions of the triggers. In this case listener responses include backchannel forms such as *mm, huh, uhuh,* and the polar response tokens *yes* and *no* and their variants (*yeah, yep, nope*) as well as fully lexical responses. We exclude syntactic triggers

such as interrogative forms, clausal tags (through which response is strongly coerced) and non-verbal behaviour, as well as turn-final conjunctions such as *and, but* and *or,* which have already been fruitfully investigated (Koivisto 2012), albeit there may be evidence of grammaticalization and emergent discourse particle-like behaviour for such items (see Mulder and Thompson 2006 on turn-final *but*).

Studies of turn-openings have yielded information on the coherent progression of successful turn taking and how listeners respond to previous talk. Tao (2003) observed that turn-openers are primarily lexical and that the turn-opener typically functioned to acknowledge and link to the previous speaker's turn. This McCarthy (2010) interpreted as a central feature in the mechanism of creating conversational 'flow' or confluence, the jointly created fluency observable in successful conversational interactions. Tao's (2003) insight also provides evidence for an internal discourse-level structure within the speaker turn, consisting of the opener followed by the main body of the turn. Here we wish to propose candidates for a third turn component, the lexical trigger, in this case, the vague category marker, a component which invites the listener to respond verbally in some way.

Turns in the IrE and BrE context: Corpus insights

Schneider (2005), using elicited data, compared responses to thank-yous in Irish, British and North American (USA) English. However, corpora of naturally occurring spoken data across varieties of English have considerably enhanced the possibility of pragmatic and discourse-level comparisons between and among varieties, applying to the data the conversation-analytical approaches sketched out above, using the quantitative tools of corpus linguistics. Studies comparing spoken IrE and BrE to date include that of O'Keeffe and Adolphs (2008) who focus on talk among young female users of these varieties. They illustrate how BrE

speakers utilise a greater range of response items, with some items being unique to, or typical of, one variety or the other. They show how listener responses function to indicate convergence and engagement, as well as conversation managerial functions, the type of multifunctionality salient also to the current study. McCarthy (2015) focuses on primarily single word, non-minimal, fully lexical response items and those involving complements of *it's, 'tis* and *that's* and their distribution in IrE and BrE. Findings included the identification of certain IrE adjective complements (*grand*, *handy*, *mad*, *desperate*) in short responses which were absent from the BrE data.

Clancy and McCarthy (2015) is grounded in the view that pragmatic meaning is a co-constructed phenomenon (Ochs et al. 1979; Lerner 1991; Ono and Thompson 1996) and questions the notion of speaker meaning as autonomously realised. We note also the process of 'continuous classification' which was a feature of the interpretation of speech acts in Sinclair and Coulthard's (1975) seminal model of discourse analysis, wherein 'the meaning of an utterance is its predictive assessment of what follows' (p.12), that is to say, the kind of response projected by the utterance. A dialogic view of meaning takes into account the evidence of listener response in negotiating meaning as it unfolds, moment-by-moment, in the talk (cf. McCarthy 2002, 2003). Closely linked to our present preoccupation, Clancy and McCarthy (2015) used the same two corpora to examine instances of turn co-construction, where a previous speaker's utterance yielded an opportunity at the TRP for a second and subsequent speaker(s) to add syntactic components that created sentence-like (or at least clause-combining) structures across turn-boundaries, e.g. Speaker 2 following up a main clause by Speaker 1 with an *if*-clause or a *wh*-clause, items not normally perceived as 'freestanding' (see also Tao and McCarthy 2001). Clancy and McCarthy (2015) were not so much concerned with cross-variety comparison between IrE and BrE but their study can be

seen as an example of the positive power and greater generalisability of examining comparable corpora of more than one variety of a language at once. As for the present study, the investigation of turn-triggers began with no pre-judgement as to whether IrE and BrE triggers would differ either formally or in terms of distribution and function.

METHODOLOGY

Our data are taken from the IrE LCIE corpus, as previously mentioned, and the primarily BrE Cambridge and Nottingham Corpus of Discourse in English (CANCODE). CANCODE consists of 5 million words of British English data, mostly informal speech, with a small percentage of IrE talk (for full details of the CANCODE corpus and its construction, see McCarthy (1998)). For the present study, a CANCODE subcorpus of one million words taken from social conversations among families and friends and close friends serves as the BrE data. LCIE was designed to mirror the interactional matrices of CANCODE albeit on a smaller scale (one million words to CANCODE's five million); it was originally conceived as a complementary and hence broadly comparable corpus (see Barker and O'Keeffe 1999 and Farr et al. 2004 for fuller descriptions of the LCIE project). LCIE consists primarily of casual face-to-face spoken interaction in various contexts, though it also contains a subset of radio phone-in data, and more routine-bound interactions, such as service encounters. Therefore, the sample used for the present study is the 500k Limerick Corpus of Intimate Talk (LINT, Clancy 2016) subcorpus which represents specifically social conversations among families, friends and close friends. No two corpora of naturally occurring conversation can ever be 100% matched, but in this case, the data are similar enough to permit robust comparisons, as previous studies reviewed above have demonstrated.

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Turns are made up of what Sacks et al. (1974) describe as turn construction units (TCUs) (see also TURN ARCHITECTURE above), and these unit types can be sentential, clausal or phrasal or lexical units (Ford and Thompson 1996), as well as, as previously mentioned, made up of single word or multi-word items more usefully characterised as pragmatic units. These units, we argue here as elsewhere (Clancy 2016; Clancy and McCarthy 2015; McCarthy 2015), simultaneously function on interpersonal and structural planes (viz. Schiffrin 1987) where structurally, and in terms of turn architecture, they facilitate turn opening, in addition to acting as *triggers* for turn closing. In order to demonstrate the notion of 'trigger', a prime exemplar of a trigger, vague category markers (hereafter VCMs) were selected for analysis. These are also referred to in the literature as *set marking tags*, *extension particles*, *general extenders*, *generalized list completers* and *vague category identifiers*, among a plethora of other terms (see Dines 1980; Jefferson 1990; Dubois 1992; Channell 1994; Overstreet and Yule 1997; Overstreet 1999; Aijmer 2002; O'Keeffe 2004, 2006; Cheshire 2007). Such markers also have the advantage of being one of the more well-researched categories of multi-word items in the sphere of corpus linguistics. They include expressions such as *or something like that, things like that, that sort of thing,* and *and stuff*. An example from the BrE data, (1), illustrates their typical functioning in conversation.

(1) (CANCODE)

[*The Langtons* is a pub which the speakers are considering going to; Speaker tags (<$1> <$2> etc.) are numbered according to the order in which speakers enter the conversation. = indicates false starts, and final+ indicates an interrupted utterance, with +initial showing a resumed utterance]

<$2> And the Langton's is great.

<$1> Yeah.

<$2> Really good for+

<$1> Yeah.

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<$2> +the stu= It's won competitions **and things like that**.

<$1> Really.

<$2> Pub of the year.

<$1> Mm.

Here *and things like that* encodes an assumption that the listener(s) will understand that *competitions* is one example of a range of things that might include awards, accolades in the press, league tables, or any event that can be understood as redounding to the good reputation of the pub, and that it is not necessary to spell out in tiresome fashion all the possibilities. The category of phenomena to which *and things like that* refers in (1) above is inherently and purposefully vague, hence the term VCM. Nor is the expression a vacuous filler: its absence would restrict the scope of the pub's achievement only to winning competitions, which is clearly not what the speaker wants to say. VCMs, therefore, when they occur, are a necessary component of speaker meaning, are essential to natural, successful communication and are examples of pragmatic encoding par excellence. Our working hypothesis was that there would be at least a tendency for VCMs to elicit some kind of response, to ratify (or challenge) the mutual understanding which they project. One further justification for looking at VCMs in IrE and BrE is the difference in their attested frequency in general counts of recurring multi-word strings (often also referred to as *clusters, lexical bundles* or *chunks*) in the conversational data under consideration. For instance, in the whole CANCODE five-million word spoken corpus, the 20 most frequent five-word strings, given in Carter and McCarthy (2006: 830-831), show a good half-dozen items which are clearly part of or whole VCMs, while *that sort of thing* is listed at rank 14 in the top 20 four-word clusters. In the one-million-word LCIE corpus, on the other hand, the most frequent VCM four-word cluster is *or something like that* is in position 22, with *that sort of thing* appearing in position 762. Very many of the top-ranking clusters in both the LCIE and CANCODE corpora are highly

interactive items such as *you know, but I mean, do you think, you know what I mean,* suggesting that the VCMs may also play different interactive roles in both corpora, reflected in their different frequency of occurrence.

For the purposes of the present study, a list of VCMs commonly referred to in the literature was drawn up. The list was derived principally from Carter and McCarthy (2006: 202-203) and O'Keeffe (2004, 2006), thus drawing on sources based on both IrE and BrE data, and, in both cases, corpus-informed. These sources threw up the following 15 items as candidates for detailed analysis:

1. *(and) things (like that)*
2. *sort of / kind of*
3. *(and) all (of) that*
4. *(and) (all) that/this sort/kind/type of thing*
5. *these/those/all sorts/kinds/types of thing(s)*
6. *(or) something (like that)*
7. *(or) anything (like that)*
8. *and stuff (like that)*
9. *and/or whatever*
10. *and that*
11. *and so on*
12. *and so forth*
13. *etc./etcetera*
14. *and whatnot*
15. *(and) this, that and the other*

Words in brackets indicate variants around a head noun or pronoun (e.g. *thing, something, sort, stuff*), as there often seemed little or no difference in meaning between realisations such as *and all that* as opposed to *and all of that*, or expressions involving *kind* and *sort*.

Our primary interest was in to what extent such items, projecting as they do assumptions about shared worldviews or cultural knowledge and the assumption that the listener will not experience difficulty in understanding the possible references of the VCM, would generate a response, what such responses would look like and whether there was any

pattern which might elucidate the process of negotiating pragmatic meanings. In the present context, we are especially interested in any differences in distribution and functions of the chosen VCMs in IrE and BrE. Concordances were run on random samples of 100 lines of concordance data (where 100 were available) for each item were used for analysis. In cases where fewer than 100 occurrences were found, percentages of target phenomena were calculated for comparative purposes. The concordances were then sorted rightwards and lines containing tags indicating a new speaker (e.g. <$1>, <$2>) following the search item were marked out for quantitative and qualitative analysis.

THE PRAGMATICS OF VCMs IN IrE and BrE

Table 1 shows the rank ordering of nine of the chosen VCMs in terms of what percentages of their occurrences were followed by speaker change of some sort. The nine items represent those items occurring more than 20 times in both corpora. 20 occurrences seemed to be a natural cut-off point in both datasets, with the remaining items all occurring fewer than 10 times. There is, however, an important difference to be noted here between the IrE and BrE data before commenting on Table 1 in more detail. In LINT, the below 20 occurrences cut-off point was reached after the nine items shown in Table 1, whereas this point was reached after 11 items in the CANCODE data. Both the VCMs *and so on* and *those/these/all sorts/kinds/types of things*, while frequent in the BrE data, did not make the cut-off point in LINT; the VCM *and so on*, for example, prominent in CANCODE, does not occur in LINT at all. The figures in Table 1 are to be interpreted thus: the percentage figure shows how many per hundred (or normalised to per 100) occurrences of the item occur just before speaker

change. Most occur immediately before, but some are followed by a discourse marker such as *you know* or a non-verbal marker such as *mm,* followed then by speaker change. These have been retained in order to underpin the contention that pragmatic markers often operate in concert, a phenomenon borne out in the studies of response items, where response tokens cluster to create multi-functional contributions (McCarthy 2002) but do not result in speaker change. The counts exclude syntactically coercive items such as interrogative clauses and question tags, since these are liable to trigger response independently of the VCMs under scrutiny.

Table 1. Occurrences preceding speaker change as % of total occurrences

	Item	**IrE**	**BrE**
1	*(or) something (like that)*	50	61
2	*and that*	38	39
3	*(and) things (like that)*	37	65
4	*(or) anything (like that)*	35	65
5	*that/this sort/kind/type of thing*	34	48
6	*and stuff (like that)*	33	35
7	*and all (of) that*	22	59
8	*and/or whatever*	20	59
9	*sort of / kind of*	9	52

Table 1 points to a number of issues with regard to the occurrence of VCMs as turn-final items in these two corpora. VCMs in BrE appear to be both more frequently used in general, as we briefly mentioned, and more frequently followed by an immediate change in speaker turn when employed in turn-final position in an utterance. For example, 43% of instances of turn-final *sort of / kind of* in BrE are immediately followed by speaker change, but this figure

is only 9% in IrE. Indeed, six out of the nine VCMs in the BrE data achieve more than 50% speaker change immediately after their occurrence. In contrast, in the IrE data, only one marker, *(or) something (like that)*, achieves this 50% figure. In Table 1, only two of the nine items, *and that* and *and stuff (like that)*, have a similar profile of realising speaker change across the two datasets. This raises the question of the role of VCMs in conversation in Irish and British English. In general, VCMs perform important social and interpersonal functions such as the softening of implicit criticisms or 'strategic imprecision' (Leech, 2000: 695). The low frequency of occurrence of VCMs in the IrE data, coupled with the more generally accepted phenomenon that speakers tend to perform much of their pragmatic work at the end of the turn (Clancy and Vaughan 2012), perhaps suggests a higher levels of directness and precision amongst intimates in the Irish data. However, there may be another explanation: previous research into LINT has shown other markers that traditionally function in the interpersonal realm, such as *like*, *you know*, *I think*, and so on, are more frequent in LINT than in, for example, the spoken component of the BNC (cf. Clancy and Vaughan 2012; Clancy 2016), and it might be that IrE speakers choose to enact the strategies of mitigation or imprecision through the use of these markers instead. Cheng and O'Keeffe (2015) observe in passing that a specific example of vagueness being open to challenge in a very direct way in an Irish family discourse context, which may also have a bearing on frequency. Hence, the Irish pragmatic system may not utilise VCMs interpersonally to the same extent as in British English. If, however, we are to explore the notion that VCMs trigger speaker change in the form of response, and the evidence from the BrE data and, to a lesser extent, the IrE data suggests that they do, then we should pay close attention to this phenomenon.

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Responses following the VCMs

Here we examine examples of the responses elicited by VCMs in the course of speaker change and investigate whether there are any notable patterns which may support our hypotheses concerning the interactive qualities of VCMs. Subsequently, we comment on IrE and BrE similarities and differences. We first consider what types of responses make up the new speaker's contribution in Table 2, and we then present the results of this classification in Tables 3 and 4.

Table 2. Classification of response types following turn-final VCMs

Response types	
Tag	**Description**
BC	Back channels: any non-verbal utterances or vocalisations such as *mm, hm, uhum*
YN	*Yes* or *no* and their variants, e.g. *yeah, aye, sure, nope, nah*
PM	Pragmatic markers, including discourse markers such as *right, well, so, okay*, emotive markers such as *oh* and *ah* and non-minimal responses such as *(that's) great, good, crazy*
L	Laughter (tagged in transcripts as extralinguistic information
O	Other responses not commencing with any of the above

Tables 3 and 4 show the distribution of response types in both the IrE and BrE data respectively for each of the nine markers we analysed in Table 1, presented in order of total number of responses per item. Although it has been noted that 100 random lines, or fewer where necessary, were selected for analysis, totals can potentially exceed 100 since responses may consist of a cluster of response types (e.g. *well yes; oh right; mm well no*). Also, more than one interlocutor may respond, thus adding to the totals. Clustering and more than one speaker responding will be exemplified below.

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Table 3. Distribution of response types (IrE)

IrE Data	**Response Types (RTs)**					
Item	**BC**	**Y/N**	**PM**	**L**	**O**	**Totals p/item**
(or) something (like that)	3	14	19	-	18	**54**
and stuff (like that)	4	9	12	1	17	**43**
(or) anything (like that)	3	14	10	1	8	**36**
and all (of) that	-	11	7	1	4	**23**
(and/or) whatever	1	6	8	-	7	**22**
and that	-	9	2	-	8	**19**
that/this sort/kind/type of thing	2	3	5	-	3	**13**
(and) things (like that)	-	-	2	-	7	**9**
kind of / sort of	-	4	-	-	5	**9**
Totals p/RT	**13**	**70**	**65**	**3**	**77**	**228**

Table 4. Distribution of response types (BrE)

BrE Data	**Response Types (RTs)**					
Item	**BC**	**Y/N**	**PM**	**L**	**O**	**Totals p/item**
(or) something (like that)	16	33	15	10	37	**111**
(and) things (like that)	13	31	21	3	22	**90**
kind of / sort of	12	26	14	2	25	**79**
that/this sort/kind/type of thing	13	24	18	4	17	**76**
(and/or) whatever	14	7	14	3	20	**58**
(or) anything (like that)	12	13	13	1	13	**52**
and that	6	9	13	-	10	**38**
and all (of) that	6	4	7	-	8	**25**
and stuff (like that)	1	12	2	-	8	**23**
Totals p/RT	**93**	**159**	**117**	**23**	**160**	**552**

Although we found that the frequency patterning surrounding the occurrence of VCMs as turn-final items that precede speaker change was quite different between the IrE and the BrE data; in relation to the distribution of response types, we find some broad similarities. Tables 3 and 4 show that in the IrE data 66% of all responses consist of some kind of reactive item at the speaker-initial slot, whether it be a backchannel marker, a convergent *yes/no*, a pragmatic marker (*right, okay, well,* etc.) or laughter – in the BrE data, this figure is slightly higher at 71%. This accords with studies of turn-openers reviewed above, which have shown how turn-initial items primarily attend to the immediately preceding talk. In both datasets, *Yes* and *no* form the largest group of responses and serve to acknowledge and show understanding of the assumptions projected by the VCM, with *yes* following affirmative items (2) and *no* following negative items (3).

(2) (LINT)

[Speakers are discussing their university grading system]

<$1> Like about like am in my certificate and my diploma got like d'you know the way.

<$2> Is that good or bad?

<$1> Well like it's it's bad like I mean well it's not very bad because we say fifty to fifty-five.

<$2> Mm

<$1> Fifty to sixty is a is an honour two

<$2> Yeah.

<$1> Or fifty five to sixty five **or something like that**.

<$2> **Yeah**.

(3) (CANCODE)

[Speakers are discussing a well-cared-for environment]

<$2> Er and it's erm not you know it's not polluted **or anything like that**.

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<$1> **No**.

Tables 3 and 4 also demonstrate that pragmatic markers form another large group of items following VCMs. As mentioned above, they may occur singly or, as in (4), in combination, in this case consisting of an emotional reaction (*oh*) and a non-minimal response of positive engagement (*that's good*), along with a tag question (*isn't it?*).

(4) (CANCODE)

[Adult asking a young person about their day at school. 'Turner' is the 19thC British landscape painter J.M.W. Turner]

<$1> So what did you learn today?

<$2> Nothing.

<$1> Nothing?

<$2> About Turner's pictures.

<$1> Mhm. What about them?

<$2> We just learnt about texture **and stuff**.

<$1> **Oh. That's good. Isn't it**?

<$2> Mm.

Similarly, in (5), *or something* is followed by an utterance with the response token *yeah* in turn-initial position and the turn-final tag question *couldn't you*.

(5) (LINT)

[Speakers chatting about footwear; <$E> indicates extralinguistic information such as laughter and <$O> indicates speaker overlap]

<$2> That Alice though is stupid I mean how practical are they.

<$1> Walking around in slippers like.

<$2> Outside.

<$1> Does she think she's living in like Beirut **or something** <$E> laughter <\$E>.

<$2> **Yeah** <$O1> **could understand it then couldn't you** <\$O1>.

<$1> <$O1> Honestly like <\$O1> or it depends.

The majority of pragmatic markers affirm understanding of the VCM and/or express positive engagement with it (also evidenced by the occasions of laughter such as in (5)). However, as noted above in the context of Irish family discourse, vagueness can be open to direct challenge. In the BrE data a number of responses begin with markers such as *well,* commonly understood as a complex item marking 'reception' of the previous utterance, as an elaboration of the VCM, as offering some modification of its projected assumption(s), as marking a dispreferred response or as multi-functional (Jucker and Smith 1998: 174; Rühlemann 2007: 119). (6) shows an example of a dispreferred response. Interestingly, the challenge is resolved by the first speaker repeating the VCM, presumably now renegotiated in the light of the challenge.

(6) (CANCODE)

[Speakers are discussing and industrial environmental hazard near some houses]

<$2> Yeah. But people buy houses round this gas tank.

<$3> Yes I know. But the houses+

<$2> They don't know about the risk.

<$3> +the houses were already there weren't they before the chemical plant was built **or whatever**.

<$2> **Well** no they could be built afterwards couldn't they?

<$3> **Right. Or whatever then**.

What these types of negotiation of meaning show is that there is no cast-iron certainty that listeners will completely share the assumptions projected in a VCM. However, despite

occasional challenges like that in (6), VCMs most frequently produce a response indicating understanding and engagement with the projected assumption.

As previously mentioned, the totals of different types of responses are inflated by more than one speaker responding to the same VCM, which we consider to be evidence of the fundamentally co-constructive nature of VCM use, with more than one participant often realising their responsibility to negotiate meaning in multi-party conversations. The pragmatic meaning of the VCM thus becomes interactively achieved, rather than being the property of the mind of a monologic speaker. In (7), the meaning of the instance of turn-final *or something* is further negotiated by two other conversational participants and in this way a specific example of what is being represented by the VCM is successfully negotiated.

(7) (LINT)

[Speakers are discussing the entrance to their neighbour's house]

<$2> I think that is so I always think that gate. <$O> It's just so sad <\$O>.
<$1> <$O> It's freaky isn't it <\$O> it's like a cemetery **or something**.
<$2> Yeah it it looks like a scene from like the+
<$3> A film **or something**.
<$1> +the Adams family.
<$3> Yeah actually does doesn't it?
<$2> Like it's really scary it's brilliant.

In the BrE data, an example of this multiple expression of negotiation and collective affirmation in (8) involves the repetition of the VCM by two other speakers, with the resolution of the sequence by the first speaker *It's the same idea*, itself a fairly vague assertion.

(8) (CANCODE)

[ENSA = Entertainments National Service Association, a World War II organisation providing entertainment for British forces]

<$1> Er what was the American equivalent to er ENSA? What it's United States+

<$4> Erm

<$1> +en entertainment forces **or something like that**.

<$5> **Something like that**.

<$4> **Something like that. Yeah.**

<$1> **It's the same idea.**

<$5> Yeah. Yeah.

Such complexes of VCMs are not uncommon, especially in the BrE data, where, as evidenced in (6) and (8), the VCM is repeated by different speakers during the process of negotiation, underpinning the interactive nature of their use in the conversation. In addition, (9) involves relexicalisation (McCarthy 1988; Buttery and McCarthy 2012) of the notion of a large quantity: *a lot* is relexicalised by speaker <$1> as *enormous amount*, offering an affirmation of understanding and agreement with the wider reference of *and all that* attaching to *gambling*.

(9) (CANCODE)

<$2> But there was a lot of that wasn't there. **A lot of** gambling **and all that**.

<$1> Oh. **Enormous amount**.

<$2> Yes.

<$1> Yes. Yeah.

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Buttery and McCarthy (2012) suggested that certain evaluative adjectives could be seen as triggers for speaker change in BrE, especially those open to upgrading or downgrading (e.g. *lovely, awful, horrible, brilliant).* As with the present set of VCMs, speaker change was not seen as obligatory but displayed strong tendencies to occur in particular contexts. Around the VCM, it seems, a good deal of negotiating and moves towards affirmation and mutual understanding of its reference and scope can take place, as the examples show.

The classification of response types as evidenced in Tables 3 and 4 unearthed a phenomenon worthy of more attention here – that of the notion of multiple turn-final position triggers in both datasets. In (10), *or something* is followed by *do you know*, an additional interrogative pragmatic marker that appeals to shared knowledge (instances such as those described here in (10)-(14) have not been included as turn-final in our counts in Table 1).

(10) (LINT)

[Speakers are looking at photographs together]

<$1> So old god almighty.

<$2> What?

<$1> I just look so my face **or something do you know**.

<$2> It's that you're younger like it's you're young.

<$1>I dunno does my face look that fat like.

<$2> No that's cos you're younger like you look younger that's the way I see it.

Similarly, in (11), additional pragmatic work is done after the occurrence of the VCM *or anything* in the form of an anaphoric reference to Dublin, *up there,* and the pragmatic marker *you know*.

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(11) (LINT)

[Speaker <$1> is telling <$2> about a concert she is planning to go to]

<$2> Have you been in that part of the country before?

<$1> No never.

<$2> Have you been in Dublin?

<$1> Yeah my aunt lives in Dublin but I've never been to any concerts **or anything up there you know**.

<$2> What's your favourite part of the country?

<$1> Em I've only been to Dublin City. I like all the different shops there you know.

<$2> Yeah.

This phenomenon, the co-occurrence or clustering of pragmatic items in final positions has been noted in Irish English (Clancy and Vaughan 2012) and is also evident in the BrE data. In (12), *you know* is again seen to co-occur or cluster with a VCM, on this occasion *all sorts of things*, whereas in (13), it is *like* that adds the additional pragmatic element to our VCM complex.

(12) (CANCODE)

<$2> They vary. They vary in length. <$=> You can d= <\$=> You can do a four week course you can do a an eight week you can do a three month you can do **all sorts of things you know**.

<$3> **But** I'd want something <$=> that was <\$=> that I could actually use. <$=> Because+

<$2> Yeah.

<$3> +you know it <\$=> And then you've got+

<$2> Generally+

<$3> +to have had a course that's a certain length <$H> haven't you <\$H>.

<$2> +generally speaking the longer the course the more useful it is obviously.

<$3> Mm.

(13) (CANCODE)

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[*Thou knows* is a northern English dialect variant of standard BrE *you know*]

<$3> Oh he's an artist is he?

<$1> Yeah. Oh I'm a painter in the sense that <$=> thou knows I I I <\$=> thou knows the industrial **and things like that and that kind of stuff like**.

<$3> He's the artist is he?

As we have already mentioned, it has been noted that vagueness is open to challenge in intimate discourse in an Irish context. An example of a direct, unmitigated challenge to vagueness in the form of the vague category *wedding stuff and things like that* is evident in (14).

(14) (LINT)

[Speakers are discussing wedding preparation in the car]

<$2> Oh it's beautiful. If you're ever in the south of France you should visit it. I was just over an hour away from it when I was living in Toulouse.

<$3> I must do house stuff **wedding stuff and things like that next week**.

<$2> **What kind of wedding stuff?**

<$3> Sort out bands and I got a DJ. He hasn't got right of way has he?

<$2> He has. You're grand on my side as far as I can see. That's lovely there now. I'd love to live in that house there now and just step out onto the front lawn.

Interestingly, although the challenge is a direct one, it is, in essence, mitigated by the intimate nature of the context itself characterised as it is by relatively fixed and stable speaker relationships (Clancy 2016) and the conversation continues unproblematically with no evidence of repair. The nature of the intimate context which allows higher levels of directness in the form of the direct challenges evident here may well be accountable for the clustering of

VCMs and more traditional pragmatic markers such as *you know* or *like* in (10)-(13). Speakers, equipped with the knowledge that vagueness will not always pass unchallenged, on occasion perform more pragmatic work in addition to the VCM itself. This affords the participants an extra dimension of interpersonal protection, thus facilitating a challenge should one be deemed necessary. Based on the present study, we suggest that the trigger for turn ending can then be found either at the completion of the VCM or VCM + pragmatic marker cluster.

CONCLUSION

We have taken a corpus pragmatics approach (Romero-Trillo 2008; Aijmer and Rühlemann 2015) to the nature of turn architecture in Irish and British English conversations. We investigated in more depth a set of turn construction units (VCMs) to test the hypothesis that they might be positioned in turn-final slots, at points of speaker change. We then drilled down further to see how the next speaker weaves into their new turn a response to the turn-final VCM, and at all stages compared IrE data with BrE data samples. We contend, as have many others (e.g. Heritage and Greatbatch 1991), that casual conversation, the real-life, un-edited, unplanned interactional expression of our relationships with others and significant others, is a *baseline* genre. Casual conversation in general, and intimate discourse in particular, as Clancy (2016) contends, offer analysts interested in naturally occurring interaction, and how and why it is organised in the way that it is, what could be described as the ur-genre. It is, perhaps, axiomatic to suggest that quantitative and qualitative analyses can and should complement each other; we borrow from two apparently dichotomous analytical frameworks which have been broadly described as highly 'qualitative' (conversation

analysis) and 'quantitative' corpus linguistics (however erroneously, in fact) but we can say are both in the main bottom-up approaches. These two approaches have been shown to have complementary strengths when combined (see Carter and McCarthy 2002). As Richards (2005: 1) observes, conversation analysis can direct research attention to '…apparently tiny features of interaction and explode their dimensions beyond all expectations, revealing delicacies of design and management that resist the assaults of clumsier instruments.' We should underline, in case it is still necessary, that corpus analysis is not always, or if recent trends are to be observed, even usually, analogous with the use of large-scale datasets; recently, a focus on pragmatic features of talk has been facilitated using smaller corpora and smaller samples from corpora given that '…small contained datasets provide a constant interpretive dialectic between features of texts and the contexts in which they are produced (Vaughan and Clancy 2013: 70). A central concern for the present study, as addressed at the outset, was to prioritise the description of conversation, and to characterise it in IrE through comparison with BrE – and vice versa. The oft-observed normative character of conversational turn-taking, the fact that a new turn in talk will be connected to a prior turn, contributing to confluence, as McCarthy (e.g. 2010) terms it, was the primary point of entry for the datasets. We look for evidence at utterance level in pragmatic units clustering at turn final points, and the type of interactional projection, anticipation and response following them, what Arundale and Good describe in a slightly different but connected context as the "Janus Principle" in the 'interactional achievement of conversation' (2002: 134; see also Clayman and Raymond 2015).

The findings from our corpus analysis provide an insight into the use of vague category markers as turn-final items in a sample of IrE through comparison with a broadly comparable sample of BrE. In general, although the raw frequencies of vague category markers were not

in focus for our study, prioritising as we did their organisational functions vis a vis turn architecture, the VCM *that sort of thing* was shown to be notably less frequent in the IrE data than in the BrE data. Furthermore, although we identified 15 VCMs common in the previous literature, our methodological process reduced this to nine VCMs that occur with regular frequency in both the IrE and BrE samples. For example, in the IrE data *those/these/all sorts/kinds/types of things* did not make our cut off point of 20 or more occurrences and we also noted that there were no occurrences of *and so on*. Our next step was to provide a quantitative, frequency-based examination of VCM positioning within speaker turns in order to determine whether or not they function to trigger speaker change. We observed that while turn management is a feature of VCMs in both contexts, it is arguably more so in the BrE context. We found that in the BrE sample, 6 of the 9 most frequent VCMs in turn-final position trigger speaker change at a rate of 50% or higher. This is in contrast to the pattern in IrE which features only one turn-final VCM, *(or) something (like that)*, that triggers change at this 50% mark. These findings afford some potentially illuminating sociopragmatic insights into the linguistic behaviour of Irish and British intimates. It appears that Irish intimates might be more direct and precise that their British counterparts; however, we suggest that due to the higher use of other, more traditional, pragmatic markers such as *like* and *now* in IrE(see Clancy 2011; Schweinberger 2012, 2015; Vaughan and Clancy 2012), Irish intimates tend to perform indirectness and imprecision in a different way.

When it comes to the response types that occur after turn-final VCMs, however, we see a more similar pattern between the datasets. We identified five categories of response type and found that in both the IrE and BrE samples, the response types 'yes/no' and 'pragmatic markers' account for a large proportion of responses in both the IrE and BrE data. This, we suggest, reflects understanding of, and positive engagement with, the assumption projected

by the use of the VCM. In order to investigate this finding in more detail, we performed a qualitative analysis of responding in both datasets. This analysis revealed that, in addition to responses occurring as single word items as expected, they often occur in 'clusters' where a yes/no response might be followed by a pragmatic marker in the form of, for example, a tag question, that again, similar to the use of VCMs, triggers speaker change. We argue that these patterns of response, which often in themselves trigger speaker change, indicate that VCM meaning is dynamically achieved through a pragmatic process of co-construction. Finally, we turned our attention to the co-occurrence of VCMs and traditional pragmatic markers such as *you know* and *like* at turn-final position in the IrE and BrE data. VCM meaning, although largely positively received or collaboratively achieved, is also open to challenge from conversational participants, particularly in an intimate IrE context. It appears that speakers can opt to perform more pragmatic work around their use of a VCM in order that this possible challenge can be appropriately managed in an interpersonal sense. Both VCMs and traditional pragmatic markers have been shown to trigger speaker change. This, therefore, raises the possibility of the phenomenon of multiple speaker change triggers co-occurring towards the end of a speaker's turn.

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