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Part I

Introduction

1

Introduction to *Vague Language Explored*

Joan Cutting

Exploring vague language

Aim of the volume

The danger of being known as someone who is fascinated by vague language is that you run the risk of friends and colleagues using it just to humour you. Thus a University of Edinburgh colleague once ended an email to me, ‘See you whenever it is, if not before,’ and another, also from the university, engaged me in this email exchange:

> Colleague: So do you know about the charity ceilidh at St Brides Centre Saturday week then?
> Me: On 4th yeah – are you going?
> Colleague: I’m certainly thinking about it. I’m inclined to. How’s that for being wishy-washy?

What this demonstrates to me is that there is more than one perception and definition of vague language (VL), and that it can have an informal, socially cohesive function.

VL is a central feature of daily language in use, both spoken and written. But what is it exactly and why is it used? What is the use of studying it and what is still unknown? Do language students need to learn it? *Vague Language Explored* is a collection of chapters about VL in context. Gathering descriptions from a variety of specialisms, it examines the function of VL in a range of social contexts. It then suggests applications of findings and directions that VL research could take next.

The volume contains a wide range of approaches, taken from the fields of pragmatics, corpus linguistics, genre analysis, language and power, interactional sociolinguistics, cross-cultural sociolinguistics and the psychology of language. This should make it relevant to students and scholars in areas of linguistics, English language studies, modern foreign languages, communications studies, media studies, philosophy, psychology and psycholinguistics, as well as to those that believe in cooperation and cross-fertilization among specialisms. It is hoped that the volume will appeal to experienced researchers seeking a new direction, as well as being an inspiration to new researchers.

Because of its emphasis on applications, the volume should be of interest to students, teachers and scholars in the fields of education, teaching English to speakers of other languages (TESOL), teaching English as a foreign language (TEFL), English for academic purposes (EAP) and English for specific purposes (ESP). It is hoped, too, that *Vague Language Explored* may serve as a resource for designers and writers of English-language coursebooks, thus satisfying the need for materials that train language learners to participate in casual conversations and understand VL. Some chapters may also be of interest to people in media, medicine and law.

The contributors to the volume come from several countries and cover a range of English varieties and other languages. Some are based in the UK (Birmingham, Cambridge, Cardiff, Edinburgh, Milton Keynes and Nottingham), others are in Hong Kong, Ireland and New Zealand. As far as Englishes are concerned, varieties discussed are British English, Irish English, North American English and New Zealand English. Other languages investigated are Cantonese and German.

History of vague language

In order to provide a theoretical background to the chapters in this book, I offer a brief history of studies of VL. First, I must differentiate between the terms ‘VL’ and ‘implicitness’. Studies of VL look at language that is inherently and intentionally imprecise, describing lexical and grammatical surface features themselves that may refer either to specific entities or to nothing in particular. Studies of implicitness mention whole bodies of underlying meaning, and language dependent on the context, based on unspoken assumptions and unstated meaning. Implicitness can be expressed with VL and other language features; VL can express implicit meaning but it can be taken at its face value.

Most of the studies in the 1960s, 1970s and 1980s were of the ‘implicitness’ variety; theorists were aware of the social dimension but they were not interested in examining the language itself in any great detail. Garfinkel (1967, p. 3) talked of ‘unstated understandings’, and

Bernstein (1971) included context-dependent sentences in his list of the features of the restricted code. Goffman (1963) examined the way that social and interpersonal contexts 'provide presuppositions for the decoding of meaning' (Schiffrin 1994, p. 105). Grice (1975) saw implicitness as conversational implicature, in which speakers flout the maxims of the 'cooperative principle' (quantity, quality, manner and relevance), assuming that the hearer understands the implied meaning. Note that whereas conventional implicature is the logical relationship between two utterances where the truth of one suggests the truth of the other, conversational implicature is the indirect, unstated meaning of an utterance, additional to what is said. Gumperz (1982, p. 131) realized that members of social groups use implicitness: 'exclusive interaction with individuals of similar background leads to reliance on unverbalized and context-bound presuppositions in communication'.

A few of the 1970s and 1980s studies did mention VL, but they did so briefly, as part of an overall description of language. Lakoff (1972) pointed out that in phrases such as 'sort of' there is a meaning that 'implicitly involves fuzziness'. Crystal and Davy (1975, pp. 111–12) mentioned 'vague collectives' ('bags of'), 'number approximations' ('about 30') and 'dummy nouns' ('thing', 'stuff') and acknowledged that 'lack of precision is one of the most important features of the vocabulary of informal conversation'.

In the 1990s, researchers came to see VL as a central aspect of the communicative competence of the native speaker of English. In her seminal book *Vague Language* (1994), Channell says that 'Any social group sharing interests and knowledge employs non-specificity in talking abut their shared interest' (p. 193). She affirms that an expression or word is vague if (a) it can be contrasted with another word or expression which appears to render the same proposition, if (b) it is purposely and unabashedly vague or if (c) the meaning arises from intrinsic uncertainty. Her analysis of vague expressions shows that 'their meanings are themselves vague', that 'speakers share knowledge of how to understand them' and that 'it is apparently impossible to describe their meanings independently of consideration of context and inference' (pp. 196–8). She lists 'vague additives' ('around ten'), 'vague implicature' such as approximators and vague quantifiers ('15,000 died'), 'vague placeholders' ('thingy' and 'whatsisname'), and 'tags' ('or something', 'and things' and 'and so on').

Since Channell, VL has been recognized as 'a pervasive property of texts, and a property of considerable social importance' (Fairclough 2003, p. 55) and 'an important feature of interpersonal meaning / . . . /

especially common in everyday conversation' (Carter and McCarthy 2006, p. 202). They claim (Carter and McCarthy 1997, pp. 16–19) that:

> General words / . . . / are widely used in spoken discourse / . . . / general words *thing* and *stuff* are among the most frequent words in spoken English / . . . / Vague expressions are more extensive in all language use than is commonly thought and they are especially prevalent in spoken discourse / . . . / In most informal contexts most speakers prefer to convey information which is softened in some way by vague language.

At the end of the twentieth century, VL was finding its way into grammar books. The *Longman Grammar of Spoken and Written English* (Biber *et al*. 1999, p. 265) touched on it briefly under the headings of other features, explaining that approximators convey imprecision, that hedges such as 'like' can indicate imprecision of word choice, and that in generic reference the noun 'refers to a whole class rather than to an individual person or thing', the latter being superordinates, in my model. By 2006, VL had a section of several pages to itself in the *Cambridge Grammar of English* (Carter and McCarthy 2006, pp. 202–5). There it is seen as a separate, though closely related, category from 'approximations'. VL is described as words or phrases 'which deliberately refer to people and things in a non-specific, imprecise way' (ibid. p. 928), such as 'stuff', 'like', 'or anything', 'or whatever', and 'sort of'. Approximations as described as vague expressions used with numbers and quantities, as in 'around six', 'five minutes or so', 'seven-ish', and 'loads and loads'. The present volume considers both these categories as VL.

Vague language in this volume

VL has been described in many forums and publications, but this volume is the first to bring together various descriptions under one title. Although each chapter gives a definition of what the writer understands as VL, this debate is, in fact, not central to our volume. We are not hoping to reach a consensus.

The contributors in *Vague Language Explored* look at intentional vagueness, which occurs by choice. Some contributors examine vague expressions referring to people and things, and others focus on those referring to numbers and quantities, but most look at them all together, under the heading of VL. All the contributors, with the exception of Cook, look at spoken VL. Some take a mainly quantitative approach, the others a mainly qualitative one.

Most of the chapters have a bottom-up approach, starting with the lexis and grammar, and going to the interactional macro level of implication. Their categories are not identical and there is a certain amount of overlap. Some focus exclusively on general extenders: witness Terraschke and Holmes ('and things like that') and Evison, McCarthy and O'Keeffe ('and all the rest of it'). Others examine general extenders along with a series of other VL features. Cotterill looks at approximators ('some sort of', 'this, that and the other') and 'etcetera' additives or tags ('and everything', 'something like that'). Adolphs considers the vagueness of 'exemplar followed by a tag' ('gasping for breath or anything?'), 'kind of', 'like' and 'a bit'. Koester points to vague nouns ('things') general extenders and approximators ('about 40'). Cheng examines a wide range of markers, quite different from others in the volume: 'VL by scalar implicature' ('more', 'lot'), 'VL by choice of vague words or phrases' ('something', 'things') and 'vague additives to numbers' ('about'). Warren looks not at VL itself but at the meaning of VL combined with discourse intonation patterns, some of which add to the vagueness.

A few chapters have a top-down approach, starting with the wider picture. Cook sees VL as ambiguity and uncertainty of truth, as indeterminacy and imprecision; he looks at the vagueness of language in general. Rowland starts from an analysis of uncertainty and looks for linguistic realizations of it, such as hedges ('I think', 'maybe') and approximators ('around', 'fairly'). Trappes-Lomax sees VL as one means of addressing issues of face: a tool for expressing politeness while protecting self. Cutting looks at in-group markers in general, focusing on different degrees of vagueness that surface and deep structures can be used to express: metonymical proper nouns, superordinate nouns, and general nouns and verbs, non-anaphoric demonstrative pronouns and adverbs, non-anaphoric third-person personal pronouns, vague clauses, clausal ellipsis and humorous conversational implicature.

Social function of vague language

History of social function

This volume focuses on VL that is intentionally vague, but of course, not all VL use is intentional. Sometimes speakers are tired or in too much of a hurry to find the right word. Sometimes they do not process words properly or as they would wish. It can also be the case that there are emotional reasons for non-processing. Let us turn now to the social history of intentional VL.

In the 1970s and 1980s, although theorists were aware of the social dimension, studies of the social context of VL were relatively rare. Crystal and Davy (1975, pp. 111–12) noted that 'the use of lexical vagueness is undoubtedly a main sign of social and personal relaxation'. Brown and Levinson (1987), describing positive politeness strategies, mention ellipsis and in-jokes among their in-group identity markers, used to claim common ground. Tannen (1984, p. 31) lists ellipsis, indirectness, implicature and unstated meanings as interpersonal involvement signals of 'high involvement style'. She claims, 'the more work / . . . / hearers do to supply meaning, the deeper their understanding and the greater their sense of involvement with both text and author' (1989, p. 23).

Since the mid-1990s, linguists have looked in greater detail at the social usage of VL. Channell (1994) examines the micro-functions: she suggests that general nouns can be used to avoid being offensive, derogatory or pretentious, deliberately withhold information, avoid showing uncertainty or a lexical gap, and protect oneself or somebody/something else. Others talk of the function in more general terms, but they nearly all point to VL as a marker of social cohesion. McCarthy (1998, pp. 108–18) says that VL makes 'an important contribution to naturalness and the informal, convergent tenor of everyday talk'. Carter (1998) sees VL as a social leveller: it 'puts the speakers on an immediately casual and equal footing with their interlocutors'. Carter and McCarthy (2006, p. 202) state:

> Vague language softens expressions so that they do not appear too direct or unduly authoritative or assertive. It is also a strong indication of an assumed shared knowledge and can mark in-group membership: the referents of vague language can be assumed to be known by the listener.

Cutting (2000, 2001, 2002) finds that discourse communities use VL to assert in-group membership and show solidarity, as well as to exclude outsiders.

Critical discourse analysis takes quite a different position, seeing implicitness as a social divider. Although Fairclough (2003, p. 55) claims that 'All forms of fellowship, community and solidarity depend upon meanings which are shared and can be taken as given', he makes the point that written or spoken texts with power can carry implicit assumptions that they impose upon the reader or listener by making them bring the same assumptions into the process of interpretation (Fairclough 1989). Wodak (1996, p. 2) examines the effect of speakers in a position of power using implicit language. She explains that confusion can result when there are 'gaps between distinct and insufficiently coincident cognitive worlds', since these can separate 'insiders from outsiders, members of institutions from clients of those institutions, and elites from the normal citizen uninitiated in the arcana of bureaucratic language and life'.

In the field of second-language acquisition, Roberts (2003, p. 117) follows on with the view that heavily context-dependent language is associated with the assertion of power. She makes the point that contextualization cues call up backgound knowledge which relates to social relations, rights, obligations and ideologies. This, she says (ibid. p. 118), is a problem for second-language acquisition of minority-language-speakers:

> Knowing how to use and interpret a particular cue means at least for that interactional moment that you are a 'belonger'. And in contrast, the failure to pick up on a cue not only creates misunderstanding but sets the minority linguistic speaker apart. She is not in that interactional moment an emergent member of the same communicative community. As a result, small interactive differences can contribute to large social consequences.

Social function in this volume

The most distinctive feature of the volume is that it focuses on the function of VL *in context*. The contributors examine the reasons for using VL and the result of using it.

The contributors entertain readers with a wide range of social contexts, participants, genres and purposes. They describe bosses mitigating orders in office meetings, staff hedging gossip in the corridor, and health professionals mitigating directives and softening potentially distressing subjects so as not to alarm patients. They show mathematics students indicating their uncertainty in problem-solving activities, witnesses covering up memory-loss and untruths in the courtroom, and paper-presenters saving their faces at conferences. They describe pop-song writers leaving themselves open to interpretation, food and tobacco public relations websites showing how caring and sharing the companies are, and callers to radio phone-ins implying that their views are everybody's. They show German and New Zealand students getting close, and British and Canadian students claiming in-group membership. They encounter Hong Kong Chinese and native-speakers of English indicating how vague they mean to be through intonation. They reveal British people in casual conversation, giving little importance to the referent, to be friendly or critical.

Applications and further research in vague language

Need for applications to TEFL

Second-language teaching research and methodology books in 1970s and 1980s did not discuss VL in depth, but since the mid 1990s applied linguists have realized the need to apply the findings from studies on vagueness to TEFL. Channell (1994) says that VL 'merits specific attention in the description of English, as well as in the teaching programmes of learners of English and their teachers.' Jordan (1997, pp. 240–3) recommends that EAP teachers make their students aware of vague written language so that they can write using hedges such as modals expressing possibility, probability adverbs and approximators, and so that they can understand and speak using colloquialisms such as 'thingy' and 'whatsisname'. Carter (2006) advocates the teaching of ellipsis, and of vague word clusters ('and all the rest of it', 'and all that sort of thing' 'and things like that') because they occur as frequently as individual words.

However, as Eggins and Slade (1997, p. 8) say, 'there is still a paucity of adequate materials for teaching casual conversation to learners of English as a second or foreign language'. Carter (1998, pp. 43–56) goes further: 'Several English language coursebooks do not exhibit many examples of vague language, even though it is always pragmatically highly significant, and nearly always enables polite and non-threatening interaction.'

Applications and further research in this volume

The second most distinctive feature of this volume is that it puts emphasis on applications of findings about VL. These applications are in the fields of L1 performance in schools, second-language acquisition (SLA), TEFL, EAP, forensic linguistics, clinical pragmatics, counselling and law. The most obvious application out of all of these is TEFL; questions asked include 'What should learners of English as a foreign language be taught to use?' and 'What should learners be taught to understand but not use, and why?'

The volume brings together the research of the theorists and the needs of the practitioners. Most of the contributors feel that their findings will inform those involved in the teaching of and material design for EFL, ESP and EAP. Some have even higher aspirations: one hopes to improve teacher awareness and sensitivity, another wants to contribute to transparent conduct of public affairs, and another wishes to improve relations between speakers of different languages.

Each chapter of the volume concludes with a suggestion as to where future research should go next. Some contributors suggest that the study of VL described here be taken further, others recommend an investigation of types of VL other than the ones covered here and others still point to new contexts for VL analysis.

Map of the volume

To enable navigation around this volume, I provide a map with a brief synopsis of each chapter. Three of the chapters (Cheng, Cutting and Trappes-Lomax) are reformulated and updated versions of papers presented in a colloquium entitled 'Vague Language' at the annual conference of the British Association for Applied Linguistics 2003, in the University of Leeds. Each contributor has participated in the writing of their synopsis.

Vagueness and genre

In Chapter 2, ' "This We Have Done": The Vagueness of Poetry and Public Relations', Cook points out that many of the world's most acclaimed literary 'masterpieces' are also those whose meaning is most contested, and that a variety of approaches to literature consider indeterminacy to be a literary virtue. Literary criticism and stylistics have catalogued formal devices which encode and ensure such ambiguity, making the text capable of yielding an apparent infinity of valid possible interpretations. Cook notes that in recent years corporate web pages have adopted many of these formal literary features.

Cook's chapter explores the contrast between the use of such devices in a Bob Dylan song and in a corpus of public-relations discourse on food and tobacco websites. It illustrates the formal devices which realize literary indeterminacy, and documents the presence of such features in public-relations prose. It discusses why the vagueness of meaning in these two contexts has such different effects, and what the implications of this are both for an understanding of literature and for the transparent conduct of public affairs.

In Chapter 3, ' "About Twelve Thousand or So": Vagueness in North American and UK Offices', Koester investigates conversations across a variety of office environments and shows that VL occurs regularly in work-related interactions. She analyses conversations from organizations recorded in North America and the UK, focusing on vague nouns, ('things', 'bit'), vague categories ('and stuff', 'something like that'), and vague approximators ('about', 'or so'). She finds three types of genre: (a) collaborative, where all participants contribute equally, for example decision-making or discussions, (b) unidirectional, where one speaker plays a dominant role, for example instructing or briefing, and (c) non-transactional, 'off-task' conversations, as in office gossip or small-talk. She finds that VL occurs more frequently in unidirectional genres and suggests that the risk of performing face-threatening acts is higher here, and that VL is therefore used as a hedging device.

In Chapter 4, 'Caught Between Professional Requirements and Interpersonal Needs: Vague Language in Healthcare Contexts', Adolphs, Atkins and Harvey note that in a number of healthcare contexts, a tension exists between the communicative aim of minimizing impositions and the institutional requirement for clear and concise information. Health professionals are required to explain illness and disease to their patients in an understandable and direct way and are discouraged from using any VL (Sontag 1991). Yet, research shows that VL is pervasive in health communication contexts and plays an important part in the negotiation of advice and thus in affirming patient choice (Adolphs *et al.* 2004).

This chapter examines examples of VL in a sample of the Nottingham Health Communication Corpus (NHCC), a 1-million-word corpus comprising of a variety of contexts and groups of health professionals and patients. Adolphs Atkins and Harvey focus on the relationship between types of VL and institutional requirements that relate to two distinct healthcare contexts: NHS Direct phone-ins and hospital–chaplain interaction. The results show that different levels of vagueness may serve different contextual requirements.

Rowland's Chapter 5, ' "Well Maybe Not Exactly, but It's Around Fifty Basically?": Vague Language in Mathematics Classrooms', reminds us that mathematics is typically characterized as a precise and exact discipline, and that for students there are intrinsic and extrinsic penalties associated with 'wrong' or even hesitant responses to questioning. Rowland makes the point that uncertainty is a valid response to a mathematical challenge, and that such a cognitive state is to be expected when students are asked to make predictions and generalizations in enquiry-based, problem-solving activities. In such circumstances, in the social setting of the classroom, uncertainty must be recognized, and handled with care and sensitivity. Rowland analyses transcripts of talk in mathematics classrooms from primary school to university undergraduate, focusing on 'hedges' such as 'about', 'maybe' and 'I think', and teachers' linguistic strategies associated with 'politeness' (Brown and Levinson 1987) such as use of indirect speech acts.

Cotterill's Chapter 6, ' "I Think He Was Kind of Shouting or Something": Uses and Abuses of Vagueness in the British Courtroom', points out that the law represents a professional and social context characterized by a search for precision and directness, and that, in contrast, the language of witnesses and defendants at trial is typified by imprecision, doubt and vagueness. Eyewitnesses may be uncertain of what they have observed, memories may by decayed by the passage of time, and defendants may produce vague responses in an attempt to be evasive or deceptive.

This chapter draws on a 1-million-word corpus of witness examinations and cross-examinations taken from trials held in the late 1990s in the UK, and studies the semantics, pragmatics and discursive characteristics of vague responses given by witnesses to lawyers' questions in the courtroom setting. It analyses the ways in which vagueness is handled by the legal system and explores the degrees of tolerance to VL in courtroom interaction. The chapter suggests that, whereas vagueness has traditionally been seen as a negative phenomenon in the legal setting, it may be considered common and necessary in witness examination and cross-examination.

Psychology of vagueness

In Chapter 7, Trappes-Lomax looks at 'Vague Language as a Means of Self-Protective Avoidance: Tension Management in Conference Talks'. He argues that speakers and writers use strategies to minimize risks, and specifically to avoid interpersonal trouble (threats to the face of the addressee), interactional trouble (misunderstandings, misalignments), and personal trouble (threats to the face of the addressor). He notes that work on politeness, tact and hedging has focused little on strategies to avoid personal trouble, or self-protective behaviour in the biologist's sense of 'behaviour that tends to protect an animal by minimizing its exposure to hazard' (Allaby 1999).

Trappes-Lomax asks what kind of hazards we expose ourselves to in speaking and writing, and by what linguistic means we attempt to minimize these. He analyses the hazards faced by presenters at medical conferences, and the kinds of VL speakers employ to protect themselves.

Chapter 8, ' "Looking Out for Love and All the Rest of It": Vague Category Markers as Shared Social Space', by Evison, McCarthy and O'Keeffe, describes the connection between VL reference domains (what the categories refer to), the level of shared knowledge (social group, national or global) and the speaker relationship. The contributors hold that, in order to use VL successfully, speakers must negotiate expectations about what their co-participants know within social space (Vygotsky 1978), and that the shared knowledge required in order to interpret vague categories has a common core of socio-culturally ratified 'understandings'. Vague category markers are a tool for creating short-cuts when referring to sets, prototypes and projected and negotiable categories, as in 'everybody's looking out for love and all the rest of it', 'university courses and that sort of thing' and 'I've got to wash my hair and everything'. This chapter uses the British English CANCODE corpus and the Irish English LCIE corpus to explore VL in contexts where the participants have different degrees of shared knowledge and intimacy, notably casual conversations, spoken academic data, and calls to a radio phone-in show.

Cross-cultural vagueness

Chapter 9, 'The Use of Vague Language Across Spoken Genres in an Intercultural Hong Kong Corpus', by Cheng, uses the 2-million-word Hong Kong Corpus of Spoken English (HKCSE) of the English Department of the Hong Kong Polytechnic University. The HKCSE is made up of naturally occurring conversations, academic discourses, business discourses and public discourses, involving Hong Kong Chinese and native-speakers of English. The use of VL is examined in an intercultural context.

It is found that the major determinant of the forms of VL (word combinations containing 'very', 'more', 'some', 'much' 'many', 'quite', 'most', 'lot', 'few', 'bit', 'something', 'things', 'kind of' and 'about') and the frequencies with which they occur is related more to the genre than to whether the speaker is Hong Kong Chinese or a native-speaker of English. For example, this study suggests that when conversations are compared with public discourses, the forms of VL employed for similar functions are often different and the overall VL frequency is higher for conversations than for public speeches. The findings are compared with the forms of VL extracted from a database of EFL textbooks, and the implications are discussed in relation to the teaching of VL.

In Chapter 10, '{ / [Oh] Not a < ^ Lot >}: Discourse Intonation and Vague Language', Warren examines VL and the communicative role of the discourse intonation choices (Brazil 1997) in the HKCSE (see Cheng above). He reminds us that VL is particularly associated with spoken language (Carter and McCarthy 1997), and that discourse intonation system is an important resource to contribute to context-specific meaning. Discourse intonation consists of a set of choices (tone, prominence, key and termination) not formulated with reference to grammar and without fixed attitudinal meanings. Warren's study examines five manifestations of the role of intonation in adding situation-specific meaning to a speaker's use of VL: vague tagging ('or something'), alternative 'or' ('hot-dog or hamburger?'), approximative use of numerals ('two or three'), premodification of vague determiners ('quite a lot of money'), and repeated vague forms. The interplay between VL and discourse intonation is discussed and exemplified with reference to the specific social contexts, in combination with the local context within the discourse itself.

In Chapter 11, ' "Und Tralala": Vagueness and General Extenders in German and New Zealand English', Terraschke and Holmes explore the use of 'general extenders', pragmatic devices 'which serve referentially as expressions of vagueness, and interpersonally to build rapport, and which conform to a specifiable structural pattern', namely CONJUNCTION (PREMODIFIER) VAGUE NOUN (POSTMODIFIER). In English, examples are 'and stuff', 'and everything' and 'or something like that'. In German, they are '*und so was*' and '*oder so was*'.

The data is a corpus of informal dyadic interactions: between (a) native-speakers of New Zealand English, (b) native-speakers of German, and (c) native-speakers of New Zealand English and native-speakers of German. The study focuses on the English 'general extenders' used by Germans speaking English with native speakers of New Zealand English. It indicates that extenders serve politeness functions, their meaning based on an assumption of shared background knowledge (Brown and Levinson 1987; Overstreet 1999) and rapport management (Spencer-Oatey 2000), and examines the extent and principle areas of transfer of general extenders from German to English. The chapter stresses the need to increase awareness among learners of English as a Second Language (ESL) about the politeness functions of extenders, so to facilitate relations between native speakers of different languages.

Conclusion

In Chapter 12, ' "Doing More Stuff–Where's It Going?": Exploring Vague Language Further', Cutting describes her model of vague in-group code of academic discourse communities (2000): non-anaphoric demonstrative pronouns and adverbs, and third-person personal pronouns, metonymical proper nouns ('How's your Chomsky?'), superordinate and general nouns ('that thing') and general verbs ('I haven't done any Chomsky'), clausal ellipsis and conversational implicature. This VL is used mostly with a socially cohesive function as a high-involvement strategy for asserting in-groupness. She claims that formality, depth of relationship and social function affect VL use

(Cutting 1998). She describes various studies, some using CANCODE, on the influence of social factors, such as function, depth of relationship and gender.

She suggests that research be carried out on the relationship between VL and other social groups, and on VL in other languages. She advocates an exploration of whether VL is used mainly for social cohesion or as a tool to assert. She explores the applications, describing her study of the extent to which international students can be trained to appreciate when the cause of their lack of comprehension is because of their own linguistic or cultural gaps and when it is because of the VL (1999). Applications to clinical pragmatics and forensic linguistics are also considered.

Note

*/. . ./ is used througout to denote omissions from quoted text, as distinct from pauses in discourse, which are indicated by . . .

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