

# **'This is sort of what you asked, you know': A comparative corpus-based analysis of pragmatic markers acquired in a study abroad context**

Giovani Santos (Mary Immaculate College, Ireland)

Studies on spoken language have greatly benefited from Corpus Linguistics over the recent years (Caines *et al.* 2016). One of the many insights from spoken corpora studies is that of the interactional and relational nature of spoken language in use (O'Keeffe *et al.* 2007, p.159). Indeed, face-to-face communication requires speakers to make use of strategies to convey their messages and orientate themselves through conversation in real time. Among such strategies is found a body of language employed to maintain the relationship between speakers, including pragmatic markers (PMs), which O'Keeffe *et al.* (*ibid.*) refer to as *relational language*.

This poster presents the reflections and results of a pilot study, part of a broader innovative PhD research project on second language development - with a focus on the acquisition and use of PMs by L2-users of English in a study-abroad context, *viz.* Brazilian university students living in Ireland. The data comprises two 30-minute informal interactions (unstructured interviews) between 13 participants and the researcher – one in English and one in Brazilian Portuguese – facilitating the construction of a bilingual corpus. Hitherto, 11 interactions have been recorded with 13 participants, of which 10 are dyadic and 1 is multi-party. The data amount to approximately 150,000 words across both languages.

Drawing on the English component of this bilingual L2 corpus and the one million word spoken corpus, the Limerick Corpus of Irish English (Farr *et al.* 2004), it will be possible to compare and contrast the interpersonal functions and procedural meanings of the most salient PMs found in the participants' L2 against those of the Irish English data. The questions to be answered in this study are:

- (1) Have the Brazilian study-abroad participants acquired PMs found in Irish English?
- (2) Is there a difference in the use of pragmatic markers between the L1 and L2 corpora?
- (3) Are the L2-users pragmatically successful in their use of PMs?

While Irish English has been much studied, this is the first study to focus on the influence of this language variant on a sub-group of L2-users. What is more, although this study compares and contrasts the functions and meanings of PMs between L2- and L1-users of English, it does not view the L2-user within a deficit model and will, instead, focus primarily on pragmatic competence of spoken language in use in the context of interlanguage. In that regard, this study concurs with the view of Prodromou (2005) that L2 production merits analysis in its own right, rather than applying a 'native-centric' approach.

Although the data sample selected for this pilot study may be considered small, it is argued that it can allow for a more detailed qualitative analysis of

the spoken material produced by this sub-group of L2-users of English, throwing light on important linguistic features that, otherwise, could go unnoticed if analysed from a larger corpus. As Koester (2010, p.67) notes, "a relatively modest corpus may still yield robust and powerful findings".

A future step in this PhD project will be the addition of the Brazilian Portuguese component of the L2 corpus to the analysis. In working through this bilingual L2 corpus environment (Granger 2002), it is expected that it will be possible to illuminate features of the participants' L2 based on their cultural and social immersion in a native English speaking context, as well as on their L1 transferences.

## References

- Caines, A., McCarthy, M. & O'Keeffe, A. (2016). Spoken language corpora and pedagogic applications. In Farr, F. & Murray, L. (Eds.), *The Routledge handbook of language learning and technology* (pp. 348-361). London: Routledge.
- Farr, F., Murphy, B., & O'Keeffe, A. (2004). The Limerick corpus of Irish English: Design, description and application. *Teanga*, 21, 5-29.
- Granger, S. (2002). A bird's-eye view of learner corpus research. In Granger, S., Hung, J. & Petch-Tyson, S. (Eds.), *Computer learner corpora, second language acquisition and foreign language teaching* (pp. 3-33). Amsterdam/Philadelphia: John Benjamins.
- Koester, A. (2010). Building small specialised corpora. In O'Keeffe, A. & McCarthy, M. (Eds.), *The Routledge handbook of Corpus Linguistics* (pp. 66-79). Abingdon: Routledge.
- O'Keeffe, A., McCarthy, M. & Carter, R. (2007). *From corpus to classroom: Language use and language teaching*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Prodromou, L. (2005). 'You see, it's sort of tricky for the L2-user': *The puzzle of idiomaticity in English as a lingua franca* (Unpublished doctoral thesis). University of Nottingham.