**Faculty of Humanities**

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# Interaction through vague language: L1 and L2 perspectives

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# Declaration

To the best of my knowledge and belief, this thesis contains no material previously published by any other person except where due acknowledgement has been made.

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# Abstract

Questions such as how often is *often* or how many is *many* have been the concern of the study of vague language (VL). As an integral part of the language, VL in this study refers to inexact expressions which are elastically used to contribute to effective communication. This study aims to investigate how VL can elastically meet the communication needs of L2 learners of English compared to L1 speakers. This is one of the few studies looking at VL in terms of its elasticity. It can provide insights into the use of VL in intercultural contexts, and English language teaching.

The naturally-occurring data of this study comprise the classroom interactions of three groups of speakers of English: L1 speakers (American English), Chinese-speaking learners of English (CSLE) and Persian-speaking learners of English (PSLE). There were approximately 50,000 words from each group, making a total of 150,000 words for the data. The L1 speaker data were selected from the transcripts of tutorials and small lectures on social topics from the Michigan International Corpus of Academic Spoken English (MICASE). The CSLE data were a transcript of the video-recorded classroom interactions of upper-intermediate to advanced level learners of English in China and the PSLE data were similar to the CSLE data, but video-recorded in Iran. The data were analysed on two levels: lexical level to investigate the frequency occurrence, position of occurrence, collocation and cluster of 5 vague categories. This was carried out by Wordsmith concordancing tool. A Chi-square test was also applied to statistically examine the significance of differences among the three groups. The functional level dealt with the examination of the functional properties of VL.

The results show greater tendencies for VL use by the L2 learner groups, and the three groups showed statistically different performances. The PSLE adopts a listener-oriented approach against the speaker-oriented approach by the L1 speaker, whereas the CSLE takes a middle position. The CSLE is the most frequent user of VL with an uneven distribution of items in each vague category.

Usability of a vague expression in multiple positions is found to contribute to its diverse functionality, which results in the large frequency occurrence of the vague expression. The most intriguing finding of this study is that the elastic feature of VL allows the speakers to stretch VL further to satisfy their communicative needs. The most versatile vague categories (subjectivisers) and items are the most preferred by the L2 groups. The preference of the most versatile expressions arises from more diverse communication needs of the L2 groups. Elasticity allows vague words to stretch and provide the speaker with opportunities to make strategic use of these expressions to enrich communication. This research reveals that not only is VL convenient for successful communication, but also it can facilitate the structural management of interaction. There is an interconnection between the linguistic realisations of vague items and the particular functions they serve. This interconnection is not as a one-to-one correspondence but as a continuum of particular functions in relation to the linguistic realisation of vague items. It was also revealed that cultural and linguistic backgrounds of L2 speakers can emerge in their VL use. These can occur as 'taarof' in Persian and indirectness in Chinese.

The implication of this study is that learners can be taught how they can take advantage of the elasticity of VL in the process of communication. Learners can be instructed in what ways VL can be used to compensate for the potential inadequacies in their communicative competence. The findings may be applied in language pedagogy, particularly in curriculum development and teacher education.

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## Transcription conventions

<     > = Pause

[ S1:   ] = Overlap

SU=Unknown speaker without gender identified.
SU-f, SU-m=Unknown word with gender identified

SU-1=Probable but not definite identity of speaker

SS= Two or more speakers, in unison (used mostly for laughter)

<P: 05>=Pauses of 4 seconds or longer are timed to the nearest second

…=Ellipses indicate a pause of 2-3 seconds

<LAUGH>= Current speaker laughs

<S8 LAUGH>= Speaker 8 laughs

<SS LAUGH>= Two or more speakers laughs

(xx) (words)= Two x's in parentheses indicate one or more words that are completely unintelligible. Words surrounded by parentheses indicate the transcription is uncertain.

# List of abbreviations

BBC: British Broadcasting Corporation

CA: Conversation Analysis

CANCODE: Cambridge And Nottingham Corpus of Discourse in English

CLT: Communicative Language Teaching

CP: Cooperative Principles

CSLE: Chinese-speaking Learner of English

DM: Discourse Marker

EAP: English for Academic Purposes

EFL: English a Foreign Language

ELT: English Language Teaching

ERIC: Education Resources Information Centre

ESL: English as a Second Language

ESP: English for Specific Purposes

ILP: Interlanguage Pragmatics

L1 S: L1 Speaker

LIBEL CASE: Limerick-Belfast Corpus of Academic Spoken English

MICASE: Michigan International Corpus of Academic Spoken English

NNS: Non-Native Speaker

NS: Native Speaker

NSC= Native Speaker of Cantonese

NSE= Native Speakers of English

PSLE: Persian-Speaking Learner of English

RT: Relevance Theory

SETT: Self-Evaluation of Teacher Talk

VCM: Vague Category Marker

VL: Vague Language

VOA: Voice Of America

# Chapter 1 Introduction

Vague language (hereafter VL) is an integral part of language and has an essential role in effective communication. In this study, it refers to inexplicit expressions which are elastically used to enrich communication. Vagueness has been seen differently, counted as a demerit by some but a merit by others. Some judge it as an undesirable phenomenon and a negative feature of language. For them, meaning is considered to be the core component of concepts to contribute to their meaningfulness, irrespective of the speakers' intentions and the contextual factors (Aristotle 1946, 1963; Plato, 1914). Therefore, they attribute any kind of communication breakdown to the person's inability to create the connection between the right word and the right meaning (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980; Ruzaitė, 2007). By contrast, there are others who view vagueness differently and regard the appropriate use of VL as part of the speaker's communicative competence.

The study of VL has gained popularity ever since Channell's (1994) thorough study. What this implies is that the journey of vagueness from philosophy to linguistics led to the paradigm shift in this concept and encouraged more studies on VL after Channell. Consequently, VL use has since then been treated as an integral component of language. This is obvious in Cutting's (2007) assertion that "VL is a central feature of daily language in use, both spoken and written" (p. 3).

With the number of research projects on VL on the rise, this feature of natural language has found its way into language teaching. Cutting (2007) states "[s]ince the mid-1990s, a limited number of applied linguistics and methodology books have begun to contain a discussion of possible teaching techniques to raise student's awareness of VL" (p.236). As the statement makes clear, the number is limited, just focusing on awareness-raising during instruction. This study aims to give depth to the role of VL in language teaching: the sources VL originates from

in English language teaching (ELT), how it can be  positioned to provide language learners with the most effective communication tool as well as spotting the most common functions language learners will need to use VL for in communication. It also sheds light on the proper criteria to be used as the basis for consciousness-raising on VL in ELT.

The scope of VL is embraced in the area of 'pragmatic competence' in language teaching. There is a growing body of literature indicating that instruction on pragmatic competence has proved remarkably effective in language teaching (Niezgoda & Röver, 2001; Ohta, 2001; Linddicoat & Crozet, 2001).  The present research study adopts a VL perspective in cross-cultural and interlanguage pragmatics.

## 1.1 Purpose of the study

Often, learners of English tend to use VL at an inappropriate level (too high or too low) or in inappropriate forms; and the ways in which VL is mobilised in the discourse is also different from that of L1[1] speakers (Cheng & Warren 1999; Cheng 2007).  The central research question of this study is: what are the different levels of frequencies and forms of VL used between L1 speakers and L2 learners, the strategic moves and their contributing cultural and linguistic factors?  The findings of this study will have implications for developing understanding by learners of English in achieving appropriate use of VL.

While a certain amount of attention has been and is still being drawn to VL use in various settings such as poetry (Cook, 2007), work-related interactions (Koester, 2007), healthcare contexts (Adolphs, Atkins & Harvey, 2007), and courtrooms

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[1]In this study, L1 refers to American English speakers, L2 includes CSLE and PSLE learners of English. The terms NS (native speaker) and NNS (non-native speaker) are used where other researchers originally used the two terms.

(Cotterill, 2007), VL seems to be still suffering from lack of sufficient research in academic settings. This research is a pioneering investigation of VL in English language learning classes with students from two vastly different socio-cultural and linguistic backgrounds: Chinese and Persian learners of English compared with the L1 speaker of English.

The objectives of the research, then, are:

1. To explore VL realisation in terms of its diverse forms across L1 speaker, CSLE and PSLE.
2. To investigate VL lexical patterns (frequency and forms) of L2 and discrepancies compared with patterns of L1 speakers in classroom settings.
3. To analyse VL pragmatic patterns (functions) and strategic motivations, and how differently VL is manipulated across the three groups.
4. To explore the impact of the underpinning cultural and linguistic factors (e.g. first-language transfer) on the lexical and pragmatic variances among L1 speaker, CSLE and PSLE.

Corresponding to the above objectives, this study focuses on addressing the following research questions:

1. How is VL realised among L1 speaker, CSLE and PSLE?

2. How frequently is VL used and what are the more fluently used lexical items? Are they overused or underused compared to the L1 speaker group?

3. What kinds of vague expressions are used? How are they different from the L1 speaker group?

4. How and why is VL strategically mobilised? What are the discrepancies among the three groups?

5. What are the cultural and linguistic factors underlying the interlanguage and intercultural diversities in VL use?

## 1.2 Organisation of the study

This thesis consists of 7 chapters structured as follows: Chapter 2 provides a review of the previous studies in the related field. Chapter 3 presents a description of the approach and methodology selected for this study. The results obtained from the three data sets are presented in chapter 4. Chapter 5 presents the functional analysis of VL, and discussion of the results is dealt with in chapter 6. As a final chapter, chapter 7 draws the conclusion and the implications of this study.

# Chapter 2 Theoretical foundations

For decades and even centuries precision has been considerably valued. VL, as an increasingly explored phenomenon in language, has managed to finally gain its long overdue position as a device to express imprecision in academic discourse. Contrary to the common belief that the nature of academic discourse requires non-vague expressions, it tends to make extensive use of vague expressions to allow the user to express degrees of truth, or certainty over the strength of a statement.

Therefore, there is sufficient evidence that imprecision or −vagueness− is an integral part of academic discourse. Should it be omitted, communication will be adversely affected, as Cheng and Warren (2001, p.98) state "[m]astery of vague language (both active and passive) is one measure of communicative competence in a foreign or second language, particularly those aspects termed as 'strategic competence' and 'sociolinguistic competence' ". Furthermore, Tarnyikova (2009, p.129) declares "though relevant arguments are mostly based on the precision of their wording, vague language needs not necessarily be an 'enemy' of sound argumentation, since the deliberate refrain from being vague might result in a precise but less polite or impolite interaction."

Research on vagueness approves that it is a feature of natural language, serving various functions in communication (Channell, 1994; Cutting, 2007; Ruzaitė, 2007). This, therefore, implies that the existence of VL is highly appreciated and acknowledges its significant role in communication. Channell (1994) believes VL cannot be assumed as the exception rather than the rule. Tarnyikova (2009, p.119) considers vagueness strategies and manifestations of VL to be "partly universal but to a considerable degree language-and culture- specific". Irrespective of which of these two speculations might be true, Ruzaitė (2004, p.220) asserts "[t]he results of previous investigations demonstrate that vagueness cannot and should not be avoided, since over precision can lead to communicative breakdowns".

VL, in a broad sense, is assumed to be more frequently employed in spoken mode than written language (Biber, Johanson, Leech, Conrad, & Finegan, 1999). The

reasons to support this claim are that in spoken discourse, the interlocutors share context clues such as facial expressions which may not exist in written discourse. Additionally, less precision is required in informal forms than written discourse (Cook, 1989).

Finally, speakers have access to discourse intonation (Brazil, 1997) which can help them clarify what they mean by what they say. The above statements should not at all imply that VL in written mode should be ignored or neglected, as Myers's (1996) claim that "linguistic and rhetorical researcher studying academic discourse find that writers do use vague language frequently and, I will, argue necessarily" seems to be largely correct.

VL is assumed to be of an elastic nature (Zhang, 2011). 'Elasticity of VL' lies in its versatility that also allows it to stretch over as far as demanded by the interlocutor for an effective communication and any direction required. What contributes to the elasticity of VL is the fact that VL lack s a specific interpretation, and its interpretation is relies on the context and communication purpose. This will provide the language user with a an option to make a more strategic use of VL for enhance communication. Therefore, the theoretical framework of the present study is established based on the 'elastic use of VL' in classroom communication.

## 2.1 VL: what is it and why do we need it?

Early work on VL is associated with Russell (1923) who viewed vagueness from philosophical point of view. In his work "vagueness and precision are considered as features which either belong or don't belong to a representation, of which language is an example" (p.85). He claims that vagueness or precision is nothing beyond representation: "Apart from representation, whether cognitive or mechanical, there can be no such thing as vagueness or precision; things are what they are, and there is an end of it. Nothing is more or less what it is, or to a certain extent possessed of the properties which it possesses" (p.85). He believes vagueness is a conception which is applied to any kind of representation such as a

photograph. Additionally, he argues "*Per Contra*, a representation is *vague* when the relation of the representing system to the represented system is not one-one, but one-many" (ibid, p. 89).

Following Russell, a major work which drew considerable attention and proved significant in the investigation of vagueness is Zadeh's (1965) 'fuzzy set theory'. In this theory, Zadeh rejects 'classical set theory', and attempts to address the question of whether concepts in natural language are a yes-or-no type or a more-or-less kind. The 'classical set theory' assumes that an element either belongs to a set or it does not. For example, 'John is old'. According to the classical set theory, someone is either old or not. That is, being old is not a relative concept. What the above example in accordance with the classical set theory implies is that there is a clear-cut boundary to make concepts distinct in terms of their truthfulness, which is far from reality in practice.

Zadeh (1965) developed an alternative theory expressing an opposing view which counts category membership as a matter of degree rather than a clear-cut issue. Instead of just being in the set or not, an individual is in the set to a degree. Lakoff (1972, p.458) also rejects the 'classical set theory', stating "[c]learly any attempt to limit truth conditions for natural language sentences to true, false and 'nonsense' will distort natural language concepts by portraying them as having sharply defined rather than fuzzily defined boundaries".

An example offered to clarify the point is the birdiness example (Heider, 1971). Arguing that there seems to be a hierarchical ranking to the truthfulness of a sentence, she offers the idea of a distinction existing between the central membership of a category and peripheral members. She believes there is a hierarchal order in the concept of birdiness hierarchy.

Robins
Eagles
Chickens, ducks, geese
Penguins, pelicans
Bats

In the above hierarchy, robins are regarded as typical of birds; eagles less typical than robins; chickens, ducks and geese less typical than eagles; penguins and pelicans less typical than chickens ducks and geese, finally bats are counted as hardly of a bird at all. This hierarchal order is in line with the 'prototype theory' (Rosch, 1973).Williamson (1994, p.4869) states "Used as a technical term, 'vague' is not pejorative. Indeed, vagueness is a desirable feature of natural languages. Vague words often suffice for the purpose in hand, and too much precision can lead to time wasting and inflexibility." In the same way, the term VL in this study is used without any negative connotation; instead VL is considered to be an important and integral part of everyday language. VL is defined by McCarthy and Carter (2006, p.928) as "words or phrases with very general meanings which deliberately refer to people and things in a non-specific, imprecise way".

Various terms have been used by different researchers to delineate concepts which are highly context-dependent to be understandable; the most commonly used being indirectness and inexplicitness. These terms should not be considered the same or juxtaposible, as the only thing they may have in common is that they represent no clear-cut boundaries of the concepts they refer to. Cheng and Warren (2003) proposed a classification attempting to clarify the confusion. They argue that 'indirect language' involves an inferencing process through which meaning is created, while the hearer has access to language and the context. This term embodies paradigms such as conversational implicatures (Grice, 1975), illocutionary acts (Austin, 1962), indirect speech acts (Searle, 1968) and pre-sequences (Levinson, 1983). Inexplicitness, on the other hand, refers to a case in which items of reference such as *that* and *it* cannot stand on their own feet, independent of context, but once used in a specific context, they gain a certain meaning. In other words, meaning is created through the 'joint construction' (p. 397) by the participants in the context where it is used. Hence, substitution and deixis, and reference fall into this category. Vagueness, however, differs from the other two in that even when used within a context, its property of 'vagueness' is retained, the context, however, can contribute to the construction of meaning. To put it another way, it still remains vague rather than become precise.

Channell (1994) presents cogent evidence indicating that in order for communication to be effective as well as successful, speakers will need to use vague words and expressions at an appropriate level. In other words, they will need to be appropriately inexplicit. It is assumed that an important element in what constitutes a speaker's communicative competence is the use of VL, which is contextually appropriate and understandable. Channell (1994) states vagueness in language is not a matter of badness or goodness but a matter of appropriateness. She also claims that VL serves the following purposes in communication.

a. give the right amount of information and deliberately withhold information;
b. use language persuasively;
c. display power
d. use it as a politeness and as a means of self-protection
e. use it as a means to demonstrate informality
f. fill in lexical gaps and missing information.                    (Channell, 1994)

No all vague words are equally vague, that is the boundary of conceptual categories manifested through vague words is vague to different degrees. Some vague categories are more vague and more context-dependent than others (Ruzaitė, 2007). Basing their classification of VL categories on degree of vagueness, linguists have proposed different categories of VL. The first classification of vague categories was presented by Crystal and Davy (1975) as 1. placeholders, 2. summarising lexical items, 3. vague generic terms and collective nouns, 4. approximate quantities, 5. words with suffixes. A more recent classification was proposed by Channell (1994) as 1. quantifiers, 2.approximators, 3. placeholders, 4. vague references to categories. There are discrepancies with regard to the terms used by the linguists. For example, what is called 'vague references to categories' by Channell (ibid) is called 'general extenders' by Oversteet (1995) and referred to as ''summarising lexical items' by Crystal and Davy (1975).   Also, Stenström (1944) uses the term 'hedges' to refer to approximators.

McCarthy (1998) claims vague expressions make important contributions to naturalness and informal, convergent tenor of every talk. Furthermore, Jucker,

Smith and Ludge (2003, p.1766) continue "they [vague expressions] are not just poor substitute for a precise expression. Rather, they often convey meaning that is different from and more relevant than a precise expression would".

As a linguistic phenomenon, VL is associated with such concepts as fuzziness, imprecision, indefiniteness and indirectness (Zhang, 1998; Ruzaitė, 2007). Janicki (2002) opts for the term 'incomprehensible language' as a broad term which embodies VL, and defines it as "words, expressions, formulations, idioms, texts, etc. which are easy to misunderstand, which are hard to understand, or not possible to understand at all" (p.215), and claims that it appears consistently rather than sporadically in conversation. Janicki doesn't seem to have selected an appropriate term for such categories or if she has, VL does not seem to fall under this category since the frequent occurrence of VL in conversations should disrupt communication, the opposite of which is true.

As long as the function of VL is concerned, Prince, Frader and Bosk (1982) state 'plausibility shield' (p.90), as they call vague expressions, functions to shield speakers from the full or personal commitment regarding the truth condition of an utterance. Similarly, Brown and Levinson (1987) claim that an application of VL can be to maintain the negative face of the interactants and pave the ground for the smooth precession of the conversation.

VL also functions as one of the numerous hedging strategies in making a claim. Myers (1989) argues that to be on the safe side to make claims with regard to new research findings, the author of a scientific text employs hedgers to report the potential lack of certainty. Erev, Wallston, and Neal (1991), likewise, report their research finding indicates that vague communication in tasks which demand cooperation between group members will reinforce the sense of cooperation. Similarly, Hamilton and Minoe (1998, p.6) maintain that "imprecise language can facilitate a polite exchange between source and receiver. A precise worded message might come across as too personal, threatening a receiver's self–esteem. [Thus], Vague language allows the preservation of face". In the same line, Metsa-Ketela (2006, p. 123) states "when it comes to interaction, vague language functions as a marker of politeness and unreserved atmosphere". Hence, it is fair

to claim that the investigation of vagueness is as highly appreciated as is the study of preciseness.

There have been two focuses as to how VL originates in communication. The first one is a focus on language itself. Ullman (1962, p.118) refers to factors as "(a) generic character of words; (b) meaning is never homogeneous (i.e. it is context-bound); (c) lack of clear-cut boundaries in the non-linguistic world; (d) lack of familiarity with what the words stand for". He assumes in factor (a), the word refers to a broad term, one which is not a single entity but a class of items or events which have some elements in common. In (b), meaning should be interpreted with reference to the context. That is, it is the context which specifies meaning. In (c), the concept the word refers to is vague by nature. An example to clarify the point would be " to ask oneself when a hill becomes large enough to qualify as a mountain, or at what precise age a girl starts to be correctly referred to as a woman" (Channell, 1994, p.7) . Factor (d) refers to uncertainty of what is being talked about.

The second approach dealing with vagueness is viewed from a psychological perspective. Deese (1974) maintains that vagueness exists in the structure of ideas rather than in the language system. He claims that vagueness arises from the ideas which express language rather than from the language itself. Crystal and Davy (1975, p.11) put forth four reasons for vagueness or 'lack of precision'- as they call it:

   (a) memory loss - the speaker forgets the correct word;
   (b) the language has no suitable exact word or the speaker does not know it;
   (c) the subject of the conversation is not such that it requires precision, and an approximation or characterization will do;
   (d) the choice of a vague item is deliberate to maintain the atmosphere.

Jucker et al. (2003, p.1765) believe the most obvious reasons for VL use are "uncertainty at the time of speaking. Sometimes speakers lack information about a given quantity, quality or identity. They, therefore, cannot be more precise even if they want to". Cutting (2007) claims that the speakers are exhausted or in a hurry so that they can't find the right word or the vague expression may yield

assumptions which are contextually more relevant than the exact words for the hearer.

Regardless of the lack of an agreed-upon definition of VL, various classifications with regard to the concept of vagueness have been proposed. Walsh, O'Keeffe, and McCarthy (2008 ) divide vague categories into lexical and non-lexical types; lexical categories or what Channell (1994,p.123) calls 'common categories' are referred to as items which are of the graded structure, which can have a prototype e.g. 'bird', whereas non-lexical categories, 'vague category markers' (VCMs) (Walsh et al., 2008), or 'vague category identifiers' (VCI) (Channell,1994) refer to the ad hoc items which are the by-products of interaction. Examples for the second category include exemplars +vague tags such as *cloth and that kind of thing, money and things like that*, which imply that the audience is able to infer what is meant by the speaker.

All languages whether having solely spoken form or comprised of both spoken and written modes own a variety of components which express vagueness, though the spoken form outnumbers the written mode in vague expressions (Metsa-Ketela, 2006, p.118). This rich source of vagueness arises from the existence of semantic vagueness, and also concepts lacking clear definitions, thereby expressing imprecision. The example which best helps clarify this is the distinction drawn between a hill and a mountain. Since there does not exist a clear-cut borderline splitting these two concepts, the distinction between "what constitutes a hill and what constitutes a mountain" seems highly unlikely. The second factor contributing to imprecision in language is the existence of concepts such as metaphors, ellipsis, euphemism and pronoun references (ibid, p. 18). However, since vagueness is a part and parcel of all languages, it is worthwhile to devote adequate time and effort to the study of VL.

Precision can sometimes create confusion，which a vague expression can avoid. Tannen (1989) claims the increase of precision may have adverse effects. In other words, inappropriate use of details can be boring mainly witnessed in interactions between the old and the young, and insulting when used for criticism. A precise statement can sometimes be fuzzier than a vague statement. In his psychologically

oriented study on precision and vagueness which introduces the theory of 'Preciseness Paradox'. Teigen (1990) concludes that precise language suits any circumstance involving past or present tense talks, whereas VL is the most appropriate any kind of future prediction. Past or present involve more precision but using a precise language for the future can prompt more scepticism.

To examine this theory, Moxey and Sanford (1993) state "[t]hus it would appear that if one is looking for reasons to have faith in a proposition, then specificity suggests expertise, which in turn meets that criterion. In contrast, if one is looking for reasons to be sceptical, then precision may signal suspicion" (p.16). However, Teigen rejects the possible trade-off between confidence and scepticism, arguing that some features that consolidate confidence can also contribute to doubts.

Having reviewed the definitions of VL from different perspectives, this study takes the position of Channell in the treatment of VL. Her account of VL is as a combination of lexical and functional views with clear-cut boundaries in between.

## 2.2. VL in different settings and aspects

Focusing on VL across different spoken settings such as academic discourse, business discourse, conversation and public discourse in intercultural contexts, Cheng's (2007) study reveals that it is the discourse type rather than the speaker group which determines the form and frequency of VL use. However, the question which arises here is what causes the differences in VL use within a discourse group. The current research aims at examining such factors as cultural and linguistic backgrounds, as well as pedagogic variables to account for the VL inconsistency by a discourse group. It also attempts to find other possible reasons for the inconsistency in VL use across the three groups.

VL plays different roles in different settings. For instance, it is assumed that legal system requires the maximum precision in its context. In research on VL use in forensic situations, Cotterill (2007) found that even within the same context the role VL plays can differ from one position to another, for instance, a barrister

conducting an examination-in-chief versus a cross-examiner. While the former resorts to VL to claim that he does not have precise enough account or details of the case under investigation at his disposal, calling his witness's credibility into question, VL expressions for the latter "represent an opportunity for confrontation, since vagueness may be seen to stem from witness failings in memory, expression or integrity in the eyes of the cross-examiner. Exploitation of any of these shortcomings may pay dividends in the destruction of the witness's evidential credibility" (ibid, p.112). Lakoff (1990), also, points out legal contexts demand VL by stating that to some extent laws need to be ambiguous as it is virtually impossible to see their future potential applications in different contexts. Thus, it implies that VL reinforces flexibility of laws.

Adolphs et al. (2007) state that VL in medical settings is frequently used by physicians or nurses to provide patients with a clear and true description of their illnesses. As an example, in a professional-patient consultation, the former needs to turn to VL in order to adjust his language to his non-specialist patient's knowledge. Prince et al. (1982) claim that in medical settings the existence of VL originates from the occasional substantial need to express uncertainty. When physicians use VL, it "demonstrates a scholarly orderliness in their representation of knowledge" (Adolphs et al., 2007, p.64).

In other words, while talking of diagnoses and prognoses of diseases such as cancers, physicians need an inherent degree of uncertainty in their statements to indicate that there isn't still a thorough understanding of such diseases and this demonstrates neatness rather than undesirable imperfection in the way they represent their knowledge.

The analysis of VL in UK's National Health Service direct phone-ins and hospital-chaplain-patient interaction showed VL as "helping to facilitate the patient's conversational involvement, while mitigating the force of directives to such supply personal information" (ibid, p.74). VL also helps the listener and speaker feel socially closer. With regard to NHD Direct data, while giving the patient a clear idea of "the serious nature" of the topic, VL also helps keep the atmosphere relaxed.

Additionally, VL helps nurses maintain interpersonal relationship with patients in the process of eliciting and providing responses. Since NHS Direct consultations are conducted on the phone, this discourse involves a higher level of VL use, as compared to patient-nurse interaction which occurs in a face-to-face communication demanding less VL use. As Adolph et al.'s (ibid) research finding illustrates, VL serves significant roles even in medical discourse as a common discourse in a normal life, and this is reliable evidence that English language learners need to become competent in VL use, be the purpose learning English for academic purposes, or integrating with native speakers, one aspect of which can be communication in medical settings.

Factors such as genre, discourse type, and speakers' linguistic and cultural background also play determining roles in purposes VL can serve in various settings. In a study on VL use by NSs and NNSs, Cheng and Warren (2001) found out rather than creating confusion and misunderstanding, VL can , in a broad sense, enhance friendliness and reinforce 'cooperative tone of exchange' , creating formality in conversation. Furthermore, they state "[i]n addition to this, vague language has other, more specific uses, normally classification, compensating for a lack of vocabulary (as an accommodation strategy and as an avoidance strategy), compensating for a lack of knowledge, politeness and finally 'self-protection' " (ibid, p. 86).

An instance of accommodation strategy refers to when the NS adjusts his language to the NNS audience's language level by using simple forms such as shorter sentences, simple structure and employs commonly used words. "It seems, therefore, that varying the degree of specificity is one way in which NS accommodates NNS, and whether this means using more or less VL will depend on contextual factors such as the NS's perception of the NNS's linguistic ability"(ibid, P.94).

 Another favourable function of this attribute is that by enhancing mutual tolerance between interlocutors, VL keeps the audience an active participant in the process of communication. It, therefore, serves as a hearer-involvement device

(Ruzaitė, 2007). In other words, using vague expressions to a high degree urges active and attentive participation of the interlocutor to construct the meaning of the expressed message.

There are very few studies on VL in Persian. Only two of which mainly focus on VL, the rest partially address VL either as a subcategory of a larger study such as vague expressions in the study of *metadiscourse* in Persian or view the phenomenon from a narrow perspective. The first in-depth study of VL in Persian lies in the investigation of frequency and grammatical distribution of general extenders in which Parvaresh, Tavangar and Eslami Rasekh (2010) find out that *adjunct general extenders* are more frequently used in Persian than *disjunct general extenders*. In other words, Persian speakers prefer general extenders beginning with *and* to the ones beginning with *or* in their L1. This is in line with Cheshire's (2007) finding focused on native British English but in contrast with native American English studied by Overstreet (2005).

The other trend within the Persian language was that Persian *disjunctive general extenders* were found to be less likely to occur after prepositional phrases. The comparative side of their study revealed similarities and differences between the two languages; "Both Persian and English disjunctive general extenders show smaller variability of forms compared with their adjunctive counterparts" (Parvaresh, Tavangar & Eslami Resekh, 2010, p. 33). By contrast, while Persian speakers demonstrated tendency in using general extenders both clause finally and clause internally, these structures appear in the clause final positions only in English.

The other VL study which sheds light on the Persian EFL learners' use of VL, particularly general extenders, shows that the clause-internal use of general extenders in Persian results from the SOV order in their L1 (Parvaresh, Tavangar, Eslami Rasekh, & Izadi, 2012). This finding also revealed an instance of transfer of a VL category from L1 to L2. "Non-native speakers defined the pattern conjunction+noun phrase/ determiner phrase+ (like that) in such unique GEs [General extenders] as 'and and and' and 'and this and that'. This might be attributed to transfer from Persian" (p. 277).

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With regard to the function of this vague category, they reported a new function developed in the Persian corpus that is missing in the non-native speaker data: General extender is used by an interlocutor to express outrage at what the other interlocutor has already mentioned. Contrary to the native speakers of English who attache intensifying effects to general extenders in their native language, the Persian speakers refuse to assign this function to the same category of VL in their L1 or English as an L2. Also, in the EFL group, majority of disjunctive general extenders are used as a result of the uncertainty on word choice. This is a case which occurs with a very low frequency in Persian corpus.

Employing a similar participant group (PSLE), however different in setting (in classroom context), the present study includes two other groups, CSLE and L1 speakers of English, and compares the ways they use VL in a wider scope. Although the present study excludes general extenders, some of the reasons for the difference in the use of general extenders such as L1 influence and uncertainty on word choice seem to be identifiable in the pattern for VL use by other groups, contributing to discrepancies in the way each group communicates. These differences will be examined from the functional and frequency distribution perspective.

Beighmohammadi's (2003) investigation into the application of intensifiers in written language across three different domains such as the hard science, social science and TEFL revealed that this vague category occurs twice as frequently in social science as it does in hard sciences and TEFL. His justification for the trend was that social science writers resort to discursive and rhetorical strategies in presenting what they find, while the others rely merely on reporting facts. Abdollahzadeh (2003) found no significant difference in the use of hedges between Iranian and Anglo-American writers when he investigated the interpersonal metadiscourse and the subcategories related to it in the discussion and conclusion sections of ELT papers.

Although these research findings compare the Iranian language users with the L1 speakers of English, they do not explicitly take into account the inter-cultural and

cross-linguistic factors in identifying the reasons for the difference. In addition, both of them focus on written discourse solely. The other factor drawing a distinctive line between these research studies and the current research is the fact that they mainly focus on metadiscourse aspects in their investigation, which looks into VL as a tiny building block of this phenomenon. As a result, the generalisability of their findings in terms of VL use due to this limit in the scope of their studies seems to be controversial.

There have been studies on the similarities and differences between two varieties of a language and most of them tend to focus on the more straightforward areas, namely pronunciation, vocabulary and syntax, while pragmatic and discourse features have been neglected. In research on approximators (a category under VL) between American English (AE) and British English (BE), Ruzaitė (2004) found there exist quantitative and qualitative differences between the two varieties of English in terms of approximators use. From the quantitative point of view, BE uses approximators much more frequently than the AE. In other words, BE speakers tend to be vaguer. "An American speaker might be treated as too straightforward by BE speakers. BE speakers, meanwhile, might be evaluated as too evasive by the speakers of AE" (ibid, p.22).

Another quantitative difference lies in the frequency of individual approximators used by the two speakers. BE speakers prefer to use *about* frequently, while *around*, *approximately*, and *roughly* are more popular with AE speakers. This demonstrates how speakers of two varieties of the same language view VL differently. Ruzaitė (2004) concludes that even if English is spoken in both of these countries, cultural differences cause discrepancies in their model of VL language use.

Culture seems to be a determining factor in VL use. Thus, more work is needed to be done over teaching English VL to the speakers of other languages due to the diversity of linguistic and cultural backgrounds they belong to. To achieve this goal, the most crucial step is to explore how VL is interpreted and how it is used in other languages. This is what the current research aims to explore in more

details in academic settings with two L2 speakers of English versus the L1 speaker.

## 2.3. VL and education

This study is situated in education settings, thus the focus of this section is VL in education context.

### 2.3.1 VL in classroom

In an investigation of VL in mathematics classes, Rowland (2007) found that mathematics which is concerned with absolute precision by its very nature also involves VL use, i.e. in talking about what is the most axiomatic fact, speakers need to resort to vague expressions. Although, this research finding applies primarily to math classes which use certain hedges for making predictions and generalisations, it indicates the need for VL teaching to English language learners, irrespective of the purpose these learners may have in mind for language learning. That is, VL should be taught in all kinds of English classes such as General English, English for Academic Purposes (EAP) and English for Specific Purposes (ESP). It is expected that this research finding can present convincing evidence to acknowledge the significance of VL in ELT.

Adopting Walsh's (2006) framework for classroom interaction (SETT: Self-Evaluation of Teacher Talk), Walsh et al. (2008) examined vague category markers (VCMs) such as exemplar + vague tags in academic contexts in Limerick-Belfast Corpus of Academic Spoken English (LIBEL CASE) corpus vs. two corpora of casual conversation in Limerick Corpus of Irish English (LCIE) and Cambridge and Nottingham Corpus of Discourse in English (CANCODE). Classroom interaction framework is comprised of four modes or micro-contexts namely managerial mode, material mode, skills and systems mode, and classroom context mode. A mode is defined by Welsh as a "classroom micro-context that has a clearly defined pedagogic goal and distinctive interaction feature determined largely by a teacher's use of language" (2006, pp. 62-63).

This cross-corpus study revealed that compared to casual conversation, academic discourse involves less use of VCMs. Nonetheless, VCMs in such settings have typical functions, which they lack in other settings. In managerial mode, the stage occurring at the commencement of each lesson, which consists of one clause by the teacher, no student turn-taking comes up. Frequent repetition and the 'handover' to students which comes about the end of each sequence are the typical features of this stage. What occurs next is a transition to another mode. At this stage VCMs can be employed by the teacher to "help expedite the start up phase of a lesson or activity since they can provide shortcuts that mark information or concepts that can be what is common ground and facilitate a speedy handing over to the task phase of the lesson"(Walsh et al., 2008,p. 26).

In the material mode which encompasses the teaching material or input used where students are made to answer the questions and their comprehension is checked, the researchers were not able to identify VCMs due to the limited language used at this stage. In skills and systems mode where the interlocutors are involved in an interaction on the 'core subject' of the lesson, the goal is to familiarize learners with skills and concepts new to them and provide them with appropriate feedback. This stage is characterized by the tightly controlled discourse and teacher's frequent use of display question which lead to responses by students and evaluations by teachers. VCMs at this phase serve as

> [T]wo-way portals. For the teacher, they can open a door to what is likely shared knowledge for this phase of the lesson and create a shared space around this commonage. For the learner, they open a door to a space where it is safe to take risks. Tentative propositions can be marked using VCMs and loss of face is avoided. In this mode, they engage cooperative listenership on the part of peers which also facilitates learning (Walsh et al., 2008, p. 26).

At the last stage of this process, known as the classroom context mode, the local context determines the management of turns and topics, there are abundant opportunities for communication and teacher's role is prominent at this point, which allows students as much time and space for interaction as they need. The

teacher is mainly a listener and promotes interaction. The goal, here, is for students to extend dialogue and discussion. Thus, students are given the chance to express themselves and participate in the academic discussion and give long responses. A VCM at this stage behaves similarly to the way it functions in daily conversation since "it acts as an 'involvement device' ensuring listener participation and prompting equity and understanding" (Walsh et al., 2008, p. 25).

This study is open to the criticism that it is narrow in scope, that is, only VCMs have been investigated, while other kinds of vague expressions could have been addressed. Nonetheless, it significantly sheds light on the role of VL in educational settings. Therefore, with this as one of the many applications of VL in educational settings, the current research will look at how VL in an almost similar context but with different participant groups, CSLE, PSLE and L1 speakers of English, will occur.

Although it seems that ESP includes scientific writings made up of a series of objective statements regarding facts, vague expressions are frequent in scientific journals and play significant roles in academic writings. In the academic discourse, VL can play various roles, for example, writers are able to express the proposition with more precision, while they keep in mind that exactly quantifying the world is almost impossible. Thus, in an attempt to present the information as accurately as possible, the writer tries to keep fact and interpretation balanced. Therefore, VL is an instrument to make uncertain scientific claims with more caution. "So writers often say 'X may cause Y' rather than 'X causes Y' to specify the actual state of knowledge on the subject" (Hyland, 1996, p.478).

VL also allows enough room for the anticipation of possible negative consequences of being proven wrong. In order to avoid direct responsibilities for the statements they make, academic writers use VL to make speculations. Writers of scientific articles need to keep the writings referable with respect to the further developments (Myers, 1996). The work by Myers on strategic vagueness in academic writing suggests an overall framework for the use of VL use in different articles:

A. Vagueness in statement of results allows them to be compared to results from slightly different conditions.
B. Vagueness in treatment of numbers not relevant to the argument guides the reader on the preferred path.
C. Vagueness in articulation between results and implications allows the text to be assimilated to future developments. ( Myers, 1996, p.12)

A good command of VL is thus a feature of a proficient L2 reader and writer in academic discourse. The above reasons support the need for VL teaching in English language classes (the current study's context), since ESP courses may run as complementary courses for General English programs. This can be the most appropriate point of departure for VL learning and teaching.

A similar concept to vagueness is inexplicitness. Inexplicitness is believed to be a characteristic of a native speaker's conversation (Cheng & Warren, 1999). It is manifested on two levels, the level of form and the level of inexplicitness, and is defined as "the degree to which linguistic behaviour is reliant on context to convey meaning" (ibid, p. 295). Inexplicitness emerges when the speaker chooses to use ellipses and substitution, deixis and reference in their talk. That is, by adopting these forms, the speaker relies on the context to convey the intended meaning, using lower lexical density in their talk.

There is a trade-off between level of explicitness and lexical density of a conversation, meaning that the lesser degree of explicitness, the lower lexical density it involves. It is claimed that the level of inexplicitness in the language of an academic lecture is lower than that of a naturally-occurring conversation. The findings of the research by Cheng and Warren (1999) show that NNSs of English use lower levels of inexplicitness compared to the NSs. In other words, the NNSs employ more lexical density in their conversations.

The finding of this research demands the teaching of appropriate level of inexplicitness to the learners of English. Their research mainly focused on lexical level but it still remains a question how inexplicitness can be employed to refer to different functions in conversation. To be more accurate, how differently do L2

speakers versus L1 speakers resort to inexplicitness or vagueness to express different functions in the spoken mode and how can these differences be reduced through teaching them to language learners? The current research  is a quest for the answer to this which is one of my main research questions.

Whilst most of the studies in this field demand the need for inexplicitness or require VL to be integrated in language interaction as real life communication, few explore the use of VL in academic settings. This study investigates VL use adopted by three different groups in classroom settings. In particular, lack of research on VL by CSLE and PSLE is the impetus for this study. It attempts to make theoretical explorations of vagueness, as well as an empirical analysis on how differently VL is manipulated by the three groups.

## 2.3.2 Pragmatics of VL in language learning and teaching

Cheng and Warren (2001) point out that a learner's discourse is more often than not different from that of  a native speaker's and this discrepancy might result from factors such as impact of first language vocabulary, differences in conversational rules in first language, lack of access to the required word in the target language and cross-cultural misunderstandings. These factors lead to the unnaturalness of learner's discourse in that the learner is either too precise or too vague. What they explore in their research is that there exist differences in the VL use by the NSs and NNSs in their data but these differences are not remarkable. This indicates that it is totally a wrong assumption to claim NSs and NNSs will encounter misunderstanding in cultural discourse due to the fact that there are differences in their language uses.

*Sociolinguistic competence*, according to Bachman (1990), concerns appropriateness of function in terms of context. It deals with variations in dialect or register, the naturalness, and being able to 'interpret cultural references and figures of speech'. Naturalness is another aspect which seems to address VL, as discourse without appropriate degree of vagueness lacks naturalness. This addresses why most of the time the writing or speech of a competent L2 speaker is

evaluated as pedantic and unsatisfactory by the L1 speaker, despite the high linguistic accuracy. The reason is that it does not sound natural or appropriate, for instance in terms of VL use or does not seem to have been produced by a proficient language user. Therefore, it fails to gain approval by an L1 speaker. Bachman asserts "in language use these components [and subcomponents] all interact with each other and with features of the language use situations. Indeed, it is this very interaction between the various competencies and the language use context that characterizes communicative language use" (1990, p. 86).

*Pragmatic proficiency* discusses appropriateness in terms of language function or use. Not following pragmatic norms in a speech society can result in the L2 speaker appearing rude or offensive (Nikula, 1996). To overcome such problems, and make up for the shortcomings of such factors in language learning, CLT gives room to different functions which serve various purposes in communication. To this aim, different scholars use different terms as the potential instruments to refer to these functions.

Brown and Levinson (1987) use the term *softening devices* to refer to expressions such as *I suppose* which are used to refer to the truth-condition by the speaker. Besides, Thomas (1995) adopts the term *modifying devices*, e.g. softeners and straighteners of pragmatic force, and states that although it is true that *modifying devices* create vagueness in what the speakers say, their frequency demonstrates that they are communicatively significant for the speakers.

Nikula (1996) asserts that expressions such as *I suppose, probably*, or *sort of* are counted as 'mitigating and reducing the force of utterances' which can serve different purposes. VL is also associated with expressing politeness and formality in communication. James (1983, p.201) maintains that expressions such as *sort of*, *or whatever*, and *you know* " contribute to certain informality of style and intimacy of relationship", whereas Nikula (1996) believes that other modifying devices such as *as it were* and *I presume* are applied in highly formal situations.

In line with developing language learners' *sociolinguistic competence* in second or foreign language learning, most studies in *pragmatic competence* focus on

such domains as politeness (Brown and Levinson 1987), request, apologising (Badovi-Harlig & Griffin, 2005), complimenting (Holmes1986, Holmes & Brown 1987, Pomernatz, 1978; Wolfson, 1981), and making suggestion (Alcon , 2005). Not much has been directly commented about the role of VL in improving learners' *sociolinguistic competence* and *discourse competence*. Thus, the findings of this research can contribute to the development of the body of knowledge required to analyse learners' needs in language pedagogy and to design instructional materials to meet them.

Although no language teaching approach or method literally or explicitly engages in VL instruction, literature in pragmatic competence addresses the significance of this phenomenon as a crucial building block of an L2 learner's successful communication. Therefore, as Cheng and Warren (2001) state  VL is a component of strategic competence and sociolinguistic competence, which are the major considerations of CLT and therefore offer as reasonable a justification for teaching VL in language teaching as possible. However, it should be emphasised that VL seems to be wider in scope, than merely the two components Cheng and Warren point out, and therefore fall within all the four components of *linguistic competence*.  All this said, it becomes evident that VL teaching (referred to by different terms in different studies) is supported as a component of *pragmatic competence* in CLT in language pedagogy.

Kasper (1997) begins his paper with the rhetorical question "Can pragmatic competence be taught?" He then proceeds by the answer that not only should it be not taught but also it does not need to be taught. His justification which seems to be unacceptable is that "because perhaps pragmatic knowledge simply develops alongside lexical and grammatical knowledge, without requiring any pedagogic intervention" (p. 2). This statement of his may  raise two questions, the first being how simply can lexical and grammatical knowledge help develop the 'secret rules' (Alcon  & Martinez-Flor, 2008) of language use? And the second one is while pedagogy is always there to facilitate learning, why should its role be ignored and not be allowed to work as a catalyst in teaching pragmatic competence? Besides, why is it that some advanced language learners in EFL

settings who have been studying language for a long time are still not pragmatically mature enough compared to their own *grammatical competence*?

Before getting into the details of this, it is best to ask first if L2 pragmatics is subject to learning without teaching, why have so many scholars bothered to do so many studies on it and why is there a growing body of literature in teaching and learning pragmatics in language pedagogy? (Kasper & Blum-Kulka, 1993; Kasper & Rose, 1999; Rose, 2000; Bardovi-Harlig, 2001).

In general, such areas as deixis, conversational implicature, presupposition and conversational structure are studied under pragmatics, while study of second language pragmatics, also known as interlanguage pragmatics (here forth ILP), engages in the study of speech acts, conversational structure and conversational implicature (Alcon & Martinez-Flor, 2008). Pragmatic studies in language pedagogy so far have been centred on such features as discourse markers and strategies, pragmatic routines, pragmatic fluency, and speech acts including compliments, apologies, implicature and refusals.

This study investigates VL largely as part of *pragmatic competence* seemingly, neglected by ELT practitioners. In the growing literature on VL so far, little has been said on VL in language teaching solely, although some researchers in their studies on VL from linguistic perspective, more or less, addressed pedagogy indirectly in their implications. Studies in *pragmatic competence*, similarly to approaches in second language studies, have been viewed from cognitive and social perspectives (Alcon & Martinez-Flor, 2008, p. 6). In other words, some researchers have paid great deal of attention to the mental or cognitive development of an individual's pragmatic competence, whereas others have made attempts to focus on how *social interaction* lays the foundations of an individual's *pragmatic competence* development.

With regard to the cognitively-oriented approach in the study of *pragmatic competence*, literature mainly relies on the works by Schmidt (1993) and Sharwood Smith (1981, 1991). The former's work developed as a *consciousness-raising approach* emphasises conscious attention paid to the relevant forms, the

pragmalinguistic forms they involve and the sociopragmatic constraints involved in these forms. The work by the latter places significant importance on the role of providing enhanced input by exploring techniques that aim to develop language learners' pragmatic competence.

The socially-oriented view of learning pragmatic competence places significant importance on the social interaction. This is associated with work in sociocultural and language socialisation work. "Both theories place great importance on the social and cultural context of learning and they focus on the process of language acquisition by examining language use between experts and novices over time" (Alcon, 2008, p. 7). The sociocultural view is based on the work by (Hall, 1998) where more participation in communication will lead to improved interactional competence and improved interaction can enhance pragmatic competence. On the other hand, the socialisation version (Schieffelin & Ochs, 2006) reinforces culture and language being integrated.

Li (2002) proposed a new concept, 'Pragmatic dissonance', associated with the pragmatic competence of bilinguals that is an area in relation with ILP. This is taken to be referring to the fact that L2 learners may go through a dilemma with regard to using L1 or L2 sociopragmatic norms when intercultural communication is required. This case-study demonstrated how his ecstasy for native-like linguistic competence turned into an agony to cope with the discourse management when communication with the native-speaker was involved. "This is probably because my native-like proficiency in English tends to create the expectation, or illusion, that this L2 speaker is "one of us" and will therefore observe the same rules of speaking as found in 'our discourse system'"(ibid, p. 586). The subsequent anxiety resulted from this psychological tension can lead to 'pragmatic avoidance'.

Literature in pragmatic competence now confirms that adult language learners, be it in ESL or EFL settings, demonstrate pragmatic differences compared to L1 speakers (Bardovi- Harlig 1998, Bardovi–Harlig & Harftord, 1993). Additionally, Celce-Murcia, Dornyei, and Thurrell (1995) state that there is even a noticeable imbalance between an advanced language learner's pragmatic knowledge and his

grammatical knowledge. In other words, rich grammatical competence does not necessarily reflect high pragmatic competence. Olshtain and Blum-Kulka (1985) claim that a language learner's pragmatic competence is usually less developed than his grammatical competence.

What the literature above refers to seems to be an overgeneralisation because it discusses pragmatic competence in general and does not refer to each component individually. Some of EFL/ ESL learners' pragmatic components such as VL might develop parallel to their linguistic ability. The present study aims to compare L2 speakers' pattern of VL use as a feature of pragmatic competence in EFL settings against the L1 speakers' VL use pattern. The data will be analysed to see if learners' linguistic ability correlates with their VL competence as a component of pragmatic competence. Therefore, the result can be used as evidence to delineate how VL can help students to pragmatically manoeuvre in communication.

Bardovi-Harlig (1991), Kasper (1997) and Eslami-Rasekh (2005) presented techniques to help improve learners' pragmatic competence but what is conflicting is that there are lots of language learners who opt to not behave pragmatically like L1 speakers (Washburn, 2001). This desire of language learners can be respected only in some regards, as there are some pragmatic components which need to be similar to the L1 speakers' pattern of use to make sense to others. In their L2, learners may be able to follow their L1 norms to practice speech acts, refusals and compliments in communication but VL seems to be one of the pragmatic features which might lead to marking one as pragmatically incompetent once not used close to L1 speakers.

Another reason why VL compared to other features might need to be used more like L1 speakers is that speech acts, refusals, or compliments are mostly used in spoken language but VL is applied in both spoken and written languages. Speech acts, refusals, or compliments may not be used in courses such as EAP or ESP which require academic discourse, but VL is frequently used in such contexts. Additionally, speech acts, refusal and compliments seem to be relatively culture

specific but VL needs to be used according to a more specific criterion like the L1 speaker.

It is hoped that this research can establish a firm position for the instruction of VL as a pragmatic feature. It may draw an overall picture regarding to what degree and how appropriately VL is used by L2 language learners compared to L1 speakers, and how VL as an aspect of pragmatic competence can play roles in language learners' pragmatic and linguistic competence. This is one of the early studies on VL in conjunction with ELT. However, VL is already a well-founded area in linguistics. This study also gives some implications as to how VL can be focused on in teacher education and how VL as a feature of pragmatic competence can be incorporated in the design of communicative language-learning tests.

This study aims to compare the two L2 speaker groups' VL use pattern with that of the L1 speaker and investigate the inherent linguistic, cultural and pedagogic reasons contributing to discrepancies across the three groups. This can enhance the conceptualization of VL as feature in the study of pragmatic competence.

### 2.3.3 VL and learner language

De Cock, Granger, Leech and Enery's (1998) study consisting of corpora of French-speaking advanced EFL learners in comparison to L1 speakers of British English reveals that vague tags such as *and everything* and *or something* are considerably underused by EFL learners. "NSs use almost four times as many vague tags as learners" (De Cock et al., 1998, p.77).

However, there are cases of overuse of vague expressions by EFL learners; they strikingly overuse *and so on* with an increase of ten times more often than the L1 speakers. Additionally, EFL learners underuse vague expressions such as *sort of* and *kind of*. De Cock et al. attribute the advanced learners' inability to use vague expressions appropriately to three sources including "systematic differences in the way vagueness is expressed in their French mother tongue and in English;

shortfall in teaching (the use of vague language in the classroom may be stigmatised); and finally, lack of contact with native speakers, a particular problem for EFL learners" (ibid, p.78).

This research finding clashes with that of Cheng and Warren (2001) in which they conclude that NSs and NNSs show no significant differences in terms of their VL use patterns. Also, Drave's (2002) research finding on NS and NNS's VL use pattern, contrary to Cheng and Warren's conclusion, proves De Cock et al.'s findings that there do exist discrepancies in the way NSs and NNSs employ VL in English. As all these researchers select just one single NNS group in their studies, it may be an over-generalisation to state that the L2 speakers' inappropriate use of VL might originate from systematic differences in how vagueness is expressed in their L1 languages.

The credibility of such a claim with just one L2 speaker group is questionable. In order to investigate these kinds of inconsistencies with more accuracy, the current study employs two linguistically and culturally contrastive groups of L2 speakers (Chinese and Persian) so that the effects of linguistic and cultural differences in terms of VL use can be evaluated with   more validity.

Ringbom's (1998) study on vocabulary frequencies in advanced learner English from different countries indicates that learners who share almost the same cultural and educational background with minute differences show  consistency in features of their English language vocabulary use "different from NS language" (p.49) . He claims that what is noticeable in the study is that "learner language is vague and stereotyped" (p.49).   However, he states there is no solid evidence as to what the source of this vagueness is.

Table of frequency in his report illustrates that non-numerical and quantifiers (such as *more*, *all*, *other*, *some* and *very*) are overused by learners, but *many* and *any* are overused by NSs. It is also noticed that the two general vague words *people* and *thing* are highly overused by advanced learners of English. The problem which arises from Ringbom's study is the use of the term *overuse*. He

doesn't state what the limit is. Maybe simply the expression *use more than* can present a clearer picture to the reader.

His conclusion demonstrates a view quite contrary to other linguists such as Channell (1994) and Cutting (2006), as he claims that "The limited vocabulary that advanced learners have in comparison with NSs is a main reason for the general impression of learner language as dull, repetitive and unimaginative, with many undeveloped themes" (Ringboom, 1998, p. 50). He also claims that these features "are less due to errors than to an insufficient and imprecise, though not necessarily erroneous, use of the resources available in English" (ibid. p. 51).

This judgment seems to be unsound since it is merely based on the quantitative evaluation or frequency rate. That is, Ringbom failed to investigate the qualitative dimensions of the context such as the functions of vague expressions or the structures of such terms. As advanced learners, these learners might have outperformed the L1 speakers in expressing the degree of certainty or strength of claim. Even if his claim proves correct that the advanced EFL learners' language was 'dull, repetitive and unimaginative, with many undeveloped themes', it could be due to the fact that the EFL learners had been selected from France, Spain, Finland, Sweden, the Netherlands and Germany and these countries are culturally and educationally close to one another.

This factor rather than their 'limited vocabulary' might have been the potential origin of their VL overuse. In line with this finding is another research by Nikula (1996), which demonstrates underuse of vague expressions by L2 speakers of English (Finnish speaking English language learners). She reports that such expressions as *more or less*, *kind of*, *and stuff like that*, and *everything* were less commonly used by her L2 speaking subjects in comparison to the L1 speaking ones.

Another study on VL use by NNSs belongs to Metsa-Ketela (2006). She investigated the use of VL by NNSs as English as lingua franca, compared to the NSs. This study consisted of English as a corpus of Lingua Franca in Academic Setting (ELFA) versus Michigan Corpus of Academic Spoken English (MICASE)

against the NS language. It was narrowed down to the study of *more or less* as the most frequently occurring vagueness marker in the three corpora. For the ease and accuracy of investigation, the study was conducted in monologues and dialogues separately in four domains of social sciences, humanities, technology and medicine.

The analysis revealed that *more or less* is of a relatively high frequency in academic lingua franca English, more popular with NNSs especially in monologues such as presentations and lectures rather than dialogues. In terms of function, the NNSs showed three prominent functions in their use of *more or less* namely, 'minimizing', 'comparing similarities', and 'approximating quantities'. In the first instance "*more or less* is used in a similar manner to *simply*, *only*, or *just*, and its purpose is to indicate that the concept is either small in scale or that it is not adequate" (Metsa-Ketela, 2006, p.135). This function is unique to NNS's use of *more or less*. However, the researcher believes

> [T]hough this deviates from the standard or native use of the expression, it does not seem to cause any confusion in the interaction. This unconventional function supports the view that lingua franca speakers can come up with innovative ways of using the language and negotiate new meanings for old words. It also suggests that cooperativeness and the will to understand each other play a crucial role in lingua franc English and therefore the unorthodox use of language does not necessarily result in communication breakdown ( p.141).

The second function *more or less* frequently serves in lingua franca corpus is to compare "similarities between two or more concepts or entities". The third function, however, not very frequent, is found only in the NNS data. In this function it is used only as a device to approximate quantities or expressing generalisations. This study focuses on lingua franca population as the NNS group, but the result cannot be discussed in a generalised fashion in terms of the NNSs linguistic or cultural background, as the speakers come from various countries. Moreover, this study is very restricted in scope in that it focuses on the use of one single vague expression.

The other study by Metsa-Ketela (2012), wider in scope and focusing on vague expressions in English spoken as a lingua franca setting revealed that these expressions are employed almost twice as frequently by the lingua franka speakers as the L1 speakers. *General extenders* occurred commonly in situations where there was a similarity between the interlocutors in terms of their status at university. *Vague metadiscourse particles* were densely located in doctoral defences "where speaker roles are clearly assigned and hierarchical" (p. 280). Metsa-Ketela's (2012) research is narrow in perspective. The present study aims to view VL from wider perspectives, investigating more lexical items along with their functions and focusing on L2 speakers' linguistic and cultural patterns which can contribute to the design of a VL teaching to be used in language pedagogy.

All the literature discussed thus far has concentrated on VL in spoken English, which is also the main focus of the current study. The following discussion on VL in written English will add another dimension to the understanding of VL use. The ability which most language learners appear to have problems with, especially in writing, is expressing appropriate degree of doubt and certainty (Hyland & Milton, 1997). This is actually the most frequently used instrument to distinguish between facts and opinions.

 Studies on learning in EFL/ESL contexts reveals that depending on their linguistic and cultural backgrounds, language learners display differences in expressing degrees of probability.  For instance, L1 speakers of Chinese show to opt for a more direct and authoritative tone as well as tendency to use more strong modals than L1 speakers of English (Hu, Brown, & Brown, 1982).  Allison's (1995) research demonstrates inappropriately strong assertions by ESL writers in Hong Kong. "These problems persist for L2 writers at post-graduate level where PhD supervisors are often required to counsel the need for appropriate degrees of qualification and confidence in expressing claims" ( Dudley- Evans, 1991, p.47).

Hyland (1998), additionally, states that language behaviour principles and patterns for exposition and argumentation are culture-specific and cause differences in students' writing in English. He claims that the correspondence between a claim

made and the 'evidence or reasonable assumption' in particular in academic writing gives both L1 and L2 speakers a real challenge.

Another study by Hyland and Milton (1997) which focused on hedges used in exam scripts by L1 British school leavers and Cantonese speaking English learners indicated that although Chinese have proved to be 'indirect' in writing argumentation in their L1, they use only half as many hedges as their British counterparts in similar circumstances. According to Holmes (1988) and Hyland (1994), one major reason for students' problems with the use of hedges and uncertainty markers arises from the lack of enough attention and misrepresentation of such expressions or their equivalents in pedagogical materials for ESL classes.

Moreover, Hyland (1998) states that "students require an understanding of hedges not only as text-based item, but also as discourse-based strategies, showing how they relate to the writer's overall text plan" (p.235). This research is in line with this advice by Hyland that as language learners may be the potential authors of scientific papers and books, they will need to gain mastery over expressing degree of certainty.

Wu, Wang and Cai's (2010) examination of *I think* by Chinese EFL learners revealed that compared to the L1 speakers of English, the former uses this subjectiviser far more often. Besides the similarities in the functions *I think* between the two groups (downgrading, marking deliberation, taking and holding turn, and delaying), the Chinese group was found to have attached other functions to this subjectiviser. They used it to 'signal conclusions', and to refer to listing when collocated with *so* and *firstly*. The main reasons for the heavy use of *I think* in this study were associated with the learners' inadequate language proficiency, the need for delay and habit. The present research looks at the employment of *I think* by a third group (PSLE). It will illustrate how differently *I think* can manifest in communication by each group.

Research findings in cross-cultural rhetoric show that people with different languages and cultures prefer to adhere to their own language and culture.

(Connor, 1996; Sotter, 1988). As a result, "Such differences can make NNSs vulnerable to the risk of violating communicative norms as their writing may appear as too direct, running the risk of being considered as either brusque or dogmatic, or as too tentative, and therefore seen as equivocal, different or naive" (Hyland & Milton, 1997, p.186).

In research on the use of expressions of doubt and uncertainty by L1 speakers and L2 users, Hyland and Milton (1997) find that despite the fact that the two groups made extensive use of a limited number of items, mainly consisted of modal verbs and adverbs, L2 students turn out to have problems with "the manipulation of certainty and affects in academic writing" (p.201). A comparison between Hayland and Milton (1997), Biber et al. (1999), Cook (1989), Brazil (1997) and Mayer's (1996) research findings, approves the influential roles of VL in both written and spoken modes, but indicates that VL has some characteristic features in terms of frequency and function in each mode. As an example, discourse intonation (Brazil, 1997) is unique to spoken mode which can support VL use, or the appropriateness of informal language in spoken discourse can demand high frequency of VL use.

With all this in mind, the current study will attempt to find if there are any VL functions unique to Chinese and Persian linguistic and cultural backgrounds which language learners will transfer to class or whether analogically English VL can be taught to the L1 speakers of these two languages.

With respect to learners' unusual use of vague expressions, Channel states that "It is often noticed by teachers that English of advanced students, while grammatically, phonologically, and lexically correct, may sound rather bookish and pedantic to a native speaker. This results in part from an inability to include appropriate vague expressions" (1994, p.21). Therefore, her recommendation is that vague expressions be incorporated into the curriculum of EFL classrooms. Channell even takes a step beyond this and suggests incorporating vague expressions in native speakers' higher education curriculum as she claims that optimal use of vague expressions shapes one dimension of the language of formal spoken presentations.

## 2.4 Theoretical frameworks

This section deals with the analysis of three theoretical frameworks, namely, the Cooperative Principle (CP, Grice 1975), Relevance Theory (RT, Sperber & Wilson, 1995) and elasticity of VL theory (Zhang, 2011). While the first two theories are relevant, the focus of this study is the concept of elasticity of VL.

## 2.4.1 VL and Cooperative Principle

VL is mainly examined in pragmatics and a concept related to this feature of language is the Cooperative Principle proposed by Grice (1975) in his theory of Conversational Implicature. This theory assumes that a successful communication in any context of conversation is the result of communicator's adherence to an underlying principle called 'Cooperative Principle'. CP demonstrated by Grice (1989, p. 26) through the statement of " Make your conversational contribution such as is required, at the stage at which it occurs, by the accepted purpose or direction of the talk exchange" is manifested  by four maxims: Maxim of Quantity, Maxim of Quality, Maxim of Relevance and Maxim of Manner. Grice's theory of conversational implicature appears as follows.

      a. The co-operative principle
         Be as co-operative as possible
     b. The maxims of conversation
            Quality: Be truthful
  (i)  Don't say what seems to be false.
  (ii) Don't say what you lack evidence for.
             Quantity:
 (i) Make your contribution as informative as required
 (ii) Do not make your contribution more informative than is required
           Relation: Make your contribution relevant.
          Manner: Be perspicuous
  (i) Avoid obscurity.
  (ii) Avoid ambiguity.
  (iii) Be brief.
  (iv) Be orderly.

Huang (2007) argues that the use of hedges in conversations indicates that speakers are subconsciously aware of the existence of maxims and attempt to observe them. Thus, they try to adhere to CP. To support this claim, he gives the following examples (pp. 26-27).

 

        Opting out hedges in English
a. Quality:
   As far as I know,
   I'm not sure if this is true, but ……
   I may be wrong, but ….
b. Quantity:
   As you probably already know,
   I can't say any more,
   I probably don't need to say this, but …..
c. Relation:
   Oh, by the way,
   I'm not sure if this is relevant, but ….
   I don't want to change the subject, but …
d. Manner:
   I'm not sure if this is clear, but…
   I don't know if this makes sense, but …
   This may be a bit tedious, but …

 

Grice states conversational implicature is the result of either strictly adhering to or firmly violating maxims. With regard to the first case, Huang (2007) presents the following example (p.28).

Relation:

John: What's the time?

Mary: The museum hasn't opened yet.

[Implicates]: It's at least before whenever the museum normally opens.

Huang believes in this example it is maxim of Relation that leads to conversational implicature.

If this maxim is to be satisfied, Mary's utterance has to be taken as relevant. Since John has asked a question, Mary should be providing an answer. Assuming that in saying what she has uttered, Marry is co-operatively answering John's question, we can infer that while Mary is not in a position to provide a straightforward answer, nevertheless she thinks that the museum's not being open yet might help John to get a partial answer, such as the one indicated above (p.29).

Contrary to the first example given, and as Grice pointed out, the speaker might ostensibly flout maxims. On such occasions the hearer may either realise that the CP has been violated or he may assume that this seemingly lack of cooperation may mark the speaker's attempt to follow the CP at a deeper level (Huang, 2007). Therefore, the addressee might realise he is responsible for inferring the message beyond the words. As Davies (2007) states

It could be argued that the existence of this pattern behaviour enables the speaker to make the task of the hearer more difficult; speakers can convey their intentions by a limitless number of utterances and it is up to the hearer to calculate the utterer's intention. It would seem from this that the CP is not about making the task of the hearer straightforward; potentially it is quite the reverse. (p. 2310).

The example below will help to illuminate the case.

Maxim of Quality:

Chomsky is a great sociolinguist

[Conversationally implicates] Chomsky is no sociolinguist at all.

(Huang, 2007, p. 29)

A student of linguistics will certainly know that this statement is not true and the maxim of quality has been violated but to maintain cooperative principle observed, he must assume that the speaker means something quite different from what he actually said, something beyond the literal meaning of the statement just made, "the ironic meaning"(Huang 2007). There are some distinctive properties which characterise conversational implicature (Grice, 1975; Huang, 2007). These properties include 'defeasibility or cancellability', 'non-detachability', 'calculability', 'non-conventionality', 'reinforcibility' and 'universality'.

Defeasibility or cancellibility refers to the fact that there are certain linguistic and non-linguistic contexts which make conversational implicatures disappear.

As is evident, conversational implicature also classically known as 'figurative language' (Sperber & Wilson, 1986 a) presents justification for implicitness (a concept close to VL) in that the speaker violates the CP on the assumption that the hearer is able to understand the implied meaning. "When the literal interpretation is inappropriate, the appropriate figurative interpretation [implicature] somehow comes to the hearer's mind" (ibid, p.155). Cutting (2007) claims that vague expressions foster maxim of quality but violate maxim of manner or quantity, or both. Channell (1994, p.33) mentions:

> If I'm asked what time I expected to be home from work, and I genuinely do not know, because I cannot anticipate workload or traffic, then my most truthful reply, that for which I have evidence, could be 'about six o'clock'. From this the hearer would infer that I could not say exactly.

Thus, in the example presented, the speaker is trying to be as truthful as possible (Maxim of Quality) and he actually is to the best of his ability, but his answer violates maxim of manner in that he is not clear enough to address the question. However, contrary to Cutting's (2007) claim that VL does not follow Maxim of Quantity, it seems that VL does not necessarily violate it, because VL is often used to show the succinctness, in a context where there is no need to say more than what VL expresses.

As a result of the criticism directed to Grice's theory, Horn (1984) proposed the modified model of Q-base and R-based implicature to help improve Grice's theory of conversational implicature (See Horn 1984 for a detailed discussion). However, his model, too, was called into question by Levinson (1987) but as neither of these closely engages with VL, they will not be discussed here.

Cutting (2008) criticises Grice's CP, stating that "different cultures, countries and communities have their own ways of observing and expressing [and violating] maxims for particular situations" (p.40). Through different examples, she demonstrates how a maxim being flouted in one culture is counted as strictly observed in another. In terms of maxim of quantity, "How are you?" in the United States is followed by a reply such as "fine" , but in another culture the respondent might be expected to refer to the actual state of health. When speaker A says " We'll call you in about two weeks" to speaker B and then fails to do so, this is regarded as flouting of maxim of quality in Britain, because A didn't tell the truth, in other countries, however, this is another way of indirectly stating ' We are not interested in you"(Cutting, 2008, p.40).

Additionally, Cutting (2008) argues the second major shortcoming of CP is that it is impossible to consider a clear-cut boundary between maxims. "It can be difficult to say which one is operating, and it would be more precise to say that there are two or more operating at once" (p.40).

In general terms there is some relevance between CP and VL (e.g. the principles of conversation implicature), however when it comes to specifics, CP does not provide any framework in analysing the manifestation and realisation of VL, which is important part of this present study. Furthermore, it does not provide any specific maxims for the use of VL, which would make the discussion of pragmatic functions of VL in this study less guided. Thus, CP is not the major theoretical framework upon which this study is based.

## 2.4.2 VL and Relevance Theory

As an alternative approach to Gricean pragmatics, Relevance Theory (Sperber & Wilson, 1995) assumes that human cognition is involved in maximizing relevance with regard to communication. While CP, mentioned above is based on usage principles or communication, RT lies in cognitive principle (Levinson, 1989). The point of departure of this theory is not the socially-acquired cooperation principle to be followed by communicators, but human cognition.

The assumption underlying this theory is that human cognitive system behaves in a way that it can maximize relevance with reference to communication. That is, human cognition makes the least processing effort to achieve the maximum positive effect in communication. "Various pragmatic theories appeal to complex sets of rules, maxims, or conventions to explain how this linguistic underdetermination is contextually overcome. We claim that the principle of relevance is enough on its own to explain how linguistic structure and background knowledge interact to determine verbal communication" (Sperber & Wilson, 1986a p. 161).

In this framework, pragmatics is regarded as a single notion of relevance based on two principles of relevance. Unlike CP, the principles of RT are not there to be addressed by the speaker and known by the audience and also followed or obeyed in communication. Viewed as part of human cognition, these principles "are an automatic reflex of the human mental capacity that works without the communicators having any overt knowledge of it" (Huang, 2007, p.202).

There are two principles underlying RT. The notion of relevance is the core of RT, and relevance is manifested in the form of the two principles of relevance: cognitive principles of relevance and communicative principles of relevance. As stated by Sperber and Wilson (1995) relevance is a measure consisting of two factors (i) cognitive effects and (ii) processing effort. Cognitive effort refers to the interaction of a new input and a set of assumptions already existing in a cognitive system and, processing effort addresses the effort spent for a cognitive system to produce an appropriate interpretation of any incoming information processed. "Human cognition tends to be geared to the maximization of relevance" (ibid. p.252).Thus the relevance of an input to the person is a matter of degree between cognitive effects (benefit) and processing effort (cost). Relevance of an input to an individual is interpreted as:

(a) Other things being equal, the greater the positive effects achieved by processing an input, the greater the relevance of the input to the individual at that time.

(b) Other things being equal, the greater the processing effort expended, the lower the relevance of the input to the individual at that time (ibid. p.252).

As for the communicative principle of relevance (Ostensive-inferential communication), it is not true that in the process of communication we are absorbing every possible input and scanning it for relevance because this would make communication quite difficult. The ostensive-inferential communication assumes that communication contains two kinds of information. The information that the speaker wishes to transmit and the information that covers the speaker's intention to inform the audience of the intention in mind. In other words, ostension and inference are the two poles of communication. Ostension is from the communicator's point of view and inference is from the audience's perspective. Thus, their communicative principle of relevance appears as "Every stimulus conveys a presumption of its own optimal relevance" (ibid, p.252). Optimal relevance is presumed as

(a) The ostensive stimulus is relevant enough to be worth the audience's processing effort.
(b) It is the most relevant one compatible with communicator's abilities and preferences (ibid, p.254).

Cheng and Warren (2001, p. 93) assert that "[S]ince vague language seems to be easier to process and makes fewer demands on the listener, it is probably also the case that a speaker may choose to use a greater amount of vague language to make the discourse easier for the hearer(s) to understand". On such occasions, the speaker will be able to skip technical words or 'specialized language' which the listener lacks and employ a simplified language, instead. This can be as evidence that RT might be more directly compatible with VL.

Jucker et al. (2003) adopt RT theory in their VL study. They state:

> Vague utterances allow speakers to maintain fluency when they cannot access information at the point where it is needed in the conversation. In some cases, speakers may have information potentially available but they cannot access it in a timely way. They may then decide that the processing

costs of accessing it, and the cost to fluency, are not warranted in terms of any benefits to be gained by precision. However, speakers may choose vague expressions even when they could have stated their utterances more precisely. A vague utterance may be more efficient in the sense that it yields the same contextual assumptions for lower processing cost (ibid, 2003, p.1765).

Zhang (2005) argues that RT significantly supports the non-numerical approach of VL, while she claims that the numerical, semantically oriented approach has also its own merits. She believes that Zadeh's (1965) fuzzy set theory and RT have convergent and divergent principles. In terms of compatibility, they both give priority to optimality. That is, they rely on what is the most optimum or suitable in a situation. However, the clash between the two is that the former adopts a quantitative approach, emphasizing mainly the semantic aspect of meaning with the numerical values, whereas RT insists on the cognitively oriented approach of interpretation.

One reason for the prevalence of RT is that "sometimes we don't know or cannot agree on the exact numerical value for fuzzy expressions" (ibid, 80). Additionally, there are occasions when we know the numerical value but prefer to use vague expressions for such reasons as 'withholding information' and 'safeguarding oneself'. Zhang (2005) also asserts that what determines the realisation of optimal relevance isn't the option for fuzzy or non-fuzzy form of language, but the communicator's perception of relevance of the utterance.

A similar concept to VL proposed in RT is 'loose talks'. Sperber & Wilson (1986a) maintain that loose talks are types of non-literal uses. "They are based on resemblance relations among representations, and involve interpretive rather than descriptive dimensions of language use" (p.164). When someone loosely understands a proposition or concept, it doesn't mean that the concept or the proposition is vague and nor does it indicate that the proposition expressed is given a guarantee of approximate truth. In fact, it lacks the guarantee of truth condition.

Instead, certain of its logical and contextual implications are taken to be accompanied by regular guarantee of truth, whereas others are simply ignored. Thus the truth–conditional relation between propositions and the states of affairs they represent remains unaltered: what varies is how closely the proposition expressed is taken to represent the speaker's thought (p.164).

Zhang (2005) maintains RT offers limited explanation as to how contextual effects and processing efforts can be measured objectively and how they can be compared with each other. Cutting (2008,p. 42) brings 'cultural and social dimensions' once again to attention and states like CP, RT falls short of observing the influences of such factors as "age, gender, status and nationality". She claims that each country or culture might possess its unique ways of abiding by or demonstrating maxims.

Franken (1997) questions the foundation of Sperber and Wilson's account of vagueness and approximative utterances as cases of "loose talk", asserting that there is no reason to put these two phenomena under the category of "loose talk" since vagueness originates from vague concepts whilst there doesn't exist such a thing as approximate concepts. To put it in a different way, "vague thoughts include vague concepts, but approximate thoughts include precise concepts" (Franken 1997, p.150). He claims that accounting for vagueness demands the 'interpretive use of vagueness' and it is 'the existence of vague concepts' rather than solely the former, which is the only concern of Sperber and Wilson's discussion.

When it comes to vagueness, what challenges Sperber and Wilson's account is its single focus on interpretation processes. In other words, in their account, tremendous attention is paid to how listeners make use of the text, practice decoding, and infer the communicated assumptions, whereas "they do not examine the access the speaker may have to what he is talking about, i.e. the evidential basis of his utterance" (ibid, p.140). For instance, in the example: 'Peter is bald', the speaker might have figured out this fact through direct observation, or he might have referred to knowledge he has accessed second hand or his statement might be what he has inferred. Thus each of the instances above

indicates that "the 'evidential basis' affects the way communication process is analysed".

Sperber and Wilson state that concepts are of precise and well-defined boundaries, while they can be loosely used, and this phenomenon arises from the concept of relevance. Regarding  Sperber and Wilson's analysis of clear-cut boundary of concept, Franken (1997) argues that it results from the fact that some concepts are ineffable i.e. they lack one of the three entries such as lexical entry, logical entry or encyclopaedic entry. According to Sperber and Wilson in such cases another concept is used to express this thought.

Unlike Sperber and Wilson, Franken believes that some concepts are vague by nature. That is, for some concepts, the communicator adheres to the truth proposition when he uses a vague expression. He maintains this belief is confirmed when interpretation process is examined. In other words, when A utters "Peter is bald", the listener doesn't depend merely on the implicatures of A's utterance, rather "he gets a concept of Peter's baldness and derives implication from his thought" (ibid, p.145).

"Vague expressions may guide listeners to find the best match between the utterance and the intended meaning (Jucker et al., 2003, p.1742)". The use of VL serves the purpose of obtaining maximum positive effect using the least processing effort.  While RT offers useful insights to the VL study, it mainly focuses on a cognitive approach in the study of meaning. Similar to the limitations of CP mentioned above, it provides little specific platform with which   VL analysis can be carried out adequately.   RT is, therefore, not adopted as the primary theoretical framework of this study.

## 2.4.3 The concept of elasticity of VL

The present study is the most compatible with the concept of 'elasticity of VL' proposed by Zhang (2011).  Zhang's work is one of the few attempts that provide

an overarching conceptualisation to explore the issues of vagueness in language, which has been lacking in the field of VL research.

Elasticity of VL (Zhang, 2011) refers to the fact that VL is a versatile strategy at the interlocutors' disposal for effective communication. It can be stretched as long as needed and in any direction. She characterises three directions to demonstrate how VL elasticity can be realised in communication. The examples used are

This is <u>very</u> important ⇑ (Upward)

This is <u>a bit</u> embarrassing ⇓ (Downward)

⟺
There are <u>about</u> 20 students in the classroom (Horizontal)
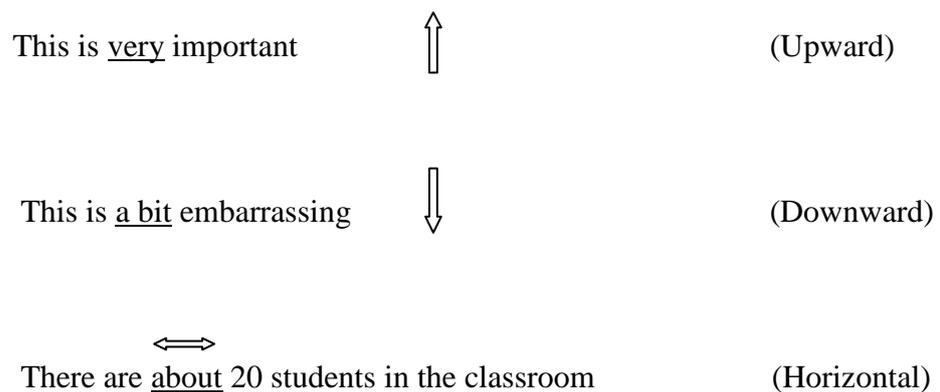
To describe the strategic manipulation of VL, she refers to vague work (VW) which is referred to as "a way of vague-ing language to fit a situation" (ibid, p.573). Focusing significantly on the dynamic nature of VL use, Zhang believes that there is no specified interpretation of VL as "it depends on contextual and communicative purpose" (p. 578). The theoretical framework of elasticity of VL has been developed relying on a main maxim, four specific maxims and three characteristics. The main maxim assumes that language can be elastically stretched in discursive negotiations to enhance communication. Zhang introduces specific VL elasticity maxims as follows:

(1) Go just-right: provide the right amount of information (e.g., That tall woman is very <u>kind</u>.)
(2) Go general: speak in general terms (e.g., Do you have any convictions <u>or anything</u>?)
(3) Go hypothetical: speak in hypothetical terms (e.g., It <u>could be</u> him.)
(4) Go subjective: speak in subjective terms (e.g., <u>I think</u> she is dishonest.)
(ibid, p.579)

She states that VL elasticity has three major characteristics.

1. 'Interconnected patterns of strategic elasticity': This refers to the concepts of interconnections existing between the 'pragmatic functions of elasticity', 'their linguistics realisations', and the specific maxims just cited. In other words, "A particular linguistic category tends to serve particular pragmatic function and to conform to certain appropriate maxims"

2. 'Determinant communicative purposes': The spontaneous communicative purpose in a particular context directs the elasticity of VL. How far the VL is stretched and in what direction is specified by the communication needs in a particular context.

3. 'Versatile pragmatic strategies': VL elasticity involves a moving back and forth within the two poles of a continuum. This kind of elasticity can range within 'contrastive pragmatic functions' such as "soft and tough, firm and flexible, cooperative and uncooperative moves" (p. 582).

To further elucidate the mechanism of elasticity of VL, Zhang (2011) uses the metaphor of a slingshot to delineate the elastic nature of VL. By this metaphor, she portrays how VL is tailored to the different needs of language users. The rubber band is stretched to aim by the user, and the stone is then released to hit the target. She describes this process as a three-stage process comprised of "stretch, aim/adjust, and release/hit" (p. 579).

The rubber is stretchable for an infinite number of times and can be adjusted to different degrees required for hitting the target. "When the target is close, simple, or clear, the result may be accurate and certain. When the target is far, complicated, or unclear, the result may be less accurate and certain"(p. 579). She also puts forth the dichotomy of passive and active use of VL. 'Passive vagueness' she states is not a matter of choice, so the speakers can't help but use it. 'Active vagueness', on the other hand, applies to where the speaker deliberately opts for vagueness. On 'passive vagueness', she gives reasons such as 'lack of specific information', 'vagueness in knowledge and memory', 'cognitive or linguistic void, or 'lack of language competence' (p.574).

This) research will embrace both 'active' and 'passive' kinds of VL use by both L1 and L2 speakers with the aim of detecting some specific reasons for VL occurrence in the classroom context so that the elasticity of VL can be revealed and language pedagogy can benefit from the implications drawn.

Zhang's (2011) novel theoretical framework is closely linked with the versatility of VL use in communication; most importantly she provides specific maxims to guide a systematic and effective analysis of VL in use (e.g. manifestation and realisation of VL). The current research concentrates on the linguistic patterns and communicative needs of VL use, thus Zhang's work on the elasticity of VL can provide a better understanding of VL use. The conceptualisation of elasticity captures appropriately the varying degrees of need for VL use from the three different groups of participants in this study, due to their cultural and linguistic backgrounds. Thus, Zhang's framework appears to be the most suitable to guide the discussion of the present study.

## 2.5 Concluding Remarks

The literature has looked into the different definitions of VL across different research papers and provided the required background for this study to proceed. It was revealed that VL can be looked at from different perspective but the one adopted for this study is the position taken by Channell. It has become evident that despite a growing body of literature on VL, it has hardly ever been investigated in an ELT setting. This research examines how the elastic feature of VL can help meet the diverse needs of language learners compared with L1 speakers. It focuses on the manifestation of VL due to its versatile role in communication.

# Chapter 3 Methodology

The present study is mixed methods research: combining both quantitative and qualitative methods. There is an integration and complement between the two approaches.

## 3.1Three approaches

At the outset of the 20th century, educational research practiced quantitative research as the dominant research approach. Due to the new movements in the field, its new counterpart, qualitative research, was developed over time by the end of the century. Creswell (2008, p.46) states "The development of the two approaches is not a case of one approach replacing the other; instead, it reflects the addition of qualitative inquiry to the traditional quantitative approach". Nowadays both approaches are practiced, which indicates each is still valid on its own.

What is interesting about these two approaches is that neither of them can be purely applied in a study (Firestone, 1987). In other words, it is hardly possible to claim that a study is purely quantitative or purely qualitative. Creswell (2008) claims that in any study, the researcher moves within a framework which gives more weight to one approach rather than the other. As Reichardt and Cook (1979) maintain, rather than being of an either or nature, research moves along a continuum of qualitative and quantitative approach. "A study tends to be more qualitative than quantitative or vice versa" (Creswell, 2009, p.3).

### 3.1.1 Quantitative approach

Quantitative research is defined as "a type of educational research in which the researcher decides what to study; asks specific, narrow questions; collects quantifiable data from participants; analyses these numbers using statistics; and conducts the inquiry in an unbiased, objective manner" (Creswell, 2008, p.46).

This kind of research dates back to late 19<sup>th</sup> century when it gained remarkable prominence in education and during the next century (Travers, 1992).

The philosophical paradigm behind quantitative research is the post positivist paradigm; however, it is also referred to as 'scientific method' or 'empirical science'. This tradition originates from Comte, and Mill's ideas. "Positivists hold a deterministic philosophy in which causes probably determine effects or outcomes. Thus, the problems studied by post positivists reflect the need to identify and assess the causes that influence outcomes, such as found in experiments" (Creswell, 2009, p. 7).

Additionally, this philosophy is based on a reductionistic approach that tries to classify and segment ideas into smaller measurable ideas which can be tested (Creswell, 2009). Post positivism believes in the observation and careful measurement of objective knowledge, giving emphasis to quantitative evaluation of phenomena. Another aspect of post positivism is its insistence on the body of laws and theories governing the world, which need to undergo verification and be tested in order to come to a deep understanding of the world. Therefore, research in scientific method commences with a theory, proceeds with data collection which contributes to the theory either being proved or rejected and then leads to the required amendments prior to further investigations (Creswell, 2009).

The steps in quantitative research originated from ideas in physical sciences, such as physics and chemistry. Education was treated like physical sciences. That is, educational patterns were looked at from the same perspective as physical sciences were viewed. Like atoms and molecules, children's behaviours were regarded 'subject to predictable laws and axioms'. This logic gave rise to the quantitative sense of research. It made measurement, assessment, numbers and experimental research a common practice. Overall, it underpinned converting educational patterns into accurately quantifiable measures for study. Generally, quantitative research owes most to three basic trends in its development; statistics, test and measurement practices, and research design (Creswell, 2008).

Statistical procedure was developed as a result of 'correlation analysis' which involved establishing relationships between two or more ideas. Later on groups superseded ideas and let researchers compare group average scores in educational contexts, and over time more complex models were designed based on these early models. The concept of measurement or evaluating an individual's mental ability resulted from countries' needs to measure combatants' readiness for the battle fields of World War I and II. This movement later on was introduced into educational settings, employed as an idea to measure individuals' achievement. This then developed into a plethora of different tests, such as aptitude tests, selection tests, placement tests, to name but a few.

In terms of research design, early research designs were simple. They began as surveys of educational issues and then continued as simple experimental studies in education such as comparing the performance or attitudes of two groups. Later on researchers managed to develop more research designs which let them study multiple groups and also administer multiple tests. However, this was not the end, as further innovations in research design led to the emergence of qualitative research.

One of the major elements of quantitative research is 'hypothesis' which is also one of its characteristic features. Another distinctive feature of a quantitative research is the presence of an attribute referred to as 'variable' which gives meaning to measurement and statistics in quantitative research. As Creswell (2008, p. 139) cites "In *quantitative* research, researchers often test theories, broad explanations that predict the results from relating variables. ...the investigator employs a closed-ended stance by identifying variables and selecting instruments to collect data *before* the study begins. Quantitative research questions and hypotheses do not change during the study". In other words, Creswell claims quantitative research is more deductive.

As a result of all the attempts to reach an ideal objectivity in research finding, it turned out that this approach, which was more applicable to physical sciences was not compatible with social sciences. The reason was that it did not fit with the reality of social sciences, which is engaging 'everyday- life questions and

problems' (Flick 2002). As a result, Bonß and Hartmann (1985, p. 21) assert "[u]nder the condition of the disenchantment of objectivist ideals, we can no longer unreflectively start from the notion of objectively true sentences. What remains is the possibility of statements which are related to subjects and situations, and which a sociologically articulated concept of knowledge would have to establish".

The demerits of quantitative research, however, are not confined to Bonß and Hartmann's criticism. Research scholars in education called traditional (quantitative) approach into question, arguing that this approach strictly focuses on the 'researcher's view of education' rather than the 'participant's view'. They criticised the situation in which experimental research is conducted, asserting that the participants are excluded from the natural setting and put in an artificial situation, greatly dissimilar to their real life situations.

Therefore, they called for approaches which valued participant's views, reflected on the setting in which participants' views were expressed, which also regarded people's impressions of educational settings (Creswell, 2008). The most remarkable research designs associated with the quantitative approach are experimental designs, correlational designs and survey designs.

Despite the inadequacy discussed above, this research is partly based on a quantitative analysis. It is comprised of the application of a Chi-square test to validate the significance of differences in the use of VL across the three groups. As a quantitative analysis on its own is insufficient to address the research questions due to the reasons given, a qualitative analysis was carried out to validate the quantitative analysis. The combination of quantitative and qualitative analysis can provide a more thorough picture of the application of VL in the classroom context.

## 3.1.2 Qualitative approach

Nowadays, popularity of qualitative research in education has grown and is still on the rise due to the flexibility inherent in this approach. Creswell (2009, p.4) describes qualitative research as "a means for exploring and understanding the meaning individuals or groups ascribe to a social or human problems". Qualitative research is a thirtyish year-old approach in education; however, it was practiced in fields such as anthropology and sociology prior to that. Creswell (2008) holds there are three themes such as 'philosophical ideas', 'procedural developments', 'and participatory and advocacy practices' which historically built up qualitative research in education. One or more of these themes may manifest in current studies (ibid).

This study proceeds with a broad view of respondents' VL use patterns in the actual context. It doesn't direct VL use within a pre-established framework such as providing the participants with specified vague expressions as questionnaire items or test items or giving them any kind of background regarding VL, nor does it focus on artificial contexts which require using certain expressions. It studies VL in quite a natural setting, which is English language classes (class discussions) for NNSs and tutorials in English literature and linguistics for NSs.

Creswell (2009) reviews some striking features of qualitative research, one of which is that researchers act as the data collection instruments; they are directly involved in actual data collection by observing participants' behaviours, and interviewing them. Despite using protocols for collecting the required data, it is the researcher who carries out the data collection procedure, rather than using questionnaires or other instruments designed by other researchers. The next characteristic feature associated with qualitative research is the chance it gives to the researchers to use multiple sources of data. It gives them the opportunity to have different sources at their fingertips; they will be able to cross over in the data collection process.

Neuman (1997) sums up the differences between quantitative and qualitative research in the following areas.

- Quantitative research deals with measuring objective facts, while qualitative research deals with constituting social reality and cultural meaning.

- Quantitative research reflects on variables, whereas qualitative research emphasises the interactive processes and events.

- In quantitative research reliability is the key factor whilst in qualitative research authenticity is the major factor.

- Quantitative research is conducted independent of the context, while qualitative research is carried out within a situational framework.

- Quantitative research attempts to find answers which can be generalized to individuals or places beyond those under study, while qualitative research focuses on the fact that the finding is based on the particular themes which were developed in a particular context.

- Quantitative research is based on statistical procedure of analysis, whereas thematic analysis counts the major focus of qualitative research.

- In quantitative research the researchers doesn't hold a significant role in the research process, while a qualitative researcher is directly involved in the process.

As mentioned earlier in this chapter, the nature of the current research is more qualitative orientated, as there is no clear picture available to the researcher of the trends which might be acquired in the course of research. Also, there is no pre-designed hypothesis in this research to narrow the direction of the study. The substantial data to be used for this study is the text generated through the interaction of the participants.

This study is in accordance with the principles of Conversation Analysis (CA). CA is generally a method of qualitative research employed to study talk in interaction (Sacks, Schegloff & Jefferson, 1974). Hutchby and Wooffitt define CA as "the systematic analysis of the talk produced in everyday situation of human interaction: talk-in-interaction" (2008, p.14).

The premise behind this method is that there is more to talk-in-interaction than simply analysing conversation; in fact CA deals with how interlocutors

understand and respond to each other, while the central focus is how sequences of actions are produced (Hutchby & Wooffitt, 1998). It is asserted that despite its seemingly disordered look, conversation is overwhelmingly structured, and follows a close order but the fact is that this 'uniformity in structure' is constructed through the orderly ways participants adopt in interaction rather than conventionally exist there ( Wooffitt 2005; Linddicoat, 2007) .

Therefore, the central rationale behind CA is that "ordinary talk is a highly organized, ordered phenomenon" (Hutchby & Wooffitt 1998, p. 14). In other words, CA studies the sociolinguistic competencies which underlie the creation and interpretation of talk in organized sequences of interaction. It does not only focus on language but the practical social accomplishment made through it (pragmatic functions).  Linddicoat (2007) defines conversation as the means of socializing, developing and maintaining relationships between people but acknowledges that conversation involves more than exchanging linguistic codes; these extra linguistic features include "eye gaze and body posture, silence and the real world context in which the talk is produced"(p.1).

One of the distinctive features of CA is the naturally-occurring data used in this approach. It stresses an in-depth analysis of real life interactions in order to study how activities are performed through utterances.  The striking feature of this approach is that it allows audio or video recordings and these recordings can be reviewed as often as required so that the correct level of accuracy can be obtained.

This approach allows different kinds of characters to represent features of spoken language.  For example, it  is possible to mark periods of overlap between the two turns, gaps between words and turns, or even to show the point where the speaker stopped and breathed, assuming that these features can have their own interpretations in the analysis of human language.

Another feature of CA is associated with the way data is analysed with this method. Rather than using numerical units such as percentages, frequency counts or totals, such adjectives and adverbs as *commonly*, *overwhelmingly*, *regularly*, *typically*, etc. are used to analyse data ( Schegloff, 1993; Liddicoat 2005).The reason for this is that data in CA is a collection of actions, and the instances in this collection are based on contextualized talks by different participants. "This means that while there may be patterns which span contexts and participants, each context is unique: a collection is a collection of single instances rather than multiple examples of the same thing" (Liddicoat 2007, p. 11). This implies that the study of collections means studying a number of single case instances whereby each next case represents "the systematic commonalities which exist across participants and contexts" (ibid, p. 11).

One of the foci of conversation analysis is the concept of turn-taking. It deals with how interactants go about turn-taking, how they figure out when it will be their turn to start or how the other interactant will realize their co-participant is handing over. Turn-taking is an accidental phenomenon in conversation, as no one can anticipate how many turns will be taken, how long each will take or how it will be organised (Wooffitt, 2005). Sacks, Schegloff and Jefferson (1974) have presented descriptions of systematic turn-taking in which they all unanimously rely on turn taking components and a set of procedures for turn allocation.

One of the main characteristics of CA is the use of naturally recorded conversations as the basis for analysis. Thus, it deals with the activities people perform with their utterances the real-life situations. An advantage of CA is that it makes access to all the contributions of interaction (e.g. accidental aspects) possible. All the details which might seem irrelevant at the first glance could be interactionally significant. Embracing different features, even those which seem insignificant in communication, CA transcripts represent details and captures richer data features. Hatchby and Woffitt summarize the methodological basis of CA as follows:

- Talk-in-interaction is systematically organized and deeply ordered.
- The production of talk-in-interaction is methodic.
- The analysis of talk-in-interaction should be based on naturally occurring data.
- Analysis should not initially be constrained by prior theoretical assumptions.

(1998, p.23)

As for other kinds of research methods, CA is not free from shortcomings. There are two major criticisms which scholars associate with CA. As it came into being in sociology first, it fails to "address the kinds of topics which are central to traditional sociological inquiry: for example, the manifestation of power and inequality in social relationship and mobilisation of disadvantage based on gender, ethnicity or class" (Wooffitt, 2005, p. 158). Secondly, there is deficiency in the methodological procedure of this design. It is narrow in scope; it is not able to "take account of the essentially argumentative nature of everyday discourse, focusing instead on the management of interpersonal harmony and accord; or that its focus on the 'technical' aspects of the sequential organisation of turn-taking means that it cannot address the wider historical, cultural and political contexts and meanings which are invoked by and reflected in the kinds of words and phrases we use in everyday communication" (ibid, p.154).

However, Billing (1999) argues that data analysis in CA should be free from any kind of prior judgment or background regarding the available data, for example, there must be no attempt to interpret utterances according to the established social scientific theories, and instead the main thrust should be to work out the order established through the participants' communicative competencies. Additionally, Billing argues that CA reflects on a specific kind of social order, claiming that the assumption of conversation analysis is that people have equal status in the interaction under study. What he means by this statement is that CA has its own ideological view regarding social order.

As the main focus of this study is to investigate VL patterns of the native speakers of three different languages and since the most appropriate context to study VL is the natural setting, CA has been selected as the key design of this study to investigate how the features discussed above such as pause, overlap in speech, and other phenomenon occurring naturally in conversation can influence participants' patterns in VL use in the English language. Another incentive for the researcher to use CA as the most appropriate design for this study is that it allows audio and video recorded data which can be viewed as often as required to be transcribed to a high level of detail.

### 3.1.3 Mixed methods approach

According to Creswell (2009, p. 4) "Mixed methods research is an approach to inquiry that combines or associates both qualitative and quantitative forms. It involves philosophical assumptions, the use of qualitative and quantitative approaches, and the mixing of both approaches in a study". This approach needs the researcher to have a good command of quantitative and qualitative research skills as it is not merely collecting quantitative or qualitative research but knowing how to integrate and link the two kinds of data (Creswell, 2009).

The mixed methods approach is the result of an evolutionary movement in the development of research approaches. As with quantitative and qualitative approaches, this method has its own philosophical underpinning, called pragmatism. Pragmatism relies on practices, situations and outcomes rather than pre-established conditions; it is concerned with what is most appropriate to solving a problem (Patton, 1990). As Rossman and Wilson (1985) assert, the researcher's main focus in this approach are the research problems and he attempts to try all the different approaches to gain a better understanding of the problem; therefore, the researcher doesn't focus on particular methods but rather the most appropriate tool to find the answer.

The merit of mixed methods research is that it employs both quantitative and qualitative methods and is able to make up for the shortcomings of each one by taking advantage of the strengths of the other and then combine the benefits. "Mixed methods research provides strengths that offset the weaknesses of both quantitative and qualitative research" (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2007). For example, in a mixed methods research the researcher can adopt a qualitative approach, justifying that quantitative approaches are not able to take the context or setting as an influential factor, or arguing that participants' roles are understated in this kind of research.

A quantitative researcher can call a qualitative research into question by criticising possible researcher's personal biases or interpretations. They may find it difficult to generalise the qualitative research finding to a large population due to the small participant size in the study. Therefore, a mixed methods researcher is allowed to make use of all kinds of data-collection tool and is able to present more comprehensive evidence for their study.

Creswell (1994, p.177) defines four types of mixed method designs as;

- Sequential studies: The researcher first conducts a qualitative phase of a study and then a quantitative phase, or vice versa. The two are separate.
- Parallel/ simultaneous studies: The researcher conducts the qualitative and quantitative phase at the same time.
- Equivalent status design: The researcher conducts the study using both the quantitative and the qualitative approaches about equally to understand the phenomenon under study.
- Dominant-less dominant paradigm with a small component of the overall study drawn from an alternative design.

This study falls under the first category, with the quantitative section dealing with the lexical analysis and the frequency occurrence of VL. This will be conducted prior to the qualitative study engaged in the functional investigation of vague expressions across the three groups.

As Creswell and Plano Clark (2007) point out, one of the shortcomings of mixed methods research is that collecting and analysing quantitative and qualitative data is highly demanding in terms of time and resources required. It also involves complicated research procedure and needs clear presentation. Additionally, as more often than not researchers come from a background of only one form of research, either quantitative or qualitative, mixed methods research can be challenging to the researcher.

A concept closely associated with mixed methods approach is triangulation. Creswell (2008, p.553) claims "triangulation refers to the fact that the inquirer is able to improve his investigation by collecting and integrating various kinds of data on the same phenomenon". The three points to triangle are "the two sources of the data and the phenomenon" (ibid, p553). The idea of triangulating data sources as an instrument to create convergence across quantitative and qualitative methods was first developed by Jick (1979).

The most commonly mixed methods designs used in education are triangulation design, the embedded design, the explanatory design, and the exploratory design (Creswell and Plano Clark, 2007; Creswell, 2008). Triangulation design also known as 'concurrent triangulation design' ( Creswell, Plano Clark, Guman & Hanson, 2003) involves simultaneous but separate collection of both quantitative and qualitative data, merging the two kinds of data, and using the result obtained to better understand a research question.

 The rationale underlying this design is that the strengths of one approach will make up for the weaknesses of the other. For example the natural setting of quantitative approach can make up for the artificial setting adopted in a quantitative study.  Creswell (2008, p 557) believes this is how the procedure for triangulation design works.  "The researcher gathers both quantitative and qualitative data, analyses both databases separately, compares the results from the analysis of both databases, and makes an interpretation as to whether the results support or contradict each other". Also, Morse (1991) states the aim of

triangulation design is to obtain data which are different but complement each other regarding a selected topic.

In the triangulation design, the researcher gives equal weight to both quantitative and qualitative data. Another characteristic feature of this design is that both quantitative and qualitative data are collected simultaneously. Additionally, the next feature of this method is that the results gained from the analysis of quantitative and qualitative data are compared to see if the datasets indicate any similarities or differences.

Creswell (2008) claims the strength of the triangulation design is that it takes advantages of the strengths of each data. However, its popularity doesn't disguise the potential problems. Creswell and Plano Clark (2007) associate it with challenges researchers may encounter. As it involves both quantitative and qualitative data, it demands hard work and high level of expertise in both methods. Besides, the researcher may find that the result of one approach contradicts the other. This dilemma may require the collection of new data, which is difficult to sort out. The third challenge is how to convert the one data set into another so that they can be integrated and comparable (Creswell, 2008).

The other mixed methods design which is to some extent similar to the triangulation design is the embedded design. The similarity between these two methods is that both involve concurrent quantitative and qualitative collection. The difference; however, is that one form of data is the primary source while the other counts as the supportive source for the first one. In other words the researcher gives more weight to one and counts the other as complementary evidence (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2007). In an embedded design the researcher can adopt a one-phase or a two-phase approach, which involves the use of quantitative and qualitative data to answer different research questions arising in a study (Hanson, Creswell, Plano Clark, Petska, & Creswell, 2005). In this design one method is considered as the component of another. The second source answers the questions which the primary source fails to.

Creswell and Clark (2007) state the strength of this design is that it still gives the researcher the opportunity to take advantage of two methods in one single study. It can also be applicable to situations where the researcher is short of time or recourses to conduct both kinds of data collection, while one is less significant than the other. The shortcomings of this design are that integrating the results of two methods to answer different research questions is challenging. " Further, like the triangulation design, the simultaneous data collection of quantitative and qualitative data may be labour intensive for a single researcher" (Creswell, 2008, p. 559).

This research follows the embedded design in that, as cited earlier in this chapter, quantitative analysis of approximators intervals which will be carried out through DCT will be integrated into the qualitative investigation of VL expressions in lexical, functional and structural levels. Therefore, the quantitative approach does not play a significant role but serves a supportive function in this study.

As can be seen, the premise of mixed methods designs is although quantitative and qualitative research approaches can be applied individually, there are occasions when these two can help the researcher reap more benefits if he can adopt a two-sided view in his research design and keep both approaches handy in the course of the research process.

## 3.2 Naturally occurring data

There are two means of gathering natural data: compiling field notes of real life data and tape-recording. With regard to the first means, Tran (2006, p.3) states "In this ethnographic method, researchers observe real-life interactions and take notes of natural data on the communicative acts in focus". While, the latter involves audio taping or videotaping social interactions as in CA with the purpose of capturing data on communicative acts in progress.

The most salient advantage of tape-recording the data is that the data will be natural and represents discourse features. The other advantage is that it frees the

researcher from note-taking which means concentrating on the job in hand is easier. Finally, the researcher doesn't need to depend on his/her memory and selective attention; as a result, the reliability of data collection rises. Besides, tape-recording provides the researcher with the opportunity to replay the data and improve transcription and, finally, it is possible to preserve the sequence of talk.

Despite the advantages mentioned, this method has been criticised in some respects. Firstly, the degree of researcher's control of social variables concerning the interlocutors is low. Beebe and Cummings (1996, p. 81) state "many studies of natural speech have not given us scientifically collected samples that represent the speech of any identifiable group of speakers. They don't give us situational control". Thus, it can be said to yield unsystematic data.

Additionally; the researcher adopting this method of data collection may run the risk of not getting enough data regarding the communicative acts under investigation after recording authentic interactions for a long period. Another disadvantage of tape-recording of such data is audio recording may harm the confidentiality of the respondents. As their exact words and voices are recorded, they run the risk of being identified or their secrets being disclosed. The respondents' fear of loss of ambiguity might give rise to biases in the data.

The remedy to this problem is to keep the recording device as unobtrusive as possible. It doesn't mean that the equipment should be concealed but that it should be located where it doesn't attract the respondents' attention so that its presence is forgotten. It shouldn't be placed before the respondents' eyes, or it should be fixed on the wall on the back of the room. Therefore, it will be out of the students' sight while not actually being hidden.

 VL is an indispensable part of natural speech. Therefore the possibility of not being able to find VL expressions in interactions through CA was relatively low. On the contrary, in this study, it made a rich resource of VL available to the researcher. Besides, the application of transcription conventions of CA to

naturally occurring data provides a clear picture of the in-depth analysis of the data.

## 3.3 Data

The data collected for this study consists of three sets of interactive discussions in the classroom context: one L1 speaker group and two L2 learners of English groups. L1 speaker data has been selected from Michigan International Corpus of Academic Spoken English (MICASE) and the two L2 speaker sets are video recordings of the classroom interactions by CSLE and the PSLE with similar upper-intermediate to advanced proficiency level. In total, the data consists of 150 thousand words transcribed based on a 20 hours of recording with about 70 participants in each of the three data sets.

Purposive sampling was employed in this research, where the researcher had predefined groups in the data collection process. A pilot study was conducted: one hour data in Iran was recorded. It was sent to the researcher online for quality and vision check. After the pilot study, the recordings were conducted as planned. Any obscurities such as unclear words were discussed with the teacher of that class on the phone.

PSLE data was mainly recorded by a director of an English language centre and partly by the researcher when he was in Iran, using a digital video camera. The CSLE data was videorecorded through an associate who was thoroughly informed of the standards of the recording required and the composite of the interaction. In terms of the standards of transcription, the same conventions used in the L1 speaker data have been matched with the transcription process of the two L2 speaker processes. L1 data transcription was ready-made from a corpus. The researcher completed the transcription of the two L2 data sets.

The main criterion forming the basis of the comparison of the data across the three groups is the number of words involved in this study, rather than the length of the recording. The reason for this kind of selection lies in the different pace of speaking with is slower for the L2 speaker groups and this would distort the comparability of the data if length of time had been selected as the criterion. As pointed out by Terraschke (2008) due to the difference in word length from one language to another and also from one discourse to another, comparing the use of pragmatic devices in terms of the length of time is not the most appropriate option.

The most salient advantage of the video-recorded data as in the present study is that it will be natural (as opposed to manipulated) and represents real discourse features (as opposed to artificial or controlled interaction). It covers not only language behaviours, but also nonverbal activities including teacher and students' facial expressions, body language and other clues such as the context of the conversation.

The L1 speaker data presents American English in academic contexts. The reason for choosing American English is that learners in both groups (China and Iran) have used American English materials during their language learning. MICASE includes conversations across a wide range of contexts, out of which only classroom (academic) contexts have been selected for this study, which totals approximately 50,000 words (51,403).

The transcription level of the spoken corpus seems to be up to the standard level and closely follows the conventions required for CA. The interactions selected for this study are from academic spoken interaction on social issues occurring in classroom discourse consisting of mainly tutorials with a few small lectures. MICASE has been taken as the norm in terms of data comparability in terms of number of words, level of transcript, and turn codification.

CSLE data has been drawn from eight sessions of interactions between students and facilitators a university in Shaanxi in central China. All the participants were upper-intermediate to advanced level learners of English. Like the L1 speakers data, the recording was made of interactive discussions on social issues between 8 to 10 participants in each session. The data excluded the formal teaching times as it did not allow for a highly interactive discussion. The word count for the CSLE transcript is 51,263 drawn from 7 hours of recordings. As all the teachers for this level were L1 speakers of English, the recording was arranged to be made of classroom discussions which were run by a facilitator (a dominant student). This was to neutralise the intervening factor of the effect of L1 speaking teacher distorting the genuineness of CSLE language recorded in the transcript.

Persian-Speaking learner of English data consists of 7 hours of video recorded interaction between teacher and upper-intermediate to advanced level learners of English. The data was collected at Azin-E-Mehr language school, located in the city of Lahijan, Northern Iran. This data excludes formal teaching, as formal teaching would center around teacher's talk only and therefore reduce naturally-occurring conversation and interaction in class. It, therefore, comprises discussion sessions on social topics. The transcript for the PSLE data comprises 51,344 words which have been drawn from eight sessions of classes, each having 7 to 20 students.

As the L1 speaker data was based on standardised procedures and detailed transcriptions of spoken language, the researcher opted for videotaping naturally occurring interlocutors' interactions, with the purpose of capturing real-life data on communicative acts in progress. The reliability of the data collection is high, and video-recording also provides the researcher with the opportunity to replay the data and improve the accuracy of transcription. More importantly, it is possible to preserve sequence of talk, which is crucial for the analysis to be carried out in this study. These features allowed the researcher to get the quality of transcription close to the L1 data which had been conducted by expert L1 speakers.

A great effort was made to keep the three data sets as comparable as possible. To this end, the same data size was adopted for each group, around 50 thousand words. To be more accurate, 51,403 for L1 speaker, 51,263 for CSLE and 51,344 for PSLE. The topics for discussion in both L2 speaker groups have been kept similar as the topics discussed in the L1 speaker data: all relate to social issues. A major concern in the comparability of data in this study was the presence of L1 speaking teacher in the Chinse classes, whose interaction in the discussion could have affected the originality of the language coming from the Chinese speaking speaker of English. To prevent this, classes were arranged to be run by a facilitator who had the role of stimulating discussions in class and initiating and closing the sessions. To make it more comparable with the CSLE data, the Persian teachers were asked to take a minimum role in class and make the minimum speech production during the discussion so that a negligible portion of the PSLE data would be comprised of teacher language.

It needs to be mentioned that unlike teachers in the Chinese classrooms, teachers in the Persian classrooms were not L1 speakers of English. So the minimum English they spoke in the classroom reflected the English of an L1 Persian speaker, but the English spoken by the teachers in Chinese classrooms could have distorted the data as all the teachers in Chinese classes were L1 speakers of English. In other words, Persian teachers were all L2 speakers of English, but Chinese teachers were all L1 speakers. To reduce this significant difference in terms of the comparability of data sets between the CSLE and the CSLE classes, CSLE classes were run by facilitators who acted the same as teachers, but were L2 speakers of English.

## 3.4 Data analysis

Table 3.1: VL lexical categories

| Level of analysis | Form (micro-level) | Examples |
|---|---|---|
| **Lexical level** | **Subjectivisers**: Diminishing the assertive or imposing tone (Blum-Kulka et al., 1989). | I think, I guess, I don't know, I guess |
| | **Possibility indicators**: To express possibility involved in a statement | maybe, may, might, probably, possible |
| | **Vague quantifiers:** "Non-numerical expressions used for referring to quantities" (Ruzaitė, 2007, p. 41). | some (of), much, many, a lot of, most (of), (a)few, a little, lots of, a lot, majority |
| | **Vague intensifiers:** "Intensify the tone of a speech" (Zhang, 2011, p. 574). | really, very, actually, so, too, quite |
| | **Placeholders**: "Dummy nouns which stand for item names" (Channell, 1994, p. 164). | something, thing, things, someone, anything, somebody, anybody |

Table 3.2: VL pragmatic categories

| Level of analysis | Strategies (macro-level) | Examples |
|---|---|---|
| **Functional level** | **Mitigation:** "A pragmatic, cognitive and linguistic behaviour the main purpose of which is reduction of vulnerability" (Martinovski, 2006, p. 2). | -Self-protection: To protect self against being proven wrong later (Channell, 1994).<br><br>- Politeness: "To avoid or to reduce conflict" (Ruzaitė, 2007, p. 49).<br><br>- Downtoning: "Soften the tone of speech" (Zhang, 2011, p.574).<br><br>- Uncertainty: Attempts made by one to distance themselves from their claim (Ruzaitė, 2007). |
| | **Right amount of information**: - No need to be precise, just right information (Channell, 1994). | -Approximation and quantification: Make an approximation or express vague quantity (Zhang, 2011, p.574).<br><br>-Emphasising: Emphasizing with a strong tone.<br><br>-Possibility: Refer to uncertain degrees of possibility |
| | **Structural function:** Facilitating the structural flow of speech and conducting discourse management | -Repairing: Strategy to make corrections in speaking.<br><br>-Hesitation: Devices used to solve oral discourse production problem (Khurshudyan, 1997).<br><br>Turn management: Helping the interlocutors realise how and when to take-turns and when the other interlocutor is handing over. |

The analysis was conducted at the following levels compatible with the objectives and research questions of this study.

Lexical level in Table 3.1 is corresponding to the research questions 1, 2 and 3 listed in Section 1.1, i.e. frequency and form of VL used. Lexical analysis of VL is conducted through software Wordsmith Tools (e.g. Concordancing) for CSLE, PSLE and L1 speaker data. This program is used in order to acquire the information regarding the type of vague expressions used, and their frequency. It also provided information on the most and the least used VL expressions and the words vague expressions collocated with.

Pragmatics level in Table 3.2 is corresponding to the research questions 4 and 5 listed in Section 1.1, i.e. strategic functions. This level of analysis involves investigating the function and possible motivation of VL used across the three groups to find inter-language and cross-cultural factors depicting the discrepancies and similarities.

## 3.5 Concluding remarks

A rigorous study of VL requires a comprehensive analysis of this area of language. Therefore, to contribute to a more thorough understanding of VL use in the literature, a multifaceted analysis is adopted. This study is conducted at two analytical levels: a quantitative study (lexical analysis) which analyses the frequency occurrence of VL at different levels, the position of occurrence, collocation and cluster of five categories; *subjectivisers*, *possibility indicators*, *vague quantifiers*, *vague intensifiers* and *placeholders* by each group. A Chi-square test was applied to statistically examine the significance of differences in using the categories.

The second level (functional analysis) will be a qualitative examination of the functional properties of VL use by each group of participants. The quantitative and qualitative analysis will be used as instruments to support each other. As VL is an integrative part of each language, the data sets used in this study were collected from naturally-occurring conversation in classroom interaction.

# Chapter 4 Results

This chapter presents a multifaceted lexical analysis of the VL categories. It comprises an examination of the frequency of each expression in the first place, along with an investigation of the collocation or cluster of words around the vague expression. In addition, close attention will be paid to any particular linguistic tendencies, grammatical and lexical patterns in the use of the expressions.

*Collocation* and *cluster* are frequently used throughout this chapter to refer to two quite distinct concepts. The word *collocation* is used to refer to the occurrence of 1 or 2 words before or after the vague word under study, whereas the word *cluster* refers to three words. In other words, any combination of more than two words is referred to as *cluster*, otherwise; the word *collocation* is employed.

It should be pointed out that all the Tables in this chapter have been ranked according to the frequency occurrence of the items in the L1 speaker interaction.

## 4.1 Subjectivisers

Table 4.1: Distribution of subjectivisers

| Item | L1 speaker of English | | CSLE | | PSLE | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Distribution | Frequency | Percentage | Frequency | Percentage | Frequency | Percentage |
| I think | 161 | 79(%) | 732 | 99(%) | 207 | 73(%) |
| I guess | 23 | 11(%) | 1 | 0(%) | 41 | 15(%) |
| I don't know | 13 | 6(%) | 5 | 1(%) | 26 | 9(%) |
| I believe | 8 | 4(%) | 3 | 0(%) | 8 | 3(%) |
| **Total** | **205** | **100 (%)** | **741** | **100 (%)** | **282** | **100 (%)** |

Subjectivisers or what are also called *epistemic phrases* (e.g. Kärkkäinen, 2010) include *I think*, *I guess*, *I don't know*, and *I believe* in this study. Ruzaitė (2007)

asserts "[h]edges with *I* convey the speaker's stance and his/ her attempt to distance him/herself" (p. 158). As can be seen in Table 4.1, the three groups of participants demonstrate differences in the use of subjectivisers with the CSLE proving themselves to be totally different from the other two groups in the overall frequency of this vague category.

While the PSLE and the L1 speaker are found to be different by around 80 tokens, the CSLE overuses this class of vague categories around more than twice as many times as the PSLE and 3 times as often as the L1 speaker. In other words, the CSLE uses a total of 741 subjectivisers while communicating in classroom, whereas subjectivisers total 205 in the L1 speakers' classroom interaction, and 282 by the PSLE in the same context.

Additionally, a glance at the Table 1 indicates that the difference does not lie in the overall frequency number of subjectivisers only. That is, individual subjectivisers have been proportionately distributed differently. This difference seems minor between the PSLE and the L1 speaker, meaning that quite like the overall frequency count, each subjectiviser item has been used more often by the PSLE than the L1 speaker, apart from the least frequently used item, *I believe*, which shows an even distribution.

But contrary to this trend, the CSLE despite overusing subjectivisers compared to the other two groups, overuses only 1 item, *I think* (732). All the other items have been remarkably underused by the CSLE in the classroom interaction. The difference in the overall frequency of subjectivisers among the three groups has been found statistically different, $p < 0.05 (\chi^2 = 177.915, d.f.6)$. Despite the statistically proven difference, the L1 speaker and the PSLE demonstrate a similarity in the ranking order of subjectivisers items, while the CSLE has only the first item in common with the other two groups in this regard.

### 4.1.1 *I think*

Table 4.2:  Distribution of *I think*

| | I think | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| Data type | L1 S<br>n=205 | CSLE<br>n=741 | PSLE<br>n=282 |
| Percentage | 79 | 99 | 73 |
| Frequency | 161 | 732 | 207 |

As Table 4.2 shows, the most remarkable difference in the individual subjectivisers among the three groups emerges in the most frequently used expression; *I think*. This is the subjectiviser CSLE shows a keen interest in the use of by 99%, amounting to 732 occurrences, while the other two groups use it with less concentration, meaning that around three-fourths of the overall subjectivisers by the PSLE and four-fifths by the L1 speaker are comprised of this expression. Put in a different way, the CSLE overuses *I think* in comparison to the PSLE who uses this expression more than 3 times less often (207), and the L1 speaker who uses it more than 4 times less often.

The percentage calculation, however, reverses the trend due to lower overall frequency of subjectivisers in the L1 speaker data. It reveals that 73% of the overall subjectivisers in the PSLE data are comprised of *I think,* while this phrase constitutes 79% of subjectivisers in the L1 speaker data. A word of emphasis is necessary that not all occurrences of *I think* expressions are vague; this has been discussed in detail in methodology chapter.

Table 4.3: Distribution of *I think* in clause initial position and as a turn-initiating device

| Data type | I think ... | | | :I think | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | L1 S n=161 | CSLE n=732 | PSLE n=207 | L1 S n=161 | CSLE n=732 | PSLE n=207 |
| Percentage | 23 | 51 | 41 | 17 | 27 | 26 |
| Frequency | 37 | 373 | 84 | 28 | 194 | 54 |

('I think ...' indicates clause initial position by the same speaker as the previous clause,': I think' indicates clause initial position acting as a turn-taking tool)

In terms of the position of *I think* in the clause, the CSLE with a frequency of 373 uses this subjectiviser in the clause initial position more dominantly than the PSLE with 84 occurrences and the L1 speaker totalling 37. According to Table 4.3, what seems to be remarkable in terms of the application of *I think* in the clause initial position is that L2 speakers prefer to use this subjectiviser in this position roughly twice often as L1 speakers, accounting for 51% by the CSLE, 41% by the PSLE but only 37% by the L1 speaker.

As shown in Table 4.3, the examination of *I think* among the three groups reveals another significant difference in that around a quarter of occurrences of *I think* in the clause initial position preform turn-initiating functions in L2 speakers' interaction: 27% by CSLE and 26% by the PSLE, whereas it accounts for only 17% of data by the L1 speaker. What seems to be striking in this mechanism of using *I think* is that L2 speakers prefer to use *I think* as a turn-initiating device in classroom interaction more dominantly than the L1 speakers.

Table 4.4: Distribution of clause-final position *I think*

|  | ... I think. | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| Data type | L1 S n=161 | CSLE n=732 | PSLE n=207 |
| Percentage | 2 | 3 | 8 |
| Frequency | 3 | 22 | 16 |

The occurrence of *I think* in the clause final position demonstrates a remarkable difference among the three groups. As illustrated in Table 4.4, this happens the most frequently by the CSLE, 22 times, while the L1 speaker with only 3 tokens is found to be the least extensive user of *I think* in this position. Although the percentage value shows the same order in terms of the use of this subjectiviser, it minimises the difference among the three groups to a large extent.

Table 4.5: Collocation of *I think I*

|  | I think I … | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| Data type | L1 S n=161 | CSLE n=732 | PSLE n=207 |
| Percentage | 8 | 9 | 2 |
| Frequency | 13 | 68 | 4 |

The frequency of *I think I…* in Table 4.5 indicates that quite like the overall frequency of *I think*, CSLE uses this collocation quite frequently. It also reveals that contrary to *I think we…* that will be discussed in the subsequent paragraphs, L1 speaker with 8% amounting to the frequency of 13 against PSLE with only 2%, just 4 occurrences, shows more inclination in using this expression in the classroom interaction. The fact that the CSLE and the L1 speaker use *I think I…* almost 3 times and more than 15 times as often as the PSLE can mean that the speaker in either group is more specific in their utterances through referring to himself/ herself by *I* even when s/he refers to something s/he is unsure about, while on such occasions PSLE prefers to use another expression *we* rather than *I*

through which s/he can share this state of uncertainty with the listener or include him or herself in the indecision.

Table 4.6: Distribution of *I think we*

| Data type | I think we | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| | L1 S n=161 | CSLE n=732 | PSLE n=207 |
| Percentage | 2 | 6 | 6 |
| Frequency | 3 | 45 | 12 |

The collocation of *I think we* also turns up quite inconsistently across the three groups. As illustrated in Table 4.6, CSLE and PSLE participants with 45 and 12 occurrences, respectively, prefer to include their interlocutor(s) in the statement which contains this category of vague expression by using the first person plural subject *we* after *I think*, with the CSLE showing a keener interest in this collocation but the L1 speaker using only 3 such collocation in their classroom interaction. Each L2 speaker group has 6% of the sentences containing *I think* followed by *we*, while the L1 speaker has 2% of their *I think* containing sentences accompanied by *we*. An example of such sentences is:

(4.1)

S1: If I have a chance, if I have a chance, I think I can, huh, I want to be a French interpreter. **I think we** can cooperate [Shaking hands with S3].          (Ch: 4: 254)

S3: Yes, yes. One of my, one of my close friends, her sister is a French interpreter....

                                                                                    (Ch: 4: 255)

Note: Ch = Chinese data, 4 = fine number, 254= speaking turn

Table 4.7: Distribution of *I think that+ subject* and *I think that is*

| | **I think that + subject** | | | | **I think that is** | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Data type | L1 S n=161 | CSLE n=732 | PSLE n=207 | Data type | L1 S n=161 | CSLE n=732 | PSLE n=207 |
| Percentage | 2 | 1 | 9 | Percentage | 11 | 2 | 1 |
| Frequency | 3 | 7 | 18 | Frequency | 17 | 16 | 2 |

The other inconsistency in the employment of *I think* is witnessed in the collocation of *I think that*. *I think that* in this study has been divided into two categories in terms of the function of *that* in the sentence. The first category investigated is where *that* serves as the subject (pronoun) of the sentence, followed by *is* as the verb. For instance,

(4.2)

S2: …be on the net or something like that, [S1: mhm ] and so so people are gonna go see it and **I think that** is a gross invasion of privacy, [S8: mhm ] to have your pictures of your_ like if I was dead and I had a autopsy.                                    (L1: 1:49)

S5: But th- they they said exclusively though that's not their expressed intent for.

(L1: 1:50)

As is clear in Table 4.7, with the frequency of 2 amounting to 1% (due to rounding off), PSLE shows considerable negligence in using this expression in comparison to the L1 speaker with 17 and CSLE with 16 occurrences. The discrepancy by PSLE against CSLE and L1 speaker seems to be considerable. However, this discrepancy in the use of *I think that* by the PSLE against the CSLE and the L1 speaker is not restricted to this pattern. When the function of *that* in the expression *I think that* shifts from a subject to a conjunction introducing a clause as in the sentence:

(4.3)

S5: … Actually by 'we' I mean all the people living in the world. You know **I think that** people in the world suffer from spiritual crisis.                              (P: 4: 48)

S1: There might be a special crisis in the world. What is happening in Iran?      (P: 4:49)

The PSLE with 18 occurrences is found to be overtaking the L1 speaker with the frequency of 3 and the CSLE with the frequency of 7. In other words, when the function of *that* in the sentences shifts, the PSLE's tendency in using this combination is found to be inverted with the CSLE and L1 speaker's tendency in using this word in the same context. Overall, the PSLE shows to be using a typical feature in using *that* following *I think*, performing two distinctly different roles.

Table 4.8: Distribution of *I think+ negative sentences*

|  | **I think+ negative sentences** | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| Data type | L1 S n=161 | CSLE n=732 | PSLE n=207 |
| Percentage | 0 | 4 | 9 |
| Frequency | 0 | 25 | 19 |

Analysis of the sentences used after *I think* indicates that while the L1 speaker does not use any negative sentences following this subjectiviser, the CSLE and PSLE show this pattern to be available in their classroom interaction. What can be derived from this pattern is that the L2 speakers of English feel like using negative sentences after *I think,* but it is an avoided pattern by the L1 speaker. Interestingly, the data illustrates that the L1 speaker, alternatively, prefers negation within the expression *I think*. The PSLE would rather, for example,

(4.4)

S7: Ok, first of all, I must say the culture.                              (P: 6:442)

S3: **I think** it is **not** cultural. I think it is not cultural, whereas the L1 speaker prefers

(4.5)

S2: The press has already put heat on 'em they're putting heat on themselves. **I don't think** it's necessary. (L1: 1:61)

S1: Well they're obviously not having enough heat put on them because it keeps happening. [S2: I think (xx) ]I mean for_ at least it's possible. Yes? (L1: 1:62)

What makes it even more remarkable is the fact that the CSLE uses both patterns roughly evenly. This occurs 22 times in the L1 speaker data and 19 times in the CSLE, while PSLE makes uses of this collocation just a couple of times. However, as *I don't think* does not seem to be a vague expression, it will not be further discussed in this study.

Table 4.9: Distribution of *but I think*

| | but I think | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| Data type | L1 S n=161 | CSLE n=732 | PSLE n=207 |
| Percentage | 4 | 5 | 11 |
| Frequency | 7 | 33 | 23 |

The next pattern showing a remarkable difference among the three groups of participants examined in this study is the co-occurrence of *I think* after the coordinating conjunction *but* to express contrast. As Table 4.9 shows, in terms of the frequency distribution, CSLE with 33 occurrences uses this collocation more often than the PSLE with the frequency of 23 and the L1 speaker with the frequency of 7 but converted into a percentile scale, PSLE turns out to be keener on devoting a large proportion of the collocation of *I think* to directly expressing contrast with 11% compared to the CSLE with 4 and L1 speaker with 5%, although the expression *I think* indicates that the speaker is not entirely sure of

what he is expressing even if he is expressing a contrast. What this means is that in the percentile language, the application of *but I think* between the CSLE and L1 speaker is roughly equal.

Table 4.10: Distribution of *I think* following DMs

| | I mean I think... | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| Data type | L1 S n=161 | CSLE n=732 | PSLE n=207 |
| Percentage | 4 | 0 | 0 |
| Frequency | 7 | 0 | 0 |

| | You know I think | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| Data type | L1 S n=161 | CSLE n=732 | PSLE n=207 |
| Percentage | 0 | 0 | 4 |
| Frequency | 0 | 2 | 8 |

Despite the frequent occurrence of *I think* in the CSLE and PSLE speech compared with the L1 speaker interaction, the two L2 speakers demonstrate incompetence in using *I think* after the discourse marker (DM hereafter) *I mean*. As is clear in seen in Table 4.10, the frequency of 7 with *I mean, I think* by the L1 speaker is translated as 4%, while CSLE and PSLE fail to use this collocation. Surprisingly, this proportion is to a high extent compensated for by the PSLE with the proportion of 4% versus zero in using another DM called *you know* collocating with *I think*.

Like PSLE with no collocation of *I mean, I think*, the L1 speaker of English shows no collocation of *you know I think*. The CSLE uses this collocation twice in their talks. Although the frequency of 2 does not seem large enough to be further discussed against L1 speaker's zero frequency, the fact that both L2 speakers groups find this combination applicable can be studied further.

Table 4.11: Cluster of *I think*

| L1 speaker data | | CSLE data | | PSLE data | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Cluster | Frequency | Cluster | Frequency | Cluster | Frequency |
| I think it is | --- | I think it is | 54 | I think it is | 14 |
| I think we should | --- | I think we should | 12 | I think we should | --- |
| But I think it | --- | But I think it | 7 | But I think it | 5 |
| I think I will | --- | I think I will | 12 | I think I will | --- |
| You know I think | --- | You know I think | --- | You know I think | 9 |
| I think that people | --- | I think that people | --- | I think that people | 5 |
| I mean I think | 7 | I mean I think | --- | I mean I think | --- |
| Yeah, I think | 6 | Yeah, I think | --- | Yeah, I think | --- |
| I think it was | 5 | I think it was | --- | I think it was | --- |
| **Total** | **18** | | **85** | | **33** |

Analysis of the most frequently occurring patterns clustering as far as 3 words before and 3 words after *I think* with the minimum frequency of 5 shows some similarities between the CSLE and the PSLE but the clusters by the L1 speaker are totally different. As can be viewed in Table 4.11, the two L2 speaker groups have 2 clusters in common but with different frequencies; *I think it is* 54 times by the CSLE and 14 times by the PSLE and *But I think* 7 times by the CSLE and 5 times by the PSLE. Due to the high frequency of *I think* in CSLE data, there are some other clusters of *I think* viewable, but only 2 in common with the PSLE and none with the L1 speaker. Therefore, with a total of 85, CSLE has the highest number of clusters with *I think*, followed by the 4 clusters by the PSLE occurring 33 times and only 3 by the L1 speaker with the overall frequency of 18.

The most striking similarity between the PSLE and CSLE is the fact that they both have *I think it is* as the most frequently-occurring cluster in their classroom interaction, albeit with different frequencies. In the L1 speaker data, the most frequently occurring cluster is the combination of *I think* following a DM *I mean*

with a frequency of 7. The second most frequent cluster with the CSLE which is comprised of two items *I think we should* and *I think I will* each with the frequency of 12 but in the PSLE data the second most frequently used cluster has a DM preceding it with 9 occurrences, whereas the L1 speaker with the frequency of 6 uses *Yeah, I think* as the second most common combination containing *I think*. What this means is that even though the PSLE and L1 speaker use DMs in their clusters, the DM each group uses with *I think* is different.

As with the most commonly used cluster which is found to be common between the CSLE and the PSLE, the second most frequently-occurring cluster; *but I think* is also found to be common between these two groups but with slightly different frequencies, 7 by the CSLE and 5 by the PSLE. However the PSLE uses *I think that people* with the same frequency occurrence as *but I think*, which is lacking in the CSLE and the L1 speaker data. What appears as the third most frequently used cluster by the L1 speaker is *I think it was* with the frequency of 5.

In general, this section of the analysis shows that there are some similarities between the clusters used by CSLE and PSLE but that L1 speaker clusters with *I think* in the same context does not resemble either group. The only similarity between the L1 speaker and either group is the fact that they combine DMs with *I think* but the difference in the DMs used undermines this similarity.

Overall, the similarities between the CSLE and the PSLE include the 2 items they commonly use as clusters and also the wider frequency distribution of clustered items between the two groups; 14, 9 and 5 by the PSLE and 54, 12, 7 by the CSLE, whereas the L1 speaker clustered items range as 5, 6, and 7. In other words, the L1 speaker clustered pattern is more concentrated and less varied.

From the words clustering with *I think*, it can be concluded that this subjectiviser by the CSLE and the PSLE has more confrontational application, used to softly express disagreement or contrast. *But I think* can be the evidence for this claim. The other evidence supporting this claim can be *you know I think* which the speaker mainly uses to create the intimacy first, in order to express something the opposite. The L1 speaker's *I think* seems to be primarily used for cooperative

purposes and to express agreement. This can be inferred from *Yeah, I think*, and *I mean I think.*

## 4.1.2 *I guess*

Table.4.12: Distribution of *I guess*

|  | I guess | | |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Data type | L1 S n=205 | CSLE n=741 | PSLE n=282 |
| Percentage | 11 | 0 | 15 |
| Frequency | 23 | 1 | 41 |

The second most frequently used subjectiviser by the PSLE and the L1 speaker in this study proves to be *I guess* which appears as the least common subjectiviser by the CSLE with the frequency of 1 only. For the reason just given, the CSLE will have very little chance of being discussed in terms *I guess* in their interaction. As illustrated in Table 4.12, PSLE with the frequency of 41 uses this expression almost twice as often as the L1 speaker with 23 occurrences. However, due to the lower overall frequency of subjectivisers in the L1 speaker data, the percentage value exaggerates this difference, showing 15% by the PSLE versus 11% by the L1 speaker.

Table 4.13: Distribution of (…) (*Con*) *I guess* (…)

| | I guess… | | | …I guess | | | Conj + I guess | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Data type | L1 S n=23 | CSLE n=1 | PSLE n=41 | L1 S n=23 | CSLE n=1 | PSLE n=41 | L1 S n=23 | CSLE n=1 | PSLE n=41 |
| Percentage | 22 | 0 | 37 | 9 | 100 | 17 | 22 | 0 | 15 |
| Frequency | 5 | 0 | 15 | 2 | 1 | 7 | 5 | 0 | 6 |

When it comes to *I guess* as a subjectiviser in the clause initial position, the frequency of 15 by the PSLE, again like *I think*, outnumbers the L1 speaker's frequency by two-thirds. As displayed in Table 4.13, 38% of *I guess* by the PSLE occurs in the clause initial position, while this value amounts to only 22% by the L1 speaker. Final position *I guess* by PSLE, quite like the initial position, outweighs the final position *I guess* by L1 speaker. Table 1.13 clearly shows that, PSLE with the frequency of 7 outperforms the L1 speaker with the frequency of 2, and the CSLE with only 1 occurrence in this position.

The occurrence of *I guess* after conjunctions for both groups of participants, PSLE and L1 speaker, is almost equal. Table 1.13 reveals that PSLE and L1 speaker with the frequencies of 5 and 6, respectively demonstrate similarities in combining *I guess* with conjunctions, the only difference being in the classes of conjunctions used, which for the L1 speaker proves to be 3, while the PSLE uses 4 conjunctions.

As Tables 4.1 and 4.12 demonstrate, the frequency of *I guess* clustering with a conjunction does not reveal much difference between the participants nor can remarkable discrepancies in terms of the pattern of use be observed between them. However, the overall distribution of *I guess* reveals that substantial intergroup disagreements do exist both in terms of frequency and the pattern of use. What is more is that neither of the two groups demonstrate a particular pattern of cluster of 3 words occurring with *I guess* with a minimum frequency of 5.

### 4.1.3 *I don't know*

As shown in Table 4.1 *I don't know* has been identified as the third most frequently occurring subjectiviser by the PSLE and L1speaker but the second most commonly-used item by the CSLE. However, it needs to be stated that *I don't know* can serve three different functions in communication; the one to be investigated in this section will be the shielding function used by the speakers. In general, *I don't know* functions as: 1. A shield or subjectiviser as in the sentence:

(4.6)

S1: …. now if you still wanna enter in, **I don't know maybe** this is gonna, be what set six set seven set set eight, I don't know where it's gonna end, but let's say it ends at set thirteen? and…. (L1: 3:53)

S11: Where would you put the parenthesis in the second line? (L1: 3:54)

This function of *I don't know* which implies vagueness in what the interactant utters is the main focus of what is discussed under subjectivisers in this study. The second purpose this expression can serve in communication is where the speaker does not refer to any particular purpose by *I don't know*. In other words, *I don't know* is only a filler to fill the gap in conversation as in the sentence:

(4.7)

S1: …um, it's not immoral, to cut class well maybe it- I mean you could ma- maybe someone could make an argument like, **I don't know** your parents paid all this money and, you made a promise to them to go to class and so it's immoral to cut class but, um, let's say uh, let's say for the sake of argument you know. (L1: 2:68)

S2: The grade. (L1: 2:69)

Known as DM, this function of *I don't know* will be excluded from this study. Finally, the third role of *I don't know* emerges when *I don't know* literally means I don't know and indicates that the speaker has no idea in this regard. For instance,

(4.8)

S2: Meredith **I don't know** who you are, or where you were sitting.          (L1: 3:556)

S24: I'm Meredith          (L1: 3:557)

As this function of *I don't know* is not associated with VL use, it will be excluded
from this study.

Table 4.14: Distribution of *I don't know*

|  | **I don't know** | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| Data type | L1 S<br>n=205 | CSLE<br>n=741 | PSLE<br>n=282 |
| Percentage | 6 | 1 | 9 |
| Frequency | 13 | 5 | 26 |

Quite like *I guess*, the occurrence of *I don't know* serving as a subjectiviser shows
the frequency of this expression by PSLE exceeds those of the CSLE and the L1
speaker. As Table 4.14 shows, this subjectiviser with the frequency of 26 occurs
exactly twice as often in the PSLE data as it does in the L1 speaker's classroom
interaction and 5 times as often as it occurs by CSLE. Looked at from  the
percentage point of view, it becomes clear that 9% of the subjectivisers in the
PSLE data are constituted of *I don't know*, while this subjectiviser constitutes 6%
of the L1 speaker data and only 1% of CSLE data.

Table 4.15: Distribution of *I don't know* with other vague expressions or fillers

|  | **…I don't know …** | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| Data type | L1 S<br>n=13 | CSLE<br>n=5 | PSLE<br>n=26 |
| Percentage | 62 | 60 | 46 |
| Frequency | 8 | 3 | 12 |

Most cases of *I don't know*, serving as a subjectiviser occur with either another vague expression such as *maybe* or a vague marker such as *huh*. According to Table, 4.15, the frequency of 8 reveals that 62% of L1 speaker's us *I don't know* co-occur with such expressions or markers, whereas PSLE data shows 12 occurrences translated as 46%, whereas it amounts to 3 tokens by the CSLE, which shows 60%, once translated into percentage value.

### 4.1.4 *I believe*

Table 4.16: Distribution of *I believe*

| | **I believe** | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| Data type | L1 S n=205 | CSLE n=741 | PSLE n=282 |
| Percentage | 4 | 0 | 3 |
| Frequency | 8 | 3 | 8 |

When it comes to *I believe*, this subjectiviser is found the least common item by the PSLE and the L1 speaker but the second least subjectiviser by the CSLE. As shown in Table 4.16 both PSLE and L1 speaker with 8 occurrences show consistency in the frequency of this expression in their speech but the CSLE with the frequency of 3 uses this item less often than the other two groups. The examination of 'I believe' position in the clause reveals that the PSLE uses this vague expression 5 times in clause initial position and 3 times in clause mid position, whereas all the occurrences of *I believe* by the L1 speaker appear in the clause mid-position.

The pattern revealed by the CSLE seems closer to the PSLE pattern as they use *I believe* in both clause initial and mid positions with 2 and 1 occurrences, respectively. However, the small overall frequency of *I believe* in the interaction by this group can question the generalizability of this pattern for the CSLE. Percentage calculations also prove that this expression makes the least contribution to the subjectivisers function by each group.

As Table 4.16 shows, this accounts for less than 5% of subjectivisers by each group; 3% in the PSLE and 4% in L1 speaker data and zero by the CSLE. What needs to be pointed out is that due to not serving a shield function, all cases of *I believe in* have been left out of this analysis. What the three groups have in common with respect to *I believe* is that none of them shows *I believe* clusters with minimum 5 occurrences.
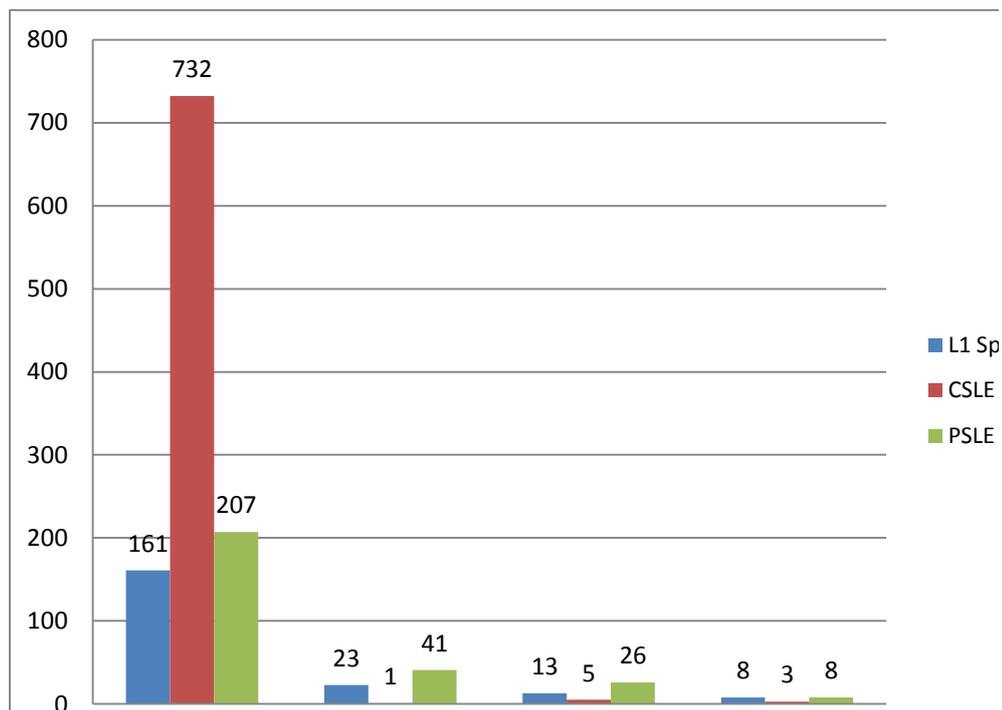


Figure 4.1: Frequency of *subjectivisers*

To sum up, CSLE with 741 occurrences prefers to use subjectivisers more dominantly than the PSLE (282) and the L1 speaker (205). But what stands out in the CSLE data is that almost all occurrences of subjectivisers are concentrated in *I think* but the other two groups demonstrate more scattered distributions with *I think* being more dominant than *I guess*, *I don't know*, and *I believe*. As Figure 4.1 shows, there is 1 category overused by the CSLE, 'I think' (723), in comparison to the PSLE (207) and the L1 speaker (161). But all the other categories by this group are less commonly used. For instance, with 51 occurrences, PSLE uses *I guess* almost twice as frequently as the L1 speaker but it is used only once by the CSLE.

The same trend occurs with *I don't know* with the only difference being that this time the frequency in the PSLE data is 26 against 13 in the L1 speaker data and 5 by the CSLE. The only similarity in subjectivisers is viewed in the frequency of *I believe* (8) by the PSLE and the L1 speaker but the CSLE still uses it far less frequently; however, when the pattern of use is looked into, some discrepancies between the PSLE and the L1 speaker data come to light once again. What is inferred from this account is that overall there are discrepancies in the pattern of occurrence of all subjectivisers besides the statistically proven differences in the frequencies.
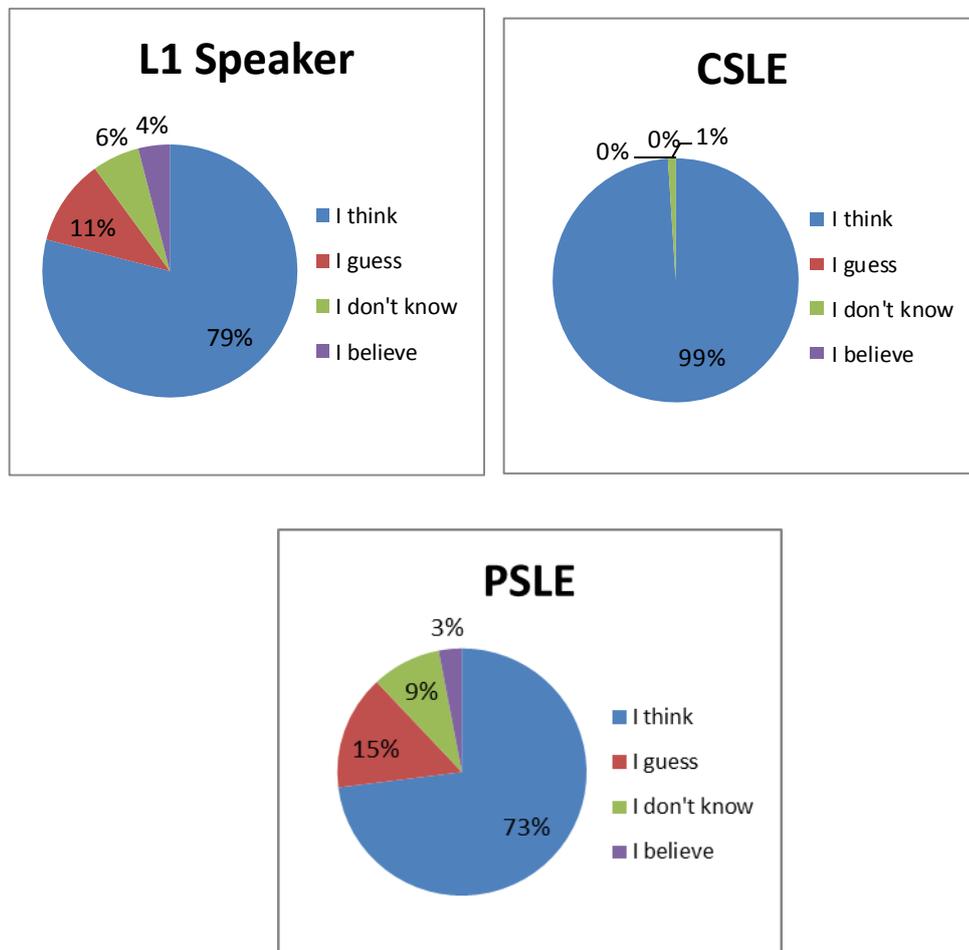


Figure 4.2: Percentage of different *subjectivisers*

As Figure 4.2 illustrates, the striking similarity in subjectivisers lies in the percentile ranking order between the PSLE and the L1 speaker, but the CSLE

demonstrates a totally different pattern. The values worked out are also to a great extent close to each other in the PSLE and the L1 speaker data but as the CSLE refuses to use 2 of the 4 items in their interaction, they end up using subjectivisers substantially differently from the other two groups. For both groups *I think* comprises around three-fourths of the category, 73% for the PSLE and 79% for the L1 speaker, but the CSLE heavily uses *I think* so that it constitutes 99% of the overall subjectivisers used in their classroom interaction.

It needs to be pointed out that the other 2 items, *I guess* and *I believe*, with zero percentage in the Figure have literally occurred in the data but due, presumably, to accidental occurrence appeared as negligible, their values recorded as zero due to rounding off. The one quarter left in the PSLE and the L1 speaker data consists of the other 3 items, with *I believe* 4% in the L1 speaker and 3% in the PSLE data, constituting the smallest portion. This should not imply that the performance of the two groups in using subjectivisers is the same, as this only reflects a quantitative investigation. Nonetheless, as discussed earlier in this section, an opposite trend will be evident once a qualitative analysis (pattern analysis) is carried out. As a last comment the three groups perform significantly differently in the employment of subjectivisers.

## 4.2 Possibility indicators

Table 4.17: Distribution of *possibility indicators*

| Item | L1 speaker of English | | CSLE | | PSLE | |
|------|-----------|------------|-----------|------------|-----------|------------|
| Distribution | Frequency | Percentage | Frequency | Percentage | Frequency | Percentage |
| Maybe | 64 | 26(%) | 312 | 82(%) | 156 | 81(%) |
| May | 56 | 24(%) | 50 | 13(%) | 15 | 8(%) |
| Might | 56 | 24(%) | 10 | 3(%) | 13 | 7(%) |
| Probably | 42 | 18(%) | 5 | 1(%) | 1 | 1(%) |
| Possible | 20 | 8(%) | 2 | 1(%) | 5 | 3(%) |
| **Total** | **238** | **100(%)** | **379** | **100(%)** | **190** | **100(%)** |

Analysis of possibility indicators in this research study comprises an investigation of expressions which as a result of uncertainty in propositions drive the speakers to resort to devices to express possibility. As for subjectivisers, possibility indicators demonstrate diversity in both frequency and pattern of use among the three groups. The overall frequency of possibility indicators by the three groups does not show any relationships among the participants and the difference is found to be significantly meaningful. $p < 0.05$ ($\chi^2 = 269.453$, d.f.8).

Like subjectivisers, CSLE uses possibility indicators more dominantly compared to the other two groups, but the positions of PSLE and the L1 speaker with regard to the overall frequency of possibility indicators are inverted. The CSLE with 379 occurrences is the heaviest user of possibility indicators and the PSLE also uses this VL category much more frequently than the L1 speaker, the latter with an overall frequency of 238 shows a strong tendency in using possibility indicators in comparison to the PSLE with 190 occurrences.

### 4.2.1 *Maybe*

4.18: Distribution of *maybe*

| | **Maybe** | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| Data type | L1 S n=238 | CSLE n=379 | PSLE n=190 |
| Percentage | 26 | 82 | 81 |
| Frequency | 64 | 312 | 156 |

The most salient similarity among the three groups in using *maybe* lies in the fact that the three groups use it as the most frequently occurring possibility indicator, however, with different occurrences. As can be seen, Table 4.18 indicates that *maybe* is the only item in possibility indicators which the CSLE and PSLE use more often than the L1 speaker.

In all the other 4 expressions, it is the L1 speaker to show the most inclination towards using. More importantly, the first 4 items occur almost evenly by the L1 speaker; *maybe* with 64, *may* 56, *might* 56, and *probably* 42, while the frequencies of these items in the CSLE and the PSLE data reveal a wider spread of occurrences, CSLE with 312 occurrences with *maybe*, 50 occurrences with *may*, 10 occurrences with *might*, and 5 and 2 occurrences with *probably* and *possible*, respectively versus *maybe* with 156, *may* with 15, *might* with 13, and *probably* with 1 occurrences by the PSLE . The characteristic feature of the L1 speaker pattern possibility indicators is that the first 4 items have been used almost evenly, while the L2 speakers demonstrate quite scattered distributions.

Table 4.19: Distribution of … (conj) *maybe* …

| Data type | Maybe… | | | Conj+ maybe | | | Turn-taking maybe | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | L1 S n=64 | CSLE n=312 | PSLE n=156 | L1 S n=64 | CSLE n=312 | PSLE n=156 | L1 S n=64 | CSLE n=312 | PSLE n=156 |
| Percentage | 17 | 41 | 55 | 20 | 8 | 15 | 8 | 19 | 28 |
| Frequency | 11 | 128 | 85 | 13 | 24 | 23 | 5 | 59 | 44 |

Around half of the overall occurrences of *maybe* in CSLE and PSLE interaction appear to be in the clause initial position, while the frequency of 11 indicates that in the L1 speaker interaction less than one fifth of the overall 64 occurrences happen to be in the exact same position. In other words, most of the occurrences of *maybe* in the L1 speaker data occur either before a conjunction or right in the middle of clauses.

Despite the magnitude of PSLE frequency occurrence (23) versus the L1 speaker frequency occurrences (13), the percentage value confirms the postulation that L1 speaker tends to use most of this possibility indicator after conjunctions. The frequency of *maybe* occurring before such conjunctions as *but*, *or*, and *so* does not show much difference between the two groups but *and* has been used differently

in terms of numbers of occurrences by the two groups. The frequency of 13 by the CSLE and 11 by PSLE indicates that the L1 speaker uses *maybe* before *and* around 3 times less often than the two L2 speaker groups.

Further investigation into the data reveals that besides preferring *maybe* in the clause initial position (S3 below); CSLE and PSLE would rather use this possibility indicator at the beginning of their statement when taking over from another interlocutor or use it as a turn-taking device (See Chapter 3).

(4.9)

 S3: You are forcing. **Maybe** now she doesn't have anything to say.          (P: 4:150)

S1: **Maybe**, we are respecting you ladies.                                    (P: 4:151)

As can be seen in the example (4.9), S1 uses *maybe* to start his turn in the talk. In fact, for the CSLE with 59 occurrences, amounting to 19% and the PSLE   with the frequency of 44 and the percentage of 28 this reveals a significant pattern, but the L1 speaker with only 5 occurrences, representing 8%, uses this possibility indicator less often to run the turn-taking task in conversation.

Another significant pattern in the PSLE data which is not available in the L1 speaker data is the occurrence of *maybe* after the DM *OK* with the frequency of 5. It shows that the PSLE on some occasions prefers *maybe* after they themselves confirm the statement by expressing 'OK' (Example 4.10) or after asking the interlocutor for confirmation by giving an interrogative DM'OK?'(Example 4.11) but this does not occur in the CSLE or the L1 speaker data.

(4.10)

S7: But it is a kind of limitation.                                           (P: 6:426)

 S5: Ok. It is good for us.                                                   (P: 6: 427)

S7: **Ok. Maybe** the other things are good for you.                          (P: 6:428)

(4.11)

S8: So you don't, you don't care about her past?                          (P: 6:781)

S2: No, no. But I am talking about the effects, **OK?** **Maybe** the effects will continue. Now
we are going to start talking, ok? Because.                                (P: 6:782)

Table 4.20: Distribution of *Maybe + verb*

|  | Maybe + verb | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| Data type | L1 S<br>n=64 | CSLE<br>n=312 | PSLE<br>n=156 |
| Percentage | 16 | 7 | 9 |
| Frequency | 10 | 23 | 14 |

Regardless of the position of *maybe* in the clause, whether in initial, mid, or final
position, the three groups demonstrate different performances in using *maybe*
before a verb. As is evident in Table 4.20, frequency based calculations indicate
that the PSLE with the frequency of 14 uses *maybe* in the same position almost
1.5 times as often as the L1 speaker but the CSLE with the frequency of 23 uses
verbs following *maybe* more than twice as often as the L1 speaker. On the
contrary, the translation of these values into percentages would totally reverse the
order, ranking L1 with 16% as the most intensive user of *maybe* before verbs
followed by PSLE with 9% and CSLE with 7 %.

Besides this remarkable difference in the data, the three groups represent a
noticeable difference in their preferences for the kinds of verbs in any possible
from: positive, negative or interrogative, to be used along with *maybe* in their
utterances. The most common verbs occurring  before *maybe* in the CSLE data are
found to be *have* and *study*, each with 3 occurrences but the PSLE prefers to use
*know* and *think* with 6 and 4 occurrences before *maybe*. Further contrast is that the
most frequently occurring verbs before *maybe* with the L1 speaker are *like* and
*know* with 3 and 2 occurrences, respectively.

Table 4.21: Distribution of *maybe +because* by L1 speaker, CSLE, and PSLE

| Data type | Maybe + because... | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| | L1 S n=64 | CSLE n=312 | PSLE n=156 |
| Percentage | 0 | 1 | 3 |
| Frequency | 0 | 3 | 5 |

The examination of *maybe* is not limited to what was discussed above as the words following *maybe* show other incompatible patterns, too. According to Table 4.21, the first striking discrepancy among the participants is the occurrence of five conjunctions to express reason, *because,* after *maybe* by the PSLE and 3 in the CSLE data, while the L1 speakers do not use any conjunctions of any kind in this position.

Table 4.22: Distribution of *maybe* + it (be) (not)

| Data type | Maybe + it(is)(was) | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| | L1 S n=64 | CSLE n=312 | PSLE n=156 |
| Percentage | 8 | 6 | 11 |
| Frequency | 5 | 18 | 17 |

The most frequent expression occurring after *maybe* is found to be *it* plus *is*, *isn't*, *was*, or *wasn't*, with *it is* being the most common one in each group. As can be seen in Table 4.22, *it is* and the variations just mentioned occur more often by the L2 speakers: CSLE 18 times and the PSLE 17 times, while the frequency of this expression with the L1 speaker is only 5, around 3 times less often.

Table 4.23: Distribution of *maybe* followed by subject pronouns

| | Maybe + Subj Pro | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| Data type | L1 S n=64 | CSLE n=312 | PSLE n=156 |
| Percentage | 28 | 39 | 50 |
| Frequency | 18 | 122 | 78 |

CSLE and PSLE show keener interests in placing *maybe* before subject pronouns. As can be seen in Table 4.23, CSLE and PSLE use subject pronouns after *maybe* 122 times and 78 times, respectively whilst only 18 occurrences of *maybe* occur before subject pronouns by the L1 speaker. In other words, 50% of occurrences of *maybe* in PSLE utterances are collocated with a subject pronoun, whereas only around one fourth or 28% of occurrences of *maybe* are placed before subject pronouns in the L1 speaker data and around 40% by the CSLE. The trend is that the CSLE and the PSLE are both inclined to place *maybe* before subject pronouns.

Table 4.24: Ranking of subject pronouns following *maybe*

| Data type | L1 S n=18 | | | CSLE n=122 | | | PSLE n=78 | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Pronoun | T/P | F/P | S/P | T/P | F/P | S/p | T/P | F/p | S/P |
| Percentage | 50 | 28 | 22 | 42 | 43 | 15 | 60 | 18 | 22 |
| Frequency | 9 | 5 | 4 | 51 | 53 | 18 | 47 | 14 | 17 |

T/P=Third Person   F/P=First Person S/P= Second Person

As can be seen in Table 4.24, the ranking of subject pronouns in terms of frequency  occurrence among the three groups indicates that the distribution of first person, second person and third person subject pronouns between the PSLE and the L1 speaker are  more similar, especially in first person and second person pronouns where both groups allocate exactly 22% of their overall subject pronouns to singular subjects and around the same percent to the first person subject pronouns as well, but the CSLE  prefers to use third person and first person subject pronouns evenly each with around 40%   and only 15 percent

constituted second person subject pronouns. What seems to be the same in all the three groups is the second subject pronouns being the smallest collocation with *maybe* in each group.

Table 4.25: Distribution of *maybe* preceding negations

| Data type | Maybe + negation | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| | L1 S n=64 | CSLE n=312 | PSLE n=156 |
| Percentage | 11 | 3 | 9 |
| Frequency | 7 | 10 | 14 |

According to Table 4.25, the examination of components occurring after *maybe* indicates that PSLE uses negatives after *maybe* more often than the other groups, exactly twice as often as the L1 speaker and 4 items more than the CSLE. The frequency numbers in this table includes both sentences which contain *maybe not+ an affirmative* like

(4.12)

S1: Because they have the potential, **maybe not** necessarily in the ERIC database.

(L1: 3:275)

and *maybe + a negative sentence*. For example;

S1: Um, you know sometimes, perhaps, if it's if it's gangs **maybe it's not** the most um, healthy or productive, way to, um .                                    (L1: 2:95)

Overall, due to the small frequency of negations occurring after *maybe* and the occurrences being close to each other, making a generalization does not seem plausible.

Table 4.26: Distribution of *maybe* preceding phrases

| | Maybe + phrase | | |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Data type | L1 S n=64 | CSLE n=312 | PSLE n=156 |
| Percentage | 28 | 10 | 11 |
| Frequency | 18 | 31 | 17 |

The examination of *maybe* placed before a phrase in the data displays almost equal occurrences by the PSLE and the L1 speaker, whereas the CSLE uses more phrases after *maybe* than the other two groups. Phrase here can cover ellipsis or any other similar structure. As is clear in Table 4.26, PSLE with 17 occurrences uses phrases after *maybe* likewise the L1 speaker with 18 occurrences, but the CSLE prefers to use this kind of collocation almost twice as often, amounting to 31 occurrences. Although the PSLE and the L1 speaker act alike in terms of the frequency, the percentage value reveals inconsistency between the two groups, the CSLE and the PSLE this time. In other words, as long as percentage analysis is involved CSLE and PSLE allocate one tenth of this possibility indicator to *maybe* before phrases.

Table 4.27: Distribution of combinations of *maybe*

| Item | L1 S Fre | CSLE Fre | PSLE Fre |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Preposition | 4 | 11 | 7 |
| Verb | 4 | 7 | 0 |
| Article | 3 | 4 | 1 |
| Vague expressions | 3 | 4 | 6 |

Further analysis of *maybe* preceding phrases, in order to work out the most frequent collocations, indicates that the distribution of *maybe* co-occurring with phrases is to some extent different among the three groups. It should be emphasised that only 4 most frequently occurring categories will be examined in this section. These categories consist of prepositions, verbs, articles and other

vague expressions such as *some*, *somebody* and etc. What stands out in Table 4.27 is that the CSLE and the L1 speaker both use all the 4 categories with *maybe* but this possibility indicator occurs with three categories in the PSLE data. In other words, the PSLE does not use *maybe* before verbs. Also, the four categories are almost evenly distributed in the L1 speaker data but the other two groups use them with different frequencies.

As is evident in Table 4.27, prepositions are the most frequently used items to occur with *maybe* by the three groups, occurring 11 times in the CSLE, 17 times in the PSLE and 4 times in the L1 speaker data. As the second most frequently used item by the CSLE (7) and the L1 speaker (4), verbs do not co-occur with *maybe* in the PSLE data. Articles and vague expressions, 3 and 4 respectively, occur with the same frequencies with the CSLE and the L1 speaker. But the occurrences of these two categories in the PSLE data reveal significant differences; articles amounting to 1, and vague expressions totalling 6.

Table 4.28: Cluster of *maybe*

| L1 speaker data | | CSLE data | | PSLE data | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Cluster | Frequency | Cluster | Frequency | Cluster | Frequency |
| I think maybe | --- | I think maybe | 20 | I think maybe | --- |
| Maybe it is | --- | Maybe it is | 17 | Maybe it is | 20 |
| Maybe I will | --- | Maybe I will | 7 | Maybe I will | --- |
| Maybe we will | --- | Maybe we will | 6 | Maybe we will | --- |
| Maybe it is | --- | Maybe it is | 17 | Maybe it is | --- |
| Maybe I think | --- | Maybe I think | 6 | Maybe I think | --- |
| Maybe they are | --- | Maybe they are | 5 | Maybe they are | --- |
| Maybe in the | --- | Maybe in the | --- | Maybe in the | 5 |

| Total | --- | | 78 | | 25 |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|

L1 produced zero *maybe* clusters. As *maybe* is highly used by the CSLE, it is quite natural that more clustered items occur around this possibility indicator and no cluster occurs around the L1 speaker data, as *maybe* occurs quite infrequently by this group. As illustrated in Table 4.28, there are 7 clustered items totalling 78 by the CSLE, while PSLE demonstrates only 2 clustered items with this possibility indicator, amounting to 25. The two groups have only one item *maybe it is* in common with 17 occurrences by the CSLE and 20 occurrences by the PSLE.

## 4.2.2 *May*

Table 4.29: Distribution of *may*

|  | **May** | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| Data type | L1 S n=238 | CSLE n=379 | PSLE n=190 |
| Percentage | 24 | 13 | 8 |
| Frequency | 56 | 50 | 15 |

Ranked in terms of frequency occurrence, the auxiliary *may* appears as the second most common vague expression to express possibility. Unlike *maybe*, overused by the CSLE and underused by the L1 speaker, *may* is more frequently used by the L1 speaker with the CSLE the second most frequent user of this possibility indicator. As it can be viewed in Table 4.29, the L1 speaker with 56 occurrences shows a strong tendency to use *may*. CSLE with 50 occurrences stands in the second position, whereas the PSLE with around one third of this amount proves to underuse it. Even translated into percentage value, the ranking remains the same.

Table 4.30: Distribution of *may not*

|  | May not | | |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Data type | L1 S<br>n=56 | CSLE<br>n=50 | PSLE<br>n=15 |
| Percentage | 16 | 2 | 7 |
| Frequency | 9 | 1 | 1 |

In terms of the negative form of *may*, there appears a consistency between the two L2 speaker groups. As illustrated in Table 4.30, while the L1 speaker shows a frequency of 9 with *may not*, the CSLE and the PSLE, each with a frequency of 1, very rarely use this collocation in their classroom interaction. In other words, the L1 speaker uses *may* more diversely than the other two groups.

Table 4.31: Distribution of *may* co-occurring with the most frequent verbs

|  | May be | | | May have | | | May say | | |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Data type | L1 S | CSLE | PSLE | L1 S | CSLE | PSLE | L1 S | CSLE | PSLE |
| Percentage | 25 | 22 | 7 | 16 | 12 | 7 | 7 | 0 | 7 |
| Frequency | 14 | 11 | 1 | 9 | 6 | 1 | 4 | 0 | 1 |

|  | May make | | | May wanna/want to | | |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Data type | L1 S | CSLE | PSLE | L1 S | CSLE | PSLE |
| Percentage | 7 | 4 | 7 | 7 | 0 | 13 |
| Frequency | 4 | 2 | 1 | 4 | 0 | 2 |

The distribution of *may* in the research data indicates that interesting patterns by L1 speaker can be seen for the use of '*may*', while some of these patterns are shared only by the CSLE and some others by the PSLE only. What is obvious is

that the PSLE does not show consistency in using different verbs with *may*. In other words, the only verb to go with *may* with the frequency of more than 1 by the PSLE is found to be *want* with 2 occurrences. As Table 4.31illustrates, the most highly frequent pattern proves to be *may be* with 14 occurrences in the L1 speaker data and 11 occurrences in the CSLE, comprising around a quarter of the overall sentences containing *may,* whereas the PSLE does not show any tendency in using this collocation.

Like *may be*, *may have* with 9 occurrences by the L1 speaker is followed by the CSLE as the second most frequently used collocation with 6 occurrences, while the PSLE only shows an accidental occurrence of 1 with this collocation. There are 2 other collocations in the PSLE and the L1 speaker data which do not occur in the CSLE data; *may say*, and *may want* each with 4 occurrences by the L1 speaker occur once and twice respectively in the PSLE.  The L1 speaker shows an even distribution in the frequency of *may say*, *may make*, and *may want* with the frequency of 4.

What seems to be striking in Table 4.31 is that apart from *may want* which occurs twice, the frequency of *may* co-occurring with other verbs illustrated in Table 4.31 is merely 1 in the PSLE data. In other words, the frequency of *may not*, *may be*, *may have*, *may say*, and *may make* in the PSLE data is 1 and the frequency of *may say*, *may make*, and *may want* by the L1 speaker is 4. This consistency of frequency by the PSLE and the L1 speaker seems to require particular attention.

Table 4.32: Distribution of subject pronouns before *may*

| | You may | | | It may | | | I may | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Data type | L1 S n=56 | CSLE n=50 | PSLE n=15 | L1 S n=56 | CSLE n=50 | PSLE n=15 | L1 S n=56 | CSLE n=50 | PSLE n=15 |
| Percentage | 32 | 30 | 47 | 16 | 6 | 0 | 7 | 4 | 0 |
| Frequency | 18 | 12 | 7 | 9 | 3 | 0 | 4 | 2 | 0 |

The analysis of words sitting before *may* in sentences indicates that the L1 speaker uses *may* after *you*, *it*, and *I* more often than the other two groups, while

the PSLE fails to use *it may* and *I may* in their classroom interaction. The only collocation emerging in the interaction by the three groups is found to be *you may* with a difference of 6 occurrences in between. The smallest occurrence in this regard applies to the PSLE with a frequency of 7, but the CSLE with 12 occurrences uses six items more than his Persian counterpart but six items fewer than the L1 speaker.

Table 4.32 also indicates that the second most frequent subject pronoun in the L1 speaker and the CSLE data to go with *may* is found to be *it* with 9 and 3 occurrences, respectively, while this collocation does not appear in the PSLE data. The next most frequent pronoun to go along with *may* in the L1 speaker and the CSLE data appears to be *I* which again like *it may* is not used by the PSLE. *I may* constitutes the third most commonly used pattern in the analysis of subject pronouns collocating with *may*. The frequency of 4 for this pattern in the L1 speaker data against 2 by the CSLE and zero by the PSLE demonstrates another discrepancy among the three groups of participants. To conclude, the CSLE and L1 speaker behave more or less in a similar way but the PSLE acts differently as long as the collocation of subject pronouns and *may* is involved.

Table 4.33: Distribution of *we may*

|  | We  may | | |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Data type | L1 S n=56 | CSLE n=50 | PSLE n=15 |
| Percentage | 0 | 10 | 20 |
| Frequency | 0 | 5 | 3 |

The discrepancy seems to stretch into other subject pronouns, this time the CSLE and the PSLE using a subject pronoun placed before *may* more often than the L1 speaker. As can be seen in Table 4.33, the CSLE with 3 occurrences uses this collocation more often than the PSLE with 3 occurrences but the L1 speaker fails to use it in classroom interaction.

Table2.34: Distribution of *they may*

|  | They may | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| Data type | L1 S n=56 | CSLE n=50 | PSLE n=15 |
| Percentage | 4 | 10 | 13 |
| Frequency | 2 | 5 | 2 |

Table 4.35 presents the only relatively similar distribution in the collocation of subject pronouns with *may* among the three groups, which occurs in the use of *they may*. As can be seen, the PSLE and the L1 speaker use this collocation evenly; each with the frequency of 2 but the CSLE with 5 occurrences uses it more often than the other two groups.

Table 4.35: Cluster of *maybe*

| L1 speaker | | CSLE | | PSLE | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Cluster | Frequency | Cluster | Frequency | Cluster | Frequency |
| We may have | --- | We may have | 5 | We may have | --- |
| There may be | 6 | There may be | --- | There may be | --- |
| You may have | 5 | You may have | --- | You may have | --- |
| Total | 11 | | 5 | | --- |

From the clustering perspective of *may*, the L1 speaker with an overall of 11 occurrences demonstrates more consistency compared with the other two groups. As Table 4.35 shows, the clusters worked out for this possibility indicator are *there may be*, 6 occurrences and *you may have* 5 occurrences with the L1 speaker and *we may have* with the frequency of 5 by the CSLE, but the PSLE fails to generate clusters of three words with more than 5 occurrences in this study.

### 4.2.3. *Might*

Table 4.36: Distribution of *might*

| Data type | Might | | |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| | L1 S n=238 | CSLE n=379 | PSLE n=190 |
| Percentage | 24 | 3 | 7 |
| Frequency | 56 | 10 | 13 |

As the third most common possibility indicator, the occurrence of *might* with a frequency of 56 in the L1 speaker data outweighs those of the PSLE and the CSLE. L1 speaker data indicates consistency by this group with regard to *may* and *might*. Put in a different way, there exists no difference as far as frequency occurrence is concerned. In addition, the frequency of these two possibility indicators with 15 and 13 in PSLE data do not reveal any substantial differences but *may* and *might* are distributed significantly differently in the CSLE interaction; *may* 50 occurrences and *might* 10 occurrences.

As Table 4.36 illustrates, the comparison of *might* reveals that despite lower occurrences of possibility indicators in the L1 speaker data compared with the CSLE data, the former, with the frequency of 56 uses *might* more than 5 times as often as the latter with 10 occurrences but the PSLE uses it 13 times. Proving the fact that *may* and *might* occur more often in the L1 speaker data than the other two groups, the percentage value indicates that the concepts the L1 speaker has of *may* and *might* are probably different from the ones by the L2 speakers in this research study.

Table 4.37: Distribution of *might* before a turn initiating subject

| Data type | ... :subject + might | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| | L1 S n=56 | CSLE n=10 | PSLE n=13 |
| Percentage | 9 | 0 | 39 |
| Frequency | 5 | 0 | 5 |

The first solid pattern which can be easily observed in the data is the location of *subject+ might* in different positions in clauses. According to Table 2.3, 5 out of 13 instances of *subject +might* in the PSLE data and 5 out of 56 of such cases in the L1 speaker data occur at the beginning of utterances, acting as the turn initiators but the CSLE never uses *might* with a turn-initiating subject in their classroom interaction. Besides appearing at the beginning of the clause, these occurrences appear at the beginning of the utterance which the interlocutor initiates the utterance with.

Despite this striking similarity between the PSLE and the L1 speaker, the pattern found is likely to produce a substantially different proportional value. Once it is converted into percentage value, it becomes evident that 9% of the overall *might* in the L1 speaker data serve the function described above, while in the PSLE data the proportion is almost 4 times as much, 39%.

Table 4.38: Distribution of subject pronouns before *might*

| Data type | Sub Pro + might | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| | L1 S n=56 | CSLE n=10 | PSLE n=13 |
| Percentage | 55 | 50 | 62 |
| Frequency | 31 | 5 | 8 |

The investigation of subjects used before *might* reveals that more than half of the occurrences of *might*, 31, are placed before subject pronouns in the L1 speaker data, while this amounts to two-thirds (8) by the PSLE and exactly half, 5, by the CSLE. When it comes to frequency occurrence, the L1 speaker shows far more

inclination to use subject pronouns along with *might* in their utterances than the CSLE and the PSLE, but when it comes to percentage value, the performances of the three groups are deemed to fall within almost the same range. (See Table 4.38).

4.39: Distribution of subject pronouns before *might*

| | You might | | | It might | | | They might | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Data type | L1 S | PSLE | CSLE | L1 S | CSLE | PSLE | L1 S | CSLE | PSLE |
| Frequency | 12 | 1 | 2 | 6 | 0 | 0 | 5 | 1 | 0 |

| | I might | | | We might | | | He might | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Data type | L1 S | CSLE | PSLE | L1 S | CSLE | PSLE | L1 S | CSL E | PSLE |
| Frequency | 3 | 2 | 2 | 3 | 0 | 0 | 2 | 0 | 1 |

| | She might | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| Data type | L1 S | CSLE | PSLE |
| Frequency | 0 | 0 | 4 |

As can be seen in Table 4.39, the L1 speaker uses 6 different subject pronouns in their talks; however, some occur with very low frequency. The most frequent subject pronoun for this group being *you* with the frequency of 12, *it* with the frequency of 6, *they* occurring 5 times and *I* and *we* each with 3 occurrences followed by 2 occurrences of *he*. PSLE data also demonstrates that PSLE prefers to combine *might* with only four different subject pronouns. From the low occurrence of *might* in the data, it is quite obvious that collocations of subject pronouns with *might* in the PSLE data are rather infrequent. *She might* which doesn't occur in the L1 speaker data, with the frequency of 4 ranks first in the PSLE data, followed by 2 occurrences of *I* and then *you* and *he* each with the frequency of 1.

What seems unusual is that the PSLE does not use *might* with plural subject pronouns and that one collocation of *you might* in the data indicates that the speaker is directly addressing the individual addressee, while one third of the overall subject pronouns before *might* in the L1 speaker data comprises *we might* and *they might* if *you might* is put aside. The CSLE shows reluctance in using *might* with third person singular subject pronouns such as *he*, *she*, and *it*. What emerges from Table 4.39 is that the CSLE prefers to use this possibility indicator with limited number of subject pronouns compared to the other two groups.

4.40: Distribution of verbs after *might*

| | Might be | | | 
|---|---|---|---|
| Data type | L1 S n=56 | CSLE n=10 | PSLE n=13 |
| Percentage | 3 | 60 | 31 |
| Frequency | 20 | 6 | 4 |

| | Might  have | | | 
|---|---|---|---|
| Data type | L1 S n=56 | CSLE n=10 | PSLE n=13 |
| Percentage | 9 | 10 | 0 |
| Frequency | 5 | 1 | 0 |

In what follows *might*, L1 speaker demonstrates 4 occurrences of *might* not directly occurring before bare infinitives, which is lacking in the PSLE data. In other words, *as well* with a frequency of 2, *actually*, and *originally* each with 1 occurrence bridge between *might* and the subsequent verb in the L1 speaker data, but in the PSLE data it is always a verb to immediately sit after *might* like in the CSLE data. The most frequent verb combined with *might* by the three groups is *be*; however, the frequency of this collocation demonstrates a significant difference.

As can be seen in Table 4.40 , the frequency of *might be* by the CSLE is 6, accounting for 60%, and 4, meaning 31% in the PSLE data, whereas this collocation occurs 20 times in the L1 speaker data, the percentage of which is 36%. *Might have* with the frequency of 5 appears as the second most common collocation in sentences containing *might* by the L1 speaker, while this collocation occurs only once in the CSLE but is not observed in the PSLE data.

The other verbs co-occurring with *might* in the CSLE and the PSLE data are so diverse that no other occurrences can be observed more than once, while in the L1 speaker data due to the high frequency occurrence of sentences containing *might*, it is still possible to explore other verbs co-occurring with *might* more than once; *may want* and *may say* each with the frequency of 2. The three groups did not display any clusters of three words occurring with a frequency of more than 5.

### 4.2.4 *Probably*

4.41: Distribution of *probably*

| | **Probably** | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| Data type | L1 S n=238 | CSLE n=379 | PSLE n=190 |
| Percentage | 18 | 1 | 1 |
| Frequency | 42 | 5 | 1 |

*Probably* occurs substantially differently among the L1 speaker and the two L2 speaker groups of English. As Table 4.41 shows, the L1 speaker uses this possibility indicator more dominantly than the other two groups. In other words, around one fifth of the possibility indicators, equivalent to 42 occurrences, in the L1 speaker interaction are comprised of *probably* but the CSLE and the PSLE have only 1% of their possibility indicators in classroom interaction constituted of *probably*; 5 and 1 occurrences, respectively. This implies that the L1 speaker shows more diversity in using possibility indicators in the classroom context. As *probably* does not occur frequently enough by the three groups, drawing a table of clusters with a frequency of more than 5 is impossible.

## 4.2.5 *Possible*

Table 4.42: Distribution of *possible*

| Data type | Possible | | |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| | L1 S n=238 | CSLE n=379 | PSLE n=190 |
| Percentage | 9 | 1 | 3 |
| Frequency | 20 | 2 | 5 |

As with all the other possibility indicators discussed thus far, apart from *maybe*, *possible* appears more frequently in the L1 speaker data in comparison with the CSLE and PSLE interaction. As indicated in Table 4.42, the L1 speaker prefers to use *possible* more frequently than the CSLE and the PSLE but contrary to the *probably* trend, the CSLE uses it less frequently than the PSLE. The L1 speaker with the frequency of 20 has around one tenth of their possibility indicators constituted of *possible*, while it amounts to 5 by the PSLE and even less, 2, by the CSLE.

With the frequency of 4, PSLE shows a keen interest in using *possible* after *it is* in negative or interrogative forms, whereas for the L1 speaker, it occurs in the same position only 8 times out of the overall 20 occurrences and once out of the frequency of 2. The diversity in the structures co-occurring before or around *possible* in the L1 speaker data includes *the last possible date*, *the best way possible* and *if at all possible…* . Of the five sentences containing *possible* by the PSLE, 2 are negative, 2 interrogatives and 1 is a statement but for the L1 speaker, there is one negative and one interrogative with the rest being statements. *Possible* turns up in one positive and one negative sentence by the CSLE.

Of all the five occurrences of *possible* in the PSLE data, 3 appear in the final position which besides occurring in the clause final position, act as a signal that

the interactant is going to hand over to the other interlocutor. In other words, they act as both a sentence closer and a device to hand over to the interlocutor, or a turn closer. In the remaining 2 which do not occur in the final position only 1 co-occurs with *that* followed by another clause.

With regard to the L1 speaker data, only six instances of *possible* occur in the final position but just 1 acts as a turn closer, 5 being followed by another clause by the same interlocutor. Of the 14 other sentences which contain the non-final position *possible*, just 4 collocate with *that*. CSLE uses 1 out of 2 of these occurrences of *possible* as a turn closer in the clause final position but the other mid-clause position of *possible* is not followed by *that*.

Finally, as with *might*, no cluster of three words with the minimum frequency of 5 was generated for *possible* by each group.
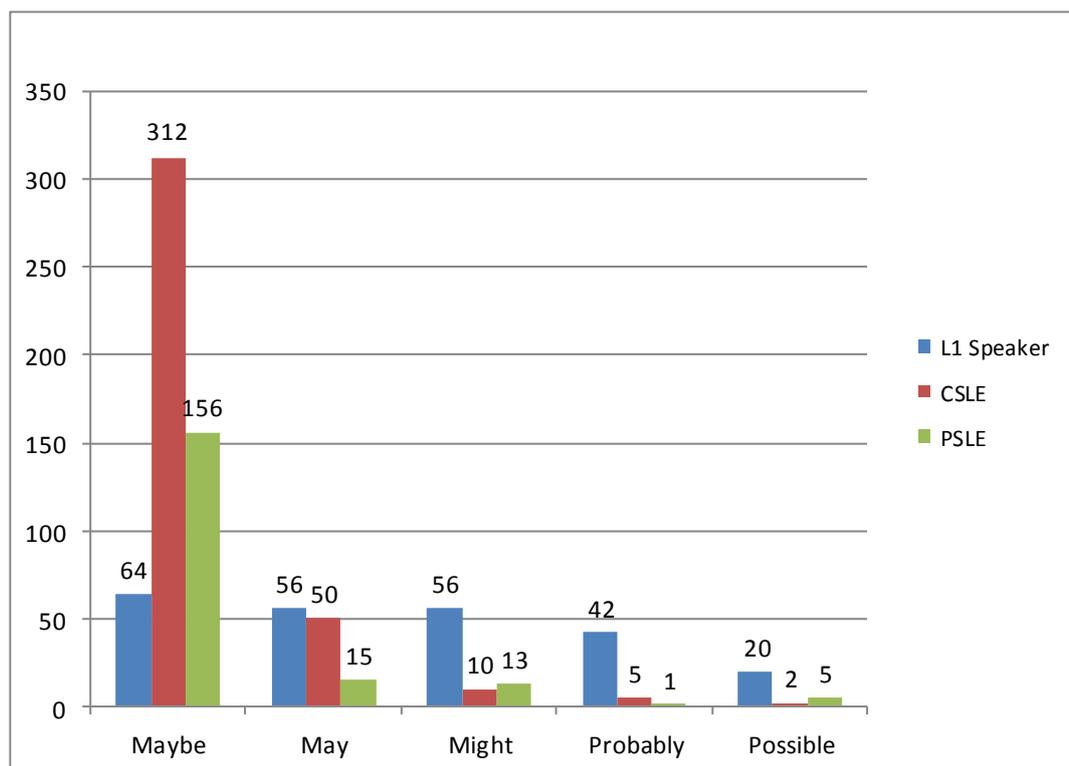


Figure 4.3: Frequency of *possibility indicators*

To recap, CSLE uses possibility indicators the most extensively and PSLE the least extensively. The difference in using this vague category by the three groups

is statistically meaningful. As can be seen in Figure 4.3, CSLE uses *maybe* more heavily than the other two groups, exactly twice as often as the PSLE and around 5 times as often as the L1 speaker but all the other items under possibility indicators are more openly used by the L1 speaker. Ruzaitė (2007) states that "*maybe* or *perhaps* suggest a lower degree of the speaker's commitment to the truth of the claim and make the claim less categorical" (p.158).

Comparison of the PSLE and the CSLE reveals that there are 3 items more commonly used by the CSLE; *maybe*, *may*, and *probably*, while PSLE uses *might* and *possible* more often than the Chinese counterpart. What stands out in the L1 speaker's reference to possibility indicators is that *maybe*, *may*, *might*, and *probably* are almost evenly distributed. CSLE and PSLE use only 1 possibility indicator, *maybe* more frequently than the L1 speaker, but in the other four categories it is the L1speaker to significantly overuse them.

The distribution of *may* in this study demonstrates a pattern in contrast with Hyland's (1997) finding that L2 users use this modal auxiliary as a marker of possibility twice as often as the L1 speaker. Another unusual trend in the examination of possibility indicators is that the PSLE hardly ever uses *probably* in their classroom interaction.
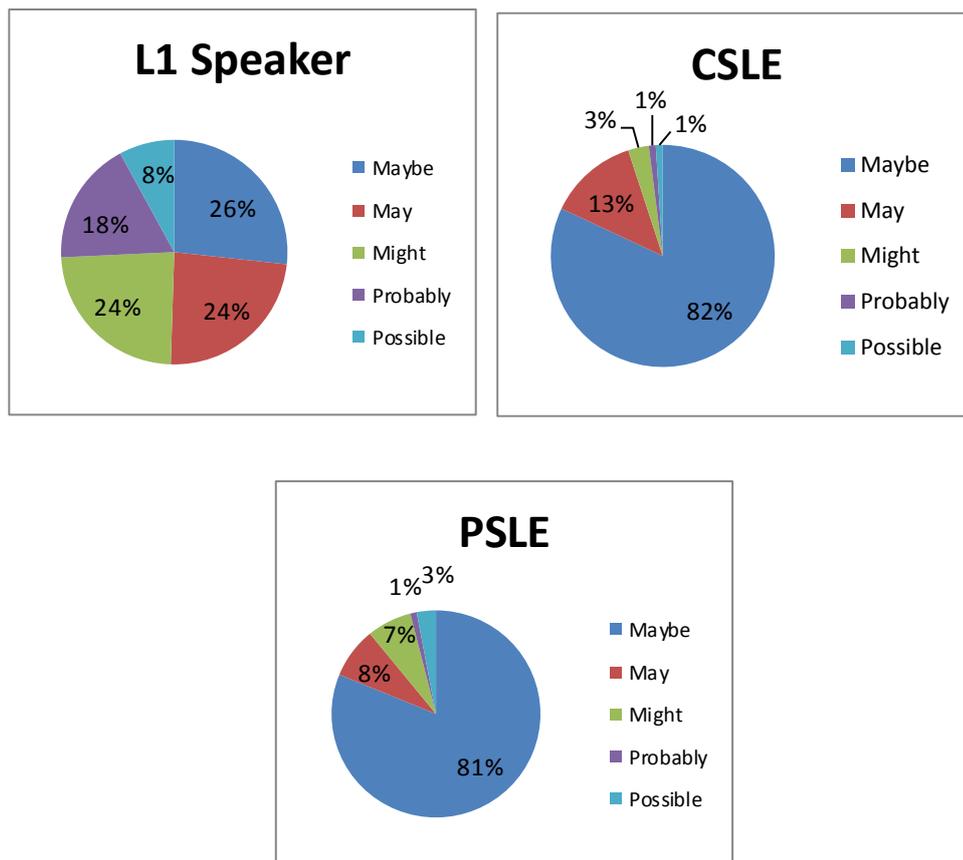
Figure 4.4: Percentage of different *possibility indicators*

The percentage of items constituting possibility indicators shows a substantial difference in terms of the proportion of the items between the L1 speaker and the L2 groups. As can be seen in Figure 4.4, the first three possibility indicators, *maybe*, *may* and *might* with an almost even distribution, comprise three fourths of the overall possibility indicators by the L1 speaker, while in L2 speaker data more than four fifths, 81 and 82%, of the categories contain 1 item only, *maybe*. The remaining one quarter by the L1 speaker consists of *probably* and *possible*, the former being around twice as much as the latter. In the CSLE and the PSLE data, on the other hand, the remaining one fifth is composed of four items. *May* and *might* each with 8% and 7% occur evenly by the PSLE but the former occurs 4 times as often as the latter in the CSLE data. Furthermore, *probably* with only 1% by each L2 speaker group is found minimal compared with 18 by the L1 speaker. *Possible* with 3% constitutes the second last item of possibility indicator, while it occurs as the least frequently used item in the CSLE and the L1 speaker data. The overall picture indicates that the trends of possibility indicators by the CSLE and

the PSLE are more or less similar, whereas the L1 speaker demonstrates a unique trend.

## 4.3 Vague quantifiers

Table 4.43: Distribution of quantifiers

| Item | L1 speaker of English | | CSLE | | PSLE | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Distribution** | Frequency | Percentage | Frequency | Percentage | Frequency | Percentage |
| Some (of) | 173 | 40(%) | 264 | 36(%) | 229 | 53(%) |
| Much | 53 | 13(%) | 106 | 14(%) | 40 | 9 (%) |
| Many | 46 | 11(%) | 163 | 22(%) | 47 | 11(%) |
| A lot of | 39 | 9(%) | 85 | 11(%) | 22 | 5(%) |
| Most (of) | 33 | 8(%) | 86 | 13(%) | 38 | 9 (%) |
| (a)Few | 21 | 5(%) | 7 | 1(%) | 0 | 0(%) |
| A little | 20 | 5(%) | 11 | 1(%) | 9 | 2 (%) |
| Lots of | 16 | 4(%) | 11 | 1(%) | 34 | 8 (%) |
| A lot | 16 | 4(%) | 8 | 1(%) | 9 | 2(%) |
| Majority | 6 | 1(%) | 0 | 0 (%) | 7 | 2% |
| **Total** | **423** | **100(%)** | **741** | **100(%)** | **435** | **101(%)** |

The third category to contribute to an in-depth analysis of VL in this study is what is called 'vague quantifiers' in the existing literature (Channell 1994; Cutting 2007, & Ruzaitė, 2007). This category consists of 10 items including *some (of), much, many (of), a lot of, most (of), (a) few of, a little, lots of, a lot*, and *majority*. As with 'subjectivisers' and 'possibility indicators', the CSLE overuses this category compared to the PSLE and the L1 speaker who prefer to use it almost evenly. But contrary to subjectivisers and possibility indicators whereby only the first items, *I think* and *maybe*, were more heavily used by the CSLE, this group demonstrates preference for using the first five vague quantifiers in Table 4.43,

*some*, *much, many, a lot of*, and *most of*,  more dominantly than the other two groups.

The L1 speaker and the PSLE overtake each other in dominantly using the remaining five items. *(A) few, (a) little*, and *a lot* preferred by the L1 speaker and *lots of* and *majority* predominantly used by the PSLE. As Table 4.43 shows, the overall frequency of quantifiers by the PSLE and the L1 speaker is roughly the same, 435 and 423 but it amounts to 741 in the CSLE data. It should be added that although both PSLE and CSLE use vague quantifiers almost evenly, the occurrences of some individual items between them prove to be different. Statistical analysis reveals significant differences in vague intensifiers by the three groups. $p < 0.05(\chi^2=211.976,$ d.f.18).

There seems to be more consistency in the occurrence of vague quantifiers in the upper section of the Table whereby all the first five items are consistently employed most often by the CSLE, but the PSLE and the L1 speaker group show fluctuations in heavily using the other five items in the lower part. For instance, L1 speaker the most frequent user of *(a) few* and *a little*, and *a lot*, whereas the PSLE uses *lots of* and *majority* more often. What Ruzaitė (2007) found in her research study is true in the current study as well, that *some* occurs the most frequently in British and American academic discourse. This is viewed not only by the L1 speaker but also the L2 speakers.

### 4.3.1 *Some (of)*

Table 4.44: Distribution of *some (of)*

| Data type | Some (of) | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| | L1 S n=423 | CSLE n=741 | PSLE n=435 |
| Percentage | 40 | 36 | 53 |
| Frequency | 173 | 264 | 229 |

As the most commonly used vague quantifier across the three groups, *some (of)* occurs the most in the CSLE classroom interaction 264 times, followed by PSLE with 229 and the L1 speaker with 173 occurrences. As can be seen in Table 4.44, PSLE has this item constituting more than half of the proportion of vague quantifiers, while the CSLE and the L1 speaker have less than half of this category comprised of *some (of)*. What the table reveals is that the L2 speakers use *some (of)* more often than the L1 speaker.

Table 4.45: Distribution of *some* in clause initial position

| Data type | . Some… | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| | L1 S n= 173 | CSLE n=264 | PSLE n=229 |
| Percentage | 2 | 4 | 10 |
| Frequency | 4 | 10 | 24 |

.Some... means occurrences in the clause initial position by the same speaker as the previous clause.

Despite the most frequent occurrence of *some* in the CSLE data, it does not happen in the clause initial position by the same group. The PSLE shows inclination to use it in the clause initial position with 24 occurrences and the L1 speaker with only 4 occurrences is found to be more hesitant in placing this vague

intensifier at the beginning of clauses. In other words, while around one tenth of all instances of *some* in the PSLE data occur in the clause initial position, the CSLE and the L1 speaker sparingly use it in the same position.

Given the small frequency occurrences of clause initial position of *some* in the CSLE and the L1 speaker data; it will be quite natural that the two groups very rarely use it as a turn-initiating device. Turn-initiating *some* appears 16 times in the PSLE interaction, whereas the CSLE shows only 3 turn-initiating occurrences of *some* and the L1 speaker avoids allocating the turn-initiating role to this vague intensifier.

Table 4.46: Distribution of *some of*

| | Some of | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| Data type | L1 S n=173 | CSLE n=264 | PSLE n=229 |
| Percentage | 15 | 3 | 7 |
| Frequency | 26 | 9 | 16 |

The ranking of occurrence of *some of* among the three groups is the reverse of that of *some*. In other words, while CSLE and L1 speaker use *some* most and least frequently, respectively in this research study, their positions are reversed once the occurrence of *some of* is examined. As illustrated in Table 4.46, L1 speaker with 26 occurrences uses *some of* roughly 3 times as often as the CSLE with the frequency of 9 and like in *some* the PSLE remains in the middle with 16 occurrences. In percentage language, the L1 speaker with 15% uses *some of* almost twice as much as the PSLE and the latter with 7% uses this vague expression twice as much as the CSLE with 3%.

Table 4.47: The most frequent collocations of *some of*

| L1 speaker | | CSLE | | PSLE | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Collocation | Frequency | Collocation | Frequency | Collocation | Frequency |
| Some of you | 9 | Some of you | --- | Some of you | --- |
| Some of the | 8 | Some of the | --- | Some of the | --- |
| Some of these | 6 | Some of theses | --- | Some of theses | --- |
| Total | 23 | | --- | | --- |

The patterns, which the L1 speaker uses *some of* with, are significantly different from the ones by the L2 speakers. As is clear in Table 4.47, the L1 speaker uses 3 collocations with the frequency of more than 5; *some of you* 9 times, *some of the* 8 occurrences and *some of these* 6 tokens. By contrast, collocations are non-existent in the L2 speakers' interactions.

Table 4.48: Distribution of *some of* in the clause initial position, before another vague expression or DM

| | **Some of …..** | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| Data type | L1 S n=26 | CSLE n=9 | PSLE n=16 |
| Percentage | 0 | 11 | 25 |
| Frequency | 0 | 1 | 4 |

| | **…V expression/DM+ some of….** | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| Data type | L1 S n=26 | CSLE n=9 | PSLE n=16 |
| Percentage | 35 | 11 | 0 |
| Frequency | 9 | 1 | 0 |

The function of *some of* seems to be different among the three groups. As can be viewed in Table 4.48, PSLE uses *some of* in the clause initial position 4 times and the CSLE just once, while it does not occur in the L1 speaker data. In other words, this phrase seems to serve a function in the PSLE data which the CSLE and the L1 speakers fail to use for in their interaction. The frequency of 1 in the CSLE seems to be accidental.

The examination of words co-occurring before *some of* reveals that many of the L1 speakers place *some of* after a vague expression (mostly subjectivisers) or a DM such as *I mean*, *okay*, 9 times or 35%. For instance:

(4.13)

S1: … The, ERIC Clearinghouse on Assessment and Evaluation and I would say, that this is probably just fine to use. okay? [S4: okay] little bit out-dated in its design but, <S4: LAUGH>I mean it's, it's okay I mean **some of** these are, I mean it's nice that they roll over, <SS: LAUGH> but,                                                        (L1: 3:122)

 S4: Cuz I looked_ I found some terms that weren't in the, in the book and I ended up not using them just cuz I was [S1: oh really?] nervous about it. I I wasn't sure like there's bullying for violence which I thought would have been a good term but,        (L1: 3:123)

It seems that *some of* is used by the L1 speaker to reinforce uncertainty in the truth condition of the proposition, while this function of *some of* is missing in PSLE data and occurs accidentally by the CSLE. Despite being vague, *some of* seems to be used with more certainty in sentences produced by PSLE.

Table 4.49: Distribution of *some* followed by adjectives+ nouns

|  | Some + adj+ noun | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| Data type | L1 S n=173 | CSLE n=264 | PSLE n=229 |
| Percentage | 14 | 9 | 10 |
| Frequency | 25 | 25 | 24 |

The analysis of patterns used with *some* indicates that the three groups behave consistently with respect to using *adjective+ noun*. As can be seen in Table 4.49, the CSLE and the L1 speaker each with a frequency of 25 makes almost the same number of  uses of *some + adjective + noun*  as the PSLE.  Even the percentage value does not seem to show any substantial differences.

Table 4.50: Distribution of positive, neutral and negative adjectives after *some*

| Data type | L1 S | | | CSLE | | | PSLE | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Adjective type | + | * | - | + | * | - | + | * | - |
| Frequency | 14 | 7 | 4 | 11 | 11 | 3 | 8 | 9 | 7 |

Despite the relatively even distribution of *adjective + noun* preceded by *some* among the three groups, the distribution of the kinds of adjectives among them reflects considerable differences.  The pattern which the L1 speaker follows in the use of adjectives seems to be an exponential pattern. As can be seen in Table 4.50, while positive adjectives in the L1 speaker data (14) appear twice as often as the neutral adjectives (7) and  the neutral adjectives occur almost twice as often as the negative adjectives (4), the adjectives used in the same position by the PSLE data fall within the same range; 7, 8, and 9.  Even more differently, positive and neutral adjectives in the CSLE data occur evenly, 11 times, but almost 4 times less often occurrence is witnessed for negative adjectives.

Table 4.51: Frequency of the most common collocation of *some* before another word

| L1 speaker | | CSLE | | PSLE | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Collocation | Frequency | Collocation | Frequency | Collocation | Frequency |
| Some people | 3 | Some people | 9 | Some people | 32 |
| Some problems | --- | Some problems | --- | Some problems | 7 |
| Some rules | --- | Some rules | --- | Some rules | 7 |
| Some other | 5 | Some other | 16 | Some other | 5 |
| Some things | 8 | Some things | --- | Some things | --- |
| Some | --- | Some | 16 | Some | --- |

| students | | students | | students | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Some, some | --- | Some, some | 7 | Some, some | --- |
| Some money | --- | Some money | 6 | Some money | --- |
| Some students | --- | Some students | 6 | Some students | --- |
| Some experience | --- | Some experience | 5 | Some experience | --- |
| Total | 16 | | 65 | | 51 |

There is consistency in the number of individual collocations and the total number of collocations of *some*. To put it in a different way, the largest number of individual collocations and the largest overall number of collocations belong to the CSLE with seven items and an overall frequency of 65 followed by 4 items with an overall frequency of 51 by the PSLE and 3 items totalling 16 by the L1 speaker. As indicated in Table 4.51, the three groups have only 2 collocations in common; *some other* occurring evenly (5) by the PSLE and the L1 speaker and almost 3 times more often (16) by the CSLE, and *some people* occurring 32 times by the PSLE, but only 3 times in the L1 speaker data and 9 times by the CSLE.

Table 4.52 Distribution of nouns after *some*

| | Some + noun | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| Data type | L1 S n=173 | CSLE n=264 | PSLE n=229 |
| Percentage | 43 | 55 | 70 |
| Frequency | 74 | 144 | 160 |

| | Some + mass noun | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| Data type | L1 S n=74 | CSLE n=144 | PSLE n=160 |
| Percentage | 32 | 11 | 4 |
| Frequency | 24 | 15 | 7 |

| | Some + countable noun | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| Data type | L1 S n=74 | CSLE n=144 | PSLE n=160 |
| Percentage | 68 | 90 | 96 |
| Frequency | 50 | 129 | 153 |

Of the overall 229 occurrences of *some* in the PSLE data, 160 are a collocation of *some* with nouns and 144 occurrences out of 264 by the CSLE are located before nouns, while 74 out of 173 collocations of 'some+ noun' occur in the L1 speaker data. In other words, while CSLE and the PSLE locate around half of their occurrences of *some* with nouns, more than two thirds of this vague quantifier are coupled with nouns in the PSLE data. The remaining values displaying collocations other than nouns include *some + adjective + noun*, *some of* or other fixed collocations such as *to name some*, or *some more*. What can be drawn from Table 4.52 is that the PSLE prefers to pair up most of the occurrences of *some* in their talks with nouns.

The analysis of nouns used with *some* demonstrates that around a quarter of nouns, 24 occurrences, preceded by *some* in the L1 speaker data happens to be mass nouns, about one-seventh, 15 occurrences by the CSLE, and even half as often (7), amounting to 4% by the PSLE. This implies that the PSLE and the CSLE show less inclination towards using *some* before mass nouns, which can be considered as a significant difference in the patterns among the three groups.

As far as countable nouns are concerned, the PSLE and the CSLE interaction reveal overwhelmingly larger numbers of countable nouns occurring after *some* against the L1 speaker. Frequency of 50 means that 68% of instances in the L1 interaction occur before countable nouns, while these occurrences are much higher by the PSLE and the CSLE. In other words, the frequency of 153 translated as 96% and 129 as 90% clearly indicate that countable nouns are dominantly used by the two L2 speaker groups, while the L1 speaker prefers to use this collocation more moderately.

Table 4.53: Distribution of conjunctions before *some*

| Data type | L1 Speaker | CSLE | PSLE |
|---|---|---|---|
| Conjunction+ some | Frequency | Frequency | Frequency |
| but some | 0 | 1 | 6 |
| or some | 2 | 5 | 3 |
| and some | 7 | 16 | 2 |
| **Total** | **9** | **22** | **11** |

The occurrence of *some* after conjunctions shows that L1 speaker and CSLE prefer the same conjunction, *and*, as the most common after this quantifier with 7 and 16 occurrences. The PSLE, on the contrary, uses it the least often (2) among the three conjunctions in Table 4.53. The most common conjunction used by the PSLE (but) is the least common conjunction preceding *some* in the L1 speaker and CSLE data, 0 and 1, respectively. What it can imply is that L1 speaker and CSLE mainly use *some* for additional purposes, while PSLE uses it to mainly refer to contrast. When it comes to the total number of conjunctions used before *some,* L1speaker and PSLE are found to be acting nearly in the same way with 9 and 11 occurrences, whereas it amounts to 22 for the CSLE.

Table 4.54: Cluster of *some*

| L1 speaker | | CSLE | | PSLE | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Cluster | Frequency | Cluster | Frequency | Cluster | Frequency |
| There are some | --- | There are some | 5 | There are some | 10 |
| Some of them | --- | Some of them | --- | Some of them | 6 |
| In some tribes | --- | In some tribes | --- | In some tribes | 6 |
| Some people who | --- | Some people who | --- | Some people who | 5 |
| For example some | --- | For example some | --- | For example some | 5 |
| Some kind of | 14 | Some kind of | --- | Some kind of | --- |
| Some of you | 9 | Some of you | --- | Some of you | --- |
| Some of the | 8 | Some of the | --- | Some of the | --- |
| Some of these | 6 | Some of these | --- | Some of these | --- |
| Give me some | 5 | Give me some | --- | Give me some | --- |
| To do some | --- | To do some | 10 | To do some | --- |
| I think some | --- | I think some | 8 | I think some | --- |
| You have some | --- | You have some | 6 | You have some | --- |
| Go to some | --- | Go to some | 5 | Go to some | --- |
| Some other things | --- | Some other things | 5 | Some other things | --- |
| **Total** | **42** | | **39** | | **32** |

The comparison of clusters of as far as three words before and after *some* with the minimum frequency of 5 by each group indicates that the patterns of each group are so distinctly different that even finding a common item among them is impossible. However, it is possible to work out a partial consistency between the CSLE and PSLE which lies in the fact that more than half of the categories (3) listed in the table by the L1 speaker are comprised of *some of* plus another constituent, while the L2 speakers do not use *some of* commonly enough to construct a cluster containing this item. The only cluster of this type occurs as *some of them* by the PSLE.

Overall, despite the highest frequency of *some* occurring in CSLE data (264), the L1 speaker shows a more extensive consistency in the distribution of clusters around this vague quantifier (42). Even a look at collocation of conjunctions discussed earlier under Table 4.53and three-word clusters, Table 4.54 lend support to this claim. It means L1 speaker, despite using *some* fewer than the CSLE and the PSLE, shows consistency in more diversely using a wider range of collocations along with this quantifier.

## 4.3.2 *Much*

Table 4.55: Distribution of *much*

|  | Much | | |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Data type | L1 S<br>n= 423 | CSLE<br>n= 741 | PSLE<br>n= 435 |
| Percentage | 13 | 14 | 9 |
| Frequency | 53 | 106 | 40 |

CSLE uses *much* exactly twice as often as the L1 speaker but it is found to be more than twice the frequency of this vague quantifier used by the PSLE. As can be seen in Table 4.55, CSLE with 106 occurrences is the most dominant user of

*much* in comparison with L1 speaker, 53 tokens, and PSLE 40 tokens. The percentage language downplays the difference, showing that CSLE and the L1 speaker behave pretty much in the same way as far as *much* is concerned. The PSLE behaves in almost the same manner as well. However, the value is partially smaller. While *much of* is a collocation that can be viewed in the L1 speaker data (4) and the CSLE data (2), PSLE refuses to use it in the same context.

Table 4.56: Distribution of what occurs before *much*

|  | how much | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| Data type | L1 S n=53 | CSLE n= 106 | PSLE n= 40 |
| Percentage | 11 | 3 | 23 |
| Frequency | 6 | 3 | 9 |

In terms of words appearing before *much*, *how much* with 3 occurrences is the least commonly used by the CSLE, while the L1 speaker uses it twice as often (6) and the PSLE 3 times as commonly (9). Besides the difference in the frequency of *how much*, the PSLE prefers to use it 5 times at the beginning of a turn, whereas it occurs as a turn initiator only once by the L1 speaker and the CSLE.

Table 4.57: Distribution of what occurs before *much*

| | so much | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| Data type | L1 S n= 53 | CSLE n= 106 | PSLE n= 40 |
| Percentage | 17 | 18 | 23 |
| Frequency | 9 | 19 | 9 |

| | too much | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| Data type | L1 S n= 53 | CSLE n= 106 | PSLE n= 40 |
| Percentage | 8 | 13 | 10 |
| Frequency | 4 | 14 | 4 |

| | very much | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| Data type | L1 S n= 53 | CSLE n= 106 | PSLE n= 40 |
| Percentage | 4 | 45 | 10 |
| Frequency | 2 | 48 | 4 |

The L1 speaker and PSLE share the frequency of 9 for using *so much* but the CSLE uses it more than twice as often, amounting to 19 times. However, the percentage value reveals that around a quarter of the overall occurrences of *much* appear after the intensifier *so* in the PSLE interaction, while it falls to less than one fifth by the other two groups. Surprisingly, 2 out of 9 such expressions by the L1 speaker and the PSLE occur in the clause final position without nouns, while the CSLE uses around half of the collocation of *so much* in the same position. So the other difference with regards to this collocation is that it occurs twice before comparative adjectives by the L1 speaker, but does not appear in the CSLE and the PSLE interaction.

The other collocation which was found common only between two groups is *that much* with the frequency of 3 by the PSLE and 5 by the L1 speaker, while the CSLE do not use it in their classroom interaction. There are 2 collocations appearing most frequently in the interaction by each group. *Too much* with the frequency of 14 by the CSLE and 4 by the other two groups is found to be more consistently used by the three groups of participants than *very much*. This

collocation is overused by the CSLE, with 48 occurrences, with 4 uses by the PSLE and only twice by the L1 speaker.

The other comparable structure in this respect is *very much* which occurs 4 times in the PSLE data and half as often in the L1 speaker data. In other words to intensify *much* the PSLE and the L1 speaker prefer to use *so* or *too* evenly but the PSLE uses *very* more frequently than the L1 speaker. However, the CSLE shows inclination in heavily using intensifiers before *much*.

Overall, of all the five collocations of *much* investigated, 1 happened to be of an even frequency among the three groups; *as much as* with the frequency of 3, and 1 was found to be more commonly used by the PSLE, 14 occurrences but in the other 3 items of intensifiers occurring with *much* the CSLE has been identified as the most dominant user of.

4.58: Distribution clause-final position of *much* by

| L1 S | | CSLE | | PSLE | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Pattern | Frequency | Pattern | Frequency | Pattern | Frequency |
| …much. | 5 | …much. | 39 | …much. | 6 |
| …so much. | 2 | … so much. | 10 | …so much. | 2 |
| …very much. | 1 | …very much. | 27 | …very much. | 2 |
| Total | 8 | | 76 | | 10 |

The emergence of *much* in clause final position, which modifies a verb reveals roughly the same frequency for the PSLE and the L1 speaker but the CSLE feels more comfortable using this vague quantifier at the end of the clause. It appears 6 times in the clause final position by the PSLE and 5 times by the L1 speaker, but the CSLE, uses it heavily in the same position, 39 times. The common collocations in the clause final position among the three groups are *so much*, again

like the previous pattern describing a verb with 2 occurrences by the PSLE and the L1 speaker but higher 10 by the CSLE. *Very much* occurs with the frequency of 2 by the PSLE and 1 by the L1 speaker, but far more frequently (27) by the CSLE.

The investigation of constituents following *much* indicates that in terms of *much* before comparative adjectives, the L1 speaker with 12 occurrences outperforms the PSLE with 4 and the CSLE with 1 occurrence only. For the L1 speaker the comparative *much* occurs 7 times before *more* and 5 times before short adjectives, while *much more* in the PSLE data is identified only once and the only occurrence of *much* before a comparative adjective by the CSLE is found to be of the same type. In other words, the L2 speakers fail to use *much* before comparative adjectives freely. What it can imply is that the L2 speakers do not intensify comparative adjectives in their classroom interaction.

The most significant difference across the three groups appears in the co-occurrence 'much+conjunctions' which is observed in the CSLE data. To be more precise, all these happen in phrases containing *very much*. The first conjunction to appear after *very much* is found to be *and* with 9 occurrences to refer to addition. The next collocation indicates that the CSLE prefers to use a conjunction to refer to contrast after *very much*, but with the frequency of 4. There is one more conjunction to prove that the CSLE uses *much* more freely than the other two groups. Besides *addition* and *contrast*, the CSLE shows attempts to express *reason* after *very much* by using 3 tokens of *because*.

The analysis of components occurring after much reveals only 1 component in common among three groups. *Much time* with 6 occurrences by the CSLE, 3 occurrences by the L1 speaker and 4 occurrences by the PSLE happen to be standing out in the investigation of what occurs after *much* in this research study.

As is evident, each group chooses to use their typical collocations. For instance, *much money* with 10 occurrences, *much attention* with the frequency of 3 and *much later* with 2 occurrences are seen frequently by CSLE, PSLE and the L1 speaker, respectively. What can be drawn from this pattern is that despite the fact that the interaction by each group occurs in the same generic context, the collocations used are differently, apart from *much time* which is common among the three groups. PSLE and the L1 speaker do not show any clusters of three words containing *much* with the frequency of more than 5 but it emerges in 2 items by the CSLE; *very much and* occurring 8 times, and *like it very much* with the frequency of 5.

### 4.3.3 *Many*

Table 4.59:  Distribution of *many*

| Data type | Many | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| | L1 S n= 423 | CSLE n=741 | PSLE n= 435 |
| Percentage | 11 | 22 | 11 |
| Frequency | 46 | 163 | 47 |

The total occurrence of *many* shows by and large a similarity between the PSLE and the L1 speaker but the CSLE shows a strong tendency in using this vague quantifier. As Table 4.59 shows, with 163 occurrences, *many* occurs more than 3 times as often in the CSLE data as it does in the data by the PSLE (47) and the L1 speaker (46). Even from the percentage perspective, it is the CSLE who heavily uses *many* more often than the other two groups but the value shows a two-fold increase in favour of the CSLE. What seems noticeable is that *many* in clause initial position is a very rare case. In actual fact neither the PSLE nor the L1 speaker uses *many* at the beginning of the clause but the CSLE uses this vague quantifier in the same position 3 times, which seems too few to be discussed further.

Table 4.60: Distribution of words before *many*

| L1 S | | CSLE | | PSLE | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Collocation | Frequency | Collocation | Frequency | Collocation | Frequency |
| so many | 6 | so many | 22 | so many | 14 |
| how many | 17 | how many | 4 | how many | 2 |
| as many | 6 | as many | --- | as many | --- |
| conjunction + many | --- | conjunction + many | 8 | conjunction + many | 4 |
| there are many | --- | there are many | 22 | there are many | --- |
| have many | --- | have many | 13 | have many | --- |
| see many | --- | see many | 8 | see many | --- |
| **Total** | **29** | | **77** | | **20** |

Looking at what occurs before *many* shows that the CSLE uses the largest number of individual items as well as the largest overall frequency of such collocations in their interaction. In other words, PSLE and the L1 speaker each uses only 3 collocations of *many* and other components, while collocations of *many* and other components following it amounts to 6 by the CSLE. The overall occurrences are found to be 20 in the PSLE data and 29 by the L1 speaker, but the CSLE shows an overall of 77 occurrences.

More importantly, there are two items in common among the three groups but with varying occurrences; *so many* with the highest frequency 22 by the CSLE, 14 by the PSLE and 6 L1 speaker followed by *how many*, 17 tokens by the L1 speaker; 4 tokens by the CSLE and only 2 tokens by the PSLE. *As many* occurring 6 times emerges only in the L1speaker data. Besides this similarity between the two L2 speakers, they choose to use conjunctions before *many* in their classroom interaction, which the L1 speaker refuses to do in the same context, but the CSLE with the frequency of 8, uses it exactly twice as often as the PSLE. CSLE has

some collocations typical of their group with considerable occurrences. *There are many,* 22 times; *have many*, 4 times and *see many*, 8 times.

What can be stated on the use of *many* is that despite the extensive use of this vague expression in the CSLE interaction, the PSLE and the CSLE show patterns more comparable to each other.

Table 4.61: Distribution of words after *many*

| L1 speaker | | CSLE | | PSLE | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Collocation | Frequency | Collocation | Frequency | Collocation | Frequency |
| many+ adj + noun | 5 | many+ adj + noun | 23 | many+ adj + noun | 7 |
| many problems | --- | many problems | --- | many problems | 5 |
| many people | 3 | many people | 16 | many people | 4 |
| many years | --- | many years | 8 | many years | --- |
| many places | --- | many places | 7 | many places | --- |
| many opportunities | --- | many opportunities | 5 | many opportunities | --- |
| many students | --- | many students | 5 | many students | --- |
| **Total** | **8** | | **64** | | **16** |

With respect to the words following *many*, it appears that the L1 speaker and PSLE behave by and large similarly. This trend applies to both the number of individual collocations and the total number of collations used. As Table 4.61 shows, there are 2 individual collocations by the L1 speaker and 3 by the PSLE, while this amounts to 6 by the CSLE.

The three groups have two collocations in common; *many+adjective+noun* which is also the most frequent by each group. Its frequency distribution is 5 by L1 speaker, 23 by CSLE and 7 by PSLE. The second collocation common among the three groups *many people*, like the first one, is the most frequently used by the CSLE, but the L1 speaker and PSLE groups do not show tendency in the use of this collocation. It occurs 16 times in the PSLE data but 3 and 4 times by the L1 speaker and PSLE, respectively.

In terms of the total number of collocations of *many*, CSLE with the frequency of 64, prefers such collocations exactly 4 times as often as the PSLE and the PSLE with 16 tokens uses it exactly twice as often as the L1 speaker. This means the collocation of *many* is more popular with the L2 speakers than the L1 speaker, particularly the CSLE.

The next noticeable trend observed in Table, 4.61 is the occurrence of other collocations, which are typical of the CSLE. The 4 collocations of *many years* (8), *many places* (7), *many opportunities* (5) and *many students* (5) are all unique to CSLE classroom interaction, while PSLE uses only one collocation unique to this group, *many problems* (5). The only two combinations available in the L1 speaker data, *many + adj+ noun* and *many people*, are also used by the CSLE and the PSLE.

The analysis of final position use of *many* reveals that CSLE and the PSLE with 12 and 19 occurrences show inclination toward using *many* or *many+ noun* at the end of a clause, whereas this occurs only twice by the L1 speaker. PSLE and the L1 speaker also preform similarly in underusing *many of* which occurs only twice by the PSLE and once only by the L1 speaker, but it occurs more frequently by the CSLE with 7 uses.

With regard to the cluster of *many*, the data reveal that this quantifier occurs almost evenly by the two L2 speaker groups. Only the two L2 speaker groups show cluster of three words around *many* with the frequency of more than 5, each

using just one cluster; *there are many*, 26 times by the CSLE and *so many different* with a frequency of 7 by the PSLE.

### 4.3.4 *A lot of*

Table 4.62: Distribution of *a lot of*

| | a lot of | | |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Data type | L1 s<br>n=423 | CSLE<br>n=741 | PSLE<br>n=435 |
| Percentage | 9 | 11 | 5 |
| Frequency | 39 | 85 | 22 |

Like all the vague quantifiers studied so far, the CSLE demonstrates frequent employment of *a lot of* in their talks. As indicated in Table 4.62, *a lot of* by the CSLE occurs around 4 times as often as the PSLE and twice as often as by the L1 speaker.   Unlike *much* which the two L2 speaker groups used almost evenly, *a lot of* with the frequency of 85 is more dominant in the CSLE interaction compared to 22 by the PSLE and 39 by the L1 speaker. It occurs 4 times after conjunctions; 3 occurrences after *and* to express addition and one occurrence after *so* to express result by the L1 speaker, but it turns up in the  same position only once by the CSLE and is also missing in the PSLE interaction.

The most commonly used collocations studied in this regard are *there is a lot of*, with 5 occurrences by the L1 speaker versus twice by the CSLE and only once in the PSLE data, and *have a lot of* evenly with 6 occurrences by the CSLE speaker and the PSLE versus 1 by the L1 speaker. *There are* occurs 8 times only in the CSLE interaction.

As far as the  words occurring after *a lot of* are concerned, the most frequently occurring collocations in the L1 speaker data are found to be *a lot of people*, 6 times, whereas it occurs 3 times by the CSLE and only once in the PSLE data.

There are other collocations with higher frequencies which occur only in the CSLE data such as, *a lot of money* 10 occurrences, and *a lot of time* with the frequency of 4. This trend is in conflict with what Drave (2002) found in his research on VL by two culturally different groups where the most common word to the right of *a lot of* by the Native speaker of English and the Native speaker of Cantonese speaking in English was found to be *a lot of people*. This difference might be attributable to the context whereby the interactions occur.

The other collocation common among the three groups, however, with larger frequency differences are *a lot of things* 19 times by the CSLE, twice by the L1 speaker versus only once by the PSLE. *A lot of questions* 3 times and *a lot of problems*, 2 occurrences, are the 2 collocations which are not available in the L1 speaker and the CSLE classroom interaction.

Table 4.63: Distribution of adjectives and nouns after *a lot of*

| | a lot of+ count nouns | | | a lot of +mass | | | a lot of + adj | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Data type | L1 S n=39 | CSLE n=85 | PSLE n=22 | L1 S n=39 | CSLE n=85 | PSLE n=22 | L1 S n=39 | CSLE n=85 | PSLE n=22 |
| Percentage | 64 | 55 | 64 | 15 | 22 | 32 | 13 | 9 | 0 |
| Frequency | 25 | 47 | 14 | 7 | 19 | 6 | 5 | 8 | 0 |

It is assumed that *a lot of* is mainly preferred with count nouns and this is supported by the table showing the distribution of segments occurring after *a lot of* by each group, which reveals more than half of the instances of *a lot of* occurring before count nouns. As is indicated in Table 4.63, CSLE with 47 occurrences is the most frequent user of this collocation, followed by L1 speaker with 25 and PSLE with 14 occurrences. In terms of percentage value, the trends by the PSLE and the L1 speaker appear to be exactly the same, 64% but the CSLE uses around 10% less in the same position.

The consistency in using *a lot of* arises from the pattern that around more than half of the cases of *a lot of* co-occurs with count nouns by the three groups. In terms of mass nouns occurring after this vague quantifier, CSLE, as with count nouns is the group to most dominantly follow this pattern, followed by L1 speaker and minutely differently by the PSLE. According to Table 4.63, this collocation is observed in the classroom interaction by each group more than half less often as *a lot of* and count noun collocation. Contrary to the count noun percentage value whereby the values happen to fall within a narrow range, the mass noun percentage reveals a wider range; 32% by the PSLE, 22% by the CSLE and 15% by the L1 speaker of English.

The most inconsistent pattern in the occurrence of *a lot of* and a segment following it occurs in *a lot of* followed by adjectives. Although this happens to be the least common collocation containing *a lot of*, the PSLE finds it totally unused with the frequency of zero but it occurs with 8 and 5 frequencies by the CSLE and the L1 speaker. It means that around one-tenth of the overall phrases by the two groups are comprised of *a lot of* followed by adjectives. The CSLE more occasionally than the L1 speaker opts for adjectives between *a lot of* and nouns; the former 8 times and the latter 5 times. The translation of the frequency values shows roughly 10% of the phrases containing this vague quantifier constituted of *a lot of* +adjective; 13% by L1 speaker and 9% by CSLE.

The analysis of the components  used after this quantifier indicates that 4 object pronouns follow *a lot of* in the L1 speaker data, while the CSLE and the PSLE fail to use object pronouns after this quantifier.

It is only the CSLE that shows clusters of three words co-occurring with *a lot of* with the minimum frequency of 5. The two items *there are a lot of* with the frequency of 8 and *learn a lot of things* with 5 occurrences turn up with the CSLE, while the other two groups show no consistency in using fixed collocations often enough in their interaction to reach the frequency of at least 5 in their data.

### 4.3.5 *Most (of)*

Table 4.64: Distribution of *most (of)*

| | Most (of) | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| Data type | L1 S<br>n=423 | CSLE<br>n=741 | PSLE<br>n=43<br>5 |
| Percentage | 8 | 13 | 9 |
| Frequency | 33 | 86 | 38 |

The same consistent pattern for all the vague quantifiers studied so is reiterated for *some (of)* as well, meaning that like all the other vague quantifiers examined thus far, CSLE shows a strong tendency in using *most often* more commonly than the other two groups. As can be seen in Table 4.64, the frequency of *most (of)* by the CSLE (86) is more than twice as often as by the PSLE (38) and the L1 speaker (33). On the other hand, the percentage value shows consistency among the three groups, indicating that they have around one-tenth of their vague quantifiers made up of *most (of)*.

Table 4.65: Distribution of *most of*

| | Most of | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| Data type | L1 S<br>n=33 | CSLE<br>n=86 | PSLE<br>n=38 |
| Percentage | 15 | 23 | 39 |
| Frequency | 5 | 20 | 15 |

In terms of frequency occurrence, CSLE and the PSLE seem to be acting more or less in the same way, using *most of* more often than the L1 speaker. As indicated in Table 4.65, CSLE with 20 and the PSLE with 15 occurrences use this item exactly 4 times and 3 times as often as the L1 speaker, respectively. What it means is that the two L2 speaker groups show a considerable trend to *some of* in their interactions. This is confirmed by the frequency calculation which shows the

percentage value for the L1 speaker to be the smallest with 15%, while the value for CSLE and the PSLE happen to be larger with 20 and 15%, respectively.

The other similar trend between the CSLE and the PSLE with respect to *some of* is that the two groups use this phrase 4 and 5 times respectively in the clause initial position, whereas the L1 speaker uses all instances of *some of* in the clause mid-position. Additionally, most of the expressions before *most of* by the L1 speaker refer to emphasis. For example:

(4.14)

S1: What'd we say? On the farm, two intervening words. Ttwo-N farm. So instead of using, W I use N. **In fact** most of the constructions that you see out there, that use, a W, could often be turned around to be a, two-N. So .                                    (L1: 3:339)

S21: Hairy animals                                                                          (L1: 3:340)

But the expressions occurring before *most of* in the CSLE and the PSLE data refer to uncertainty. For instance:

(4.15)

S4: Something like this. But nowadays because **I think, huh**, most of the house especially in towns, in cities, such as big cities like Tehran and the other cities are, the house doesn't have any.   (P: 6:603)

S2: They are like flats.                                                                (P: 6:604)

(4.16)

S2: **I think, maybe**, most of you have seen the film' Scrappy'.                  (Ch: 7: 64)

S7: Yeah.                                                                                (Ch: 7: 65)

S2: In this film a lot of students always make troubles to the teacher and sometimes they put some glue, on the, the chair and the teacher sits on it. I think that's terrible.

(Ch: 7: 66)

Fixed patterns occurring after this quantifier emerge as *most of people* 4 occurrences, and *most of them* with a frequency of 3 by the PSLE and *most of the Chinese*, *most of the people*, *most of the time* each with 2 occurrences by the CSLE, L1 speaker, on the contrary, does not show fixed patterns occurring in classroom interaction. Nonetheless, the PSLE seems to behave similarly to the L1 speaker in *some of* in one regard, being the occurrence of object pronouns after *most of* (3); however, all of them turn out to be the same *them* in the PSLE data, but different from one another in the L1 speaker data, *you*, *us*, and *them*. The CSLE shows only 1 occurrence which seems to be accidental, given that the largest frequency of *some of* belongs to this group.

Table 4.66: Distribution of *most*

| Data type | Most | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| | L1 S n=33 | CSLE n=86 | PSLE n=38 |
| Percentage | 85 | 73 | 61 |
| Frequency | 28 | 63 | 23 |

*Most* is in a broad sense more extensively used in the classroom interaction than *most of* by all the participants. As is clear in Table 4.66, the percentage value by each group exceeds 50. The CSLE with 63 occurrences, translated as 73% uses this vague quantifier the most excessively of all. Although the PSLE and the L1 speaker use it almost evenly, the percentile value reveals a significant difference. While the L1 speaker with 28 occurrences stands as the second most frequent user of this item, the percentage language displays the largest proportion, 85% belonging to this group, whereas CSLE with 63 occurrences takes the second

place. What can be inferred from this trend is that the L1 speaker prefers *most* to *most of* far more often than the other two groups.

A substantial proportion of this quantifier is preceded by the article *the* by the PSLE and the L1 speaker group; 20 occurrences by the former and 16 times by the latter, while the CSLE uses the smallest number of such collocations in their classroom interaction, which converted into percentage value shows just a small amount. The salient difference between the first two groups in this respect is that *the most* occurs in the clause initial position by the PSLE 6 times, while the L1 speaker fails to use it in the same position in the classroom interaction. However, the CSLE places *most of the* in the clause initial position twice.

Table 4.67: Distribution of words after *most*

| L1 speaker | | CSLE | | PSLE | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Collocation | Frequency | Collocation | Frequency | Collocation | Frequency |
| most important | 1 | most important | 20 | most important | 13 |
| most people | --- | most people | 6 | most people | --- |
| **Total** | **1** | | **26** | | **13** |

The other striking difference in *most* among the groups resides in what follows this quantifier. The only commonly occurring collocation among the three groups emerges as *most important* which seems to be accidental by the L1 speaker, due to its single occurrence, but the other L2 speaker groups employ it often enough to generate a trend. The CSLE using *most important* 20 times shows a stronger tendency using this collocation than the PSLE with 13 occurrences, which is found to be the only collocation by this group. The other collocation with higher frequency than 5 is typical of the CSLE group; *most people* 6 occurrences.

Table 4.68: Distribution of cluster of words with *most*

| L1 speaker | | CSLE | | PSLE | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Cluster | Frequency | Cluster | Frequency | Cluster | Frequency |
| The most important | 13 | The most important | 17 | The most important | --- |
| Most important thing | --- | Most important thing | 12 | Most important thing | --- |
| Think the most | --- | Think the most | 6 | Think the most | --- |
| Total | 13 | | 35 | | --- |

The cluster generated by the Wordsmith program displays the cluster of three words with the minimum frequency of 5 appearing in the L2 speaker groups only. The CSLE shows higher number of clusters than the PSLE. Table 4.68 indicates that the only cluster by the L1 speaker is in common with the CSLE with a close frequency; *The most important* occurs 17 times with the CSLE and 13 times with the L1 speaker. The other 2 clusters in the CSLE interaction are *most important thing* with the frequency of 12 occurring twice as often as the other cluster *think the most*.

### 4.3.6 *(A) few*

Table 4.69: Distribution of *(a) few*

|  | **(a) few** | | |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Data type | L1 S n=423 | CSLE n=741 | PSLE n=435 |
| Percentage | 5 | 1 | 0 |
| Frequency | 21 | 7 | 0 |

Besides being the first item interrupting the consistency in the dominant frequency of vague quantifiers by the CSLE, *(a) few* is the only quantifier in this study which does not occur in the PSLE data. Even the CSLE with the highest overall number of vague quantifiers and also the highest number of occurrences with all the categories investigated so far does not employ *a few* in their classroom interaction so commonly. In other words, despite the fact that the CSLE uses vague quantifiers almost twice as often as the L1speaker, *(a) few* with the frequency of 7 occurs exactly 3 times less often compared to this group, only 2 occurrences being *few*.

What seems interesting next is diversity of nouns used by the L1 speaker so that no two same nouns occur after *(a) few*, while the CSLE uses the word *days* 5 times after this vague quantifier. The lack of this item in the PSLE interaction can be attributed to the lack of such item or concept in the learners' mother tongue.

### 4.3.7 *A little*

Table 4.70:  Distribution of *a little*

| Data type | a little | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| | L1 S n=423 | CSLE n=741 | PSLE n=435 |
| Percentage | 5 | 1 | 2 |
| Frequency | 20 | 11 | 9 |

Known as a quantifier, *a little* serving as a determiner or an adverb to modify adjectives, adverbs, verbs and nouns is more commonly used by the L1 speaker than the other two L2 speaker groups. However, a word of note is needed here that not all occurrences of *a little* in the data were examined as *a little* in sentences such as

(4.17)

S1: Yeah, that's a good, that's a good one. <PAUSE WHILE WRITING ON BOARD> so basically, um what kinds of consequences are there? I mean there's one consequence like, you were saying um, the boy shoots **a little** girl, and she dies and that's sort of a natural, consequence. um, what other kind of consequences, are there that might, might be, useful, to teach morals?                                      (L1: 2:36)

<PAUSE:05>

S7: Just like sitting in a corner.                                      (L1: 2:37)

fulfils a different function. The L1 speaker with 20 occurrences uses this quantifier twice as often as the CSLE with 11 occurrences and the PSLE with the frequency of 9. However, as can be viewed in Table 4.70, *a little* comprises a small proportion of vague quantifiers in the classroom interaction by each group, but what is considerable is that despite this discrepancy, the differences from the percentage perspective cannot be particularly meaningful because the magnitude

is not large enough to present a generalisable trend. In a broad sense, there is partial consistency in what occurs before *a little* by the L1 speaker and the CSLE.

*Is* with 7 occurrences by the L1 speaker and 6 occurrences by the CSLE is the only collocation the two groups use in common. But *was* with a frequency of 3 is typical of the L1 speaker. The PSLE, contrary to the other two groups, shows no collocations with *a little* occurring more than once in their interaction. It should be pointed that occurrences of *a little bit* have not been taken into consideration in the analysis of *a little*.

Around more than half of the sentences (9) which contain *a little* in the L1 speaker data have a comparative adjective following this quantifier, whereas only one third of the sentences (3) comprised of this quantifier in the PSLE data follow the same pattern. In addition, frequency of 1 in the CSLE indicates that this pattern occurs only accidentally for this group. The L1 speaker seems to show consistency in the comparative adjectives used. Lack of cluster of three words occurring around this quantifier with the minimum frequency of 5 is a common trend among the three groups.

### 4.3.8 *Lots of*

Table 4.71: Distribution of *lots of*

| | lots of | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| Data type | L1 S n=423 | CSLE n=741 | PSLE n=435 |
| Percentage | 4 | 1 | 8 |
| Frequency | 16 | 11 | 34 |

The first vague quantifier which is employed more dominantly by the PSLE than the other two groups in this study comes up as *lots of*. As can be seen in Table 4.71, the PSLE with 34 occurrences uses this vague word more than twice as often

as the L1 speaker (13) and 3 times as often as the CSLE (11). Even the percentage value confirms this rough proportion.

The occurrence of words before *lots of* displays an interesting pattern in terms of *there + be* verb by the three groups. While *there are lots of* occurs 5 times in the PSLE data, the L1 speaker does not use this pattern in their interaction and the CSLE uses it only once, which seems to be accidental. By contrast, the L1 speaker uses *there is* 5 times, while the PSLE accidentally uses it once and the CSLE never uses it in their classroom interaction.

Given the frequency distributions of collocations of *lots of*, a reverse proportion between the L1 speaker and the PSLE becomes evident. PSLE prefers to use countable nouns with *lots of*, whereas the L1 speaker prefers to locate singular nouns after this vague quantifier. This phenomenon will be discussed in more detail in a coming paragraph which deals with countable and mass nouns occurring with this quantifier between the two groups.

Table 4.72: Distribution of words before *lots of*

| L1 speaker | | CSLE | | PSLE | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Collocation | Frequency | Collocation | Frequency | Collocation | Frequency |
| There are lots of | --- | There are lots of | 1 | There are lots of | 5 |
| There is lots of | 5 | There is lots of | --- | There is lots of | --- |
| Total | 5 | | 1 | | 5 |

In what occurs before *lots of*, the investigations revealed only 2 items, neither of which is common between the three groups. *There are lots of* occurs as an item that the two L2 speakers groups have in common but *there is lots of* used 5 times is unique to the L1 speaker.

25 out of 34 nouns occurring after *lots of* in the PSLE data are countable nouns, while this amounts to 12 out of 16 by the L1 speaker, and 5 out of 11 by the CSLE. In terms of the mass nouns used after *lots of*, the PSLE shows a frequency of 9 in such positions, while the L1 speaker and the CSLE each uses 4 mass nouns after *lots of*. While the proportion of countable nouns and mass nouns after *lots of* appears to be even by the CSLE, the L1 speaker and the PSLE choose to use countable nouns roughly 3 times as often as the mass nouns.

The 4 mass nouns in the L1 speaker data are all the same, i.e. *money*. Also, in the PSLE data, there is the mass noun with the frequency of 4 *lots of knowledge* along with *lots of time* occurring twice, the rest being accidental due to the frequency being 1 but none of the 4 mass nouns after *lots of* by the CSLE occurs consistently.

Table 4.73: Distribution of words after *lots of*

| L1 speaker | | CSLE | | PSLE | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Collocation | Frequency | Collocation | Frequency | Collocation | Frequency |
| lots of things | --- | lots of things | --- | lots of things | 11 |
| Total | --- | | --- | | 11 |

Like the elements occurring before *lots of*, the elements occurring after this quantifier reveal a more stereotypical use by the PSLE. While the L1 speaker and the CSLE show no collocations starting *lots of*, it occurs 11 times in PSLE data.

As Table 4.73 illustrates, the most frequently occurring collocation as such in the PSLE data is the collocation of *lots of* with a placeholder *things*, 11 occurrences which does not occur with the L1 speaker and CSLE data, the rest being *lots of knowledge* 4 times, *lots of people* with the frequency of 3, and *lots of time* and *lots of problems* each occurring twice. Unlike the PSLE, the L1 speaker shows much fewer fixed patterns to go with *lots of*; the only pattern of collocation being *lots of money* occurring 4 times, whereas the CSLE does not use any frequent

collocations. With regard to *lots of* there is only 1 cluster of three words with the minimum frequency of 5, *there are lots of* which occurs in PSLE data with 5 occurrences.

### 4.3.9 *A lot*

Table 4.74: Distribution of *a lot*

| | a lot | | |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Data type | L1 S n=423 | CSLE n=741 | PSLE n=435 |
| Percentage | 4 | 1 | 2 |
| Frequency | 16 | 8 | 9 |

As with *lots of*, *a lot* occurs 16 times in the L1 speaker data, but contrary to *lots of* which this group was ranked second in the use of, *a lot* has been used the most dominantly by the L1 speaker. In addition, it occurs half as often in the CSLE data with the frequency of 8 and almost equally, 9 times, by the PSLE. Overall, as Table 4.74 indicates, *a lot* has been identified as one of the least significant vague quantifiers, regardless of the speaker group as less than 5% of overall vague quantifiers by each group is constituted of this item.

Of the 9 occurrences of *a lot* in the PSLE data, 3 occur in the clause final position, which means 33%, this amounts to 4 translated as half used by the CSLE, whereas only 1 appears in the same position in the L1 speaker data which gives a value of 6%. In terms of patterns used before *a lot*, the data displays more consistency in what the L1 speaker uses. It is possible to find patterns occurring twice before this quantifier; *became a lot*, *has a lot*, *it a lot*, *there is a lot* but when it comes to the PSLE interaction, only 1 pair along these lines appear, *games a lot*. The same occurrence is true for the CSLE data but the collocation happens to be *learn a lot*.

In terms of the words appearing after this quantifier, the L1 speaker uses comparative adjectives after *a lot* 6 times, 3 of which are the multi-syllable adjectives placed before *more*, 2 irregular comparative adjective *better*, and 2 infinitives following *a lot*. But more than half of such quantifiers in the PSLE are followed by conjunctions, 2 for reason, 2 for contrast and 1 for addition. Thus it can be generalized that the L1 speaker's use of *a lot* is mainly associated with comparisons, while *a lot* used by PSLE seems to create the need for a new proposition through conjunctions.

As most of the occurrences of *a lot* by the CSLE occur in the clause final position, no meaningful pattern can be worked out for the occurrence of words in this position. The three groups did not show any clusters of three words occurring with this quantifier with the minimum frequency of 5.

### 4.3.10 *Majority*

Table 4.75: Distribution of *majority*

| Data type | Majority | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| | L1 S<br>n=423 | CSLE<br>n=741 | PSLE<br>n=435 |
| Percentage | 1 | 0 | 2 |
| Frequency | 6 | 0 | 7 |

A small proportion of quantifiers is constituted of *majority* in the data by the PSLE and the L1 speaker but the CSLE interaction is devoid of this vague quantifier. As shown in Table 4.75, despite the relative similarity in the frequency of *majority* by the two groups, they present a significantly different pattern to go with *majority*. All the 6 occurrences of *majority* by the L1 speaker are followed by *of*, while none of the 7 occurrences of this quantifier in the PSLE data precedes this preposition. In fact, 3 of them occur in the clause final position. *The+ adjective +majority* is typical of the L1 speaker (2).While all the other cases of

*majority* in the L1 speaker interaction (2) are preceded by the definite article *the*, the PSLE uses only  half this number of *the majority* in their conversation.

As for *much*, *a lot of*, *a little*, and *a lot*, a cluster of items occurring with *majority* does not come up for any of the group.
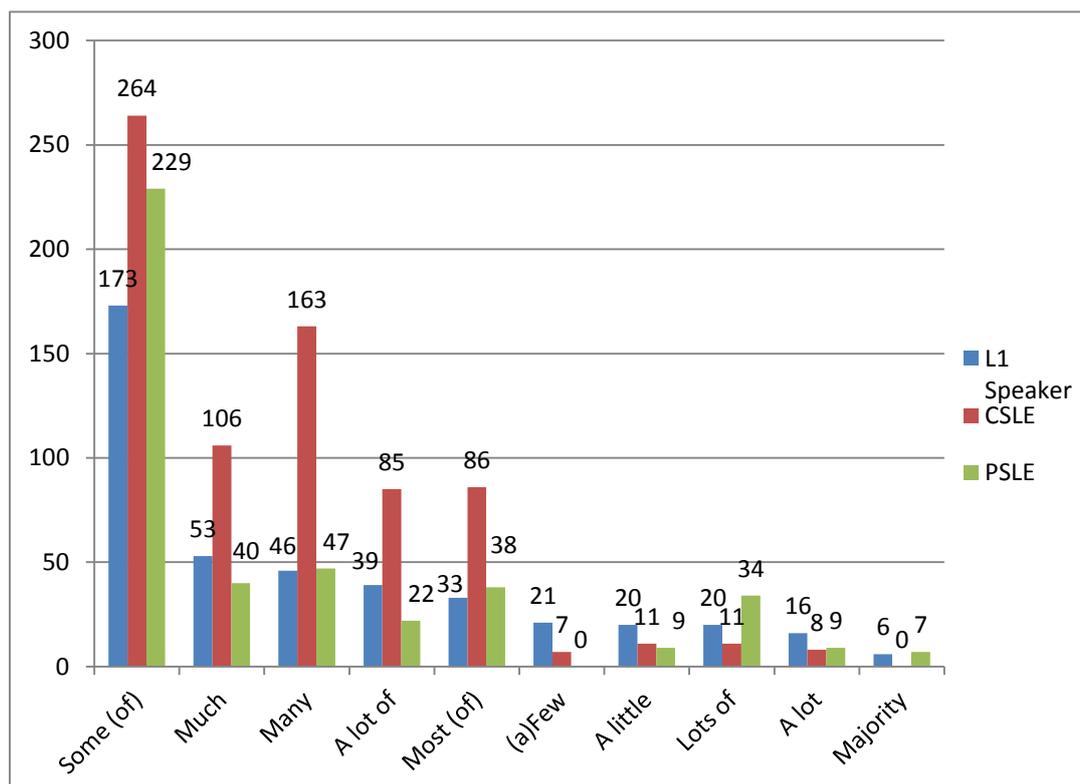


 Figure 5: Frequency of *quantifiers*

To recap, the overall frequency of quantifiers by the three groups indicates that this VL category occurs almost evenly in the classroom interaction between the two L2 speaker groups, PSLE (435) and L1 speaker (423) but almost twice as often amounting to 741 by the CSLE. Statistical analysis of the occurrences of this category among the three groups proves significant differences. In addition, close investigation of some subcategories also reveals discrepancies even between the groups with even relatively the same frequencies.

Of the ten vague quantifiers studied, the first five on the chart were heavily used by the CSLE, but the second five occurred inconsistently frequently between the L1 speaker and PSLE. There are two kinds of consistencies viewable in Figure 5, the first being the fact that the first five items were all dominantly used by the CSLE (*some, much, many, lots of* and *most*) but the second five items are scattered between the PSLE and the L1 speaker in terms of domination of frequency numbers.

The second trend appears in the differences in the numbers of frequencies. While the frequencies in the first five items prompt using the term *overuse*, the frequency occurrences for the second half of the illustration displays closer distance between the three groups. As Figure 3.11 illustrates, *some* emerges as the most common vague quantifier among the three groups occurring 266 times in the CSLE interaction, 229 times by the PSLE and 173 times in the L1 speaker data. As the second most frequently occurring item, *much* with 106 occurrences is used exactly twice as often in the CSLE data as does it in the L1 speaker interaction but 40 times in the PSLE data.

On the whole, there is more consistency in the pattern of use for quantifiers expressing small quantities in that *(a) few*, and *a little* are both used more frequently by the L1 speaker within a limited frequency range by the three groups, while there are fluctuations in the use of quantifiers to express large quantities. Ruzaitė (2007) reports intervarietal difference in the frequency of quantifiers between American English and British English, indicating that speakers of American English use quantifiers more commonly than the British English speakers. She also points out that there can be different combinations of intensifiers occurring before quantifiers but the most common quantifiers to precede *much* and *many* are *very*, *too*, and *so*.

This study, however, refutes her finding, demonstrating that despite *so* being heavily used, *too* and *very* do not follow quantifiers so frequently in the classroom context. To support the claim of inconsistency in using this category of vague

expressions in different contexts by different groups of speakers, reference to Drave's (2002) remark that *a lot* and *many* are the most frequently quantifiers in his study seems to hold true.
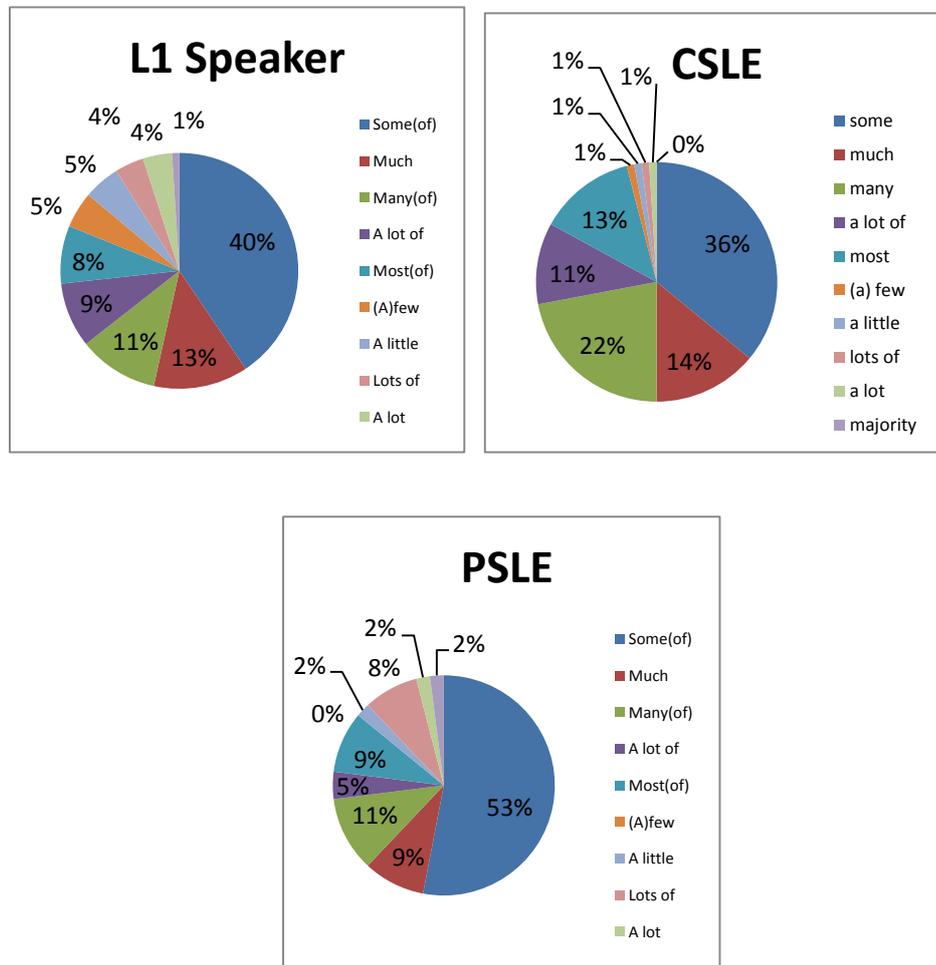


Figure 6: Percentage of *quantifiers*

Analysis of quantifiers from the percentage perspective reveals significant differences. In a broad sense, the ranking of items in terms of percentage value is tremendously different for this vague item. However, the two L2 speaker groups show a closer ranking. For example, the first four items in the ranking position are the same between these groups. 1. *Some* 2. *Many* 3. *Much* 4. *Most* and 5. *A lot of*.

As Figure 3.12 clearly illustrates, more than half of the quantifiers by the PSLE are consisted of *some*, while this proportion in the CSLE and PSLE covers 2

items, namely *some* and *much*. The other trend drawn from the table among the three groups is that the items in the lower part of the table are more or less scattered by both the L1 speaker and the PSLE but the CSLE demonstrates less concentration in which the overall percentage value for the last five items shows 5, while it happens to be 14 and 19 for PSLE and the L1 speaker respectively.

## 4.4. Vague intensifiers

Table 4.76: Distribution of *vague intensifiers*

| Item | L1 speaker of English | | CSLE | | PSLE | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Distribution | Frequency | Percentage | Frequency | Percentage | Frequency | Percentage |
| Really | 174 | 43(%) | 164 | 19(%) | 58 | 17(%) |
| Very | 79 | 20(%) | 498 | 56(%) | 108 | 32(%) |
| Actually | 67 | 17(%) | 24 | 3(%) | 73 | 22(%) |
| So | 40 | 10(%) | 154 | 17(%) | 75 | 23(%) |
| Too | 24 | 6(%) | 34 | 4(%) | 15 | 5(%) |
| Quite | 16 | 4(%) | 9 | 1(%) | 4 | 1(%) |
| **Total** | **400** | **100(%)** | **883** | | **333** | **100(%)** |

The examination of vague intensifiers in this study is confined to six items: *really*, *very, actually*, *so*, *too*, and *quite*. From quantitative perspective, as Table 4.76 also confirms, in a broad sense, the CSLE overuses intensifiers in the classroom interaction, consistent with all the other categories such as subjectivisers, possibility indicators, as well as the vague quantifiers studied thus far. However, there is a substantial difference in the first individual item occurring under this category.

Contrary to the categories delineated before, the first item in this category has not been dominantly used by the CSLE. In other words, the first and the last items,

*really* and *quite*, have been heavily used by the L1 speaker. There is only 1 item dominantly used by the PSLE, *actually*, but the rest were preferred by the CSLE. Performance of Chi-square test reveals significant differences in vague intensifiers among the three groups, p. $<0.05(\chi^2=321.263$, d.f.10).

## 4.4.1 *Really*

The first item to be examined is *really*. It is essential to point out that not all occurrences of *really* in the data have been analysed as there are some cases in which *really* does not serve any intensifying purposes. For this reason, *really* in such contexts as the example below has been excluded.

(4.18)

| | |
|---|---|
| S5: Four-oh-two | (L1: 3:509) |
| S8: I have | (L1: 3:510) |
| S1: Huh? | (L1: 3:511) |
| S5: Four-oh-two. | (L1: 3:512) |
| S1: Oh, **really?** Yeah? | (L1: 3:513) |
| S8: Four thirty-one. | (L1: 3:514) |
| S1: **Really?** You sure you used D-F? | (L1: 3:515) |

As can be seen in the example (4.18) *really* is used as an expression to express exclamation, although it precedes a question mark. By contrast, *really* functions as an intensifier mainly when it occurs before an adjective or is collocated with a verb.

Table 4.77: Distribution of *really*

|  | **Really** | | |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Data type | L1 S n=400 | CSLE n=883 | PSLE n=333 |
| Percentage | 43 | 19 | 17 |
| Frequency | 174 | 164 | 58 |

*Really* has been found to be the most frequently used vague intensifier in the classroom interaction by the L1 speaker. While the occurrence of this item is relatively close to the frequency occurrence by the CSLE, the PSLE significantly underuses this item in the same context. As Table 4.77 shows, L1 speaker uses *really* as a vague quantifier 174 times and by 10 items fewer, it totals 164 in the CSLE data. While with the frequency of 58 by the PSLE, it occurs 3 times less often exactly in comparison to the L1 speaker and roughly to the CSLE. Percentage value highlights the significance of this item in the L1 speaker communication, showing the proportion of this item approximating 50%, while it is revealed to be constituted of less than one fifth of the overall vague intensifiers by the PSLE and the CSLE.

*Really* occurs 5 times in the clause initial position in the PSLE data, but twice in the same position in the L1 speaker and the CSLE classroom interaction. The contexts in which this quantifier occurs by the PSLE seem unusual. The PSLE seems to have shown typical examples of using *really* in the clause initial position as in example (4.19).

(4.19)

S6: They have to have to fight with each other. **Really** instead of solving the car problem, car accident, they try to hit each other, even kill.                    (P: 6:448)

S3: I used the example to my friend. I say I hate face book because I see my friends, they are misusing it. **Really**, they are wasting their time. Four hours, ten hours a day, besides that, I don't know everything.                                            (P: 6: 1028)

This seems to be an example of misuse of *really*. L1 speaker, on the contrary, uses both cases of *really* in the clause initial position where the dummy subject *it* is missing from the sentence.

(4.20)

S1: I know this wasn't gonnahapp- help work sooner or later. Junior, high, school. Okay? Makes sense. **Really** makes sense.-**Really** makes sense. Junior high school. I know I'm gonna find that construction. Senior high school.                      (L1: 3: 346)

The CSLE also uses *really* where the dummy subject is needed but, contrary to the L1 speaker who uses this vague intensifier to intensify a main verb, the CSLE uses *really* after dropped *it is* to intensify an adjective as in example (4.21).

(4.21)

S1: And the song won a big award and even, eleven very familiar awards. **Really** amazing, amazing, and other five songs in this original song are also very beautiful.
(Ch: 6: 71)

S2: What's the name of this album?                                          (Ch: 6: 72)

As a similar trend, the three groups hardly ever use *really* in the interrogative statements; 4 occurrences by the L1 speaker and 3 occurrences by the PSLE while it does not occur in such a context by the CSLE. It should be emphasised that *really* as in example (4.22) does not count an intensifier and as such is excluded from the occurrence of *really* in the data.

(4.22)

S1: Yes, but Beijing is very hot in summer. We can't stand it.        (Ch: 4:69)

S2: **Really?**                                                       (Ch: 4:70)

S1: Yes, yes.                                                         (Ch: 4:71)

S4: Have you been there?                                              (Ch: 4:72)

It, however, proves to occur quite differently in negative sentences. The frequency of *really* occurring in negative statements is quite high (39) in the L1 speaker data, while it is almost rare in the L2 speaker groups; 7 by the CSLE and 1 by the PSLE. What seems to be significantly different in the pattern with which *really* occurs among the three groups is that the number of negative sentences containing *really* is excessively high in the L1 speaker data. The trend for the CSLE is the same with the only difference lying in the number of occurrences. L1 speaker data displays that it is 8 times more frequent in the negative statements (31) as is it in the interrogative statements (4).

In addition, it is revealed that, while the CSLE uses it only once in interrogative statements, it appears 7 times in the negative sentences. The opposite trend appears for the PSLE, showing more interrogative sentences containing *really* than negative sentences. To be more precise, 3 interrogative sentences by the PSLE happen to contain *really*, while it occurs in negative sentences only once. As the frequencies of *really* in negative and interrogative statements are too small, no generalisation can be made in this respect but what the overall delineation of the context where this vague intensifier occurs indicates is that the L1 speaker is willing to use it more diversely than the other two groups.

The PSLE uses *really* after subjects thirty times, 19 occurrences of which are placed before subject pronouns, but the L1 speaker, on the other hand, uses this quantifier after subjects almost more than twice as often, 47 times, 37 times of which occur after subject pronouns. Contrary to the two groups just named, the

CSLE uses around one-third of this vague quantifier (56) before subjects, only 2 of which happen to be no subject pronoun.

4.78: Distribution of subject pronouns before *really*

| L1 speaker | | CSLE | | PSLE | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Collocation | Frequency | Collocation | Frequency | Collocation | Frequency |
| I really | 11 | I really | 20 | I really | 3 |
| You really | 11 | You really | 4 | You really | 4 |
| It really | 8 | It really | 4 | It really | 7 |
| We really | --- | We really | 15 | We really | 5 |
| They really | 1 | They really | 6 | They really | --- |
| **Total** | **31** | | **49** | | **19** |

The two consistent trends between the PSLE and the L1 speaker in using subject pronouns before *really* are that the two groups use this collocation more or less with the same overall frequency, but the CSLE employs this collocation roughly twice as often. What is more is that PSLE and the L1 speaker prefer only 4 collocations in their interaction with only 1 being different, whereas the CSLE shows diversity in the subject pronouns collocated with *really*, using all the different collocations, thereby revealing a far larger overall frequency (49).

As can be seen in Table 4.78, *I really* is the most frequently used collocation by the L1 speaker and the CSLE with the frequencies of 20 and 11, respectively, while the most frequent collocation in the PSLE data happens to be *it really*, occurring 7 times.

Table 4.79: Distribution of verbs and adjectives after *really*

| | really+ verb | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| Data type | L1 S n=174 | CSLE n=164 | PSLE n=58 |
| Percentage | 40 | 41 | 41 |
| Frequency | 69 | 68 | 24 |

| | really+ adj | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| Data type | L1 S n=174 | CSLE n=164 | PSLE n=58 |
| Percentage | 32 | 30 | 16 |
| Frequency | 55 | 50 | 9 |

The examination of what occurs after *really* displays a consistent pattern in this regard, *really+ verb* outnumbering *really+ adjective* across the three groups. This consistency is more outstanding between the CSLE and the L1 speaker where they show roughly even distributions with 68 and 69 occurrences, respectively. The PSLE shows a lower frequency with 24 occurrences. However, as Table 4.79 shows, the three groups have around 40% of the overall sentences containing *really* followed by verbs.

 The second pattern, *really+ adjective*, also shows consistency between the CSLE and the L1 speaker by revealing the frequency of 50 by the former and 55 occurrences by the latter. As with *really + verb*, the PSLE shows a lower frequency (9) in comparison to the other two groups. The percentage language presents the values of 30 and 32 for the two groups, confirming that around one-third of the sentences containing *really* in the CSLE and the L1 speaker data is comprised of an adjective following it, whereas as it constitutes only around 10% in the PSLE data.

Table 4.80: Distribution of words after *really*

| L1 speaker | | CSLE | | PSLE | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Collocation | Frequency | Collocation | Frequency | Collocation | Frequency |
| really+auxiliary | 15 | really+ auxiliary | 7 | really+ auxiliary | 3 |
| really start | 8 | really start | --- | really start | --- |

| really want | 5 | really want | 9 | really want | 4 |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| really like | 2 | really like | 8 | really like | --- |
| really need | 2 | really need | 5 | really need | --- |
| **Overall** | **32** | | **29** | | **7** |

Employment of verbs used after *really* shows that there is more diversity in the kinds of verbs used by the L1 speaker. Besides the diversity, the L1 speaker was demonstrated to have been the most frequent user of *really* before verbs. As shown in Table 4.80, the L1 speaker prefers 5 items of such kind; *auxiliary verbs* 15 times, *start* 8 times, *want* 5 times, *like* and *need*, each twice. As the second most frequent user of this collocation, CSLE uses four items within a narrower range than the L1 speaker. 7, *really want* 9, *really like* 8, and *really need* 5 times. Unlike the L1 speaker and the CSLE, the PSLE does not frequently use the collocation of *really* preceding a verb. Two individual collocations by this group confirms this claim; *Really+auxiliary* 3 times and *really want* 4 occurrences.

The overall number of this collocation by each group also reveals the same pattern as the number of each individual collocation. The frequency of 32 shows the dominance of such collocations by the L1 speaker. CSLE as well prefer this collocation in their communication (29). In contrast, the PSLE with the frequency of 7 demonstrates the low frequency of this collocation in their interaction.

The first pattern in the examination of adjectives following *really* has been the collocation of *really+ adjective+ noun*. The L1 speaker uses this collocation 19 times in the classroom interaction, while it happens to be unpopular with the two L2 groups; CSLE with the frequency of 4 and the PSLE with 1 occurrence show inability in using it.  Although the PSLE uses *adjectives* only after *really* more often than *really+ adjective +noun*, the frequency of this collocation by this group is still much lower than those by the CSLE and the L1 speaker.  CSLE and L1 speaker with 43 and 37 occurrences, respectively prove to use this collocation far more frequently than the PSLE.

Overall, the L1 speaker uses adjectives after *really* 56 times, regardless whether followed by nouns or used alone but the PSLE uses adjectives after *really* only 9 times, 8 times of which are positive adjectives versus the 46 positive adjectives used by the L1 speaker. In addition, the CSLE uses adjectives in the same contexts 47 times, with 29 positive and 18 negative adjectives. In general what is clear from the actual data is that all groups prefer positive adjectives after *really*.

Table 4.81: Distribution of adjectives after *really*

| L1 | | CSLE | | PSLE | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Adjective | Frequency | Adjective | Frequency | Adjective | Frequency |
| Interested | 11 | Interested | --- | Interested | --- |
| Good | 9 | Good | 3 | Good | --- |
| Important | 4 | Important | 7 | Important | --- |
| Hard | --- | Hard | 6 | Hard | --- |
| **Total** | **24** | | **16** | | --- |

The table of the most frequently used adjectives, positive or negative, illustrates consistent diversity in the collocation of *really + adjective* by the L1 speaker and the CSLE. This is acceptable both in terms of adjectives used and the frequency of each adjective. By contrast, the collocation of *really* and adjective is non-existent in the PSLE interaction. The L1 speaker and the CSLE are different in the use of only 1 adjective after *really*. *Interested* as the most frequent adjective following *really* by the former (9) is not used by the latter, while *hard* occurring 6 times in the CSLE interaction is not used by the L1 speaker. The other two adjectives *good* and *important* are common between them. The second major difference between the two groups lies in the overall number of adjectives occurring after this intensifier; 24 by the L1 speaker and 16 by the CSLE. Intensifiers are seen to be strongly popular with the L1 speaker.

Table 4.82: Cluster of words occurring around *really*

| L1 | | CSLE | | PSLE | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Cluster | Frequency | Cluster | Frequency | Cluster | Frequency |
| That's really | 9 | That's really | --- | That's really | --- |
| A really good | 8 | A really good | --- | A really good | --- |
| A really interesting | 6 | A really interesting | --- | A really interesting | --- |
| It doesn't really | 5 | It doesn't really | --- | It doesn't really | --- |
| What we really | --- | What we really | 9 | What we really | --- |
| Really want to | --- | Really want to | 8 | Really want to | 5 |
| Really I think | --- | Really I think | 6 | Really I think | --- |
| I really want | --- | I really want | 5 | I really want | --- |
| Really like to | --- | Really like to | 5 | Really like to | --- |
| **Total** | **28** | | **32** | **Overall** | **5** |

Clusters of words occurring with *really* shows that the three groups use this category of intensifiers in quite different patterns. A look at Table 4.82 reveals that L1 speaker and CSLE make a more formulaic use of this vague expression but the PSLE uses this category more diversely so that only 1 cluster of three words with a frequency of more than 5 appears in their interaction.

There have been many different rubrics to refer to formulaic expressions; 'lexical phrases', 'formulas', 'routines', 'fixed expressions' and 'pre-fabricated patterns or prefabs'. Biber and Barbieri (2007) refer to them as multi-word sequences which can have idiomatic or non-idiomatic roles. Biber and Conrad (1999) claim there are more formulaic expressions or 'lexical bundles' (the term they use) involved in classroom teaching than conversation, academic writing or textbooks but according to Table 4.82, this is in conflict with the PSLE data.

Although, the low overall frequency of *really* might be a potential reason for the contrast between the L1 speaker and the PSLE data, the low frequency of the overall clusters of this vague term itself might contribute to significant differences. There is only 1 single cluster occurring in the PSLE data; *really want to* with the frequency of 5, while the table on the L1 speaker's side and the CSLE's side reflects different clusters by each group, none of which happens to be in common.

The cluster of items by the CSLE consists of four categories occurring 28 times, *that's really* with 9 occurrences being the most frequent of all, followed by *a really good* with 8 occurrences, *a really interesting* with 6 occurrences, and *it doesn't really* with the frequency of 5. CSLE with 32% employs 1 item more than the L1 speaker. However, all the items between the two groups are different, but what seems noticeable is that the frequencies of the first four items by the CSLE are exactly the same as the same as by the L1 speaker.

### 4.4.2 *Very*

Table 4.83: Distribution of *very*

| Data type | **Very** | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| | L1S n=400 | CSLE n=883 | PSLE n=333 |
| Percentage | 20 | 56 | 32 |
| Frequency | 79 | 498 | 108 |

While the second most commonly used vague intensifier by the L1 speaker, *very* stands as the most commonly used vague intensifier by the CSLE and the PSLE. As Table 4.83 shows, with a frequency of 498 CSLE is the leading user of *very*, followed by PSLE with 108 occurrences. *Very* is the least common in the L1 speaker interaction with the frequency of 79. As is clear in the table more than half (56%) of the vague intensifier in the CSLE data are comprised of *very*, while

it amounts to one-third (32%) by the PSLE and one-fifth by the L1 speaker. The implication of what has been discussed on *very* so far is that it is more popular with the two L2 groups than the L1 speaker.

The examination of different positions in the sentence where *vary* occurs indicates that while the L1 speaker avoids using this quantifier in the clause initial position, the CSLE and the PSLE use it  4 and 6 times, respectively, in the same position. All the occurrences indicate that the interlocutor uses *very* as a turn-taking device (turn-initiator), followed by very few segments just to either show they are following, or to show approval to the speaker and then hands over immediately. For instance,

(4.23)

S3: Especially the current generation is **<u>very</u>** complicated. (P: 6:737)

S6: **<u>Very</u>** complicated, yes. (P: 6:738)

S3: They are growing up with computer. (P: 6:739)

(4.24)

S9:  I think, I think. I think we are following the wrong path to be right. (P: 1: 208)

S3: **<u>Very</u>** good. (P: 1: 209)

S5: Yes, good. (P: 1: 210)

The occurrence of *very* in negative sentences reveals a trend consistent with the overall frequency and the occurrence of this vague intensifier in clause initial position. Ranking of the three groups in terms of the occurrence of *very* in negative sentences places the three groups in the following order; CSLE 25, PSLE 9 and L1 speaker 2 occurrences only.  What is interesting in cases of *very* in negative sentences is that all occurrences by the two groups happen in *not* directly preceding *very* or *a very*.

(4.25)

| | |
|---|---|
| S7: I think when he or she knows me, he respects me. | (P: 6:111) |
| S3: Ahuh, the others? | (P: 6:112) |
| S1: I think it is **not very** important. | (P: 6: 113) |

In terms of what occurs before *very* in classroom interaction, the first pattern elicited from the data shows, by and large, a similar trend by the L1 speaker and the PSLE. *A very+ adjective* before a singular countable noun is almost evenly used by the participants; it occurs 14 times in the PSLE and 12 times in the L1 speaker data, while the CSLE uses this collocation around twice as often; 27 times.

The similarity even drags on in the adjectives used after this quantifier. *Good* is the most common adjective among the three groups, evenly used by both groups before singular countable nouns: L1 speaker 5 occurrences and PSLE 4 times, but like the patterns examined before, twice as often by the CSLE. However, the frequency of this adjective occurring before plural nouns or mass nouns reveals differences between the two groups, which will be discussed in subsequent paragraphs.

The occurrence of conjunctions before *very* shows similarity among the three groups: 3 by PSLE and the L1 speaker group each, and 4 by the CSLE. In what follows *very* after this conjunction, it is revealed that 2 cases of *and very* in the L1 speaker data are followed by adverbs

(4.26)

S1: And so what it does, and the system is doing this not a human being a computer system. and the computer can do this very quickly **and very** efficiently. Computer system starts to number, each word in the field and preface, the n- word, position

information or the word position number, by the name of the field so in this case we

have. (L1: 3:268)

SS: Stop word (L1: 3:269)

S1: It's a, called a stop word and what is a stop word? Anyone know? (L1: 3:270)

while all such cases in the CSLE and the PSLE data are adjectives. What is more is that even the only adjective occurring in the same position by the L1 speaker data is an adjective which ends in *ly* and looks like an adverb, *scholarly*.

Table 4.84: Distribution of *be + verb*

| | be + very | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| Data type | L1S<br>n=79 | CSLE<br>n=498 | PSLE<br>n=108 |
| Percentage | 6 | 4 | 2 |
| Frequency | 4 | 19 | 2 |

The next pattern to be discussed is the occurrence of *be* before *very* which occurs more frequently in the CSLE data (19), while the L1 speaker uses it 4 times and the PSLE only twice. Despite the difference viewed, the percentage value shows a small proportion of the overall sentences comprised of *very* is allocated to *be + very*. The next collocation which seems to show a considerably different pattern with regard to *very* appears to be the conjugated form of *be+ very*; to be more specific, *is very* and *are very*. The first collocation is significantly largely used by the CSLE, totalling 145 but the PSLE uses it 31 times, while the L1 speaker does not show interest in employing this collocation (3).

In terms of *are+ very* the overall difference seems to be the same with each group using this collocation less often than *is very*. As with *is very*, CSLE happens to be the most frequent user of *are very* with 36 occurrences, followed by 9 occurrences by the PSLE, while L1 speaker again shows reluctance in using it with just 1

occurrence. As far as *was very* is concerned, like *is very* and *are very*, it is again the CSLE with 10 occurrences to use it most often, while PSLE uses it 6 times but the L1 speaker shows it to be non-existent in their interaction.

Hence, it can be concluded that there is more diversity in conjugated forms of *be* along with *very* by CSLE and PSLE. Despite using *very* with the lowest frequency, L1 speaker reveals a collocation in their data that the other two groups find totally uncommon. The L1 speaker uses, *something very very* for the emphatic reason twice.

(4.27)

S1: And um, that's actually something there's a um, a really famous, philosopher who, who wrote **something very, very** similar, to that so, just in case you're interested, um, Alasdair MacIntyre. I don't know jus-… . (L1: 2:45)

S11: But definitely I think like something as extreme as a child killing someone, um, some are more, like are more obvious than others and haven't been known to like, work, like certain actions. (L1: 2:46)

Table 4.85: Distribution of *very + adverb*

|  | very + adverb | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| Data type | L1 S n=79 | CSLE n=498 | PSLE n=108 |
| Percentage | 13 | 3 | 2 |
| Frequency | 10 | 16 | 2 |

As far as the analysis of elements occurring after *very* is concerned, the most distinct difference can be viewed in the class of words occurring in conjunction with this quantifier. The two possible classes which can occur after this vague category include adjectives and adverbs. It is viewed that the CSLE with the frequency of 16 uses this collocation the most often and the PSLE with 2

occurrences the least often, while it occurs 10 times in the L1 speaker interaction. Despite this, the adverbs used after *very* by the CSLE are mainly different from the ones PSLE and the L1 speaker use.

While all the adverbs used by the L1 speaker and the PSLE are regular adverbs, *adjective + ly*, the CSLE uses only 2 such adverbs in their talks, the rest all being *well* modifying a verb. What stands out in Table 4.85 is that PSLE prefers not to use adverbs with *very* in their speech. This may be attributable to the fact that in their mother tongue PSLE more often than not can use adjectives instead of adverbs to describe a verb in informal contexts. While both adverbs placed after *very* in the PSLE data prove to be *easily*, the L1 speaker uses different adverbs in such a context; the most frequently occurring 1 being *quickly* with the frequency of 5.

As can be seen in Table 4.85, adverbs constitute only a minor proportion of components occurring after *very* in the CSLE and the PSLE and, only 3 and 2%, while in the L1 speaker data, the proportion is 5 times as much. In other words, 10% of the overall sentences containing *very* are comprised of *very* + adverb collocation.

*Very much* is also found a very common collocation by the three groups. This happens overwhelmingly by the CSLE, 48 times, while the other two groups use it almost evenly with very low frequencies; 3 times by the PSLE and twice by the L1 speaker of English.

Table 4.86: Distribution of *very* following adjectives

| L1 S | | CSLE | | PSLE | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Adjective | Frequency | Adjective | Frequency | Adjective | Frequency |
| Important | 4 | Important | 28 | Important | 15 |
| Good | 9 | Good | 37 | Good | 14 |
| Busy | --- | Busy | 5 | Busy | 4 |
| Difficult | --- | Difficult | 11 | Difficult | 4 |

| Interesting | 2 | Interesting | 16 | Interesting | 2 |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Hard | --- | Hard | 18 | Hard | 2 |
| Happy | --- | Happy | 12 | Happy | --- |
| Beautiful | --- | Beautiful | 11 | Beautiful | --- |
| Famous | --- | Famous | 10 | Famous | --- |
| Hot | --- | Hot | 6 | Hot | --- |
| Easy | --- | Easy | 6 | Easy | --- |
| Convenient | --- | Convenient | 6 | Convenient | --- |
| Fast | --- | Fast | 5 | Fast | --- |
| Young | --- | Young | 5 | Young | --- |
| **Total** | **15** | | **180** | | **41** |

In terms of adjectives used after *very*, inconsistent patterns emerge among the three groups. CSLE uses different adjectives consistently after *very* in comparison to the other two groups. As can be seen in Table 4.86, there are 14 different collocations the overall frequencies of which amount to 180, while PSLE uses only six items totalling 41. By contrast, adjectives do not dominantly precede *very* in the L1 speaker interaction.

As illustrated in Table 4.86, only 3 collocations are preferred by the L1 speaker with the overall frequency of 15, all of which are in common with the other two groups. *Important*, and *good* used 4 and 9 times, respectively by this group occur more frequently by the other two groups, particularly CSLE. *Interesting* occurred 16 times in the CSLE interaction is used evenly (2) by the L1 speaker and the PSLE. CSLE uses *important* and *good* nearly twice as often as the PSLE; *important* 28 versus 15 and *good* 37 versus 14. The two L2 speaker groups have some adjectives in common, all more frequently used by the CSLE. *Busy* 5, *difficult* 4, and *hard* 18 compared to 4, 4 and 2, respectively by the PSLE.

The overall frequency of *very*+adjectives reveals the popularity of this collocation with the L2 speaker groups. While it amounts to 15 by the L1 speaker, the CSLE

heavily uses this collocation (180), and the PSLE takes the middle position with 41 occurrences.

Classification of adjectives reveals that all the adjectives placed after *very* by the L1 speaker are positive adjectives (*important, good, and interesting)*, while the PSLE uses positive and negative adjectives evenly; 3 positive adjectives (*important, good* and *interesting*), and 3 negative (*busy, difficult,* and *hard*). The CSLE, on the other hand, shows more inclination in using positive adjectives; 10 positive and 4 negative.

Table 4.87: Distribution of cluster of words around *very*

| L1 speaker | | CSLE | | PSLE | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Cluster | Frequency | Cluster | Frequency | Cluster | Frequency |
| It is very | --- | It is very | 49 | It is very | 12 |
| It's very | --- | It's very | 32 | It's very | --- |
| They are very | --- | They are very | 27 | They are very | --- |
| Is very important | --- | Is very important | 18 | Is very important | 11 |
| Is very good | --- | Is very good | 16 | Is very good | --- |
| Is a very | --- | Is a very | 15 | Is a very | --- |
| Will be very | --- | Will be very | 11 | Will be very | --- |
| He is very | --- | He is very | 10 | He is very | --- |
| Is very interesting | --- | Is very interesting | 9 | Is very interesting | --- |
| Is also very | --- | Is also very | 9 | Is also very | --- |
| A very good | --- | A very good | 8 | A very good | --- |
| Very | --- | Very | 8 | Very | --- |

| much and | | much and | | much and | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| This is very | --- | This is very | 7 | This is very | --- |
| Teacher is very | --- | Teacher is very | 6 | Teacher is very | --- |
| That's very | --- | That's very | 6 | That's very | --- |
| I am very | --- | I am very | 5 | I am very | --- |
| Am very happy | --- | Am very happy | 5 | Am very happy | --- |
| Is very useful | --- | Is very useful | 5 | Is very useful | --- |
| Like it very | --- | Like it very | 5 | Like it very | --- |
| Is very hard | --- | Is very hard | 5 | Is very hard | --- |
| The very least | 5 | The very least | --- | The very least | --- |
| A very good | 5 | A very good | --- | A very good | --- |
| **Total** | **10** | | **256** | | **23** |

The claim of inconsistency in the pattern of *very* among the three groups can be more easily supported by the clusters of 3 words around this quantifier. Quite like all the other collocations thus far, the number of clusters in the CSLE data is remarkably large with an extreme overall frequency number. As Table 4.87 illustrates, CSLE uses 20 individual clusters , each ranging from 5 to 49 in frequency, whereas the L1 speaker and the PSLE each employs only 2 clusters, both different between the two groups. There is no cluster common among the three groups. Overall, the clusters occurring in the CSLE classroom interaction like all the other items with *very* outnumber those of the L1 speaker and the PSLE.

### 4.4.3 *Actually*

Table 4.88: Distribution of *actually*

| | Actually | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| Data type | L1 S n=400 | CSLE n=883 | PSLE n=333 |
| Percentage | 17 | 3 | 22 |
| Frequency | 67 | 24 | 73 |

While the third most commonly used vague intensifier by both the L1 speaker and the PSLE, *actually* occurs in the fifth position by the CSLE. Having said this, *actually* is used the most often by the PSLE. As Table 4.88 clearly shows, PSLE with the frequency of 73 around 3 times as often as their Chinese counterparts uses it more often than the L1 speaker with 67 occurrences.

A look at the frequency value also reflects the reluctance of the CSLE in using *actually* to intensify their remarks. Put in a different way, while *actually* is proved to constitute around one fifth of the overall intensifiers by the L1 speaker and the PSLE interaction, the CSLE uses it only as 3% of their intensifiers in the same context. What is evident in Table 4.3 is that the PSLE and the L1 speaker behave to a large extent alike when it comes to *actually*.

4.89: Distribution of *actually* in negative sentences

| | Actually negative | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| Data type | L1 S n=67 | CSLE n=24 | PSLE n=73 |
| Percentage | 6 | 25 | 11 |
| Frequency | 4 | 6 | 8 |

The first discrepancy in the analysis of *actually* seems to be the fact that this intensifier seems to serve a particular purpose in negative sentences for the two

L2 groups. As can be seen in Table 4.89, the CSLE and the PSLE use *actually* more often than the L1 speaker. The minute difference in the number of tokens is not compelling evidence for this claim, but the frequency value strongly confirms it. In other words, despite the fact that PSLE and CSLE with 8 and 6 occurrences use it more often than the L1 speaker with 4 occurrences only, the frequency value makes the differences more distinct; CSLE with 25% and the PSLE with 11% using it around 4 times and twice as much.

This quantifier is used as a turn initiator 6 times by the PSLE and 4 times by the CSLE, while it serves the same purpose 3 times as often in the L1 speaker data. The other trend emerging regarding *actually* indicates that PSLE shows instances of *actually* occurring after conjunctions, 5 times, while this pattern is missing in the L1 speaker and the CSLE data; the conjunctions used are *because* twice and *but* 4 times.

The most distinct difference in the overall trend by the two groups reveals that the L1 speaker prefers to use auxiliary verbs more consistently before *actually* than the PSLE and the CSLE in their classroom interaction. These auxiliary verbs include verbs such as *be*, *do* and *modal auxiliary* in both affirmative and negative forms. The collocation of *auxiliary verb+ actually* by the L1 speaker amounts to 29, whereas in the PSLE, despite its higher overall frequency, it occurs 10 times only and the CSLE uses it only twice. Differently interpreted, it can be claimed that the PSLE and the CSLE place diverse classes of words before this intensifier, while the L1 speaker is rather more consistent with the verbs appearing before this quantifier.

The other two discrepancies observed which are also typical of two groups are the occurrences of *actually* between the infinitive marker *to* and the *verb* in the L1 speaker data with 4 occurrences. For example,

(4.28)

S1: I would have to take a look at your search **<u>to actually tell</u>** you exactly what went on...
my guess is, and I'm, I'm this is just my hunch, um, that again you may have used an or,
instead of an and. that's a possibility. Or                                            (L1: 3:197)

S9: Physical disabilities, and then not-ing out mental retardation (discussing it back)

(L1: 3:198)

On the other hand, the occurrence of *you know* as a DM before *actually* by the
PSLE with the frequency of 3 is a typical feature of this group.

(4.29)

S2: For example, imagine that you understand that she has a boyfriend what would you
do.                                                                          (P: 6:722)

S1: Well, you know, honestly, what would I do? Just shake but the most important thing
about boys friends these days in Iran is I think, actually, I am sorry<u>... **you know**, **actually**</u> I
talked about this matter with my daughters. I've got three daughters. I had to talk about
these things with them.                                                    (P: 6:723)

Occurrence of conjunctions after *actually* is another trend typical of the PSLE.
However, all the conjunctions are the same in this data, *and* with 5 occurrences.
The other pattern which may reveal significant difference with regard to *actually*
is the  occurrence of the first person plural subject pronoun *we* after *actually*
which seems to be more popular with the PSLE with the frequency of 4, while the
L1 speaker does not use it in their interaction and the CSLE uses it only once,
which seems accidental. The only subject pronoun used after this intensifier by
both the CSLE and the L1 speaker which occurs the most frequently by the PSLE
(12) is the first person subject pronoun, *I*, used 5 times by the CSLE and 3 times
by the L1 speaker.

The three groups fail to show a cluster of three words co-occurring with this intensifier with at least the frequency of 5.

### 4.4.4 *So*

Table 4.90: Distribution of *so*

| | So | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| Data type | L1 S n=400 | CSLE n=883 | PSLE n=333 |
| Percentage | 10 | 18 | 23 |
| Frequency | 40 | 154 | 75 |

The second most frequently used vague intensifier after *very* by the CSLE is proved to be *so*. It is worthwhile to point out that only the cases whereby *so* fulfils an intensifying role have been taken into consideration under this category. Contrary to *actually* which the CSLE uses the least often, *actually* is employed the most often by this L2 group. As illustrated in Table 4.4, the frequency of 154 by the CSLE indicates that intensifying *so* is used almost twice as often by the CSLE as does it by the PSLE (75) and roughly 4 times as often as the L1 speaker (40).

The two L2 groups, however unevenly, use *so* as constituting around one fifth of their vague intensifier items, while only one tenth of this item is comprised of *so*. What can be drawn from the description above is that the L2 speakers prefer to allocate intensifying roles to *so* far more than the L1 speaker. Unlike the overall frequency of *so* that occurs differently by the three groups, they demonstrate to share a close range for the frequency distribution of *so* occurring in negative sentences; 7 by L1 speaker and the PSLE each and 9 by the CSLE.

Table 4.91: Distribution of *so + adjectives*

| Data type | L1 speaker | | | CSLE | | | PSLE | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Adjective type | PosAdj | NeuAdj | NegAdj | PosAdj | NeuAdj | NegAdj | PosAdj | NeuAdj | PosAdj |
| Frequency | 11 | 1 | 11 | 112 | 5 | 74 | 20 | 6 | 20 |

The next trend in the data, which also indicates inconsistency among the three groups, refers to the kind of adjective used by each group. There seems to exist a more consistent pattern between the PSLE and the L1 speaker in this regard in which negative adjectives by each group occur as often as the positive adjectives and neutral adjective turning up generally less often.

The proportion of positive adjectives to negative adjectives occurring after *so* by the CSLE gives more weight to the former. In other words, according to Table 4.91, positive adjectives occur 112 times after *so* in the classroom interaction by the CSLE, while they use negative adjectives 74 times in the same context. The only consistency to work out among the three groups lies in the occurrence of neutral adjectives which happen to be the least often; just once by the L1 speaker, 5 times by the CSLE and 6 occurrences by the PSLE.

Table 4.92: Distribution of words after *so*

| L1 | | CSLE | | PSLE | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Collocation | Frequency | Collocation | Frequency | Collocation | Frequency |
| so much | 8 | so much | 19 | so much | 9 |
| so many | 5 | so many | 17 | so many | 15 |
| **Total** | **13** | | **36** | | **24** |

The same trend as the kinds of adjectives employed is also reiterated for the collocation *so much*; the L1 speaker and the PSLE use *so much* almost evenly; the former 8 times and the latter 9 occurrences but the CSLE with 19 occurrences uses it almost twice as often. *So many* as well is the most frequently used collocation by the CSLE, but the frequency of this collocation by the PSLE is this

time closer to the CSLE; the former 15 occurrences and the latter frequency of 17, whereas the L1 speaker with 5 occurrences is still the least frequent user of this collocation. The other possible collocations with *so* are *so often, so few* and *so adverb + adjective,* but due to either lack of occurrence or the very low frequency, they will not undergo any examination in this study.

The L1 speaker and the PSLE seem to behave in the same way in failing to use the clusters of three words with a minimum frequency of 5 but the CSLE reveals 2 clusters occurring more than 5 times; *you are so* 7 occurrences and *is so difficult* with the frequency of 6.

### 4.4.5 *Too*

Table 4.93: Distribution of *too*

|  | **Too** | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| Data type | L1 S n=400 | CSLE n=883 | PSLE n=333 |
| Percentage | 6 | 4 | 5 |
| Frequency | 24 | 34 | 15 |

The most extensive user of intensifying *too* with the frequency of 34 turns out to be CSLE. As Table 4.93 shows, CSLE with 34 occurrences uses *too* more than twice as often as the PSLE and exactly 10 tokens more than the L1 speaker. Contrary to *so* which is used the least often by the L1 speaker, the PSLE uses *too* the least commonly, occurring only 15 times. Looked from the perspective of percentage value, the three groups appear to perform in the same way in using this vague intensifier.

In terms of the kind of sentences in which *too* occurs, L1 speaker and the CSLE show more diversity in using *too*, that is, *too* occurs in both positive and negative sentences by the L1 speakers and the CSLE, while PSLE opts to use it in positive

sentences only. The overall frequency of *too* in negative sentences amounts to 4 by each group but 2 of the negations by the L1 speaker occur before *too* as in

(4.30)

SU-m: That's really interesting we'll have to see. Probably won't happen in this lifetime.

(L1: 2:127)

S1: I don't think so **not too soon** anyway but we'll see I mean you know.　　(L1: 2:128)

SU-m: No, it's a slow process.　　(L1: 2:129)

S1: It is.　　(L1: 2:130)

and the other two in sentences which are common negative sentences.　In addition, 2 tokens of *too* by the CSLE occur in sentences containing never,　but PSLE shows no inclination to use *too* in negative sentences. The other consistent pattern worked out in the L1 speaker data is the occurrence of emphatic *just*, 3 times, before *too* which is missing from the CSLE and the PSLE data.

S1: Yeah that's, yeah, I mean, yeah rebellious, or, or not we, we could call it socialized. which basically just means they're not accustomed to society's norms yet. Yeah.

(L1: 2:13)

S2: Or they're **just too** young to understand the uh, consequences of, stealing.　(L1: 2:14)

Despite the lack of patterns in what occurs before *too* in the data, the analysis of what occurs after this intensifier shows a partial similarity between the L1 speaker and the PSLE. The first similar trend can be viewed in the even occurrence of *too much*; 4 for each group but it occurs 14 times with the CSLE.　The two groups, nonetheless, behave differently in the pattern this collocation is used with. The L1 speaker uses 2 cases of *too much* at the end of clauses, besides using another 2 in the middle, 1 of which is after a verb and the other before a noun, but the PSLE places all the four instances of *too much* before nouns. However, 1 of them shows a grammatical error. CSLE, on the other hand, uses 2 tokens of *too much* at the

end of clauses, the rest occurring before nouns. CSLE shows a collocation typical of their interaction in the same context; *too many* occurring twice.

### 4.4.6 Q*uite*

Table 4.94: Distribution of *quite*

|  | Quite | | |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Data type | L1 S n=400 | CSLE n=883 | PSLE n=333 |
| Percentage | 4 | 1 | 1 |
| Frequency | 16 | 9 | 4 |

As with *too*, *quite* occurs with patterns which again indicate extensive discrepancies across the three groups. The first criterion for comparison, like all the other vague words so far is the overall frequency of this word by each group. *Quite* is used the most often by the L1 speaker, whereas the PSLE employs it the least often. As Table 4.94 displays, while the PSLE uses it 4 times only, it occurs 16 times translating to 4% in the L1 speaker classroom interaction. The CSLE, on the other hand, uses it 9 times which means around half as often as the L1 speaker. The percentage of occurrence of this intensifier proves that it constitutes a very small portion of vague intensifiers by each group; an even proportion of 1% by the CSLE and the PSLE and 4% by the L1 speaker.

As with *too*, PSLE avoids using this vague word in negative clauses. The same trend applies to the CSLE as well, while half of the clauses containing *quite* by the L1 speaker are negative. In terms of what occurs after this intensifier, the pattern seems similar but the frequency differs between the two groups. While the frequency of *quite+ adjective* collocation amounts to 7 in the L1 speaker data, the PSLE uses this collocation only 3 times, but it occurs twice as often in the same position by the CSLE. In addition, the collocation of *quite+ adverb* occurs 4 times

by the L1 speaker, whereas the PSLE uses it only once but CSLE fails to locate *quite* before adverbs.

In addition, the L1 speaker shows some other collocations such as *quite a bit*, *quite a while* and so on but the PSLE limits the use of *quite* to the 2 collocations of *quite+ adjective* and *quite +adverb*. The CSLE, on the other hand, uses *quite+ a+ adjective+ noun* and *quite+ preposition* in their interactions. The other discrepancy among the three groups occurs in the elements coming after *quite* which shows a trivial consistency between the L1 speaker and the CSLE. The L1 speaker consistency shows *quite* combined with *sure*, 3 times, but *quite easy* with the frequency of 2 emerges as the consistency by the CSLE. PSLE refuses to consistently use adjectives or adverbs in conjunction with *quite*.
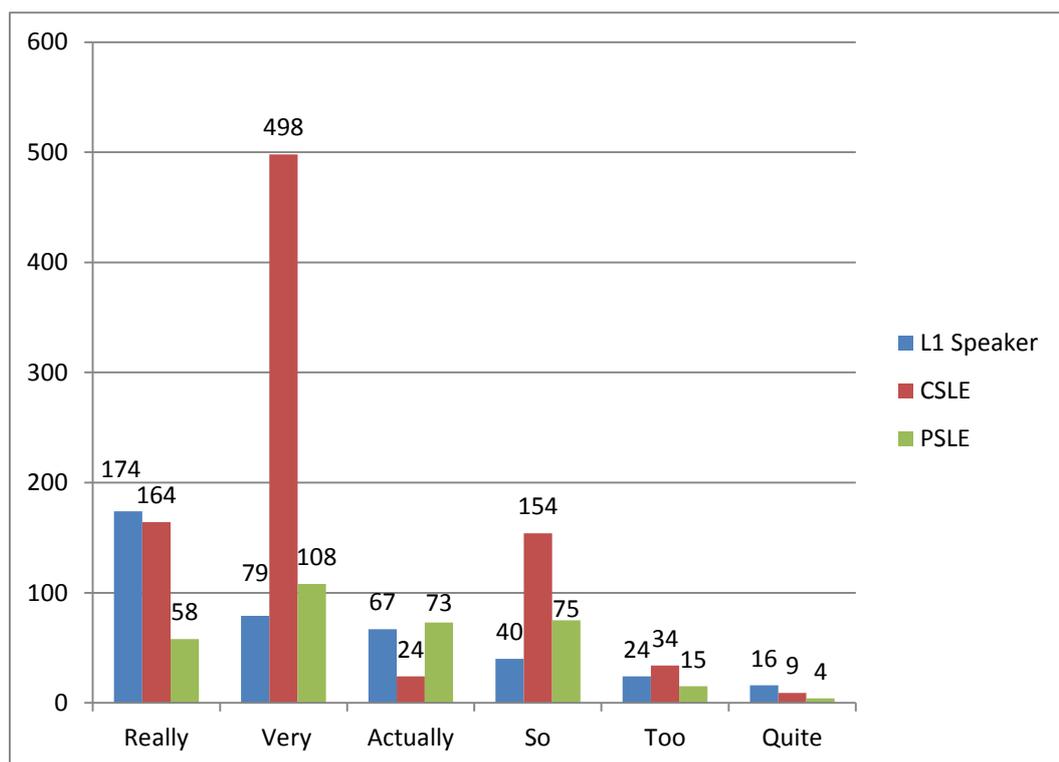


Figure 4.7: Frequency of *vague intensifiers*

As a final analysis, vague intensifiers prove to be the category with the most discrepancies among the three groups. These discrepancies go beyond frequency level and are reinforced when pattern of use and the overall trend, in general, are taken into consideration. As long as the overall frequency is concerned, the CSLE

with 883 occurrences shows a tendency to overuse this vague category compared with the L1 speaker 400 occurrences and PSLE with the frequency of 333. The three groups show the closest frequencies towards the bottom of the table; however, they are still different. Despite this, the difference in the application of vague intensifiers by the three groups has been found to be statistically significant.

In addition, in terms of the frequency of each individual item, as illustrated in Figure 4.7, CSLE uses three categories the most often, *very*, *so*, and *too* but the L1 speaker uses only 2; *really* and *quite* ( the first and the last times on the table). What is more is that the PSLE uses only 1 item the most often, being *actually*. As can be seen in the figure, the most significant frequency difference among the three groups lies in *really* which the CSLE uses around 4 times as often as the PSLE and 6 times as the L1 speaker.

Comparison of the ranking positions show that the L1 speaker and the PSLE behave similarly in the ranking position of three items; *actually*, *too*, and *quite* taking up the third, fifth and sixth positions in the ranking order. CSLE and the PSLE have only 2 ranking positions in common, while there is only 1 item similar in terms of ranking order between the CSLE and the L1 speaker. What can be drawn from the above is that the three groups have *quite* as the last item in the ranking order.
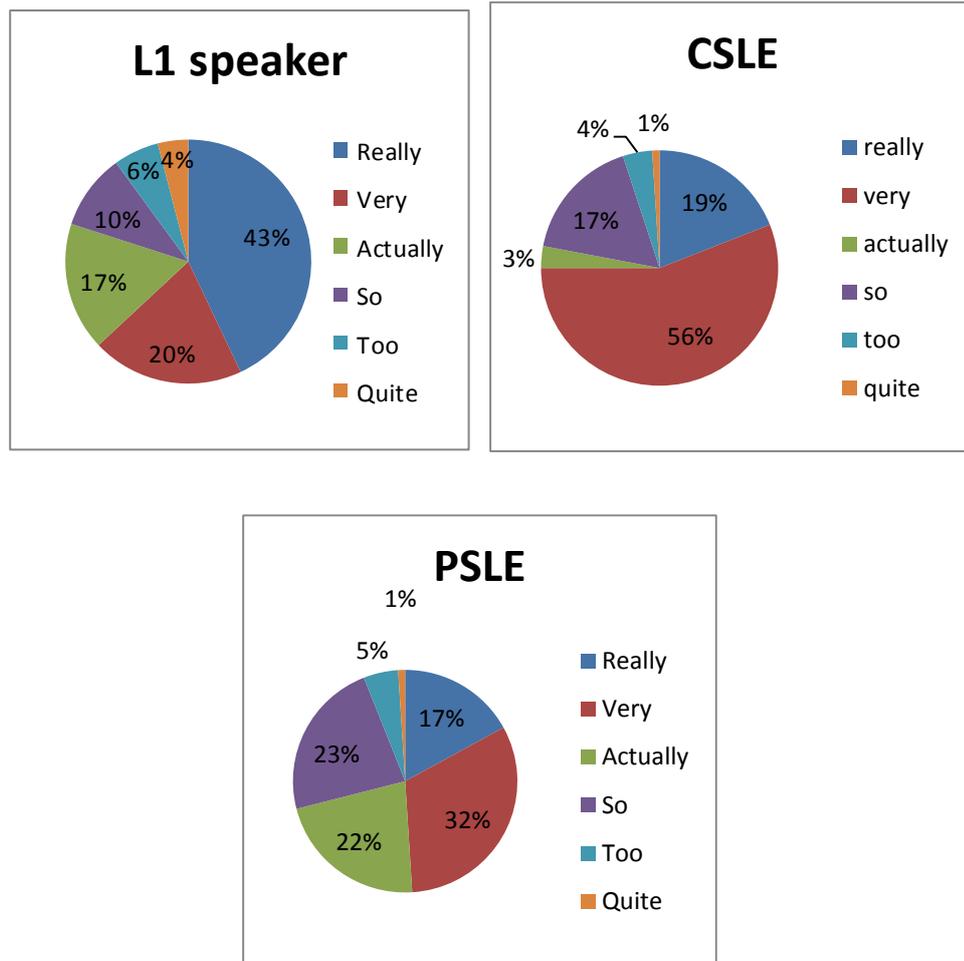
Figure 4.8: Percentage of *intensifiers*

The comparison of the overall distribution of intensifiers by the three groups reveals significant differences both in terms of the ranking of items and in terms of the percentage value of each item comprising the category. As is clear in Figure 4.8, the graph describing the PSLE presents a more evenly distributed application of vague intensifiers. This can easily be viewed in the distribution of the first two items which amount to 49% by the PSLE, 63% by the L1 speaker and 75% by the CSLE.

While the percentage of *actually*, *so* and *too* constitute one third in the L1 speaker data and more than that in the PSLE data, the overall value of these items at the very most amounts to 25, equivalent to one fourth. *Too* and *quite* are demonstrated not to be of such high frequencies in the classroom interaction by

each of the groups. However, the PSLE shows 10% of vague intensifiers in the infarction constituted of these 2 items.

## 4.5. Placeholders

Table 4.95: Frequency of *placeholders*

| Item | L1 S | | CSLE | | PSLE | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Distribution | Frequency | Percentage | Frequency | Percentage | Frequency | Percentage |
| Something | 94 | 31(%) | 80 | 28(%) | 177 | 37(%) |
| Thing | 72 | 24(%) | 82 | 29(%) | 74 | 15(%) |
| Things | 54 | 18(%) | 85 | 30(%) | 108 | 23(%) |
| Someone | 28 | 9(%) | 13 | 4(%) | 31 | 6(%) |
| Anything | 24 | 8(%) | 12 | 4(%) | 48 | 10(%) |
| Somebody | 20 | 7(%) | 11 | 4(%) | 23 | 5(%) |
| Anybody | 9 | 3(%) | 3 | 1(%) | 17 | 4(%) |
| **Overall** | **301** | **100(%)** | **286** | **100(%)** | **478** | **100(%)** |

Among all the vague categories discussed thus far, the second most frequently used vague category by the PSLE after subjectivisers is found to be placeholders. Placeholders in this study are constituted of 7 items; *something, thing, things, someone, anything, somebody*, and *anybody*. As Table 4.95 shows, PSLE uses an overall of 478 placeholders in their classroom interaction, while the L1 speaker uses 301 vague placeholders and the CSLE 286 tokens of this class.

Though placeholders are found to be the most popular vague categories used by the PSLE thus far, the CSLE shows the most unwillingness to use them among all the vague categories. There is only 1 placeholder that the CSLE uses the most frequently (thing) but all the other items are preferred by the PSLE. In addition, the three groups have been found to perform differently in the use of placeholders from the statistical perspective, p. $<0.05$($\chi^2$=48.906, d.f.12).

There is a sort of internal consistency by the CSLE, which to a lesser degree is viewable by the L1 speaker and the PSLE. A look at the first six items on the table reveals that there is consistency in each half used by the CSLE: the first three items, *something* (80), *thing* (82), and *things* (85), occur evenly versus the second group *someone* (13), *anything* 12, and *somebody* (11). This consistency can be observed in the PSLE and the L1 speaker data as well but only in the second half of the table which includes such items as *someone*, *anything* and *somebody*.

## 4.5.1 *Something*

Table 4.96: Distribution of *something*

| | Something | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| Data type | L1 S n=301 | CSLE n=286 | PSLE n=478 |
| Percentage | 31 | 28 | 37 |
| Frequency | 94 | 80 | 177 |

The most frequently occurring placeholder by the L1 speaker and the PSLE turns out to be *something*, while the CSLE uses it as the second most frequently used placeholder. As Table 4.96 illustrates, the PSLE with the frequency of 177 uses it almost twice as often as the L1 speaker (94) and the CSLE (80) in the same context. Despite the inconsistency emerging in the frequency distribution, percentage calculation shows that the difference among the three groups is not as significant as the frequency analysis suggests. As is clear in Table 4.96, *something* constitutes around one-third of the overall placeholders used by each group.

The occurrence of elements before *something* shows that despite using this placeholder the most often, the PSLE uses it after conjunctions less often than the L1 speaker. In other words, L1 speaker places *something* after conjunctions 15

times, while the frequency of conjunctions occurring before *something* by PSLE amounts to 8, which is almost half as often.

The CSLE with 7 occurrences is found to be the least frequent user of this collocation in the same context. The most frequently used conjunction by the L1 speaker and the CSLE is *or* with 13 and 5 occurrences, respectively, while this happens to be the least frequently used conjunction before *something* by the PSLE (1). *But* and *and* each with a frequency of 1 are the least commonly used conjunctions by the L1 speaker. However, the PSLE uses *and*, 5 times, as the most frequent conjunction and *but* with the frequency of 2 as the second most frequently used one. Also, the CSLE uses 3 tokens of *and something*, while *but something* has been found a non-existent pattern in their talk.

Analysis of words occurring to the left of *something* reveals consistency in the diversity of patterns derived from the PSLE data. The first diversity of such kind emerges in using *about* as a preposition with the frequency of 4, which occurs 3 times by the CSLE and only once in the L1 speaker data.

Table 4.97: Distribution of words before *something*

| L1 speaker | | CSLE | | PSLE | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Collocation | Frequency | Collocation | Frequency | Collocation | Frequency |
| do something | 12 | do something | 20 | do something | 33 |
| say something | 7 | say something | 2 | say something | 19 |
| be something | 6 | be something | --- | be something | 18 |
| buy something | --- | buy something | 2 | buy something | 5 |
| have something | 9 | have something | 3 | have something | 5 |
| know something | --- | know something | --- | know something | 5 |
| learn something | --- | learn something | 6 | learn something | --- |
| **Total** | **34** | | **33** | | **85** |

Aside from conjunctions and prepositions, the most frequent collocation of *something* occurs with verbs preceding it. In this regard, the frequency of 85 confirms the PSLE as the most frequent user of this collocation, followed by the L1 speaker (34) and CSLE (33). Besides the overall frequency number, the PSLE used the highest number of individual collocations 6, followed by CSLE 5and L1 speaker 4. As indicated in Table 4.97, *Do something* is the most frequent collocation by each group; 33 by PSLE, 20 by CSLE and 12 by the L1 speaker. The other collocations the three groups have in common are *say something* and *have something*.

Although the three groups use *say something* as a common collocation of *verb+ something*, it turns up in different ranking positions. In other words, while *say something* with the frequency of 19 appears in the second position by the PSLE,

the L1 speaker with 7 occurrences uses it as the third most frequent collocation. Furthermore, it occurs only twice as the least common collocation by the CSLE. While *have something*, occurring 9 times stands in the second ranking position by the L1 speaker, the PSLE uses it 5 times as the fourth and the CSLE 3 times as the third.

Nonetheless, there are 2 collocations which one of the three groups does not use in their talks; *be something* occurring 18 times by the PSLE is employed 3 times less often by the L1 speaker, but is not used by the CSLE. On the other hand *buy something* is a collocation the L1 speaker does not refer to in their conversation, while it used 5 times by the PSLE and twice by the CSLE. What can also be inferred from the table is that each L2 group has collocations unique to them. For instance, *know something* (5) belongs to the PSLE group solely and *learn something* (6) by CSLE only.

Table 4.98: Distribution of clause-final *something*

|  | **something.** | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| Data type | L1 S<br>n=301 | CSLE<br>n=286 | PSLE<br>n=478 |
| Percentage | 5 | 3 | 10 |
| Frequency | 14 | 8 | 47 |

. means clause final position

The analysis of the components occurring after *something* indicates that this placeholder appears in the clause final position the most often in the PSLE data. As illustrated in Table 4.98, PSLE with 47 occurrences uses it almost more than 3 times as often as the L1 speaker with 14 occurrences and CSLE with 8 tokens. Even in terms of conjunctions placed after *something*, the highest frequency is found to belong to the PSLE data where the PSLE combines *something* with conjunctions 9 times, while this collocation occurs only 4 times in the L1 speaker data and 3 times by the CSLE. This occurs between *something* and *but*, *and*, and *or* by L1 speaker and CSLE, while PSLE combines *something* with *and*, and *or*

only, meaning that the PSLE does not use *something* to express contrast, but just addition *and*, and choice *or*. This pattern can reveal an interesting trend; L1 speaker with the frequency of 15 uses conjunctions before *something* almost twice as often as the PSLE (8) but almost half as often after conjunctions.

The first occurrence of *something* in the right sorted analysis shows *something* occurring before the preposition *about*. Contrary to the collocation *about something* which is not commonly used; 4 times by the PSLE, 3 times by the CSLE, and only once by the PSLE interaction, *something about* turns up more frequently; 15 times by the CSLE, 6 times by the L1 speaker and 4 times occurring in the PSLE data. In addition, there are other collocations of *something* and prepositions which are all typical of each group. For instance, *something for* 8 times by the PSLE, *something to*, and *something from* each occurring twice by the CSLE.

Table 4.99: Distribution of what occurs after *something*

| L1 speaker | | CSLE | | PSLE | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Combination | Frequency | Combination | Frequency | Combination | Frequency |
| Something you | --- | Something you | 2 | Something you | 16 |
| Something that | 10 | Something that | --- | Something that | 15 |
| Something else | 3 | Something else | 7 | Something else | 15 |
| Something wrong | 2 | Something wrong | --- | Something wrong | 6 |
| Something like | 8 | Something like | --- | Something like | 6 |
| Something + infinitive | 8 | Something+ infinitive | 3 | Something+ infinitive | 2 |
| **Total** | **31** | | **12** | | **60** |

In what occurs after *something*, a substantial discrepancy is viewed among the three groups. The first discrepancy is easily observable in the total number of this collocation by each group. The frequency of 60 by the PSLE confirms the reliance of this group on using *something*. The L1 speaker uses this collocation more moderately (31) and the CSLE the least frequently with 12 times. In brief, the overall frequency of this collocation by the PSLE is found nearly twice as often as by the L1 speaker and five times as often as by the CSLE.

However, the frequency might prove to be different along with some partial differences in some collocations. There are 6 collocations of *something* that the PSLE uses in their interaction, while L1 speaker and CSLE use 5 and 3 such collocations, respectively. PSLE and L1 speaker share 3 collocations of *something*. As Table 4.99 illustrates, *something that*, *something wrong*, *something like* are the collocations the two groups have in common. However, the number of occurrences of each is different between the two groups. On the other hand, the similarity between the three groups lies in the 2 collocations they have in common; *something else*, and *something + infinitive.*

A close look at the table reveals that *something* is never collocated with subject pronouns by the L1 speaker, while such collocations appear in the L2 speaker data. To be more precise, *something you* occurs 16 times by the PSLE but twice by the CSLE. The most salient difference in this regard concerns the most frequently used combination; *something* and the subject pronoun *you* which is excessively used by the PSLE (16), but the L1 speaker fails to use this combination in their classroom interaction. As with *I think*, the PSLE prefers to directly involve the listener in the state of uncertainty when *something* is used in their interaction,

(4.31)

S5: Inevitable means **something** you cannot escape from.                    (P: 4:42)

But the L1 speaker seems to use this placeholder in a broader concept like passive sentences.

S: That might be an example- is this is this **something** that, needs to be seen by… .

(L1: 1:431)

*Something that* appears as one of the most frequently used collocations by the PSLE and the L1 speaker. Nonetheless, the pattern drawn from the transcripts displays trends which are different for each group. The overall frequency of this collocation reveals that the PSLE uses *something that* 15 times, while the frequency of this collocation in the L1 speaker data amounts to 10. The analysis of the function of *that* after *something* in the context shows that the PSLE uses this word as a *conjunction* and a *subject* almost evenly; 7 and 8 but *that* after *something* in the L1 speaker data brings up an uneven distribution. The L1speaker prefers to use *that* as a conjunction (7) almost twice as often as *that* as a subject (3).

The first collocation in common among the three groups has been identified as *something else*. It is the most often used by the PSLE (15), while CSLE uses it around half as often (7) and L1 speaker the least often (3). PSLE uses one-third of this collocation after the verb *do* or *does*, whereas CSLE uses only 1 token of this collocation after either of these verbs, and, surprisingly, 5 after conjunctions such as *and* and *or*. The verbs used before this collocation by the PSLE does not show any consistency.

As the second collocation occurring in common among the three groups, *something + infinitive* is the most frequent in the L1 speaker data, 8 times, while the CSLE and the PSLE use this collocation 3 times and twice, respectively.

Table 4.100: Distribution of cluster of words occurring around *something*

| L1 speaker | | CSLE | | PSLE | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Cluster | Frequency | Cluster | Frequency | Cluster | Frequency |
| You do something | --- | You do something | --- | You do something | 7 |
| To do something | --- | To do something | 8 | To do something | 7 |
| It is something | --- | It is something | --- | It is something | 6 |
| Something for eating | --- | Something for eating | --- | Something for eating | 6 |
| Attention to something | --- | Attention to something | --- | Attention to something | 5 |
| To say something | --- | To say something | --- | To say something | 5 |
| **Total** | **---** | | **8** | | **36** |

The collocation patterns of *something* which the PSLE overuses in the classroom interaction are now extended more when the cluster of words occurring around this placeholder is examined. As can be viewed in Table 4.100, while there are 6 clusters of three words with *something* which the PSLE uses with an overall frequency of 36 in the classroom interaction, the L1 speaker does not show any tendency to use this cluster in the same context, while only 1 cluster emerges in the CSLE which is found to be in common with the PSLE; *to do something* with the frequency of 8 by the former and 7 by the latter.

## 4. 5.2 *Things*

Table 4.101: Distribution of *things*

| | Things | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| Data type | L1 S<br>n=301 | CSLE<br>n=286 | PSLE<br>n=478 |
| Percentage | 18 | 29 | 23 |
| Frequency | 54 | 85 | 108 |

As with *something*, *things* is used the most often by the PSLE but contrary to *something* the L1 speaker uses it the least often. As Table 4.101 shows, as the most frequent user of *things*, PSLE uses this placeholder 108 times, exactly twice as often as the L1 speaker who makes the least common use of this placeholder. But it occurs 85 times by the CSLE. Figures in the percentage analysis indicate some differences among the three groups. That is, the contribution of *things* in the formation of placeholders is around one-fifth in PSLE data, whereas it amounts to one third by CSLE.

Like the other placeholders examined so far in this study, the first criterion for the investigation of patterns is set to the position of the word under study in the clause. From the point of view of clause position, it is found that the PSLE uses *things* in the final position 37 times, while it occurs 28 times in the same position by the  CSLE and only 8 times by the L1 speaker. From the percentage perspective, it becomes evident that exactly one third of the tokens of *things* by the CSLE and around one quarter by the PSLE occur in the clause final position, while it accounts for around 15% in the L1 speaker data.

What it can imply is that the L2 speaker groups would rather *things* in the clause final position compared with the L1 group.   In addition, around half of the tokens of clause final position *things* by each group turned out to occur as turn-shifting devices: 16 by the PSLE, 12 by the CSLE and 3 by the L1 speaker.

The examination of sentences in which this placeholder occurs indicates that the L1 speaker does not use *things* in negative sentences, whereas it occurs 8 times in such contexts by the PSLE and 5 times by the CSLE. The other context in which the occurrence of *things* was investigated is the interrogative sentences which again PSLE and CSLE show flexibility in the use of, like negative sentences. While the L1 speaker uses 2 cases of *things* in the interrogative sentences, the PSLE and the CSLE use it more than 3 times and twice as often, 6 occurrences and 4 times.

Overall, there is consistency in the pattern of use of *things* between the CSLE and the PSLE in that they both use *things* in negative and interrogative sentences fairly evenly, while the L1 speaker uses it in the interrogative sentences less frequently than the other two groups and does not use it in negative sentences.

Table 4.102: Distribution of words before *things*

| L1 speaker | | CSLE | | PSLE | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Collocation | Frequency | Collocation | Frequency | Collocation | Frequency |
| Other things | --- | Other things | 10 | Other things | 15 |
| New things | --- | New things | 4 | New things | 10 |
| Lots of things | --- | Lots of things | --- | Lots of things | 10 |
| Kinds of things | 3 | Kinds of things | 2 | Kinds of things | 10 |
| Different things | 2 | Different things | 3 | Different things | 6 |
| Some things | 8 | Some things | 2 | Some things | --- |
| A lot of things | --- | A lot of things | 19 | A lot of things | --- |
| **Total** | **13** | | **40** | | **51** |

Analysis of the words occurring to the left of *things* shows more or less similar trends by the CSLE and the PSLE. The closest similarity lies in the overall occurrences; 51 by the PSLE and 40 by the CSLE. Besides, the two groups have three collocations in common; *other things*, and *new things*, while the L1 speaker and the CSLE have only 1 item in common; *some things*.

No item commonly occurs between PSLE and the L1 speaker. Therefore, the table of collocation, like the overall occurrence of *things* confirms similarities between the CSLE and the PSLE. *Kinds of things*, and *different things* are the only items the three groups have in common, both of which are used more frequently by the PSLE. As Table 4.102 indicates, although PSLE has a larger overall occurrence (51) than the CSLE (40), the number of individual collocations by the latter (6) is larger than the former (5). The L1speaker, on the other hand, uses only 3 individual collocations of *things*.

Table 4.103: Distribution of conjunctions after *things*

| Conjunction | And | but | Because | So | Overall |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| L1 speaker | 2 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 6 |
| CSLE | 12 | 1 | 1 | 2 | 16 |
| PSLE | 7 | 6 | 3 | 0 | 16 |

Examination of words appearing after *things* brings CSLE and PSLE far closer in their performance with *things*. PSLE and CSLE use *things* +conjunctions evenly; 16 tokens, far more frequently than the L1 speaker with a frequency of 6. While the PSLE and L1 speaker demonstrate three kinds of conjunctions after this placeholder, they differ in using 1 conjunction, besides the overall frequency of conjunctions used. The most common collocation by CSLE and PSLE has been found to be *things and* occurring 17 times by the former and 12 times by the

latter, while it occurs as the second most common collocation by the L1 speaker with the frequency of 2.

The second most frequently used conjunction with *things* by the PSLE speaker is *but* with the frequency of 6 to express contrast, which the L1 speaker uses only once and this frequency seems to be accidental. The L1 speaker does not use it in their interaction. Frequency of 3 for *things because* places this collocation in the third position by the PSLE, while it shows the accidental frequency of 1 by the other two groups. Instead, it can be viewed that CSLE and L1 speaker use *so* after *things* to express result, the frequency of which amounts to 3 and 2 respectively, but this collocation is not chosen by PSLE.

Following conjunctions, the most frequently occurring expressions after *things* in the PSLE data are demonstrated to be *things that* and *things. OK?*. While the former is found frequently with the L1 speaker interaction but less frequently with the CSLE, the latter collocation is found typical of the PSLE. The overall occurrence of *things that* gets up to 23 in the PSLE data and 10 for the L1 speaker interaction but the CSLE uses it only twice.

Besides, the significant difference in the frequency distribution, the pattern of use also reveals remarkable discrepancies. Based on the analysis of the function which *that* serves in the sentence, it is revealed that the PSLE uses it either as a conjunction or subject of the sentence almost evenly (12 and 11 times), while the L1 speaker prefers to use it more as a conjunction, 10 times, than a subject, 6 occurrences. The 2 occurrences of *that* after *thing* by the CSLE show 1 serving as a conjunction and 1 fulfilling the role of a subject.

Table 4.104: Distribution of cluster of words occurring around *things*

| L1 speaker | | CSLE | | PSLE | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Cluster | Frequency | Cluster | Frequency | Cluster | Frequency |
| The things that | --- | The things that | --- | The things that | 15 |
| Lots of things | --- | Lots of things | --- | Lots of things | 10 |
| Of things but | --- | Of things but | --- | Of things but | 6 |
| Things that they | --- | Things that they | --- | Things that they | 5 |
| Things that I | --- | Things that I | --- | Things that I | 5 |
| And other things | --- | And other things | --- | And other things | 5 |
| Of the things | 5 | Of the things | --- | Of the things | --- |
| Learn a lot of things | --- | Learn a lot of things | 5 | Learn a lot of things | --- |
| **Total** | **5** | | **5** | | **46** |

Despite the overall similarity between PSLE and CSLE in the employment of *things*, the analysis of cluster of words demonstrates a consistent pattern by the L1 speaker and the CSLE in that the two groups show lack of tendency to use clusters with this placeholder. As Table 4.104 reveals, while PSLE uses 6 clusters consistently amounting to 46, L1 speaker and PSLE each uses 1 cluster only. The clusters used by these two groups are different, *of the things* by the L1 speaker, but *learn a lot of things* by the CSLE. The other similarity between the two groups besides the presentation of only 1 item by the two groups, resides in the even occurrences of such items, amounting to 5 by either group. The most consistent

pattern between PSLE and CSLE is found to be identifiable in the occurrence of *things* according to the explanations above.

### 4.5.3 *Thing*

Table 4.105: Distribution of *thing*

| | Thing | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| Data type | L1 S n=301 | CSLE n=286 | PSLE n=478 |
| Percentage | 24 | 29 | 15 |
| Frequency | 72 | 82 | 74 |

The only placeholder which turns up with the closest occurrence across the three groups is found to be *thing*. As can be seen in Table 4.105, CSLE with the frequency of 82 uses this placeholder the most often, although it is only a bit less common in the PSLE talk (74) and L1 speaker interaction (72). In percentage perspective, while *thing* constitutes a quarter of the overall placeholders in the CSLE and the PSLE data, only 15% of the placeholders in the L1 speaker data are *thing*.

Table 4.106: Distribution of words before *thing*

| L1 speaker | | CSLE | | PSLE | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Collocation | Frequency | Collocation | Frequency | Collocation | Frequency |
| The thing | 4 | The thing | 4 | The thing | 17 |
| One thing | 8 | One thing | 4 | One thing | 7 |
| The most important thing | ---- | The most important thing | 11 | The most important thing | 7 |
| The same thing | 7 | The same thing | 4 | The same thing | 5 |
| Another thing | 4 | Another thing | 7 | Another thing | 4 |

| | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| The only thing | 5 | The only thing | 2 | The only thing | 3 |
| Good thing | 2 | Good thing | 9 | Good thing | 2 |
| Interesting thing | --- | Interesting thing | 6 | Interesting thing | --- |
| **Total** | **30** | | **47** | | **45** |

The overall collocation of *thing* seems to confirm the similarity between the two L2 speakers. They have nearly an even distribution which is more often than the L1 speaker. As can be seen in Table 4.106, the total frequency of 47 by the CSLE is close to the one by the PSLE (45), while the L1 speaker uses such collocations less frequently, 30 times only. The number of individual collocations reveals marginal differences between the three groups. This difference is viewable in the presence of 8 individual collocations by the CSLE as compared to 7 by the PSLE and 6 by the CSLE.

There are 6 collocations the three groups have in common. However, they occur differently in terms of the frequency numbers, the first being *the thing* employed the most often by the PSLE, 17 times, while the L1 speaker and the CSLE use it evenly, 4 times each. *One thing* as the second common collocation occurs with the frequency of 8 by the L1 speaker and 7 by the PSLE, while it occurs around half as often with the CSLE (4). *The same thing*, *another thing*, and *the only thing* are the other items the three groups commonly use.  The collocation typical of CSLE is a combination of a positive adjective (interesting) occurring 6 times.

The patterns which the three groups use *thing* with demonstrate substantial discrepancies among the three groups. The first difference of such kind can be observed in the clause final position of *thing* by each group. The CSLE prefers this position for this placeholder the most often (30) translated around one third while 14 tokens of *thing* occur in the same position by the PSLE, but it amounts to

only 7 in the L1 speaker interaction, which is  half as often as the PSLE and around one-quarter of the CSLE. Besides that, 8 out of 14 occurrences of *thing* in the final position by the PSLE will lead to shift turns.

In other words, in addition to appearing at the end of the clause, *things* in these positions appears as a signal that the speaker is planning to hand over to the next speaker. While the same application is viewed 12 times by the CSLE, the L1 speaker never uses *things* as a turn-taking device. As an overall view, the two L2 groups use *thing* as a communication tool which the L1 speaker ignores in their classroom interaction.

As far as components after *thing* are involved, the kinds of conjunctions used indicate that each group has their own choices in combining them with *thing*. Although the frequency of conjunctions does not indicate a significant difference between PSLE and L1 speaker (4 and 6), the CSLE uses this collocation the most often, 11 times. Regardless of the frequency occurrence of this collocation, the classes of conjunctions used reveal discrepancies. Although CSLE uses conjunctions to express reason, addition, and result, the L1 speaker prefers contrast rather than reason after this placeholder. On the other hand, the PSLE opts for 2 classes of conjunctions after this placeholder; addition and reason.

In terms of the subject pronouns used after this placeholder, the PSLE uses only 2 subject pronouns *I* and *you* amounting to 9 times, while the L1 speaker and CSLE used this placeholder before subject pronouns evenly; 14 times each with *I* being the most common of all. Besides using the same pronouns that the PSLE uses, the L1 speaker uses *they* as well, which is missing in the CSLE interaction, but with the occurrence of *we*, *she*, and *it*.

The other significant discrepancy in using *thing* between the two groups lies in the collocation of *thing that*. PSLE overuses this collocation the most often with 22 occurrences, while it occurs 10 times as often by the L1 speaker translated as almost half as often as the PSLE. The frequency of 3 for this collocation marks

the fact that it is so uncommonly used by the CSLE that it can be claimed to have been ignored in the classroom interaction by this group.

In terms of the function of *that* after *thing*, it is found that it serves as the subject of the sentence and conjunction evenly (5) in the L1 speaker interaction, while it is used more as the subject of the clause occurring after *thing* than a conjunction in the PSLE data. In other words, 14 instances of *that* following *thing* function as the subject of the sentence, while the other 8 are used as a conjunction by the PSLE. 2 out of the 3 occurrences of *that* by the CSLE perform as conjunctions.

Table 4.107: Distribution of cluster of words occurring around *thing*

| L1 speaker | | CSLE | | PSLE | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Cluster | Frequency | Cluster | Frequency | Cluster | Frequency |
| Most important thing | --- | Most important thing | 11 | Most important thing | 8 |
| Thing that I | --- | Thing that I | --- | Thing that I | 5 |
| The same thing | 7 | The same thing | --- | The same thing | 5 |
| The only thing | 5 | The only thing | --- | The only thing | --- |
| A good thing | --- | A good thing | 8 | A good thing | --- |
| Another thing | --- | Another thing | 5 | Another thing | --- |
| Most interesting thing | --- | Most interesting thing | 5 | Most interesting thing | --- |
| **Total** | **12** | | **29** | | **18** |

The investigation of clusters of three words occurring around *thing* by each group shows that the CSLE uses more clusters with a higher overall frequency. Reference to Table 4.107 reveals that a collection of 4 different clusters are preferred by the CSLE which amounts to 29, while PSLE uses only 2 clusters totalling 18, and L1 speaker employing 2, occurring 12 times overall.

What seems unusual is that the three groups do not have any clusters in common, but it is possible to see 2 clusters in common between two groups. *Most interesting* is used as the most frequent cluster by the CSLE (11) and PSLE (8), while *the same thing* occurs as the cluster in common between L1 speaker and the PSLE. The CSLE has three clusters typical of their interaction; *a good thing* (8), *another thing* (5), and *most interesting thing* (5) by the CSLE, but PSLE and the L1 speaker each has only 1 cluster which characterises their interaction; *thing that I* 5 times by the PSLE and *the only thing* with the same frequency but by the L1 speaker.

### 4.5.4 *Anything*

Table 4.108: Distribution of *anything*

| Data type | Anything | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| | L1 S n=301 | CSLE n=286 | PSLE n=478 |
| Percentage | 8 | 4 | 10 |
| Frequency | 24 | 12 | 48 |

As with all the placeholders examined so far, except for *thing*, PSLE is the most heavily reliant on vague words. The overall occurrence of this item across the three groups displays an interesting trend. As Table 4.108 shows, PSLE with 48 occurrences employs this placeholder twice as often as the L1 speaker with the frequency of 24. This is still twice as often as the frequency of occurrence of this item by the CSLE (12). Analysis of percentage values demonstrates a relatively similar behaviour in the distribution of the item under this category. To put it in a

different way, *anything* constitutes exactly one tenth of placeholders in the PSLE and but less by the L1 speaker and the least by the CSLE.

What is more is that the difference across the three groups is not restricted to the frequency occurrence, as the pattern which this placeholder is used with shows a significant difference as well. The first discrepancy in this regard arises from the context of the occurrence of *anything* in the classroom interaction by each group of speaker. While the occurrence of *anything* in the negative sentences by the PSLE proves to be more than 39 out of an overall of 48, the CSLE happens to use exactly half of the sentences containing *anything* in the same context, whereas less than half of the cases of *anything* (10) occur in negative sentences by the L1 speaker, but from the view of interrogative statements, an opposite trend emerges.

While the frequency of *anything* in negative sentences works out to be 5 by the L1 speaker, it amounts to only two by the PSLE and 1 by the CSLE. In other words, *anything* in negative sentences comprises around 20% of the sentences containing this placeholder, whereas only two sentences comprised of *anything* occur in the PSLE, which is translated as around less than 4% and the only occurrence in the CSLE data is translated as 8%. Overall, it seems that for the PSLE and the CSLE *anything* is associated with expressing negative sentences but the L1 speaker shows more diversity in using this placeholder by using it in negative, interrogative and affirmative sentences.

The other difference in the pattern of the use of *anything* indicates that 3 cases of *anything* in the L1 speaker data are placed at the end of the clauses, whereas the PSLE tends to use it in the same position 15 times and the CSLE 5 times. Put in a different way, while L1 speaker uses only 13% of tokens of *anything* in the clause final position, this pattern seems to occur substantially in the interaction by the PSLE and the CSLE, 31 and 42%, respectively.

Interestingly, none of these clause-ending placeholders by the CSLE and PSLE serves a turn-shifting role although the PSLE opts to use around one-third (6) of

the clause-ending *anything* as a turn-shifting device. That is to say that in the L1 speaker data, when the clause ends in *anything*, it is the same speaker who begins the next clause, while in the PSLE 40% of the clauses ending with *anything* are coupled with a clause by another interlocutor. Overall, the mechanism of the application of *anything* by CSLE and PSLE seems to be pretty similar as has been viewed appearing in negative sentences, the clause final position, turn-shifting device.

Table 4.109: Distribution of words before *anything*

| L1 speaker | | CSLE | | PSLE | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Collocation | Frequency | Collocation | Frequency | Collocation | Frequency |
| Have anything | ---- | Have anything | --- | Have anything | 13 |
| Do anything | 4 | Do anything | 4 | Do anything | 10 |
| **Total** | **4** | | **4** | | **23** |

With reference to the terms preceding *anything*, L1 speaker and CSLE demonstrate a similar performance. As Table 4.109 shows, the overall number of collocations of *anything* by the PSLE (23) is almost 8 times as often as that by the L1 speaker and CSLE, each with 4 occurrences. The three groups have only one collocation in common; *do anything* as the only collocation by the L1 speaker and CSLE but 10 times by the PSLE. Besides the larger total number, the PSLE group uses 1 individual collocation more than the other groups; *have anything* 13 times.

Table 4.110: Distribution of words after *anything*

| L1 speaker | | CSLE | | PSLE | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Collocation | Frequency | Collocation | Frequency | Collocation | Frequency |
| Anything+ infinitive | --- | Anything + infinitive | --- | Anything + infinitive | 7 |

| Anything else | 6 | Anything else | --- | Anything else | 2 |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Total** | **6** | | **---** | | **9** |

In placing *anything* before another word, the PSLE and the L1 speaker show some minor similarities. This is associated with the number of collocations of *anything* which are non-existing in CSLE data. As Table 4.110 shows, the two groups act fairly closely in the overall collocation of *anything* and another word; such collocations occur 9 times by the PSLE, while the L1 speaker uses them 9 times.

The difference between the two groups can be viewed in the number of individual collocations which is *anything else* 6 times by the L1 speaker and 2 by the PSLE *anything+ infinitive* 7 times and *anything else* twice by the PSLE. As is clear, they share only *anything else*. Like most of the other placeholders investigated thus far in this study, the most frequently used collocation by the PSLE does not occur in the L1 speaker interaction. In other words, while *anything + infinitive* is found to be the most common collocation the PSLE uses, this is not observed in the L1 speaker interaction.

Table 4.111: Distribution of cluster of words occurring around *anything*

| L1 S | | CSLE | | PSLE | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Cluster | Frequency | Cluster | Frequency | Cluster | Frequency |
| Not have anything | --- | Not have anything | --- | Not have anything | 12 |
| Not do anything | --- | Not do anything | --- | Not do anything | 7 |
| Have anything to | --- | Have anything to | --- | Have anything to | 7 |
| **Total** | **---** | | **---** | | **26** |

As far as the cluster of words occurring around *anything* is concerned, PSLE demonstrates more consistency, while the CSLE and the L1 speaker do not show this consistency due to the low frequency occurrence of *anything* in their data. As can be clearly viewed in Table 4.111, there are 3 clustered items in the PSLE data, the overall frequency of which amounts to 26, but when it comes to the L1 speaker and the CSLE, all the related columns and rows are found to be blank which is the result of low frequency occurrence.

### 4.5.5 *Someone*

Table 4.112: Distribution of *someone*

| Data type | Someone | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| | L1 S n=301 | CSLE n=286 | PSLE n=478 |
| Percentage | 9 | 4 | 6 |
| Frequency | 28 | 13 | 31 |

The occurrence of *someone* appears quite like that of *anything,* in which PSLE happens to be the most frequent user of this placeholder and the CSLE the least frequent user. As Table 4.112 shows, this vague item turns up 31 times in the PSLE classroom interaction, while it occurs a few tokens less often by the L1 speaker (28) and even around half as often in CSLE data. This frequency difference between the first two groups is so minute that it can be neglected in the discussion of the overall frequency. This generates a trend in which the L1 speaker and the PSLE act alike in using this placeholder in their classroom interaction. However, the percentage distribution indicates that *someone* constitutes around 10% of the overall placeholders by the speaker, while it emerges to be half as much by the CSLE and the PSLE.

The first criterion to compare the behaviours of the two groups in using *someone* reveals similarity among the 3 groups. *Someone* is hardly ever used by either group in the clause initial position or clause final position. The former is missing in the CSLE data but it occurs once in the L1 speaker data and twice in the PSLE

classroom interaction, and the frequency of the latter is zero in the L1 speaker and the CSLE classroom interaction and only two in PSLE data. The overall, interpretation would be that the three groups demonstrate consistency in the position where *someone* is employed.

Despite the similarity just referred to, the most considerable difference among the three groups associates with the frequency of conjunctions and propositions occurring before this placeholder. The most frequently used collocation by the L1 speaker proves to be conjunctions and *somebody* with the frequency of 7, while PSLE uses this collocation in their interaction only 3 times and the CSLE only twice. There are 4 kinds of conjunctions in the L1 speaker data; *if* to express condition, *and* to express addition, *because* to express reason, and *or* to refer to choice.

PSLE, on the other hand, chooses to use only 2 kinds of conjunctions; *if* to express condition and, *and* to express addition, while CSLE uses only conditional *if* in their interaction. The only conjunction occurring frequently before this placeholder among the 3 groups happens to be *if*. The implication of this analysis is that the L1 speaker finds the collocations of different conjunctions with *someone* more facilitative, while the two L2 groups are less inclined to use diverse conjunctions with *somebody*.

With regard to prepositions occurring before *someone*, the same considerable difference as conjunctions is noticed, with the PSLE using this collocation the most often. The overall frequency of *preposition + someone* collocation by the PSLE amounts to 11 but CSLE and L1 speaker use them rarely, twice and only once, respectively. While the few occurrences of prepositions appear as *about*, and *for* by the L1 speaker and *for* by the PSLE, the L1 speaker demonstrates more prepositions consistently occurring before this vague word. This is as diverse as the four categories comprised of *about*, *for*, *to*, and *with*.

What can intensify the differences just analysed is that all the prepositions, apart from *for*, in the PSLE data occur after *talk* and *speak*, whereas *about* in L1 speaker data follows the verb *read*, while *for* in the CSLE data as well as the 1 occurrence of *for* by the L1 speaker precede the verb *wait*.

The only pattern that can make the study of what occurs after *somebody* more understandable is the examination of conjunctions following this placeholder. This collocation occurs only once in the L1 speaker data and the CSLE interaction, both being *someone and*, but the PSLE uses *someone + conjunction* 3 times; *and*, *if*, and *or* each with 1 occurrence. As the overall frequency of occurrence for *somebody* is relatively low for each group, it is quite natural that no cluster of 3 words with the minimum frequency of 5 can be observed.

## 4.5.6 *Somebody*

Table 4.113: Distribution of *somebody*

| | **Somebody** | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| Data type | L1 S n=301 | CSLE n=286 | PSLE n=478 |
| Percentage | 7 | 4 | 5 |
| Frequency | 20 | 11 | 23 |

As the sixth most frequently occurring placeholder in the data by each group, *somebody* is found to be used with relatively the same proportion as *someone* by each group. According to Table 4.113, the highest overall frequency of *somebody*, 23, is demonstrated by the PSLE, but the L1 speaker is found to use it less often, however, a few tokens only. By contrast, the CSLE with 11 occurrences employs this placeholder around half as often as the other two groups. The percentage language reveals a very small proportion of the data comprised of *somebody*, less than 10% in each group.

As with *someone*, they did not show any inclination to use *somebody* in clause initial and final positions. The only interesting trend in this regard is that the frequency of this placeholder occurring in the clause initial position is the same as its occurrence in the clause final position for each group. Put in a different way, *somebody* occurs twice in the final position and twice in the initial position in the PSLE data, whereas the CSLE and the L1 speaker use it only 1 time in the same positions.

The only consistency in the analysis of the words to the left of *somebody* in the PSLE data lies in the occurrence of conjunctions. These occur as *and* with the frequency of 1, and *if* 3 times. But in the CSLE and the L1 speaker data, there is no consistency at all. Even in terms of conjunctions, there is only 1 conjunction *and* occurring once with the CSLE and *or* occurring only once with the L1speaker.

In terms of conjunctions occurring to the right of *somebody*, the pattern is more or less similar to what occurs after *someone*. This similarity is more striking when the use of relative pronouns is taken into consideration. From the perspective of conjunctions used, the PSLE uses *and* twice, while the L1 speaker uses this as the only conjunction after this placeholder and the only conjunction used by the CSLE turns up as *or*.

As far as relative pronouns are concerned, the L1 speaker chooses *who* as the only 2 relative pronouns after *somebody*, while the L1 speaker prefers *that* to fill the position of the only 2 relative pronouns in their classroom interaction. Relative pronouns are not found in the CSLE interaction. This trend seems to have been repeated from the pattern shown for *someone*.

### 4.5.7 *Anybody*

Table 4.114: Distribution of *anybody*

| | anybody | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| Data type | L1 S n=301 | CSLE n=286 | PSLE n=478 |
| Percentage | 3 | 1 | 4 |
| Frequency | 9 | 3 | 17 |

The least frequently used placeholder by each group is found to be *anybody*. Like all the other placeholders examined thus far, except for *thing* PSLE is the most extensive user of this item. According to Table 4.114, PSLE makes reference to *anybody* 7 times as the required placeholder in their interaction, while it is employed half as often (9) in the interaction by the PSLE and only 3 times by the CSLE. The percentage analysis; however, levels off the frequency difference and shows a relatively pretty low percentage value by each group.

Investigation of the words occurring to the left of *anybody* shows that this placeholder occurs in the clause initial position as a turn-taking device 3 times in the data by PSLE and L1 speaker, while CSLE uses all the 3 tokens of this placeholder in clause mid-position. But when it comes to interrogative statements, PSLE and the L1 speaker leave a contradictory trace whereby the PSLE uses *anybody* in the interrogative clauses 7 times, 4 times of which the question mark appears immediately after *somebody*, but in the L1 speaker data, there are only 3 interrogative statements with *anybody* inserted in it, but *anybody* is not the word after which the question mark appears.

In terms of the elements occurring after *anybody*, there is only 1 trend which occurs in the PSLE data; *anybody else* with the frequency of 4, 2 of which occur in negative sentences and the other 2 in questions.

Due to the low frequency of *somebody* in the data, the patterns worked out appear infrequent and accidental. This reason also leads to the lack of clusters for *somebody*.
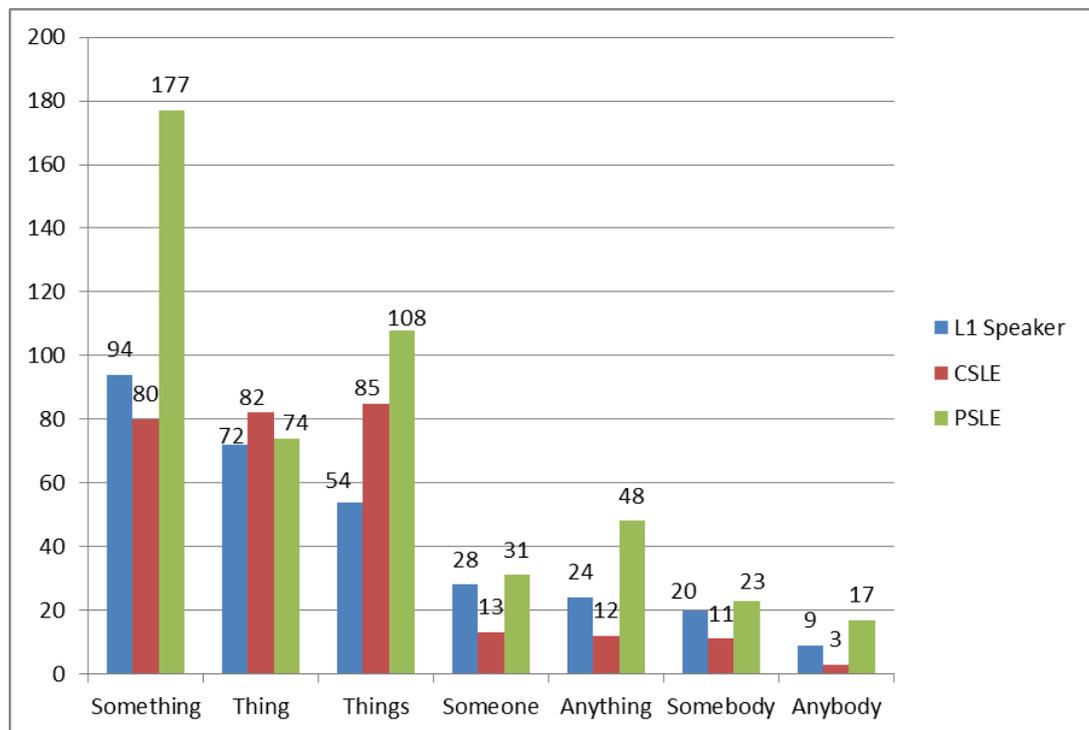


Figure 4.9: Frequency of *placeholders*

To sum up, as a category of vague expressions, placeholders have been found the most popular with the PSLE totalling 478, while L1 speaker uses 301 such expressions and CSLE with 286 items in their interaction. As is displayed in Figure 4.9, PSLE uses each placeholder the most excessively of all with the exception of *thing* that is strongly preferred by CSLE. In other words L1 speaker uses placeholders the least often.

The most dominant trend on the Figure can be drawn from the columns representing the placeholders occurring in the CSLE data whereby the first three

items; *something*, *things*, *thing*, are evenly distributed. The same trend can be viewed for the second three items as well by the same, *anything*, *someone*, and *somebody*. What seems even more considerable is that the second three items in the CSLE and the PSLE interaction show consistency within each group as well.
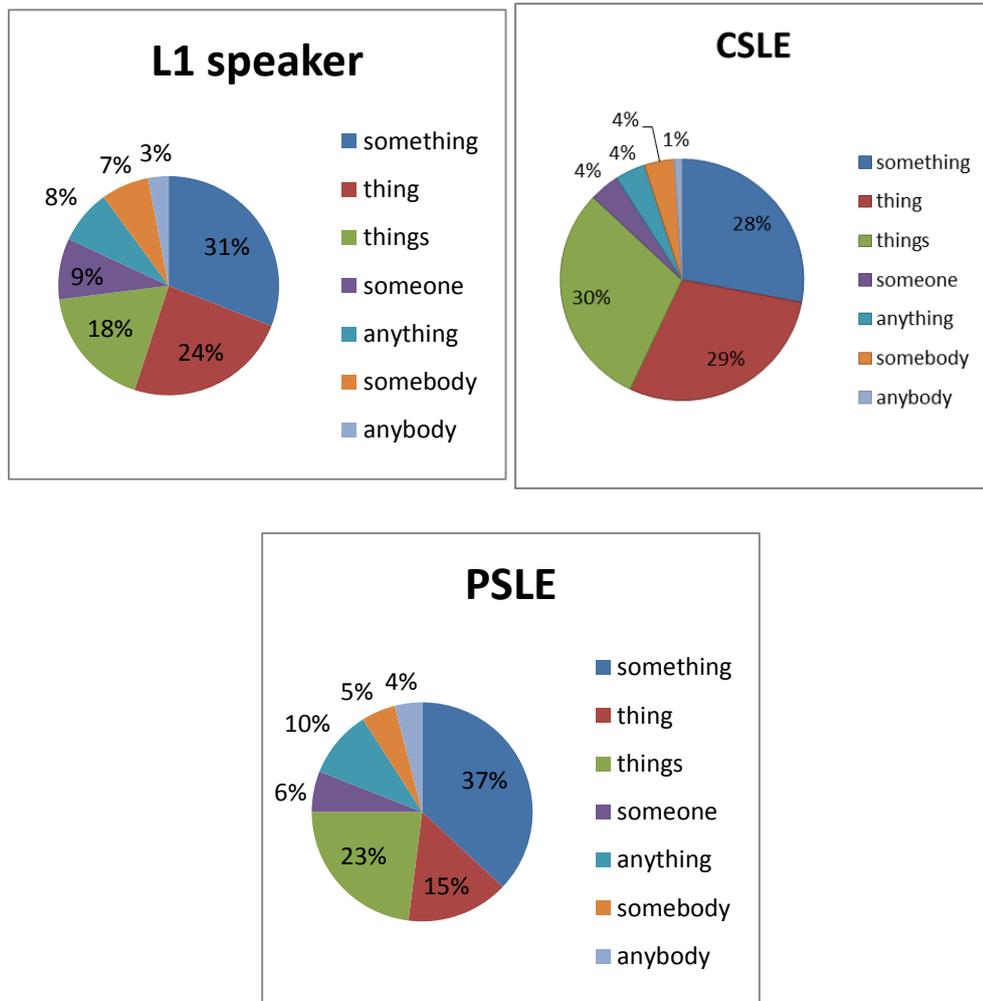


Figure 4.10: Percentage of *intensifiers*

Analysis of the percentage rate of placeholders reveals some similarities between the PSLE and the L1 speaker and an internal consistency in the distribution of these vague words. As Figure 4.10 shows, the first three placeholders on the charts, *something*, *thing*, and *things*, each with a slight difference between the two groups, constitute three quarters of placeholders. It accounts for 73% by the L1 speaker and 75% by the PSLE, while 87% of the overall placeholders by the CSLE are comprised of the same three items.

The remaining one quarter left in the L1 speaker and the PSLE data is comprised of the other four items, *someone*, *anything*, *somebody*, *anybody* with roughly similar distributions, with the only difference in the ranking of *someone* and *anything* being reversed between the two groups. It means while *anything* (10%) is the largest value followed by *someone* in the PSLE, the latter is larger than the former in the L1 speaker interaction.

Despite the fact that the CSLE performs differently from the other two groups, they show a substantial consistency in using the same items in their classroom interaction, apart from *anybody*. To be more precise, *someone*, *anything*, and *somebody* each comprising 4% of the placeholders in the CSLE interaction appear as equally significant in their classroom interaction.

## 4.6 Concluding remarks

The lexical realisation of VL is more dominant in L2 speaker classrooms. It was revealed that the L1 speaker was the least vague with the total occurrence of 1567, whereas the CSLE with the overall frequency of 3030 tended to use VL the most often, and the PSLE (1718) took the middle position. The most dominant used of each vague category in this study turned out to be one of the L2 groups; the CSLE with four categories and PSLE with one, but L1 speaker alternates between the second and third positions.

The category constituting the largest proportion in each data set is different but with similar percentages. The largest proportion in the L1 speaker data is *vague quantifiers* (27%), but CSLE uses *vague intensifiers* (29%) and PSLE *placeholders* (28%). In the same way, the smallest proportion points to a different category in each group. The smallest percentage in the L1 speaker data is subjectivisers (13%), while the CSLE shows placeholders (9%) and PSLE

possibility indicators (11%). The comparison of the largest and smallest proportions shows a rough consistency in the magnitude across the three groups.

It seems that the groups did not use VL for the purpose of being less vague or vaguer but they aligned VL use with their communications needs. The heavy use of VL means that the user needs to stretch VL for the purpose of smooth flow of communication, rather than preferring to stay vague.

# Chapter 5 Pragmatic functions of VL

The growing body of literature in VL (Channell, 1994; Cutting, 2007; Ruzaitė, 2007; Jucker et al. 2003) acknowledges the pervasiveness of this taken-for-granted feature of natural language in communication. The present chapter will deal with a functional analysis of VL in the three data sets. Drave (2002, p. 26) believes "[t]he major function of VL is to tailor conversational contributions to the perceived informational needs of the other participant(s) so as to maintain and enhance the ongoing relationship". The major functions of VL are listed as:

- Filling lexical gaps (where a speaker cannot recall a word or where one does not exist in the language)
- Filling knowledge gaps (memory lapse)
- Emphasising (and de-emphasising)certain information
- Deliberately withholding specific information
- Conveying tentativeness
- Conveying an evaluation of, expectation about, a preposition
- Maintaining an atmosphere of friendliness, informality or reference (ibid, pp. 26-27)

Owing to Channell's (1994) early list of VL functions and other frequently quoted sources (Pince et al., 1982; Jucker et al., 2003; Cutting, 2007), this list is not free from disputes. One source of controversy seems to originate from the different classification systems developed to refer to VL. This can be seen in the application of the terms *softener* or *downtoner* to refer to the same phenomenon. The other controversial area appears to come from the inconsistent use of functional and lexical terms as interchangeable items. For instance, Jucker et al.'s (2003) system mixes the functional category *downtoner* with the lexical category *placeholder*.

Given the accounts above, VL functions in this chapter have been classified under three broad categories of mitigation, right amount of information, and structural function, each with subcategories that have been selected on the grounds of showing the minimum degree of overlap in between. The three broad categories are mitigation, right amount of information, and structural function.

Lexical categories here do not necessarily match up with one and only one function. As Ruzaitė (2007, p. 161) claims, "[q]uantifiers expressing a big number, e. g. *many, much, loads* predominantly perform the sub-function of *emphasising*. Quantifiers referring to small quantities mainly perform the sub-function of *mitigating*. However, the function of quantifiers can change depending on the preceding quantifier, e.g. *quite a few* is emphatic, whereas *a few* without the intensifier *quite* is mainly used as a mitigator". *Possibility markers* can also be applied to refer to *possibility*, politeness, *right amount of information* or *discourse management*, diversity has been shown in the following examples.

# 5.1 Mitigation

As diverse as its lexical realisations, VL can perform a wide range of functions, depending on the context where it occurs. Martinovski (2006, p. 2) defines mitigation as "a pragmatic, cognitive and linguistic behaviour the main purpose of which is reduction of vulnerability". Focusing on *quantifiers* and *approximators*, Ruzaitė (2007) points out that "Mitigating quantifiers can mitigate not only a quantity, but also the force of request, apologies, advice, instructions and criticism" (p.183). *Mitigation* in this study will fall into 4 categories: *self-protection*, *politeness*, *downtoning* and *uncertainty*.

## 5.1.1 Self-protection

One of the common uses of VL is as a protection tool which the speakers can use to protect themselves (self-protection, self-defensive). This tool "attends to the

face needs of the speaker" (Trappes-Lomax, 2007, p. 135) or it can serve 'other-protective face-work' (ibid, p.135). In other words, it can also help to protect the face of the listener or a third party. There seems existing areas of overlap between self-protection and politeness. Discussed under the term *shield* by Prince et al. (1982), uncertainty has been found to result from two different sources: *plausibility reasoning* for *plausibility shield* to express doubt and *attribution shield* through which the speaker attributes a belief to someone else. Self-protection can be assumed to be a notion that is associated with the face issue in communication. Below are three examples to show how self-protection has occurred among the three groups of participants in this study.

(5.1)

This is a discussion between three L1 participants over nine turns.  They are discussing online search and data base during a tutorial.

S1: Okay, library services to phy- physically handicap. d- yes?                    (L1: 3:186)

S14: Um, I completely screwed mine up. *<SS: LAUGH>* and, and, when I did the search for my first facet I was doing two at a time with the descriptors, and then when I combined 'em, to make, at the end I ha- I think I had four groupings. I used and instead of or, and then when I finally combined all three facets I got a big fat zero.    (L1: 3:187)

S1: And you know why.                                              (L1: 3:188)

S14: Yes. And I, don't know why I did it but <SS: LAUGH>                    (L1: 3:189)

S1: Okay. Did you have it right on your, script?                          (L1: 3:190)

S14: Yes                                                          (L1: 3:191)

S1: Or your, okay. Well I'll take a look at e- you know, it's good_ did you realize then when you were online when you did that or after you signed off and you, stewed about it for a while?                                              (L1: 3:192)

S14: After I stewed a little while. <SS: LAUGH>                          (L1: 3:193)

S1: Okay, and, this is sometimes typical, when you're first learning how to search. that's why I try to say don't revise online, because sometimes it does take you a little while to sort of figure out, what exactly did I go wrong, where I wound up with, zero or I wound

up with, thirty thousand, you know sometimes, when you're online it's just too hard to assess that. [S14: yeah unfortunately ] yeah I sort of like the old days**, I guess, maybe,** I'm just one of those, analog print people, when we had these long printouts,and you could look through that long printout while you were online. Now with this awful, Telnet, animal, you can only really look back a few screens, and I just find it very, disconcerting. I I wish I could look back, all the way to when I began, and D S is really the only thing we have, to accommodate, that browsing backwards, in your search. <PAUSE:04> yeah?                                                             (L1: 3:194)

In (5.1), S1 is discussing the good points of non-online revising. In supporting her claim, S1 gives an example as to how an analogue printout can be more advantageous to Telnet (a network protocol). To further reinforce the argument, she gives an example in turn 194 about why she thinks it can be more helpful. Assuming that there might be some disagreement, she prefers to use 2 vague words consecutively to defend herself against being wrong. *I guess, maybe* means she might be wrong and there might be other reasons for preferring these kinds of revisions.

(5.2)

This extract is a discussion between eight CSLE participants over sixteen turns. They are discussing what the teaching job involves and what is required to be a good teacher.

S3: I think, in one word, the most important thing about teaching is, huh, teaching, teach, teach students how to be a man, yeah.                           (Ch: 7: 143)

S9: I have an opinion. Huh, I want, I think if you want to be a good teacher, you have to be three Ps.                                                          (Ch: 7: 144)

Ss: <Laugh>.                                                                (Ch: 7: 145)

S2: Be patient, profession?                                                 (Ch: 7: 146)

S9: Performance.                                                            (Ch: 7: 147)

S4: Performance, yeah.                                                      (Ch: 7: 148)

S6: Passion.                                                              (Ch: 7: 149)
S2: Three Ps. Patience, passion, and performance.                          (Ch: 7: 150)

S1: What about you?                                                        (Ch: 7: 151)

S8: Yes, patience is an important factor. Many students pay more attention to you, in your class. Therefore your class is efficient I think. I think this is very important.

(Ch: 7: 152)

S7: I think, huh, I don't think passion is a very important thing because I think passion is a temporary thing which cannot exist long. I think we should choose what we like, and what we love. Yes, it is the most important.                          (Ch: 7: 153)

S5: To be a teacher is maybe very easy, **maybe** not, **maybe** very difficult. It is all up to you and, huh, hope you have a bright future.                              (Ch: 7: 154)

S6: What kind of job do you think, the, the teachers, what kind of job? Very honourable or very boring, simply as, huh, as stable job? Huh.                        (Ch: 7: 155)

S5: Different people have different answers.                               (Ch: 7: 156)

S6: What about you?                                                        (Ch: 7: 157)

As is clear in (5.2), the discussion begins with a moral view on teaching job by S3 in turn 143 and proceeds with S9 mentioning three criteria as three Ps required for being a good teacher. Following S8's confirmation of one of the required factors in turn 152, S7 through *I don't think* in 153 very softly expresses disagreement with the criterion *passion* as a required element, but proposes *love* as the replacement for this criterion. Like S7, S5 disagrees on the referred criterion. She first claims it is very easy to be a teacher in turn 154, but quickly uses a vague expression *maybe* in the negative form to protect herself against the opposing views. S5 in turn 154 finds it insufficient and right away adopts an opposite view, stating that it "*maybe* very difficult". Even the two-sided view is reinforced by "it is up to you", implying that the speaker is going to attribute the validity (truthfulness) of her claim to the would-be teacher's discretion. In other words, the last segment of S5's utterance can be interpreted as the fact that the speaker means to protect herself against any responsibility the utterance may bring her.

(5.3)

This is a discussion between 2 participants of PSLE over five turns. They are discussing democracy and freedom. S3 is trying to convince S2 that the U.S.A is no different from the other countries as long as freedom is concerned but S2 argues that the U.S.A is still ahead of many countries.

S3: Don't say 'but' look I know if you want to say something, you get punished in this place, Ok? The knowledge that you see, the people that you see, it is accepted. What you see to happen. But over there, there is no excuse. When you say to yourself this is supposed to be the land of freedom, these people are supposed to know everything. Ok? Then you see abuses there....come and see what they do with, come and see what the story is over there. Find out about Mc Donald's story, find out about Rockefeller, what he did or he raised all the crisis in South because there was competition and in the north there was all his , he raised the High Street Times, ok guys. Find out about John F Kennedy. Then you can see, hey, this is not Rafsanjani. Yes.                    (P: 1: 499)

S2: But.                                                                                                (P: 1: 500)

S3: But.                                                                                                (P: 1: 501)

S2: But, you know this level of intellectuality if I am right, you know here if we have the maximum, one hundred, ok? I think in Iran it is twenty. **I think I don't know** European countries maybe it is thirty but it is much more. Ok? Maybe it is fifty. I agree. **Maybe** it is the same as here but there are differences.                    (P: 1: 502)

S3: By the way, at the beginning of what you say, OK? There was George W Bosh's Autobiography 'All the vaila' . I guess it is. It is a good movie. You have to see. It is a true story.                                                                    (P: 1:502)

In the case of (5.3), self-protection manifests itself in the PSLE interaction more dominantly, as the PSLE uses several devices to protect himself against being wrong. S2 initially uses "if I am right" to indicate that he may be wrong and smoothly tries to express contrast. As he proceeds, he opts for more self-protection devices and uses double devices "I think, I don't know" insisting the conservative position. S2 even finds this degree of protection insufficient and uses *I agree* but then using *maybe* as another self-protection device emphasises the contrast, again. What is distinct in this example is that emphasising his own stand, the speaker is zigzagging between the contrasts through multiple self-protection

devices. On the one hand, S2 attempts to highlight his own view, and on the other, S2 tries to reserve the room for protection in case the opposite is proven right.

## 5.1.2 Politeness

When we speak, there are certain linguistic choices we make, which indicate the social relationship that is perceived to exist between the interlocutors. One such phenomenon can arise in expressing politeness. "Politeness as it is understood in linguistics involves more than the common-sense notion of politeness as the conventionalized observance of certain social norms which spell out the appropriate ways of, thanking or greeting" (Nikula, 1996, p. 92). Politeness is mainly associated with Brown and Levinson's (1978, 1987, 1994) politeness theory which stands on the pillar called 'face' raised by Goffman (1967).

Face is defined as "the public self-image that every member wants to claim for himself" (Brown & Levinson, 1978, p. 66). Each individual needs to look after the face of others in case they are seeking their face to be maintained. In other words, the interactants need to mutually look after each other's face. Face in Brown and Levinson's politeness theory is divided into 2 separate but related categories; *positive face* and *negative face*. The former deals with the individual's desire to be liked and appreciated by others while the latter "concerns a person's want to be unimpeded and free from imposition" (Tracy, 1990, p.210). In other words, positive-face deals with the desire for approval, while negative-face concerns desire for autonomy.

There is also the concept of *face-threatening act* which occurs when communication "runs contrary to the face wants of the addressee and/or the speaker" (Brown & Levinson, 1978, p. 70). VL manifests in this concept of politeness theory whereby "vagueness is used as one way of adhering to the politeness rules for a particular culture, and of not threatening face" (Channell, 1994 , p. 190). Ruzaitė more specifically refers to quantifiers as "a politeness strategy to minimize face-threat" (2007, p.183).

Positive politeness strategies aim at satisfying participants' needs for approval, and hence include things like exaggerating agreement with the interlocutors, showing interest, and noticing the hearer's wants and needs. Negative politenesses strategies help satisfy participants' need for autonomy by indicating the speaker's reluctance to impose on others' territory and to restrain their freedom of action. Being indirect, using hedges, and veiling responsibility by the use of impersonal forms are examples of negative politeness strategies (Nikula, 1996, p.93).

Furthermore, Brown and Levinson (1983) and Aijmer (1997) maintain that one of the manifestations of politeness strategy occurs in the use of *I think* that fulfils the function of mitigating face threat.

Politeness theory has been criticised on grounds such as concentrating too much attention on the speaker, devaluing the listener and also that rather than looking at the 'cultural and situational appropriateness', it has been excessively centred around universality of politeness (Eelen, 2001; Trappes-Lomax, 2007). This study takes the position of Brown and Levinson (1978) in treating politeness. Below are examples of how VL performs politeness functions in the three data sets.

(5.4)

This is a discussion between five L1 speaker participants over eleven turns. The speakers are talking about the rules applied to what kinds of pictures can appear in newspapers, what criteria allow their publications and the checklists that specify if they can be printed out.

S12: Well if you can't identify whose body it is it's not really so much an invasion of privacy.                                                                 (L1: 1:447)

S1: Mhm. Okay, lots of times, a picture of a body uh, you don't see the, the face, [S12: yeah ] you know, either it's covered or just the angle, s- you just see a, you know, a

form. [S12: yeah. ] um, so there's the question of the distance. What about uh, related to that is how it's played, right the play of the photo what, what does the book say about that? I think that's in there isn't it? On the checklist? See it on the checklist or in one of the case studies. is there anything about how the photograph is played questions they ask about how it's played? (L1: 1:448)

S13: Didn't it say something like if it was, pl- like, under the fold it's not in the checklist but didn't it say something like it's, not as harmful? (L1: 1:449)

S1: Yeah you're right um, I think there's another checklist, after the first checklist. um, page two-twelve. (L1: 1:450)

S12: Oh that's right (L1: 1:451)

S1: This was the checklist, [S13: oh ] after the um. [S5: oh, yeah ] the campus tragedy.

(L1: 1:452)

S5: Instructional value? (L1: 1:453)

S1: Instructional value, mhm. Is it **possible** to present the image in such a way that it reflects, its instructional value without inflicting undue emotional distress? So present the image that could I- get involved in the play, whether it's on the front page how big it is, so forth. Um, and, point four is very important disclosure what's what's that about and why is that so important? Yeah? (L1: 1:454)

S16: You have to be able to justify why you put the picture in in the first place, [S1: mhm ] to the readers. (L1: 1:455)

S1: So can you remember from, some of the case studies for today any examples of where, there was an explanation that was, given? (L1: 1:456)

S16: The wasn't the, middle finger one, [S1: Yup] in the, the one paper a couple of them wrote the, right there to the reader, [S1: mhm ] on why they printed it and then there was one that didn't, that got like the most complaints and the one asked for feedback from, all the readers saying, [S1: okay ] (that wanted their) opinions. (L1: 1:457)

The participants go through each criterion one by one. S12's comments on invasion of privacy are not a statement but a request for further clarification. S1 seems to possess the right knowledge about this and he tries to be politely refusing or expressing disagreement with S12 without using any direct VL when in turn 448 he gives examples of situations in which S12's idea is not acceptable. When

S5 raises the issue of instructional value in turn 453, using the phrase 'is it possible', S1 in turn 454 makes a polite request for presenting the image of the dead body in a way that it mainly addresses the instructional value rather than provoke the readers emotions. He even tries to drop some hints by giving the size and again refers to another point.

(5.5)

This is a discussion between 2 CSLE participants over seven turns. They are discussing EFL learning and the weaknesses associated with it in China. Both participants are students.

S3: I asked some students, teachers and my foreign friends. It is just, you have, huh; you don't have, huh, learning a foreign language atmosphere. You have to create it just every day; look at the foreign newspaper first and, huh, you'll speak something. You should think it in English and then speak it. They just told us we should build atmosphere for us. And, huh, we just, hu, listen to something just like BBC, VOA which is familiar for us. But I think that's not enough, we need more chance to, to actually practice it because language is, huh, like our mother tongue. Why can't we speak so fluently? Because we speak every day, every time, every minute, every second. So we are familiar with most of it, so it is really, it is not really easy for us. Not just, huh, like English, or French. We even have no chance in class. We speak English but after class or after school we speak Chinese or our mother tongue. So our oral English is not very well and even we can't, we can't catch up with the foreigners who speak just five years Chinese. When I am in 'Expo' American exhibition, there's a handsome, handsome boy.

(Ch: 4:146)

S1: <Laugh> Handsome.                                                    (Ch: 4:147)

S3: Yeah, he is really handsome.                                         (Ch: 4:148)

S1: He speaks Chinese very well. When I asked how long have you, have you, have you studied for Chinese? Just five years. She, he said to me Chinese is really hard, harder than English. I said oh really? I think it's really easy. She said it's your mother tongue, so you say it's really easy Maybe and I said as our Chinese students, maybe, huh, we have studied English from our elementary school, right?                    (Ch: 4:149)

Class: Yes.                                                              (Ch: 4:150)

S3: But our English is not very good. Maybe that is a question. That is the focus and our school and even elementary school are, huh, **maybe** the department of education

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should pay attention to this part. This is really important. Our study of English is not just, huh, pass the exam. Huh, actually, we should know how to use it and we should we can be a fluent; we can communicate with us, with our friends, our friends and travellers easily. I think that is our destiny when we choose English as our majors, right.

(Ch: 4:151)

S1: I find, huh, I find a terrific video about how to improve our oral English. I' I think it can help you. (Ch: 4:152)

As can be seen in (5.5), S3 is explaining what an ideal L2 learning situation should be like. The first factor she names is the atmosphere and states that it can be created by the learner, like reading the foreign newspaper and listening to BBC or Voice of America (VOA) but she finds it insufficient and refers to lack of the opportunity to speak English as the main reason for the lack of fluency in English. S1 then narrates an experience by a foreign speaker of Chinese who speaks Chinese fluently after five years. S3 then tries to justify why they do not make much progress in learning English. Using *maybe* in turn 51, she is very politely blaming the Department of Education and criticising how English is perceived to be. The criticism is directed towards the exam-oriented approach in language pedagogy in Chinese education system, whereas she believes the ability to communicate should be the goal of learning English in this country.

(5.6)

This is a discussion between 4 PSLE participants over eighteen turns. They are discussing the advantages and disadvantages of modern life.

S6: Ok, now the advantages and disadvantages of modern life. I can say, there are goals, for example, disadvantage can be that people's life is gonna be (xx) can say. These people are being somehow like robots. (P: 4:152)

S2: Brainwashed. (P: 4:153)

S6: Yes, that now they sit somewhere, they can do everything. By sitting somewhere and just working with the computer, not being in variety or somewhere like this. About that question that is it good or not, about this aspect it is not good, of course, but about the advantages that people are getting more knowledge about. (P: 4:154)

S2: Different cultures. (P: 4:155)

S6: Yes, and huh (pause) the nature they are living in. They are getting more knowledgeable and they are knowing themselves too, so by this respect, it can be good for them because they're finding themselves and things like this. For example, Abed says that maybe in the future we can be sure that there is no difference between people and animals, just maybe the face, you know, you can see that people thought that men are somebody and women are somebody else. They are not like each other, but they are getting to know that, we are the same in a lot of ways. They are human and we are the same. You know, it's an example that we are faced with, we had in our life. You have proved it. (P: 4:156)

S2: Ok. (P: 4:157)

S1: By this example. You mean? (P: 4:158)

S6: You know. I mean that totally I mean it can be good, it can be bad. We cannot say that it isn't good. (P: 4:159)

S10: You know, Can I say **something**? (P: 4:160)

S1: Sure. (P: 4:161)

S10: Ok. About what Maryam said. I agree with Maryam but we know we are going to know lots of things. We are getting lots of knowledge, but unfortunately, I think are drowned in lots of knowledge what we are going to and this is a problem again; knowing lots of knowledge, having lots of knowledge. (P: 4:162)

S2: Which one is wrong and which one is right? (P: 4:163)

S1: Yes. (P: 4:164)

S10: Knowing without having an aim. We have knowing that why we know this and a-.

(P: 4:165)

S2: You know advertising to...that flash colour. Sometime it is easy to be cheered. What's good could look good and what is wrong could look right. (P: 4:166)

S10: Exactly, but it is not correct in all fields. For example, in scientific a- (P: 4:167)

S2: The basic knowledge. (P: 4:168)

S10: Yeah, we should have a lot of knowledge but some fields just like religious fields. You know it isn't good to have a lot of knowledge because it makes you to be I don't know. (P: 41:169)

The discussion begins as a two-sided argument first, with S6 counting 'access to lots of knowledge' as a merit. As the conversation goes on, S10 in turn 160 very politely tries to join in, using "Can I say something". *Something* here may imply that she means to be not expressing agreement. When it comes to her, in turn 162 again to show her politeness, S10 states "I agree with Maryam" (S6), but immediately opposes her, counting what was taken as a good point "getting lots of knowledge" by S6 as a demerit in her own argument. It seems that although *something* may generally appear to be neutral in terms of the speaker's position, it can in this context imply the speaker's position; that an opposing view is to be expressed.

## 5.1.3 Downtoning

*Downtoners* or *detensifiers* (Hübler, 1983) are what Prince et al. (1982) have called *adaptors*. Blum-Kulka, House and Kasper (1989) define *downtowners* as "Sentential or propositional modifiers which are used by a speaker in order to modulate the impact his/her request is likely to have on the hearer" (p.284). They include words such as *a bit*, *a little*, *a little bit* and so on. Jucker et al. (2003) state "[t]hey introduce vagueness into a proposition or increase the degree of vagueness of an utterance" (p. 1746). They also claim that *downtowners* are used when speakers find that an available word does not adequately cover the meaning they have in mind.

Pearson (1998, p. 103) states "[f]requently used downtowners are adverbials, (e.g. just), modal *can*, and non-factive predicators ( e.g. *one way of defining a ... is*)". Furthermore, Wu et al. (2010) maintain that *mitigators* such as *probably* and *maybe* may follow *I think* giving a much stronger downtoning function to it. Ruzaitė (2007) also adds that " The quantifiers *(a) little*, *a bit* and *a little bit*

minimise the force of verbs and downtone the intensity of adjectives" Below are three examples of how downtoning is used by the three groups of speakers.

(5.7)

This is a discussion between 2 L1 speaker participants over three turns. They are discussing on-line revision on a new system and a problem one of the participants experienced. It seems to be an interaction between a teacher and a student.

S1: Or your, okay. Well I'll take a look at e- you know, it's good_ did you realize then when you were online when you did that or after you signed off and you, stewed about it for a while?                                                    (L1: 3:192)

S14: After I stewed a little while. <SS: LAUGH>                                    (L1: 3:193)

S1: Okay and, this is sometimes typical, when you're first learning how to search. That's why I try to say don't revise online, because sometimes it does take you a little while to sort of figure out, what exactly did I go wrong, where I wound up with, zero or I wound up with, thirty thousand, you know sometimes, when you're online it's just too hard to assess that. [S14: yeah unfortunately ] yeah I sort of like the old days, I guess maybe I'm just one of those, analog print people, when we had these long printouts, and you could look through that long printout while you were online. Now with this awful, Telnet, animal, you can only really look back **a few** screens, and I just find it very, disconcerting. I,I wish I could look back, all the way to when I began, and D S is really the only thing we have, to accommodate, that browsing backwards, in your search. <PAUSE:04> yeah?

(L1: 3:194)

In example (5.7), S1 tries to track down the problem to find how it all originated by asking a question. She then states that it is a common problem and she had warned them about it by asking them not to do any online revision. She also notifies the class of the extra time needed as the consequence of online revision. Then S1 in turn 194 engages in comparing the old system with the new system and gives preference to the old system as it provides the user with a more convenient service, long printouts, while she tries to undervalue the new system by downtoning the significance of the service it provides as just allowing to go back "**a few** screens". This downtoning of the effectiveness of service is then turned into an explicit criticism as 'disconcerting'.

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(5.8)

This is a discussion between four CSLE participants over six turns. They are talking about songs and singers and how songs can be used in English language learning.

S5: Can you show us a song? (Ch: 6: 18)

S1: No, no, no. I maybe listen to those women singers but they really are, good, very beautiful but it is hard for me to sing. (Ch: 6: 19)

S2: I want to introduce some singers to you just like, huh, Britany. She has some songs like' every time'. It is so slow and beautiful. Once I wanted to train my listening, and it is good to train my listening. And if you want to improve a high level, you may, you may. Of course, it is just my suggestion, choose some rap. (Ch: 6: 20)

S1: Rap? (Ch: 6: 21)

S2: It is **a little** slow, a slow rap, not so quick. I found it just like Brittany's Circus, although it is very fast. I like 'New (xx). It is very fast. The speed is very fast but (xx) I don't know how many times you have, you have heard it. Huh, you will feel it is not slow. Huh, it is not fast at all and you can hear at your work clearly. I think it is also a good way. It is up to you what kind of music you like. (Ch: 6: 22)

S3: Yeah, I think it is, it is a way to enjoy life and some days I told me that, huh, you, it's necessary for everybody to learn to sing a song very well and, huh, only I like' Terry Sif'. Yeah, I think her songs are very beautiful. (Ch: 6: 23)

In (5.8), S5 asks S1 to sing them a song but S1 declines this request. S2 in turn 20 tries to introduce some singers to others and recommends rap as an appropriate music to improve their listening skill. S1in the next turn asks for confirmation by uttering 'Rap?'. This confirmation can mean either that rap is not slow enough to be appropriate for language learning purposes or that S1 is not familiar with rap and needs to make sure if it really is appropriate to be used for language learning purposes. Assuming the first possibility and the assumption that S2 may disagree and oppose S1's view, S2 in turn 22 immediately tries to adjust the reply to the

possible disagreement by S1 and uses the downtoner *a little* to soften the adjective *slow*, meaning that it is not as fast as other rap music but indicates that it is not very slow. This *downtoner* seems to function as the point of departure of a continuum, starting with *a little slow*, continuing to *slow rap* and ending in *not so quick*. It seems the *downtoner* allows the speaker to make a contradictory statement, as S1 believes the listener feels the music S2 names is not slow, but she feels it actually is not fast, contrary to what she mentioned earlier.

(5.9)

This is a discussion between two PSLE respondents over five turns. They are discussing the structure of a government.

S7: Ok, I think there is something about this country. You know for sure I, I am agree with the previous regime, Shah and the King, huh, hundred percent, hey, I think they were wrong and I guess even now but there is, huh, **a little** chance that if we changed ourselves at that time, we changed ourselves, we could improve because they changed the rules. (P: 1: 440)

S3: Infrastructure. (P: 1: 441)

S7: Yup, but there is some basis for building structures, building, building a house. You know, you cannot build a two-story building on some weak basis. (P: 1: 442)

S3: They set the rules. (P: 1: 443)

S7: Yes, nowadays, and nowadays we have such a basis. We cannot improve on this, with this, with this government. You know? Huh, (P: 1: 444)

In example (5.9) S7 expresses his overall agreement with what the previous regime, the Kingdom, did. He even highlights it with the expression *one hundred percent*. S7 in turn 440 uses the downtoner *a little* before *chance* to underline his overall view that even changing themselves would lead to unsatisfactory improvement, due to the changes in rules that occurred. S3's contribution does not convince S7 and he believes some more examples will be needed. In turn 442, he gives the example of building a house to show that for everything some preparation is needed. To show this he refers to a building that needs to have a strong foundation. To magnify the point, the speaker again adopts two opposing

views, *a two storey building* and *the weak basis.* The weak basis is shown in a weaker form by *some* occurring before it. In turn 444, he continues that the country does not have a strong position in the world. Therefore, making improvements seems far from reality.

## 5.2 Right amount of information

This category of VL function is mainly associated with Grice's (1975) maxim of quantity (Channell, 1994). It consists of two parts "1. Make your contributions as informative as is required (for the current purposes of exchange). 2. Do not make your contribution more informative than is required" (Grice, 1975, p.173). Therefore, VL is one of the devices speakers can use to tailor their contributions (Channell, 1994). The category *Right amount of information* is subcategorised into *approximation and quantification*, *emphasising*, and *possibility*.

### 5.2.1 Approximation and quantification

VL preforms the functions of *approximation* and *quantification* when the speaker realises that precision is not necessary and the like. Crystal and Davy (1975) report *non-numerical quantifiers* that are used without any kinds of numbers. Carter and McCarthy (2006, p.919) introduce two classes of quantifiers: closed class consisting of *all*, *some*, *many*, *much*, *few*, *little*, *several*, *enough*; open class comprised of *a lot of*, *plenty of*, *large amounts of*, *a bottle of*, *two loaves of*. Channell (1994) believes *non-numerical quantifiers* help create implicature and thus avoid breaking the maxim of quantity.

Below are examples of how VL can perform approximation and quantification functions by the three groups of participants in this study.

(5.10)

This is a discussion between two L1 speaker participants over eight turns. They are discussing ERIC (Education Resources Information Centre) and web searching.

S15: I don't know I just, my experience in searching in general in other systems has been that, usually, people don't wanna wave through to the end. They're gonna look at the first ten depending on, you know what their needs are. (L1: 3:141)

S1: This is actually a re- real important point. Why should it not matter in this case-searching Dialog? (L1: 3:142)

S15: Cuz everything, should be, as good, as the beginning searches. (L1: 3:143)

S1: Right. There is no ranking, using Dialog. at least, this classic, Dialog or Dialog Classic that we're using. a Dialog does have another system called I believe, Freestyle. which does do **some** ranking. okay? but I think it only gives you the first fifty or, whatever. Oh we may get to that or you may wanna do that for one of you s- uh search reports. yeah?

(L1: 3:144)

S15: so is that okay? (L1: 3:145)

S1: That's it? Okay, good what facets did you have? (L1: 3:146)

S15: I had three facets, I did pregnancy, um, teenagers and dropping out. [S1: okay ] and then I expanded under each of those and I didn't, have as many under pregnancy, um, I limited it to, pregnancy slash D F and pregnant students. um may (L1: 3:147)

S1: Okay, I, I would suggest to you, that there are **some more** [S15: okay ] like unwed mothers, and early childhood or early parenthood or whatever it was, that there some others to use. [S15: okay ] and, since there are so **few**, I would add more. [S15: okay ] on the other hand you got sixty citations so it didn't necessarily hurt but if you wanna be more comprehensive, you wanna add more descriptors. any other experiences on the search? Yeah (L1: 3:148)


In example (5.10), S15 seems to be comparing his experience using two different searching systems. The expression *other systems* he uses in turn 141 can indicate that the system he is talking about is to some extent different from other systems. He then gives an overall view of how other systems are used, in general, by others. The way he speaks gives the impression that he is not for this new search system and speaks in favour of the other general ones, but S1 seems to be trying to underline the benefits the new system can offer by asking a question in turn 142 that makes this option stand out. In supporting the system, S1 in turn 144 tries to imply that the old system still has drawbacks even if it involves ranking by stating

that it gives only the first fifty items. She even tries to extend the privileges of the search system when S15 explains the three facets he had and could not get sufficient sources for one item. Her expression of *some* in turn 148 directly emphasises the quantity of facets she could have used. This can be viewed in the examples she gives through *like* and even emphasises this by *or whatever it was* in turn 148. She is reinforcing the quantification by giving examples and also using *or whatever*.

(5.11)

This is a discussion between three CSLE participants over three turns. The participants are discussing public transport in Beijing and Shanghai.

S5: What about transportation in Beijing?                                    (Ch: 4:94)

S1: The transportation is, huh, is convenient but, huh, there are **many, lots of** people and every time, every place, you just stand, it just is just very tight.                  (Ch: 4:95)

S3: This is similar, is similar to /shanghai. When I, last year I travelled to Shanghai, it is, it is a holiday maybe I forgot. The subway is full of people and everybody's expression is similar. They're just not talking, no speaking, just standing or sitting there. And think them, about themselves and not like' Tingwang' or' Tangwang', people very friendly. Maybe when we get on the bus, we will talk with each other. They don't. I am not. I am not get accustomed with it.                                    (Ch: 4:96)

In example (5.11), replying to S5's question, S1 looks at public transport in Beijing from two different perspectives. The first seems to be her evaluation of the facilities and the physical aspects of the transport such as the timetable, the frequency of the transport, while the other aspect is linked to the congestion of passengers on the public transport. This overcrowding is described in turn 95 by vague quantifiers *many* and *lots of* that are used to refer to large numbers or quantities. S1 assumes there is no need to specify the number but roughly reflects this quantification. S3 confirms S1's claim in turn 96 and also expresses agreement over S1's statement. He finds it similar to Shanghai and confirms S1's approximate quantification by pointing to the fact that the subways are overcrowded.

(5.12)

This is a conversation between 4 PSLE participants over ten turns. They are talking about the disaster that occurred in Hiroshima during the World War II and what happened after that in Japan.

S3: American for destroying Hiroshima and killing hundred fifty thousand people and the nicest deal about Hiroshima history. If you ever have the chance to go read the life, the biography of the six people that threw the bombs down, you see what happened to them.

(P: 1: 172)

S4: They all kill themselves. (P: 1: 173)

S3: That is very interesting. Ok? America helped Japan to rebuild itself. (P: 1: 174)

S2: What happened to them? (P: 1: 175)

S3: America helped Germany to rebuild itself. (P: 1: 176)

 S2: What happened? (P: 1: 177)

S4: They killed themselves. (P: 1: 178)

S2: They committed a suicide? (P: 1: 179)

 S3: **Some** of them died*. **Some** of them got killed. The one who was supposed to throw the bombs didn't like to do that to happen, so these guys threw the bombs.    (P: 1: 180)

S4:  It wasn't the first time. They didn't know its war; they are doing it to kill, maybe. They (xx) one hundred people died. (P: 1: 181)

In example (5.12), asked about the destiny of the pilots, S3 shows the quantification by using *some* in turn 180. This is where he assumes this quantification can best fit the context, rather than the exact number given.

## 5.2.2 Emphasising

Most of the intensifiers perform the emphasising function. Intensifiers have been referred to as *boosters* (Holmes, 1990; Hyland, 2000).   What is noticeable in the study of boosters is the fact that they are most of the time studied in comparison

with hedges (Holmes, 1990; Bradac, Mulan, & Thompson, 1995; Hyland 2000). Investigating the functions of some boosters in writing, Hyland states "Boosters like *clearly, obviously* and *of course* allow writers to express conviction and to mark their involvement and solidarity with an audience." (2000, p. 179).

Besides the intensifiers (boosters)/ hedges dichotomy available in the literature, gender related studies on the application of these vague words make a substantial contribution to the study of VL (Holmes 1990; Bradac, Mulan, & Thompson, 1995). Holmes' work shows, contrary to what Lakoff (1972) claimed, significant differences in the function of different boosters by male and females in the literature. Bradac, Mulan, and Thomson (1995) believe that women show more consistency in using intensifiers than men. This has been supported by other studies as well (McMillan, Clifton, McGrath, & Gale, 1977; Mulac & Lundell, 1986; Mullac, Lundel, & Bradac, 1986; Mulac, Wienann, Widemann, & Gibson, 1988).

Wright and Hosman (1983) claim the overuse of intensifiers by female speakers brings more interactiveness on their side in communication. Even the context of communication has been claimed to contribute to difference in the language used. Bradac et al. (1995) discuss that women use more intensifiers when talking to women but more hedges when talking to men.

Ruzaitė (2007) maintains intensification can also be expressed through quantifiers. For instance, multal quantifiers can emphasise a large quantity or long periods of time. The other possible ways to add emphasis, Ruzaitė states, are repeating the same quantifier (*lots and lots*) or placing an intensifying premodifier (*really*) in front of a quantifier. Below are examples of how intensifiers have been used to fulfil emphasising functions. The examples are not gender-specific but are viewed from culturally and linguistically distinct perspectives.

(5.13)

This is a discussion between five L1 speaker participants over four turns. They are discussing the death of a race car driver and the safety rules applied to race car driving.

S3: Is there any posi- possible cause of death? I mean, if you s- you, I saw it on T-V. So, you see just, crash. I mean and he was one of the top, race car drivers right? And so I mean it.                                                                                      (L1: 1:38)

S1: So o- I mean obviously [S3: why do they need them ] his death was caused by the crash so that's not the question [S7: they're b- ] the ques- the question is what aspect of the crash specifically caused his death?                                              (L1: 1:39)

 S6: There were a lot of questions about the type of restraints um, what s- [S2: (like how to change) ] like there're **so many** different seat belts and there's certain ones, yeah.

(L1: 1:40)

S1: Like how did it start? What happened to him at the moment of, impact? Which part of his body, made contact with,                                                       (L1: 1:41)

In excerpt (5.13), the discussion begins with a broad question by S3 like the possible cause of death, but S1 in turn 39 tries to narrow the question down by mainly asking about the specific aspect of the crash that caused the death. S6 also keeps narrowing it down to issues related to restraints and as he proceeds, he restricts it further and arrives at a particular aspect. Once the reasons for the crash have been restricted through *so* (*many*) in turn 40, S6 tries to emphasise the diversity of seat belts available and attempts to indicate that it was the seat belt that caused the death. This emphasis arouses curiosity in S1 as to how it all happened and what happened first.

(5.14)

This is a discussion between 4 CSLE participants over 4 turns. They are discussing university and university life.

S1: In fact, these prestigious universities provide many, huh, opportunities to many students. They can do different volunteering things, but in smaller cities maybe we have, huh, less such activities. (Ch: 4:120)

S3: My friends in Jason University, in holidays, they are only at home five days, so after that they will go back to school. They were study hard, huh. For example, TOFO and do some experiment, huh, do many experiences about school. So it is **very**, they are **very** busy and, and. They are, life is **very** full. (Ch: 4:121)

S4: I think our university life is boring. It is **too** boring. It is **really** boring. Just study and, huh, study, study. We have no to, we have no chance to. Ok, I want to be a volunteer and to, huh. (Ch: 4:123)

S5: We have no chance. (Ch: 4:124)

In example (5.14), S1 points to an advantage prestigious universities can offer to their students like volunteering jobs to prepare them for their careers. S3 in turn 121 mainly refers to how hardworking students at such universities need to be and towards the end of her statement, she uses *very* 3 times to emphasise studying at such universities. S4 comments on their university life and expresses her dissatisfaction with the university life by using double intensifiers to overwhelmingly emphasise the negative aspect of their university life. The emphasis is demonstrated by "it's too boring. It's really boring". In turn 123, S4 continues with expressing the same idea in different words, this time the emphasis is shown differently from the last time. Rather than using an intensifier to emphasise the negative aspect, the speaker this times repeats the negativity 3 times to highlight it, "Just study, and, huh, study, study".

(5.15)

This is a discussion between 4 PSLE participants over seven turns. The discussion is on the responsibilities of being a parent. As an actual parent, S2 is giving details of requirements to be a good parent.

S3: As our parents had. For example, the problems that were between, the problems that were between my parents with their parents, huh, were more than our problems, ok? And in the future our problem will have less I think.                                    (P: 7:322)

S1: This generation is getting **more** aggressive.                                    (P: 7:323)

S2: Actually, I think your problem will **be worse**, not less.                                    (P: 7:324)

S5: Exactly.                                    (P: 7:325)

S2: You know nobody can know everything. He is right. Lack of information can cause problems. I believe personally being a parent comes with a great responsibility. You have to have **really, really**. You have to be **really** talented to be a parent and you have to have **lots of** responsibility. For example, if you want to have a child, you have to think over everything. You have to know a bit of psychology. You have to know a bit of, I don't know, whatever.                                    (P: 7:326)

S1: Sociology.                                    (P: 7:327)

S2: Sociology, yes. You have to be into politics. You have to know **lots of** things to be parent. Some people think it **really really** ideal a child is coming, is growing up, is as easy as that but it is not this, it is not this. I mean he is right. If his parents know about computer, maybe they would encourage him to do it. I mean my daughter was. Sorry if I keep examples of my children. I am just speaking of my experience.                                    (P: 7:328)

In example (5.15), S3 is of the idea that the gap between the new generations will be narrower and narrower as he gives examples between his parents' generation and his generation. But he is disagreed with by the next interlocutors when S1 uses the adjective "more (aggressive)" in turn 323 and is disapproved by S2 by "will be worse not less" in turn 324. *More* in S1's statement seems to perform a quantifying role but *worse* by S2 appears to be emphasising. S5 brings his reply in line with S1 and S2 by saying *exactly* in turn 325 which besides expressing agreement, emphasises the approval. S2 then adopts an emphatic approach, trying to address the problems facing parents and the responsibilities parents should feel. The first factor she counts, *talented*, is emphasised by the intensifier *really* and

then she refers to the broad concepts *responsibility* again and uses a quantifier, *lots of,* in turn 326 to emphasise it.

So in this discussion, first she refers to the broad concept "a great responsibility" and then gives an example of what it is, emphasising it by *really* and immediately shifts to the broad concept again but uses a different word to emphasise, *lots of*. This shift between intensifier and quantifier for emphatic purposes is also viewed in the next turn (328) by S2 where she uses the quantifier *lots of* to refer to what has to be known to be a parent, and then resorts to an intensifier to highlight the emphatic tone "*really really* ideal"

## 5.2.3 Possibility

Focusing on hedging in a medical context, Prince et al. (1982) examine possibility function under both approximators and shield.  In this study, this function serves to refer to different degrees of possibility.

(5.16)
This is a discussion between six L1 speakers of English over nine turns. They are discussing how social control works in the society and why people do what they do.

S1: Sure. I mean, I I mean, social control is obviously, not perfect, so um <PAUSE WHILE WRITING ON BOARD> so yo- so young people. Um what does that tell us about young people, um, if young people are more likely to say, steal something? You might wanna talk to her after class just to, find out what she's doing and, whether you wanna participate in it.                                                          (L1: 2:8)

SU-m: that's you.                                                                            (L1: 2:9)

S3: Me? Okay. <SS: LAUGH>                                                        (L1: 2:10)

S1: Um, okay so what does that, what does that tell us already, if if young people, are more likely to steal things than, than o- um, older people? Yeah.                    (L1: 2:11)

S4: Either that they're, more rebellious, or **maybe**, or just that they're not as accustomed to, society's norms yet.                    (L1: 2:12)

S1: Yeah that's, yeah, I mean, yeah rebellious, or, or not we, we could call it socialized, which basically just means they're not accustomed to society's norms yet. Yeah.

(L1: 2:13)

S2: Or they're just too young to understand the uh, consequences of, stealing

(L1: 2:14)

S1: Oh that's yeah, and this is important um, the consequences... somebody else have something they wanted to say?                    (L1: 2:15)

S5: There also like, isn't like as many consequences for them.                    (L1: 2:16)

S1: Yeah, that's true, I mean, um why do you think that there are not as many consequences? I mean why do, why do um, why does society_ why is our society set up so there won't be as many consequences?                    (L1: 2:17)


To discuss the topic in example (5.16), S1 chooses the example of a young person stealing something. S1 then continues after a couple of turns and raises an explicit question about whether young people are more likely to steal things than older people. S4's reply to the question in turn 12 contains two possibilities which seem to be opposite to each other, expressed through a correlative conjunction *either…….or….* and the vague possibility indicators *maybe*.


The first possibility attaches a negative characteristic to young people, describing them as 'rebellious', whereas the second one associates them with a softer attribute of inability to adapt themselves to the norms of society. S1 in turn 13 is attempting to approve S4 by reiterating the same ideas and the same possibilities but the device to refer to the possibility is *or* only. The same device is resorted to by S2 in turn 14 to refer to a possibility but a new possibility is introduced this time, which is being immature to understand the consequences of stealing.


(5. 17)

This is a discussion between two CSLE participants over twelve turns. S2 is describing what she is planning to do in her trip to Japan with her pen pal.

S2: My pen pal will come to see me, who is doing a course in Oriental studies. I will go along with her to Japan. (Ch: 1: 168)

S1: Wow, so it, sounds really interesting. How do you get along? (Ch: 1: 169)

S2: We'll **probably** use one of those very fast and poor trains to get there and then go by taxi or on foot. (Ch: 1: 170)

S1: Oh, it's a good choice and how do you go around? (Ch: 1: 171)

S2: On foot or by boat? (Ch: 1: 172)

S1: And, huh, what do you want to wear? (Ch: 1: 173)

S2: Huh, it depends on time of the year. I would want to go there in spring for the cherry blossom, so **probably** just jeans and a sweatshirt. I'd make sure I had a clean pair of, pair of, socks or and or some slippers shoes because I think you have to take off them when you visit the temples. (Ch: 1: 174)

S1: Yes, it is a good idea. What would you buy? (Ch: 1: 175)

S2: Nothing. Tourist things. I **might** buy an electronic gadget like a calculator. They're supposed to be cheap in there. (Ch: 1: 176)

S1: Huh, what would you eat and drink? (Ch: 1: 177)

S2: I'd look for 'Western Food' and **probably** end up eating at Mc Donalds. She can't stand row fish and she doesn't like rice much, either. (Ch: 1: 178)

S1: Oh, yes. How considerable! What essential items would you take with you?

(Ch: 1: 179)

In (5.17), S2 uses multiple possibility indicators as she is not yet sure if things will work out as planned and prefers to explicitly highlight this possibility in her talks. Turn 170 is a compound sentence with a possibility involved in each clause. The first possibility is indicated through *probably* which is applied to the main means of transport in "We'll **probably** use one of those very fast and poor trains to get there".

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The second possibility associated with the other means of transport is expressed through a possibility indicator, *or*, other than a vague possibility indicator. What can be inferred from turn 170 is that S2 uses *probably* as the number of options to choose from is not specified in the first part of the sentence but the doubt involved in the second means of transport reveals that *or* best fits the sentence. Turn 174 by S2 involves possibility as well. This possibility is expressed through *probably* which demonstrates that choice of cloth by S2 totally depends on the kind of weather. This can be confirmed by *so* in turn 174 which operates as a conjunction to express result and as they talk about the season for the visit precedes this conjunction, "**probably** just jeans and a T-shirt" is used as the reason for this possibility".

In reply to S1's question on what she is planning to buy. S2 in turn 176 again elevates possibility in her remarks but through a different word *might* this time. *Nothing* at the beginning of turn 176 cannot be interpreted as nothing literally, as S2 immediately continues with a broad category for shopping item "tourist things" can imply that the speaker has not yet made up her mind as to what to buy or has no need to provide a specific list.

What seems to be noticeable in S2's reply in turn 176 is that she initiates the possibility by being broad first and gradually narrows it down. "Tourist things" is too broad to be readily guessable by the listener. It is next narrowed by "electric gadget" but "gadget" is still a general term. It seems the speaker realises this broad terms may be an inadequate answer to the question and attempts to clarify it more by giving an example of what she means by gadget. The last part of the sentence looks at the reason for the possibility inherent in turn 176. This means the reason S2 prefers to give more possibility weight to this sentence is that she expects such devices to be cheap there, otherwise she may not buy them. As with the other two questions, the last question by S1 elicits a possibility involving answer. Possibility in S2's answer, "**probably** end up eating at McDonald's" in turn 178 is justified in two regards: S2 prefers "Western food", her pen pal does not like raw fish which is so common there.

(5.18)

This is a discussion between six PSLE participants over thirteen turns. They are discussing the non-face-to-face communication.

S7: It's easier when you write something or speak with someone; talk with someone on the phone. It's easier for you to talk some issues or problems that you cannot tell them face to face. (P: 2:75)

S1: Ok. Sometimes writing is much better, huh, when you cannot speak easily and speak some (P: 2:76)

S8: Problems and  a- . (P: 2: 77)

S9: But, it isn't common, you know, the writing. (P: 2:78)

S1: Ok, why in our daily life, sometimes we want to speak with each other, instead of saying directly, ok? (P: 2:79)

S9: Yes. (P: 2:80)

S1: We say to our partner. Ok. Go home I will call you, yes? Why? (P: 2:81)

S2: Because we are are ashamed of. (P: 2:82)

S8: Because by phone we can talk together easily. (P: 2:83)

S7: **Maybe** we want plenty of time to speak in a better condition, in. (P: 2:84)

S1: In a more relaxed situation**?** (P: 2:85)

S7: Yes. (P: 2:86)

S5: **Maybe** we need sometimes to prepare ourselves to say that. (P: 2:87)

S1: So these kinds of instruments help us. (P: 2:88)

In (5.18), S7 and S1 both agree that non-face-to-face communication is the most convenient, but in turn 78, S9 points out that it is not the most common method. Without expressing agreement or disagreement with S9, S1 in the next turn prefers to raise a question for preferring non-face-to-face communication. S2 and S8 immediately provide the answers using *because*. But the answers by S7 and S5 given in turns 84 and 87 are initiated with the possibility marker *maybe*.

## 5.2.4 Uncertainty

It seems that *lack of information* brings about *uncertainty*. Channell (1994) discusses *uncertainty* under *displacement* which occurs mostly when talking about past and future events. She also adds that there are instances which go beyond the tense constraints. Channell introduced *uncertainty* in the present as well. According to Channell (1994), examples which include *lack of information* can be associated with Grice's maxim of quality which is stated as "Do not say that for which you lack sufficient evidence" (1975, p.46). Channell in her above work also points out that VL is resorted to when due to *uncertainty* of the subject, lack of knowledge and vocabulary and the unequal relationship between the participants, the speaker feels stressed out.  Examples of how *uncertainty* is expressed through VL across the three data sets are discussed below.

(5.19)

This is a discussion between 4 L1 speaker participants over eleven turns. They are discussing an editorial on a crime.

S1: Hm. There're some more examples, from, the case studies yeah?          (L1: 1:466)

S12: Um the, the, the kid that got shot outside the convenience store [S1: mhm ] the editor, um, wrote wrote a, column was it the same day of the paper? I'm not sure, but he wrote a column explaining why they, [S1: yeah] why they ran it cuz at first he didn't wanna run it.                                                                               (L1: 1:467)

S1: You can actually see it, y- you can see the column, [S12: yeah ] tu- turn the page.

(L1: 1:468)

S12: Yeah, oh.                                                                          (L1: 1:469)

S1: Well it's in there somewhere **I don't know**.                               (L1: 1:470)

S12: Yeah yeah it's right here. Oh wait,                                           (L1: 1:471)

S1: Th-                                                                                 (L1: 1:472)

S12: No no no, that's not it.                                                         (L1: 1:473)

S1: I know that it's in there somewhere. I just saw it. Anybody r-            (L1: 1:474)

S5: (You can actually)                                                        (L1: 1:475)

S11: I mean it shows the,                                                     (L1: 1:476)

In (5.19), S1 asks about more examples and S12 refers to one that was published in the paper, but there is uncertainty as to where in the newspaper the column appears. In turn 468, S1 tries to help S 12 locate where it actually appears and asks him to turn the page but *somewhere* by S1 is indicative of approximation of the location of the article and the speaker tries to highlight the uncertainty of the position by using the final position *I don't know*. The double affirmative marker "yeah, yeah" in turn 471 by S12 indicates that he managed to spot it, but the word "wait" following agrees that S12's uncertainty was to the point. S12 again highlights the uncertainty and explicitly states that it is not the one. S1 then in turn 474 confirms S12's uncertainty regarding the exact positions where it appears by "it's in there somewhere".

 (5.20)

This is a discussion between three CSLE participants over two turns. They are discussing what they are planning to be doing in their future career.

S5: Shean, what are you going to do when you grow up?                          (Ch: 7: 9)

S1: Huh, when I was a small child, I always wanted to be a teacher. Maybe because teaching is the only profession I've seen and I've had this dream for about, huh, many years. But and I chose university teacher when I was in college. But, now, when I, huh, when I, huh, graduate from this university, I already have doubt that if I really want to be a teacher in the future, **maybe,** I will choose another job for me in a later time. What about you?                                                                        (Ch: 7: 10)

In (5.20), asked about her future job, S1 tries to demonstrate that there is a gap between her childhood dream job and the job she might persue in the future. This can be inferred from the reference to her childhood at the beginning of her

utterance. She even tries to highlight the transition from her childhood job to a partially different position by pointing to her career at college. When it comes to her favourite job currently, she shows her uncertainty about following her decision by saying "I already have doubt if I really want to be a teacher in the future". This uncertainty is reinforced by the following *maybe* where she explicitly talks of choosing a different job at a later stage in her life.

(5.21)

This is a discussion between five PSLE participants over twelve turns. They are discussing the reasons for cave paintings.

S1: And go to the past. Old time.  Why, for example, in cave now we found some pictures?

<div align="right">(P: 2:103)</div>

S3: Yes. (P: 2:104)

S1: Yes? You know what is the aim of this kind of pictures? In the cave? (P: 2:105)

S5: It's I think. (P: 2:106)

S1: By that writing they want to communicate with the next generation. (P: 2:107)

S7: Yes. (P: 2:108)

S1: yes? (P: 2:109)

S5: **I think** some parts of these pictures was some religious reason. (P: 2:110)

S1: Don't you think that these persons were alone and didn't have anybody to speak with them. Instead of speaking, they write something. (P: 2: 111)

S8: Because of they were alone, were must be artists. And their paintings in the cave show that ...for next generation. (P: 2:112)

S7: **Maybe** they wanted to transfer some kind of information which they had.  (P: 2:113)

S3: Culture. (P: 2:114)

In (5.21) S1 who raises the question of the reasons for cave drawings tries to answer it over the next few turns (107), but the answer does not seem to be literally the answer to the question. It seems to have been raised to initiate a discussion. This can be verified on the confirmation made by S7 in turn 108, which indicates that S1 has been exclaimed with S7's response and is expecting a more detailed reply. This strategy by S1 proves to be effective as S5 proceeds with a reply (religious reason) that contains some uncertainty (through *I think*). S1 again tries to elicit more response by making more points such as "feeling alone" as a reason for cave drawing. As the discussion proceeds, more reasons are come up with, thereby more uncertainty is revealed in replies, expressed through *maybe* by S7 in turn 113.

## 5.3 Structural function

Besides fulfilling a lexical function, VL can also facilitate the structural flow of information whereby it performs a strategic function in the communication process. Jucker et al. (2003, p. 1739) state "Vagueness is not an only an inherent feature of natural language but also-and crucially- it is an interactional strategy. Speakers are faced with a number of communicative tasks, and they are vague for strategic reasons".

There are different types of pragmatic functions relating to structural functions, most cases of which are the results of discourse management, lexical gap or insufficient competence. This category concerns the mechanics of communication. It examines the effect of such factors as lapses at discourse level, lexical gap and insufficient competence in communication and how they are coped with by the interactants.

Focusing mainly on *approximators* and *quantifiers* in academic contexts, Ruzaitė (2007, p. 187) finds out "Discourse management is especially important in academic discourse since metastatements with quantifiers help teachers organize discourse and make interrelations between the future, present and previous

discourse". Her analysis revealed two important patterns in which quantifiers contributed to discourse management. The first one called as *general-specific* which refers to a situation where a specific comment follows a generalisation with a quantifier, and the second one called *specific-general* is associated with a general comment following a specific comment.

Structural function in this section is studied under three subcategories: repairing, hesitation, and turn-management.

## 5.3.1 Repairing

The first structural function of VL examined is *self-repair*, also known as *self-correcting*. In a broad sense, the phenomenon of correction or repair is subcategorised into *self-correction* and *other correction*. The study of repair has been significantly influenced by the work of Schegloff, Jefferson and Sacks (1977) in which they introduced *repair sequences* as segments to the study of repairs. This sequence involves repair-initiating turn which is followed by a coming turn that creates the outcome of the repair that is referred to as *execution of repair* by Rutter (2008). Either participant in the conversation can produce the turns just referred to. Schegloff et al. (1977) divide repair sequence into four types summarised by Rutter (2008, p. 36) as:

(1) *Other-initiated other-repair.* When the recipient of the trouble source both initiates and executes its repair.

(2) *Other-initiated self-repair.* When the recipient of the trouble source initiates, or calls for, its repair but the architect of the trouble source executes the repair themselves.

(3) *Self-initiated other-repair.* When the architect of the trouble source is responsible for initiating the repair, but its outcome is brought about by the recipient.

(4) *Self-initiated self-repair.* When both initiation and execution of repair are carried out by the trouble source architect.

More specific VL-related investigations of repairs are associated with what Prince et al. ( 1982, p. 94) called *non-substantive self-repairs*. It involves *mere repetition* and *substantive self-repairs* that involve *the replacement of a word or a phrase*. Their study reveals frequent use of self-repairs in the physician-physician discourse, and confirms the frequent occurrence of *shields* in *self-repairs* than *approximators*.

Ruzaitė (2007) claims that the act of correcting occurs consciously and concludes that *quantifiers* and *approximators* are deliberately used in such contexts. She indicates that "Self-correction is an important aspect of classroom communication, where correctness is principal requirement" (ibid, p. 189).

Below are three examples of how VL performs the correction function among the three groups of participants.

(5.22) This is a discussion between three L1 speaker participants over eleven turns. They are discussing a crime case in which two ten-year-old boys who killed a two-year-old boy in England and how the court found them eligible to be released from the prison after eight years as a result of feeling remorseful. They are discussing how the boys are to be given new identities and a chance to begin a new life.

S1: This is anonymity in terms of their names right?                                     (L1: 1:4)

S2: Right                                                                                                (L1: 1:5)

S1: How about their, images, their faces? [S2: um they show a ] can can newspapers take pictures and publish the photograph without the name? Or is that not in the judge's ruling?                                                                                        (L1: 1:6)

S2: Um it didn't say, [S1: mhm ] but I mean it shows a picture of them when they were ten, and so **I guess** if you're like, if they look, **I don't know** about you but I look exactly the same as when I did when I was little, *<SS: LAUGH>* so it'd be really easy to tell.

S1: Well I have less hair than I, than (I did then.) *<SS: LAUGH>*     (L1: 1:8)

S2: So, um     (L1: 1:9)

S3: Was the initial sentence longer than eight years?     (L1: 1:10)

S2: Yeah the initial sentence was for fifteen years of [S3: oh okay ] detention, but um, [S1: (xx) a good time ] they switched it to eight years, so just until they were eighteen [S1: mhm ] and um, yeah so it doesn't **I mean I guess** they don't even I don't even think the papers know what these boys look like now, [S1: mhm ] and so there's a chance that they look nothing al- [S1: mhm ] alike and that they'll, live the rest of their lives in, anonymity or there's a chance that maybe people will figure it out, and **I don't_ it doesn't really** say what the papers are allowed and not allowed to do it just says that,

(L1: 1:11)

S1: Cuz cuz wherever they're living, you know let's say they're living in some town somewhere in England, once you publish the photograph anybody in the town that, sees that person on the street is gonna know who they are. [S2: right ] then you might as well publish their name because it, it then becomes public knowledge.     (L1: 1:12)

S2: Yeah I don't think that they've been, um press has been, granted access to them [S1: mhm ] so I don't know if people know it.     (L1: 1:13)

S1: But I just didn't know whether the judge specified image as well as name.     (L1: 1:14)

In (5.22), S1's question on the kind of anonymity of the criminals is asked in two parts. The first is associated with anonymity in terms of their names, but anonymity of their images seems to be to a certain extent controversial. S2 is trying to address the issue in turn 7 but she feels she needs to correct herself. S2 has two unsuccessful starts for the new chunk in the statement "if they're like, if they look" are both abortive.

The third start begins with a vague word *I don't know* which reveals that the speaker is correcting herself. S3 changes the direction of the conversation in turn 10 by asking the question whether the term of their sentence was more than eight

years. Answering S3's question in turn 11, S2 faces the same false start challenge as she makes a few corrections. "So it doesn't" is followed by *I mean* and *I guess* as correction markers until the speaker comes up with the appropriate start.

What follows these correction markers is still found to be inappropriate by the speaker and she feels the need to make another correction, but this time the speaker seems not to prefer to use a correction signal due to the frequent reference to this kind of marker in the previous sentences. In turn 11, **"I mean I guess** they don't even" is still found insufficient to express what the speaker (S2) means, so he adopts a different chunk "I don't even think" to correct himself without giving a clue that a modification in the structure is occurring. He then continues that the boys are still living in anonymity but expresses doubt that the anonymity can be maintained for the rest of their lives. To highlight this uncertainty, he resorts to another correction involving a vague expression of "and **I don't\_ it doesn't really** say" in turn 11, *really* here seems to highlight the shift in the structure rather than intensify the verb following it.

(5.23) This is a discussion between five CSLE participants over five turns. They are discussing what they are planning to be in the future.

S2: Yes, I agree with you. I'll try my best.                                        (Ch: 2:60)

S5: I am going to be educated further, huh, because during these years, my second degree is Chinese, so I want to be an editor, so I want to go to a newspaper office. Maybe, I want to be a teacher because you know, as a teacher the happiest thing is giving the knowledge you have learned to the, to your students and you, and you see them grow happily. So this is my goals.                                        (Ch: 2:61)

S3: I think I will find a job first. Maybe, it's very hard but just like 'Yung Fan' I think 'huh' the four years study really cost my parents so much and I really want to support myself. So if you, I can, **I think** I will find a job. I did, I don't know what kind of job I will get, so I have many plans. I really want to try different kinds of jobs. Since my mother is a teacher, she warns me to be a teacher, too. Huh, she thinks, huh, the teacher might be

suitable for me, is suitable for me. Maybe she is right, but I really want to try something new, something different. I don't know, I don't know what to do but maybe I will try something different. (Ch: 2:62)

S1: I think if the students can, if the kind, the child can be your student, they will be happy. (Ch: 2:63)

S6: I think I also will find a job first. I want to be a tourist guide because I want to travel very much. I have a dream. I can call travel China in ten years and all my life I can travel all the world. (Ch: 2:64)

In (5.23), S5 provides a more assertive answer to the future career question in comparison to S3. In turn 62, *I think* seems to have been used for the purpose of correction. It seems to have been used to compensate for the false start as in "So if you, I can, **I think** I will find". The speaker makes two false starts "so if you" being the first one followed by "I can" which is still found unsatisfactory by the speaker. He, thus, makes up for this inadequacy by *I think* to function as a correction marker. This is in line with what Wu et al. (2010) claim that *I think* can perform *self-repair* for Chinese EFL learners.

(5.24) This is a discussion between three PSLE participants over seven turns. They are discussing some social problems they experience in their daily life.

S3: That is the price that you have to pay for your own dignity. (P: 1:360)

S2: You. (P: 1:361)

S12: Abed, it is like that when you go to the nature. Ok? And you see every one threw out their garbage in the environment. Ok? Huh, you said that I want to change myself, I would not do that. Huh, maybe the others don't do that, but I **actually** it is you are saying it is about yourself, that's you did it. (P: 1:362)

S3: said it in an example. (P: 1:363)

S12: And maybe, and maybe. The others when they see you. (P: 1:364)

S2: They learn it. (P: 1:365)

S12: Yeah, they learn it. (P: 1:366)

In (5.24), S12's speech in turn 12 counts as an example of a problem faced quite a lot in the society, and he is trying to present a simple example that demonstrates how changing oneself can contribute to the evolution of a society. The speaker makes a false start in this sentence where he is referring to a contrast by *but* and immediately picks up a vague word, *actually*, to make up for the error and makes a new start that flows to the end of the turn.

## 5.3.2 Hesitation

Hesitation markers are defined as "a set of tools with certain time duration that are used to solve oral discourse generation and reproduction problems and that can be both retrospective (e.g. correction of a produced discourse piece) and perspective (e.g. planning problems of the coming discourse piece)" Khurshudyan (1997, p.1). Stubbe and Holmes (1995) believe that DMs provide speakers with verbal planning time, but this function has hardly ever been attributed to VL expressions to the best of the researcher's knowledge.

Wiese (1984) claims hesitation may appear in different forms such as filled pauses (e.g. uh, mhm), repetitions, corrections, and drawls. The available literature reveals that the two terms *hesitation markers* and *delaying markers* have been use interchangeably in papers. Focusing on *I think* by Chines learners of English, Wu et al. (2010) find out that EFL learners use this marker to show their difficulty in finding the right word coming next. It may be possible that *hesitation markers* occur more widely in language learner interaction than the L1 speaker communication, and the patterns in which they occur may be different between the two.

The examples below present instances of hesitations occurring among the three groups which may shed light on different patterns.

(5.25) This is a discussion between four L1 speaker participants over 13 turns. They are discussing why a photo of an accident was chosen among other photos to be published in a newspaper.


S17: If they had to, sh- show one, of the a- from the accident scene.    (L1: 1:515)

S1: And why would you prefer that?    (L1: 1:516)

S17: M- I don't know. <SU-f: LAUGH>.    (L1: 1:517)

S1: Okay.    (L1: 1:518)

S17: Cuz it doesn't, **I don't know** I just, think seeing dead bodies in a newspaper I don't

(L1: 1:519)

S1: I mean it, it bothers you.    (L1: 1:520)

S17: Yeah.    (L1: 1:521)

S1: Okay. Yeah?    (L1: 1:522)

S3: I, I mean I agree that it it's bothersome and that would be helpful but then if you you know after the explanation was made if you look at, um the letters that they received um, I was kind of, shocked to think that the reader would I mean that some of these would be, <CLEARS THROAT> excuse me sent into the newspaper about, if you think about **basically, you know** if you think about how many lives were saved from this or if somebody thinks of this image, it's it's it is upsetting and it is powerful and that's why they wanted it in there because, once an image like that is stuck in your head it's there, and then whatever, possibly whatever images were in the photograph or whatever it is, can trigger off those, images that you have in your mind and it, can prevent something similar from happening.

(L1: 1:523)

S1: Instructional value. Yeah?    (L1: 1:524)

S6: I mean th- they didn't mention it here but also like I think sometimes it hits home more like a picture of the, students, before an im- like a a normal [S3: mhm ] picture of them. [S1: mhm ] because it shows them you know like, a- and then like maybe a picture of the of the of the actual car or something like that, [S3: mhm ] cuz it it sort of you know it humanizes you I think.    (L1: 1:525)

S1: Mhm    (L1: 1:526)

S11: Well at that point they didn't know who the students were or who the people were.    (L1: 1:527)

In (5.25), S17 expresses her preference for a particular photo but once asked the reason for the preference by S1 in turn 516, she proceeds with a quick answer *I don't know* in turn 517. Although S1 implies this answer is sufficient, S17 decides to elaborate on the reason for her preference, but still finds the reason elusive. This encourages her to use the same answer as before, *I don't know*, but this time it functions as a device to help the speaker cope with the hesitation. In other words, this device allows her to buy more time to think of a reason to answer the question in turn 519.

There seems to be other markers which can highlight the state of hesitation by S17 like *I just, think* right after *I don't know* and even the final position *I don't* which the speaker meant to say *I don't know* again, but was interrupted by S1. S3 is expressing agreement with S1 that publishing the paper was bothersome, but raises the advantages this has brought by making reference to the letters the newspaper received in turn 523. Her attempt to specifically point out one of the advantages raises the need to use a device to handle the hesitation brought up by the memory lapse. Therefore, to buy the time to think and arrive at the implication of this advantage which is many lives saved the speaker resorts to "basically, you know".

(5.26) This is a discussion between five CSLE participants over eleven turns. They are discussing Disneyland in different countries.

S7: Have you ever been to Disneyland? (Ch: 4: 317)

Class: No. (Ch: 4: 318)

S2: Do you want to be there? (Ch: 4: 319)

S4: Even the Disneyland in Hong Kong, we didn't. (Ch: 4: 320)

S3: You know, Disneyland is now in a building in Shanghai. **Maybe**, **maybe** one day.
Maybe four years later or one year later we can go there. (Ch: 4: 321)

S1: I hope we can go to Disneyland together. (Ch: 4: 322)

S3: Yeah, that is a good choice. Good idea.[Tapping on S1's shoulder]. (Ch: 4: 323)

| | |
|---|---|
| S1: We must earn money. First earn money. | (Ch: 4: 324) |
| S1: Money is really important, important, and important. | (Ch: 4: 325) |
| S3: Maybe we are poor people. | (Ch: 4: 326) |
| Class: Yeah. | (Ch: 4: 327) |
| S4: When we go shopping, there are many different kinds of things. | (Ch: 4: 328) |

As can be seen in (5.26), this extract begins with a question on Disneyland by speaker 7 in turn 317. As no one has been to Disneyland before, the discussion drags on. Following S4 in turn 320, who points to Disneyland in Hong Kong, S3 in turn 321notifies the class of Disneyland in Shanghai. However, when it comes to further comments on Disneyland in Shanghai, she appears hesitant and maybe she realises that there is nothing more to say about it and immediately decides to express hope that they can visit it in the future. This hesitance is realised in the consecutive occurrence of the two vague words *maybe, maybe*.

(5.27) This is a discussion between five PSLE participants over ten turns. They are discussing why the Iranian nation is so lonely in the world and not supported by others.

| | |
|---|---|
| S3: You think that we are alone? | (P: 1: 202) |
| S10: yes. | (P: 1: 203) |
| S3: In the world right now. | (P: 1: 204) |
| S10: After this government. | (P: 1: 205) |
| S3: Because we are wrong or because we are right? I ask my question again. You think that the reason why we are alone in this world right now is because we say the truth because we are right about what we say or because we are wrong? | (P: 1:206) |
| S1: Yes. | (P: 1:207) |
| S2**: I think, I think. I think** we are following the wrong path to be right. | (P: 1: 208) |
| S3: Very good. | (P: 1: 209) |
| S1: Yes, good. | (P: 1: 210) |

S9: In some points, we are right. In some points we are wrong but they are making rules, rules wrong things so big because they're powerful, because they have got great advertisements. (P: 1: 211)

Extract (5.27) begins with a question by S3 in turn 202. This is confirmed by S10 in turn 203. Turn 206 involves a question as to whose fault this situation can be. In other words, is it because they are telling the truth or because they are making a big mistake? To answer the question, S2 in turn 208, goes through a state of hesitation and tries to buy time through repeating *I think* 3 times. This triple repetition of *I think* is used as a device to make up for the delay in the response.

## 5.3.3 Turn management

Alwood, Cerrato, Jokinen, Navarretta and Paggio (2007, p. 276) believe turn management "is coded by three general features *Turn gain*, *Turn end* and *Turn hold*". Section 3.1.2 of this thesis presents some explanation of turn-management in conversation. The following examples show how VL is used to manage turns smoothly across the three data sets.

(5.28) This is a discussion between five L1 speaker participants over twelve turns. They are discussing whether an autopsy photo should be published by a journal.

S1: have they said we will not publish the photo? Or have they just said we don't intend or so (L1: 1:66)

S12: (xx) We don't intend to. (L1: 1:67)

S5: Right. (L1: 1:68)

S1: That's different from saying we won't, won't do. (L1: 1:69)

S12: Right. We don't intend to well what if something else comes up? (L1: 1:70)

S5: Right the the wording was is has no intention of publishing photos, (L1: 1:71)

S1: No intention of publishing (L1: 1:72)

S5: It was their attorney who said the photos are important because they might reveal what caused, [S1: mhm ] Earnhardt's death. [S1: mhm ] and then the other th- as I said

before the other thing is that that, in Florida, granting public access to autopsy photographs is permissible if it's not part of a criminal investigation. [S1: mhm ] so the other feather in their cap is the fact that if it was another state then we we might not be having this argument.                                    (L1: 1:73)

 S1: **I guess** another question would be has this happened in the past? And it, has there been an autopsy photo that, news media have obtained access to? You don't happen to know do you?                                                              (L1: 1:74)

 S5: Uh <SS: LAUGH>                                                     (L1: 1:75)

 S1: Not not that you're the expert on this uh,                          (L1: 1:76)

 S2: Thinking back to who's died recently no.                           (L1: 1:77)

The speakers in (5.28) are discussing the answer received from a journal regarding the publication of a particular photo. S12 is probably the one who talked to the people in charge of the journal and is just passing the answer to others. S5 also continues the discussion by pointing out the importance of photos as stated by the attorney and also the other requirements for the photo to be published. S1 in turn 74 tries to take a turn by using the vague expression *I guess* to make a new point as to whether autopsy photos have been made available to the news media.

(5.29) This is a discussion between four CSLE participants over fifteen turns. They are discussing culture and how culture can contribute to differences in communication.

 S4: Culture difference. Having a difference between China and other countries, it really exists.                                                                 (Ch: 5: 391)

 S2: We can know what he really means in his words, with his words.       (Ch: 5: 392)

 S4: **I think** as, as soon as that we major in English, we major in Japanese or major in French, we learn foreign, foreign languages, and we must first, we must first learn the culture and we must know something about the culture. Culture is very heritage. For us, it is very beneficial.                                                   (Ch: 5: 393)

 S1: Yes.                                                                (Ch: 5: 394)

 S2: **Maybe** culture maybe can help us to improve our language.         (Ch: 5: 395)

 S3: Yeah, that is right.                                                (Ch: 5: 396)

S4: We can enrich our knowledge. Then we can maybe have, we have different kinds of information. (Ch: 5: 397)

S1: Do you know any other culture shock between Chinese and foreign countries?

(Ch: 5: 398)

S4: Let me think a while. (Ch: 5: 399)

S2: **I think** in our culture. I didn't know it's when we nod our head, it means different things. (Ch: 5: 400)

S4: Yeah, yeah. I remember that we has [nodding head down] this means yes. [Nodding to side] this means no but in a culture that (Ch: 5: 401)

S3: I know it is an India. (Ch: 5: 402)

S4: [Nodding head down and laughing] Just this is no. It is interesting. (Ch: 5: 403)

S2: **Maybe,** it is difficult for Chinese to, to talk with the Indian. (Ch: 5: 404)

S3: Huh, I think there are some, there are still some things that are common for which, we have been like each other. (Ch: 5: 405)

The noticeable trend in (5.29) is the consistency S2 shows in taking-turns by using a vague expression. The extract begins with a reference to culture and cultural differences. To join in the discussion, S4 begins her turn by *I think* to highlight the link between language and culture. S2 tries to provide a further comment for the confirmation she is trying to give over the next turn; the turn-taking *maybe* is further continued by the fact that culture can contribute to better language learning. S1 raises a new question in turn 398 which calls for some examples of cultural differences between China and other foreign countries.

Using another vague expression as a turn-taking device, S2 in turn 400 volunteers to refer to a particular example of gesture, nodding head, as an example causing cultural differences. In the next turn, S4 gives a specific example of this cultural difference and like S2's previous utterance, S3 and S4 perform supportive roles and approve her. But contrary to the previous utterances where S4 always hung on to S2's utterance, S2 in turn 404, agrees with S3 and S4 by using a vague turn-taking word, *maybe*.

(5.30) This is a discussion between three PSLE participants over eleven turns. They are discussing how a mother treated her son and the consequences of this behaviour.


S6: Unfortunately, his mother because of decreasing the emotional events and decreasing the sentimental hobbies of her son, he bought for him everything that he wants. For example, every toys, every instruments, every books that there was in the CD. In some buying, I was with him. (P: 7:59)

S1: While he was shopping for the things. (P: 7:60)

S6: Yes, and after all when there is, there was no other thing. (P: 7:61)

S1: Nothing else left <laugh>. (P: 7:62)

S6: She decided to buy a computer for him and I saw unfortunately it became, huh, when her mother asked him Houman do you want anything? Do you want any food? He said that mom, you are wrong. I am a superman. I am a superman without any eating.

(P: 7:63)

S1: I don't need to eat. I don't need to be fed. (P: 7:64)

S4: **Actually,** this kind of thing can influence the personality of these children. (P: 7:65)

S1: ok. (P: 7:66)

S4: And about the physical problem. You know, when you spend lots of time in front of the monitor, your eyes become hard actually and you. (P: 7:67)

S1: So you will lose your eyesight. (P: 7:68)

S4: Yes, and you need to wear glasses, unfortunately. (P: 7:69)

S5: Ok, you are talking about the psych, you know, actually the physical problem children will face. (P: 7:70)


In (5.30), S6 describes what the story is and how the mother treated her son in turn 59 and continues this into turn 63 despite the two interruptions by S1 in turns 60 and 62. Following S1 in giving an example of what the child could have said to his mother, S4 tries to take a turn to comment on this kind of behaviour in turn 65. The vague expression *actually* indicates that the speaker means to push and at the same time show her position. This turn taking device can also be interpreted as the

beginning of an utterance that will change the direction of the discussion, as it initiates the discussion on the consequences of this kind of behaviour to children.

## 5.4. Concluding remarks

It is almost impossible to put VL into absolute categorical classifications of pragmatic functions and a consensus on the pragmatic functions of vague words is hard to reach. However, it is possible and useful to analyse the pragmatic functions of VL, because a tentative picture of how this device can contribute to enhanced communication and how enhanced communication can also be taught to the learners of a language can be accessed through an analysis of pragmatic functions of VL.

This chapter investigated how VL can be used as a multifunctional device in communication. Adopting three main categories, *mitigating*, *right amount of information*, and *structural function*, it examined how one function can be manifested through diversified lexical categories. Each functional category in this study has been subcategorised such as *self-protection*, *politeness*, and *downtoning*, for mitigation; *approximation and quantification*, *emphasising*, *possibility* and *uncertainty* for right amount of information and finally *repairing*, *hesitation*, and *turn-management* for structural function.

Unlike most works on VL, in addition to the usual pragmatic functions of mitigation, the present study also focuses on structural functions at discourse level. The first part, *mitigation*, concentrates on how VL is used to lessen the strength of an utterance for different purposes. *Right amount of information*, as the second category in the functional analysis of VL, deals with how the effect of insufficient information can be shown through the use of this feature of language.

Furthermore, the section *structural function* characterises how VL can contribute to the dynamics of interactive approach in the process of communication. The

most salient trend emerging in the function of VL is the fact that a vague word has the potential to appear in different contexts and preform different functions. The other significant trend observed concerns the fact that there is no monotone matchup between lexical categories and functional categories of VL. To be more specific, as a lexical category, quantifiers can serve *emphasising*, *quantification and approximation*, *uncertainty*, or *self-protection* function.

# Chapter 6 Discussion

This chapter discusses linguistic trends of VL use shown across the three data sets in relation to linguistic, cultural, and pedagogic factors involved. The focus here is the combination between overall and individual occurrences. Differences in the frequency distribution of items will be discussed in the first place, and then the likely causes of the similarities and discrepancies in the patterns.

## 6.1 Overall frequency distribution

Table 6.1 Overall distributions of vague expressions

| Item | L1 speaker | | CSLE | | PSLE | |
|------|------------|--|------|--|------|--|
| Distribution | Frequency (Percentage) | | Frequency (Percentage) | | Frequency (Percentage) | |
| Subjectivisers | 205 | (13%) | 741 | (24%) | 282 | (16%) |
| Possibility Indicators | 238 | (15%) | 379 | (13%) | 190 | (11%) |
| Vague Quantifier | 423 | (27%) | 741 | (24%) | 435 | (25 %) |
| Vague Intensifier | 400 | (26%) | 883 | (29%) | 333 | (19%) |
| Placeholder | 301 | (19%) | 286 | (9%) | 478 | (28%) |
| **Overall** | **1567** | **(100 %)** | **3030** | ***(99%)** | **1718** | ***(99 %)** |

*Due to rounding off individual categories.

As can be seen in Table 6.1, vague expressions are used approximately twice as often by the CSLE (3030) as are they by the PSLE (1718) and the L1 speaker (1567). The comparison of the performances of the three groups highlights meaningful differences from the statistical perspective, $p<0.05(\chi^2= 361, d.f.8)$.

CSLE is found to be substantially vaguer than the PSLE, and the PSLE is slightly vaguer than the L1 speaker. The two L2 groups resort to VL more often than the L1 speaker. This is a trend in a direct contrast to another research study on VL looking at the native speaker of English (NSE) versus native speaker of Cantonese

(NSC) in which Drave (2002) concludes that the former turned out to be vaguer than the latter. Rankings of categories in terms of frequency also display discrepancies among the three groups, which again clashes with Drave's claim that "the rank order of most frequent items virtually identical" between the NSE and the NSC (ibid, p. 29).

These discrepancies may have been caused by 1) different groups of participants: Mandarin and Persian speakers (this study) vs. Cantonese speakers (Drave's), and English speakers which in this study includes speakers of American English but unspecified in Drave's study 2) different scopes of data analysis: Drave's conclusion is based on investigating only two categories of VL, namely *approximators* and *placeholders*; whereas this study involves more of the vague categories. Addressing a wider scope of VL use, the present study can present a more generalisable view of this feature of language among the three groups.

As Table 6.1 shows, 5.91% of words in the CSLE data and 3.34% of those in the PSLE data are comprised of the vague expressions examined in this study, while, as the least vague group, the L1 speaker has 3.04 %. Furthermore, it is found that the most frequent user of each category is an L2 speaker group. This supports Metsa-Ketela's (2006, 2012) findings who found L2 speakers using vague words more heavily than the L1 speakers. However, Nikula (1996) revealed the opposite with the possible reason being the low proficiency level of the L2 speaker groups.

Of the five categories in this study, four including *subjectivisers*, *possibility indicators*, *vague quantifiers* and *vague intensifiers* have been used the most heavily by the CSLE whereby the *subjectivisers* and *vague quantifiers* occur evenly (741). *Placeholders* as the only category not used the most frequently by the CSLE, was employed the most commonly by the PSLE with the frequency of 478. This indicates that the L1 speaker is a moderate user of VL in this study. In other words, benefiting from the elasticity of VL (Zhang, 2011) by stretching it to the required degree, the L2 speakers seem to be compensating for the

inadequacies arising from insufficient vocabulary and lack of knowledge (Channell, 1994; Cheng & Warren, 2001).

As can be viewed in Table 6.1, the overall occurrences of VL by the PSLE and the L1 speaker are close, with the smallest difference lying in the frequency of *vague quantifiers* which were used 435 times by the PSLE and 423 times by the L1 speaker. The largest difference among the three groups is found in the total number of *vague intensifiers*.

From the view of VL elasticity (Zahng, 2011), the L2 learners find VL more in line with their communicative needs. To meet the needs and to achieve the communication goals, they prefer to take advantage of the feature of elasticity in their interactions and use VL more often than the L1 speaker. L1 speaker does not use any of the five VL categories the most often among the three groups. This reveals that the L1 speaker does not sit in the maximum occurrence pole of the continuum, but shifts between the middle position and the minimum occurrence pole. All the maximum occurrence poles are occupied by L2 speakers.

Maximum occurrence                    Minimum occurrence

Subjectivisers

CSLE ——— PSLE ——— L1 S

Possibility indicator

CSLE ——— L1 S ——— PSLE

Vague quantifier

CSLE ——— PSLE ——— L1 S

Vague intensifier

CSLE ——— L1 S ——— PSLE
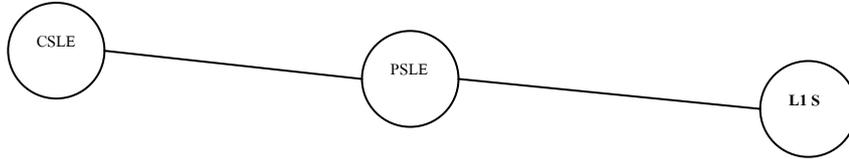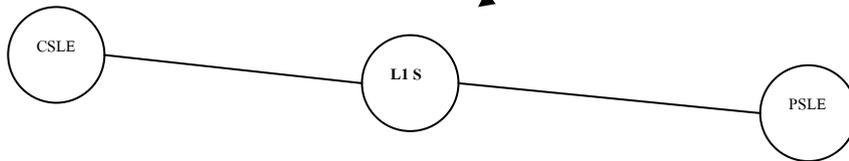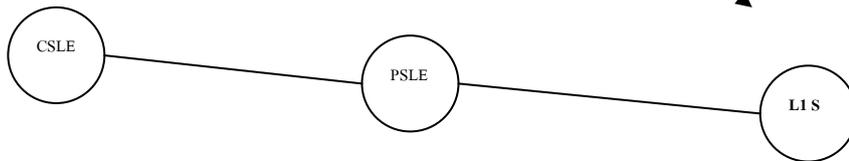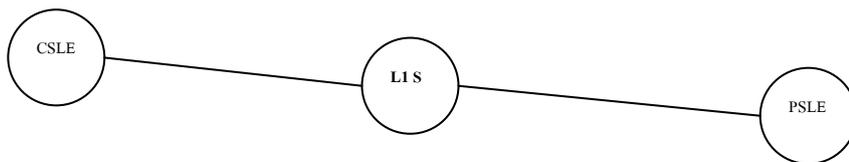
Placeholders
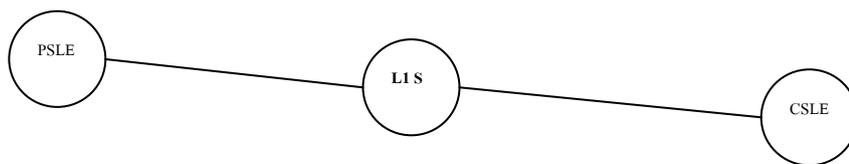
Figure 6.1: Positions of VL use in the overall VL continuum

As shown in Figure 6.1, L1 speakers are between the middle position and the right pole which indicates that the vague categories are either used the least frequently or moderately by the L1 speakers. L2 speakers consistently use each of the categories the most commonly. Speaking their L1, the speakers of English in this study have not been pushed to quantitatively make an excessive use of the elasticity of VL. While using English as their L2, each learner group may have found VL tool as the most versatile and effective communication blessing.

## 6.2 Cluster of vague expressions

A dominant pattern drawn from the data shows that the expressions used more freely in multiple positions in the clause (such as *subjectivisers*) are used the most often by one of the L2 speaker groups, while other expressions (such as *vague intensifiers* and *possibility indicators*) used more in fixed positions are the least preferred by either group. To be more precise, *subjectivisers* that can appear in the clause initial-position, clause mid-position and clause final-position, unlike *placeholders* occurring in the exact same positions, appear to be more common with one of the L2 groups than the other vague categories.

This is where the elasticity of VL can arm the L2 speakers with a more powerful tool for communication. In other words, in terms of Zhang's (2011) slingshot metaphor of elasticity of VL, placing the vague expression in different positions in the sentence can help the interlocutor "stretch the rubber band more" and arm him with a more convenient tool for communication.

For instance, most of the *possibility indicators* in this study, such as *may*, *might* and *possible*, occur in specific positions. *Vague intensifiers* occur before adjectives only, but *subjectivisers* and *placeholders* can have more flexible applications in utterances, serving a wider range of purposes such as turn-taking or turn-giving. This indicates that as *subjectivisers* and *placeholders* can serve different functions due to their flexibility, they are strongly preferred by one or both of L2 speakers. They may provide the users with the means to cope with different communicative needs in classroom interaction.

The scope of VL can be examined from the concentration of vagueness within an utterance. The application of some vague categories can develop the vagueness to the element immediately preceding or following the vague word or phrase which is known as local vagueness (phrasal vagueness), but there are some other vague categories the employment of which can extend the vagueness beyond the phrasal level and result in global vagueness (clausal vagueness).

Given the dichotomy of local vagueness and global vagueness, the other possibility for the popularity of *subjectivisers* with both L2 speaker groups is that they can be used more openly than the ones heavily used by the L1 speakers. As vague categories popular with the L1 speaker, *intensifiers* and *possibility indicators*, need to collocate with other immediate components, for example, *intensifiers* with adjectives and most of the *possibility indicators* such as *may* and *might* with verbs, they are more or less restrictive, but the popular vague categories with the L2 speaker are of more open applications.

To be more specific, vague categories can vary in the scope of vagueness they can hold in utterances; some categories like *intensifiers* are narrower in scope of vagueness (local vagueness), which applies to adjectives whilst other vague categories like *subjectivisers* extend the vagueness to the entire sentence (global vagueness). In other words, *subjectivisers* widen vagueness to the entire sentence, while the vagueness in *intensifiers* is less widespread, seemingly more attached to adjectives than the whole sentence.

(6.1)

S2: Era, every one, Reza Shah, had limited Hejab and everyone wanted to have it, to put it but **I think** limitation makes people do the thing that is limited. It is a principle. If you want people to do something, limit it.                                            (P: 6:482)

S4: Ok. Others ? What do you think? What happens to our country in the next century?

(P: 6:483)


(6.2)

S5: You must hit everybody who violates the others' rights. You know **I think** social injustice is because of some people opinion. Because they think they are better than the other race, racism.                                            (P: 6:1259)

S4: Ahuh.                                            (P: 6:1260)


As can be seen in examples (6.1) and (6.2), *I think* in each sentence covers the entire sentence. In (6.1), it applies to the whole sentence following *but* and in (6.2) it embodies the entire cause regarding social injustice. On the contrary, due to the emphatic nature of intensifiers, their vagueness is linked to merely the segment which immediately proceeds or follows it in the sentence, rather than the entire sentence.


(6.3)

 S20: Yeah,I just grabbed this from the Michigan Daily which I thought was **really** interesting that this is a normally a color, uh daily, [S1: mhm ] and they got Ellerbe here in black and white,                                            (L1: 1:735)

S1: Wonder why.                                            (L1: 1:736)

(6.4)

S1: Well yeah and there's, <SS: LAUGH> there's another, there's another question. This is **a really good**, **a really good** point that you bring up. Um, I mean we say that, and maybe you would I mean I'm not saying you wouldn't, but um there's lots of people in the world, take Bill Gates you know for an example, who um, make lots of money, have lots of money or other people who inherit lots of money. They don't have to work, but they do.                                                                    (L1: 2:82)

S16: It makes 'em happy.                                                                    (L1: 2:83)

It is evident in (6.3) and (6.4) that *really* is used by the speaker to emphasise the adjective immediately following it. In (6.4), even the speaker finds *really* insufficient in emphasizing the adjective *good* and prefers to demonstrate the emphasis by repeating *a really good* twice.

Some contradiction regarding the employment of clausal and phrasal vagueness arises from the occurrence of *vague quantifiers*. Although *vague quantifiers* hold local vagueness, they are not used the least frequently by either of the L2 speaker groups, which is found to be in contrast with other such items.

The explanation for this trend might be that items under this vague category, *some*, *much*, and *many*, to name just a few, are of remarkable grammatical significance and are ranked as the most frequent grammatical patterns incorporated in the syllabi of ELT books. Thus, these quantifiers appear in many elementary level ELT series such as 'New Headway English Course', 'Interchange Series' and reinforced in the upper levels due to the cycling syllabi they follow. This provides the L2 speakers with adequate practice of these items and makes them part of their grammatical competence. In short, what the patterns viewed in the VL use by the L1 and the L2 groups can imply is that the L2 speakers prefers categories with global vagueness, but the L1 speaker prefers local vagueness.

With regards to the use of *subjectivisers*, the three groups proved to be statistically different in the overall number of this vague category, p<0.05($\chi^2$= 410.347, d.f.2). *Subjectivisers* happen the most often by the CSLE, while the L1 speaker is found to be the least frequent user of this category. As with *subjectivisers*, *possibility indicators* as well have been found significantly different among the three groups, p<0.05($\chi^2$ + 71.755, d.f.2), with the CSLE using it the most often and the PSLE the least commonly.

While individual *possibility indicators* are evenly distributed in the L1 speaker data, the L2 speakers perceive these items differently, depending on such factors as L1 influence and incompetence in L2. The first point noticed in the case of *possibility indicators* is associated with *maybe*, which CSLE and PSLE overused compared with the L1 speaker. This trend will be discussed in detail in 6.5. While the percentage value shows a close interdependence between the following four items in the L1 speaker data: *maybe* (26%), *may* (24%), *might* (24%), and *probably* (18%). The values characterising the same items in the PSLE and the CSLE data reveal huge inconsistencies. For instance, *maybe* with a frequency of 81% and 82%, respectively, indicate that the L2 speaker groups lean toward this *possibility indicator* for one reason or another.

While each individual *possibility indicator* is used the most heavily by the L1 speaker, except for one item; apart from *maybe* by the CSLE, the PSLE prefers all placeholder items the most, apart from *thing* by the CSLE. Interestingly, while *placeholders* with 435 tokens occur as the most frequent vague expressions by the PSLE, the CSLE use this category as the least common group of vague words in the classroom interaction (286). In other words, *placeholders* seem to play crucial roles in the PSLE interaction.

It seems *placeholders* may serve functions in the PSLE interaction that the L1 speaker and the CSLE fail to attach to in their classroom interaction. These functions appear across a range of applications such as, L1 influence, influence of

language incompetence, cognitive processing focus, memory overload and different communicative approach.

# 6.3 Concentrated distribution vs. evenly-spread distribution

Occurrence ratio between a vague expressions and the total word count in the data may present another perspective as to how differently these expressions occur across the three groups of participants.

6.2 Ratio of vague expressions and the total word count

| Item | L1 Speaker N= (51403) | CSLE N= (51263) | PSLE N= (51344) |
|---|---|---|---|
| Subjectivisers | 250 | 69 | 182 |
| Possibility Indicators | 216 | 135 | 270 |
| Vague Quantifier | 122 | 69 | 118 |
| Vague Intensifiers | 129 | 58 | 154 |
| Placeholders | 171 | 179 | 107 |

Note: The number in this table represents the group of words in which each vague category occurs.

As Table 6.2 shows, on average there is one *subjectiviser* in every 250 words in the L1 speaker data, whereas this vague expression occurs more frequently, in every 182 words by the PSLE. The CSLE shows a more concentrated use of *subjectivisers* as they occur in a smaller group of numbers (69). Unlike *subjectivisers*, possibility indicators used in each 270 words by the PSLE occur in a larger number of words in comparison with the L1 speaker with 216 words. But like *subjectiviser*, the number of words by the CSLE is the smallest (135).

Additionally, like *subjectivisers*, *vague quantifiers* occur in the largest groups by the L1 speaker but the size of the words in this group are to a large extent close to that of the PSLE ; 122 for the former and 118 for the latter. The CSLE demonstrates a group of words with the same size as the *subjectivisers* (69) for this vague category. As for *vague intensifiers*, the smallest group of words belongs to the CSLE with the size of 50 words, whereas the largest group is identified in the PSLE data (154) and the middle group is found to be L1 speaker with 129 words.

The only largest word group witnessed in the CSLE turns out to be *placeholders* with the size of 179 words followed by L1 speaker with 171 and the PSLE with a density of 107. This aspect of the lexical analysis acts as a supplement to the frequency and percentage discussion presented so far.

Despite using all the categories more often than the L1 speaker, L2 speakers, in particular the CSLE, show more concentrated distribution. In the case of subjectivisers, CSLE uses an overall of 742 vague words under this category, 732 of which are constituted of *I think* only. Although both PSLE and the L1 speaker mainly use this class of *subjectiviser* in their classroom interaction as well, 79% and 73% respectively, the CSLE has this item comprising 99% of the overall *subjectivisers*. What this high density implies is that only 1% of *subjectivisers* in the CSLE interaction are comprised of the other four items under this category.

One reason why *I think* has been overused by the CSLE seems to be that this *subjectiviser* has been given the DM functions by this group. In other words, for CSLE *subjectivisers* are used where DM seem to be more appropriate. This trend also emerges in Wu et al.'s (2010) study where CSLE overuse *I think* as fillers. This is associated with the speaker's need in communication, such as the need for a filler, that makes him stretch VL by overusing this item (Zhang, 2011). Other reasons for the popularity of *I think* appear to lie in the representation of elasticity of VL (linguistic and discourse use as a turn-taking device) and cognitive processing focus. (See Sections 6.8 and 6.10 for details)

With regards to *possibility indicators*, the most evenly-spread distribution is observable with the L1 speakers, with the first three items (see Table 4.17) evenly constituting three quarters of this vague category and the remaining quarter comprised of the last two items, whereas like *subjectivisers*, PSLE and CSLE employ the first items dominantly, 82 and 81%, respectively, with the rest scattered round the other four items.

The only two categories which reveal a closer distribution by the three groups are found to be *vague quantifiers* and *placeholder*. The former seems to have occurred more or less evenly as a result of the need to collocate with nouns and the other variant, which is the quantity it refers to. This factor looks like an equaliser in the occurrence of *quantifiers*.

The reason for the even distribution of *placeholders* seems to be first the frequency which these items naturally occur within talks. In other words, all the *placeholders* examined in this study are the highly frequently used items by both L1 and L2 speakers. The other reason seems to be that almost all *placeholders* perform grammatical functions rather than carry lexical content. Besides, the items under *placeholders* seem to be close to one another in terms of semantic and syntactic features. There are items such as *somebody*, and *someone* which can be interchangeably used in speech.

As far as *vague intensifiers* are concerned, the most concentrated distribution is found again with the L2 speaker groups, CSLE, with more than half of the vague words from this category concentrated on *very* with the rest scattered around the other five items.

In summary, the data shows that the L1 speaker tends to use vague categories with a higher density, while the L2 speakers show concentrated distribution in using vague words. This stands out in *possibility indicators* where L1 speaker shows

the distribution of *maybe* (26%), *may* (24%), *might* (24%), *probably* (18%), and *possible* 8(%). The concentrated distribution of this item by each L2 speaker group shows 82%, 13%, 3%, 1% and 1% respectively by the CSLE and 88%, 8%, 7%, 1%, and 3% by the PSLE. It seems that the first items in each category like *I think* for subjectivisers and *maybe* for possibility indicators are more versatile by L2 speakers. This versatility can be due to L1 transfer, development of the learner's passive knowledge into active knowledge because of sufficient practice in educational material. The manifestation of this versatility can be realised as a tool to manage cognitive processing, or an instrument to conduct discourse management.

## 6.4. Collocation patterns

Some collocation patterns are uncommon in the English language. The unusual collocation pattern that occurred in the L2 speaker data sets may have originated from insufficient exposure to English, which drives them to either use their own creativity in using collocations, or to borrow collocations from their L1.

One of the inconsistencies across the three groups lies in the collocation of vague expressions with other words. The discrepancies arise where either of the three groups use the collocations with significant differences in the overall occurrences or each group uses collocations which are typical of theirs. For instance, *we may*, which is non-existent in the L1 speaker data, is used by the CSLE and the PSLE to show that the speaker is attempting to say something indirectly and with a tentative tone. *We* in this context is mainly used by the PSLE to show politeness by creating a kind of intimacy, avoiding the explicit and direct disagreement and warning.

The CSLE and the PSLE culturally prefer indirectness in making a request or expressing disagreement (Zarei & Mansoori, 2007; Gudykunst, Matsumoto, Ting-Toomey, Nishida, Kim, & Heyman, 1996). Additionally, *we* is most of the time

the subject pronoun the Persian speaker uses instead of *I* to refer to himself to show politeness to the speaker. This is confirmed when the data shows that the PSLE does not use *I may* in the classroom context, while this collocation occurs frequently by the L1 speaker.

(6.5)

S6: Nuclear power is what we are trying to use.                                    (P: 1:37)

 S8: That's our absolute right. Yes?                                              (P: 1: 38)

S6: And,huh, because of some problems, **we may** not be able to use it, and we have many problems like our scientists will run away to another country.          (P: 1: 39)

In (6.5), S6 does not agree with S8 but is trying to indirectly say no by using *we* and involving the interlocutor in the negative reply. This also indicates listener-oriented approach by the PSLE discussed in 6.9 The pause at the beginning of S8's utterance along with the hesitation marker, *huh*, after *and* signals the time needed for finding the best and the most indirect strategy to express the disagreement. The trend of using the vague word as a device to mainly express indirectness seems to arise from the cultural norm of the PSLE and the CSLE in which indirectness is highlighted to avoid offending the people they interact with.

The collocations of *may not* and *maybe*+not demonstrate discrepancies between the L1speaker and the two L2 speaker groups. While *may not* and *might not* are found to have been used more frequently by the L1 speakers, the PSLE shows inclinations in using *maybe* + not in comparison to the L1 speaker. As explained in detail in section 6.5 dealing with first language influence, this trend seems to have emerged as the closeness of *maybe* to the structure mainly used to express possibility in the Persian language. In other words, *maybe* or *maybe* +negative are the two structures which the PSLE mainly uses in their L1 language and as a result of similarities of these structures between the two languages, the PSLE prefers them to *may not* and *might not*.

The most differential collocation patterns can be noticeably observed in the tables of collocations and tables of cluster of placeholders (Section 4.5). This inconsistency is observable in almost all categories of placeholders. The first major discrepancy in the collocations and clusters is the large overall number of occurrences of each by the PSLE. The second difference lies in the inconsistency in the diversity of collocations and clusters across the three groups.

The differences lie either in the existence of items in one group, while the other group fails to use them, which is almost always applicable to the PSLE patterns or the existence of the items in both groups with very few of them being in common .The example demonstrating the first instance can be the table of cluster of words around *something* by the PSLE which shows 6 clustered items emerging around this vague word with a range of frequency of 5-7, totalling 36, while the CSLE uses only 1 item with 8 tokens and the L1 speaker data lacks any clustered items with *something*.

The fact that employment of placeholders can be geared to the communicative needs of speakers can be viewed in the collocation of *anything* with other items. The three groups use only 1 collocation in common, the PSLE uses the highest number of collocations, while the CSLE uses the smallest number of all. There are 6 sets of collocations in the PSLE data, making a total of 32, while the L1 speaker, giving a total of 14, demonstrates four sets with only two in common with the PSLE and the CSLE using only two collocations with the total of 7.

There can be two reasons for the overall frequency of collocations and clusters around placeholders. Firstly, they appear to help the speakers cover for the lack of concentration as to remember some words. Secondly, they have the potential to be used almost like a DM to enhance communication. It is true that placeholders are also used by the L1 speakers to compensate for the lack of a word or inability in remembering the appropriate words, but as the PSLE data includes speakers who are not as proficient in speaking as the L1 speakers, they encounter such situations more often, thereby using more of such vague categories.

(6.6)

S5: You are talking about parents who are not young enough to know about computers. When there is a ....there                                                    (P:6:877)

S2: My parents don't. My parents don't can't work with computer, too, either. Huh, they don't know lots of **things**. They didn't. They know a lot of **things** but about these kinds of things that are I don't know common in nowadays. They, most of them time they don't agree with that with these, ok? But I try to have a relationship with them, that it solves our problems, ok? For example, I do my works, I do my, huh, I got my ways, ok? And they just, huh, watch me send, huh, I don't know how I can say.                (P: 6:878)

S1: This is their way.                                                    (P: 6:879)

(6.6) illustrates a situation in which the PSLE uses a placeholder to be more general or *maybe* to compensate for the word which he may not be able to remember if he wants to be more specific. This pattern, however, does not occur in the CSLE, as this group is the least frequent user of this vague category.

The  more frequent use of collocations and clusters containing placeholders seems to have resulted from the fact that the PSLE has a good command of formulaic (memorized) expressions used in their L1, meaning that placeholders might be more common in Persian than in English or  Chinese. For the reason given, the PSLE tends to use these formulaic expressions in the academic context, but the L1 speaker may have shown sensitivity to the context where they can be used and thus used them less often. In other words, the PSLE might have used these expressions  regardless of the appropriateness of the context in which they occur.

What this implies is that classroom context might demand other vague categories than placeholders, due to more specificity required in it. As a result, the L1 speaker may show sensitivity to the appropriateness of expressions in terms of the context where they are used, while the PSLE as a result of focusing on meaning

and the purpose may fail to pay attention to the appropriateness and use the most immediate words and expressions to cross their mind in communication.

Therefore, appropriateness of expressions with respect to the context from the L1 speakers' perspective may be another factor in the distribution of some vague words or expressions. PSLE seems to be using placeholders more openly than the L1 speakers and CSLE in terms of the context where they are applied. It appears that placeholders are generally used less often than other categories of vague expressions in academic settings in English by the CSLE and the L1 speaker, while vague quantifiers and vague intensifiers are found to be more common in such contexts. This is clearly illustrated in the overall table of frequency whereby placeholders are ranked at the very top on the PSLE side, while the L1speakers and the CSLE use them less commonly.

What can be inferred from the above mentioned findings is that the same formulaic expressions which the PSLE use in the classroom contexts are also available in the English language, but the L1 speaker seems to have resorted to other words or structures to assign their functions to. The CSLE, on the other hand, appear to have resolved this by using other vague words.

As discussed in section 5.1.2 the assumption of *may* and *might* by the PSLE and *might* by the CSLE expressing politeness is to some extent confirmed when the pronouns collocating after these modal auxiliary verbs are examined. In the PSLE data, *you may* is found to be the most frequent collocation of subject pronouns and the auxiliary verb, followed by the collocation *we may* in the second position. This shows that the PSLE uses *you may* to show indirectness to the interlocutor, giving a hedged warning.

(6.7)

S5: For example? (P: 6:176)

S2: Ok, Your school is a kind of society. For this kind of cheating **you may** have problems for your future. (P: 6:177)

S3: Discrimination. (P: 6:178)

From the cultural perspective, the Persian speaker is accustomed to expressing disagreement or criticism indirectly through soft statements, which involves the other party who is being referred to (Behnam & Niroomand, 2011). In other words, all the disagreement or criticism is implied rather than explicitly stated.

In (6.7), S5 seems not to have been convinced by S2's previous statement and in turn 176 asks him by "For example" to be to the point and speak more frankly. S2 in turn 177 is informing S3 of the potential consequences of a possible situation, so he uses *you may* to involve the listener and notify him of the problems he may encounter in the future. This is how S2 indicates that he disapproves of what is happening. S3 in turn 178 confirms his understanding of S2's disapproval of the situation and gives a tangible problem, "Discrimination". But for Chinese only *might* appears to perform this function.

(6.8)

S4: It is very useful for his or her future, for his own development. I think that is what a teacher should do and we can also make friends with our students that are quite interesting. And to be a teacher is not just about teaching, just about giving, just about giving the same lessons. If we do just this, that **might** be a little bit boring. Yeah, that' what I think. (Ch: 7: 57)

# 6.5 Influence of first language

First language can act as a two-edged sword, on some occasions debilitating L2 learning and on others facilitating it. The items which are different in two

languages are claimed to be difficult to learn whilst similar items are asserted to be more easily learned (Lado, 1957).

> Individuals tend to transfer the forms and meanings, and the distribution of forms and meanings, of their native language and culture to the foreign language and culture –both productively when attempting to speak the language and to act in the culture, and receptively when attempting to grasp and understand the language and the culture as practiced by natives (ibid, p. 2).

This can be viewed in the frequency occurrence of *possibility indicators* where the frequency of all the items by the PSLE seems to have been influenced by the transfer of an item from Persian language, leading to the underuse of other items under the same category which are less dominantly used in Persian. In other words, it appears that all items under the category of *possibility indicators* have been spread, tightly influenced by the L1 of the PSLE. As displayed in Table 4.17, the first reason can be that *may* and *might* more often than not appear as expressions to indicate politeness than possibility to the learners of English. The CSLE, by contrast, shows a frequency for *may* close to that of theL1 speaker in this study.

Comparison of the position and application of *may* and *might* in the L1 speakers' speech against the PSLE shows that *may* and *might* are likely to be underemphasised in terms of their functions in the L2 instructional materials and be still part of L2 learners' passive linguistic competence. In other words, the L2 learners might have learned it to the recognition level but still be unable to use it at production level. It seems that due to the approximation of the meanings of *may* and *might* to *maybe* in the Persian language, the PSLE has opted to express possibility through *maybe*. Other modal verbs, such as *can* and *must*, do not have any other equivalents in Persian which are used more commonly by the PSLE than the L1 speakers. *May* and *might* are not entirely interchangeable in English: the former involves stronger force than the latter. However, in Persian there is no

such difference. These two auxiliary verbs have an equivalent in Persian, *maybe*, which almost all possibility roles is assigned to, despite the difference in the part of speech. It seems the grammatical (syntactic) reason discussed in (6.9) can be one of the reasons.

(6.9)

 S4: Different people, different culture, different views.                    (P: 6:830)

S1: Yes, it influenced you.                                                  (P: 6:831)

S6:  I don't know to some other works. Because, due to that, they **may, might** not understand us that way. I am not a, that, I don't know that shy, or, guy. I did lots of effects and lots of things but when, the only thing you seen, the garden is beautiful nature, is cows, sheep, dolls and just taking care of your children.              (P: 6: 832)

As (6.9) shows, the PSLE reveals uncertainty as to which modal auxiliary to choose to express possibility. He first chooses *may* but switches to *might* which can be interpreted to have occurred as a result of the lack of clear distinctions between these two words in the Persian language.

This is also why these two possibility indicators are discussed together here. Given the accounts above, the underdeveloped concept of *may* and *might* by the PSLE can be measured as the main reason for the tendency to underuse these vague words in the classroom interaction.

The occurrence of *might* by the CSLE shows a similar pattern as the PSLE data, but *may* has been found with a larger frequency. It seems that CSLE has acquired the use of *may* better than the PSLE, but in terms of *might* both L2 speaker groups underuse it. The use of *may* and *might* indicates that there is a clear difference between these two auxiliary verbs for the CSLE.

On the whole, *maybe* has taken the position of other possibility indicators in the CSLE and the PSLE data. There may be other reasons for the trend emerged but what can be added here is that the trend regarding the overall frequency of *may* and *might* in PSLE data is strongly in line with what Ataie and Sadr (2008) acknowledge in their research study: the Persian native speaker ended up using *may* less frequently than the L1 speaker in their data. The distinction between *may* and *might* seems to carry more grammatical functions than lexical weightings for the learners of English. Roomer, 2004 reports, the two fall in the lower rank in the modal auxiliary list by the L1 speaker, *might* 6th and *may* 8th as the penultimate item, while *can*, *should* and *must* occupy higher ranks in the frequency list of modal auxiliary verbs.

It is quite distinct that *maybe* is the only possibility indicator the two L2 speaker groups use more often than the L1 speaker. . The reason for the popularity of this item might lie in the versatility of *maybe* due to its potential to occur in different positions in the clause. The reason why the PSLE overuses *maybe* compared to the L1 speaker can be because this is the item most frequently used by the PSLE in Persian, and as this item can appear in different clausal positions, it is the most preferred by the PSLE.

Both the PSLE and the CSLE use more than half of the overall tokens of *maybe* in their clause initial position, the reason might vary between the two groups. The PSLE uses possibility indicator items at the beginning of clauses in their L1 and *maybe* seems as the most compatible with this pattern. As it is quite common to use an equivalent close to this possibility marker at the beginning of the clause in Persian, this tendency was also transferred to the English class. In line with this tendency, the only possibility marker which could fit into this framework is *maybe*.

This can also be supported by the figures in Table 4.19, showing the occurrence of *maybe* in the sentence initial position, 85 tokens amounting to 55% by the PSLE versus 11 translated as 17% in the L1 speaker data. As a result, due to the

possibility of using *maybe* in the structure close to their L1 structure and the availability of this possibility marker in both L1 and L2, which can facilitate the transfer of the item, the PSLE overused *maybe* and even compensated for the low frequency of other possibility markers with this word.

(6.10)

S1: … but they're they are from the University's uh Linguistics Department and this is Janine this is Bonnie and someone will **probably** wanna say something about it.

(L1: 3:3)

S1: That Photoshop book is bothering me because I'm thinking that I'm in I'm in six-forty.

(L1: 3:4)

As can be seen in (6.10), the L1 speaker uses *probably* in the sentence mid position to express possibility, but the PSLE as in (6.11), which gives nearly the same context prefers to use *maybe* in the sentence initial position because of the reasons given above.

(6.11)

S1: I don't know. (P: 4:55)

S4: A general idea. Oh, yeah. It is a general idea. But it is true. **Maybe** some people have goals and they are searching for it and, huh . (P: 4: 56)

S7: The attention that they are giving to it. (P: 4: 57)

*Maybe* by the CSLE occurs as the most frequent possibility indicator as well, but as the reason for this occurrence seems to be the representation of elasticity of VL or impact of cognitive processing, not the L1 language. (See Sections 6.10 and 6.8 for detail)

L1 language influence on L2 use emerges in *subjectivisers* as well. The comparison of *I think that* among the three groups indicates that the tendency to use *that* after *I think* by the PSLE is contrastive to the other two groups. While the L1 speaker, with 17 occurrences, accounting for 11%, and the CSLE with the occurrence of 16 preferring *that* acting as the subject (pronoun) of the sentence (1%), the opposite case occurs when the function of *that* in *I think that* switches to a conjunction (complementiser) as in (6.12).

(6.12)

S4: People think they should be very brief in everything they, for example, when they are in a line, they try to go earlier, to for example buy something or when they are in taxi lines, they try to go to the taxi sooner than the others.　　　　　　(P: 6:149)

S2: Ok.　　　　　　(P: 6:150)

S4: **I think that** it is wrong.　　　　　　(P: 6:151)

The frequency of 18 by the PSLE, translated as 9% against 3 translated as 2% by the L1 speaker and 7 accounting for 1% by the CSLE reveals that the PSLE tends to use this function more dominantly than the CSLE and the L1 speaker.

The reason for the minimal use of subject–serving *that* in *I think that* by the PSLE can be that the PSLE uses either *this* or *it* indistinctively in the same position in their L1. In other words, *that* is mainly used as a demonstrative pronoun (determiner) rather than a subject in Persian. As there is no such pronoun as *it* in the Persian language, there seems to exist no distinct difference between *it* and *this* in the mental lexicon of its speakers. Mental lexicon is defined as the knowledge of words the users of each language have (Aitchison, 2003). These two words are used interchangeably by PSLE. This can also be confirmed through a glance at the table of cluster (Tables 4.7 and 4.11), which show the dominance of *I think it is* (14) in the PSLE data over *I think that is*. For this reason it seems *I think that is* has been superseded by *I think it is* by the PSLE .The complementiser

*that* after *I think* is quite common in Persian and this pattern, thus, might have been transferred from the learner's first language.

L1 influence is also manifested in the use of quantifiers by the PSLE as well. The trend emerging in this category is that, apart from *a lot of*, and compared with the CSLE and the L1 speaker, PSLE consistently uses more count nouns after quantifiers. This amounts to 153 occurrences versus 68 by the L1 speaker and 129 by the CSLE after *some (of)* and 25 occurrences versus 12 tokens in L1 speaker data and the frequency of 5 in the CSLE data after *lots of*.

Likewise, even in *much* and *many* which have the same equivalents in Persian the frequency of *many* (47) is found to be more than that of *much* (40), while this is the opposite in the L1 speaker data, much (53) vs. many (46). Although, *much* can be applied in different contexts such as *much* with mass nouns, *much* to describe adjectives or *much* occurring before comparative adjectives, the PSLE does not usually use it in such contexts, which means *much* is generally treated as a quantifier to mainly collocate with mass nouns.

The overall dominance of count nouns in the Persian data is further reinforced when the table of collocation of *lots of* is viewed more closely (see Table 4.73). This table reveals that the PSLE uses this vague quantifier with a count noun 11 times. While the other two groups avoid using count nouns in the same position. The low frequency of *lots of* in the CSLE data seems to be a factor undermining this claim, but it can be attributed to the fact that Chinese language is insensitive to the distinction of the concepts of count and mass nouns.

Besides, the PSLE even shows more consistency in using *there are lots of* with 5 occurrences, while the L1 speaker does not show any such combinations and the CSLE uses it only once. By contrast, the L1 speaker uses *there is lots of* with the frequency of 5 which is non-existent in the PSLE data. It seems that these quantifiers demand a plural noun and this might have originated from the system of plural and singular nouns in the Persian language.

The proportion of countable nouns to mass ones after *lots of* reveals that the L1 speaker and the CSLE keep the two kinds if nouns after this vague quantifier balanced, whereas the PSLE prefers to use countable nouns three times as often as the mass nouns. In general, there are two proposed accounts on the distinction of mass-count nouns: the 'distributional account' which relies primarily on criteria associated with morphosyntactic or syntagmatic properties for the classification of these nouns. (Allan, 1980; Sharifian & Lotfi, 2003), and 'notional approach' which concerns with the semantic and conceptual attributes of nouns (Wierzbicka, 1983; Sharifian & Lotfi, 2003).

The study by Sharifian and Lotfi (2003) on mass-count distinction in the Persian language reveals that the Persian speakers' conceptualisation of mass-count nouns allows them to use some mass nouns as count nouns (plural) in certain contexts. They claim what may cause differences in the mass-count distinction between languages can be the cultural conceptualisations existing in the structure of a language, meaning that culture might influence conceptualisations in using mass-count nouns. In other words, "language structure is largely governed by the ways in which humans conceptualise their experience, which may be formed or informed by culture" (Sharifian and Lotfi, 2003, p. 241).They maintain the mass-count distinction across different languages arises from "underlying discrepancies in conceptualizing experience that is being coded in linguistic expression" (p.229).What this implies is that the English, Chinese and Persian mass-count systems are distinctively different.

As a result of this cultural conceptual account, the PSLE might have developed a more flexible count nouns system in using nouns making it more dominant than the mass noun units. This might be a reason why PSLE prefers to use more count nouns with quantifiers that are usable with both nouns. Due to such discrepancies in mass-count distinctions, quantifiers and maybe approximators as well are quite differently used by the L1 speakers and some L2 speakers of English.

L1 influence manifests in the use of vague intensifiers as well. The occurrence of *so* and *too* across the three groups of participants displays two overall trends. Despite the consistently heavy use of these two items by the CSLE, the different pattern is revealed between the PSLE and the L1 speaker. PSLE with 15 tokens is the least frequent user of *too*, preceded by the L1 speaker with 24 tokens, nearly twice as often. The L1 speaker with 40 tokens is found to be the least common user of *so* preceded by the PSLE with 75 occurrences, close to twice as often. The inversion of the rankings of PSLE and the L1 speaker in using *too* and *so* can reveal differences: the PSLE uses *too* half as often as the L1 speaker but *so* twice as often.

The L1 speaker can be assumed to have resorted to the lexical density of English words to compensate for the low frequency of *so* in their data. For instance,

(6.13)

S4: In important position in government, it is very important. Race, your religion is **so** important.                                                         (P: 6:188)

S6: I mean for example [Aghazadeh]. This kind of discrimination.            (P: 6:189)

As can be seen in (6.13), in the PSLE speech *important* collocates with *so*. As in the example below, the L1 speaker shows lexical diversity and uses *extremely* before *important*.

(6.14)

S1: So it's an exception to the rule. Case study thirty-five photo digital cover-up very important.This issue is **extremely** important. I'm sorry they don't have more case studies, like this because.                                                    (L1: 1:685)

Despite the fact that *extremely* expresses a stronger degree, it seems that even to express the same degree of importance, *extremely* will not be commonly used by

the PSLE. However, this seems not to be confined to the PSLE because the percentage language also indicates that *so* occurs more dominantly with both L2 speaker groups. There are other such adverbs which occur in the L1 speaker interaction reinforcing their lexical diversity, which PSLE either does not use or uses very infrequently in their classroom interaction. *Highly*, *definitely*, and *extraordinarily* to name just a few. This provides the evidence that PSLE might have demonstrated less lexical density due to the limited lexical diversity of intensifiers in their language or incompetence in the L2, giving rise to the heavy use of *so*.

Both L2 groups employ *so* 5 times as often as *too*, while this proportion is less than twice as often with the L1 speaker. One reason can be rooted in the lack of an equivalent for *too* in the Persian language. *Too* does not exist in the Persian language and even the features attached to it are not identifiable by any other concepts in Persian. Features such as collocation with some particular adjectives, the negative concept which it implies and also the particular structure where it is used (*too* + adjective + infinitive) make it less widely useable by the PSLE.

Given the reason, the PSLE prefers to use *so* and *very* which can be easily transferred from the L1, but *too* as a result of not being available in Persian is employed less often by the PSLE group than the L1 speaker. It appears that with some modifications in the structure to make it grammatically sound, the PSLE uses *so* and *very* to express what *too* by the L1 speaker expresses.

(6.15)

S2: Doesn't it work in this room? (L1: 3:2)

S1: No it doesn't it, the room's just **too** small. So, that's, number one, okay so I like it better like this so if you guys wanna, …. (L1: 3:3)

In (6.15), the L1 speaker uses *too small* to intensify the smallness of the room but in (6.16), due to the reasons given in the preceding paragraphs, S5 uses *so busy* to

confirm S2's statement which contains a case of *too busy*. The frequency of such collocations where *so* + adjective occur in the PSLE data brings the number of occurrences of *so* in classroom interaction of this group up, whereas the L1 speaker prefers *too* + adjectives in such contexts.

(6.16)

S2: You are **too** busy.                                                                                    (P: 6:552)

S5: Yes, I am **so** busy and have to. In spite all that, my parents were really worried about me going to the university because they said you are very busy. You're always working. You've got three kids to look after.                                                  (P: 6:553)

(6.17)

S4: In important position in government, it is **very** important. Race, your religion is **so** important.                                                                                              (P: 6:188)

S6: I mean for example [Aghazadeh]. This kind of discrimination.                       (P: 6:189)

In (6.17), the PSLE prefers to use *so* where the L1 speaker may use *too*, which can widen the gap in the proportion of *so* and *too* in the PSLE interaction. It is also possible to see *very* as well being used by the L2 groups where *too* can be employed. The PSLE has also allocated a proportion of the task which *too* performs in the L1 speaker data to *very*, due to the lack of *too* in their L1 language and also lack of linguistic competence. This can be confirmed by the proportion of *too* to *very* between the two groups. While PSLE uses *very* 7 times as often as *too*, the L1 speaker shows only a proportion of 1 to 3 in their talks. The same pattern is also witnessed in the CSLE classroom interaction with a larger proportion; 1 to 14, but this seems to have occurred as a result of language incompetence, which is discussed in section 6.7.

(6.18)

S14: After I stewed a little while. <SS: LAUGH>                                              (L1: 3:193)

S1: Where I wound up with, zero or I wound up with, thirty thousand, you know sometimes, when you're online it's just **too** hard to assess that. (L1: 3:194)

In (6.18), the L1 speaker uses *too* to intensify the hardship of assessing something online, while in (6.19) below with almost a similar context, due to the reasons given above, the PSLE opts for *very* to intensify the hardship of changing culture.

(6.19)

S2: Yes? And how can we improve our culture? For example practicing? What? What should we do? Training? (P: 6:434)

S5: But you know I think our culture is **very** hard to change because one of.

(P: 6: 435)

S3: No, very easy to change. (P: 6:436)

This statement can be confirmed once the frequency of *very* by the PSLE is compared with the L1 speaker (108 vs. 79), meaning that the PSLE might have used *very* rather than *too* to intensify some adjectives. This seems to be the reason why the CSLE also uses *very* heavily (498).

As a conclusion, in this study L1 influence contributed to a discrepancy in the use of some vague intensifiers including *too*, *so*, and *very*. *So* and *very* were existent in the Persian language, the PSLE found them more comfortable to use and even came to use them where the L1 speaker would use *too*, which is non-existent in Persian.

The influence of L1 can sometimes result in the devoid or underuse of some items in the L2 speakers' interaction. The zero token for *(a) few* in the classroom interaction by the PSLE against the L1 speaker reinforces the claim. The significant difference between the two groups in this regard can come from the lack of the word in the Persian language. In the mental lexicon of the PSLE, there

seems no distinction between count and mass nouns, when it comes to a term to express a small amount or small number.

The duality in the use of these quantifiers makes it more difficult for the Persians to use these items in the spoken context than the written one. These features include such concepts as countable or mass and the number or amount, which are not available in the Persian language. This can be confirmed when the frequency of *(a) few* is inspected in the data, revealing that the PSLE neither uses *a few* nor makes reference to *few* in their classroom interaction. Having said that, it may not be appropriate to conclude that the PSLE is not able to use them appropriately, but to argue that due to cross-language differences, the PSLE has not yet gained the full mastery necessary to use certain vague items appropriately.

## 6.6. Influence of cultural protocols

Cultural protocols emerge in the way the speaker from a culture uses VL in their interaction. These protocols can reveal particular details which may vary between the users of VL (Terraschke & Holmes, 2007). The first manifestation of cultural protocols can be sighted in the pattern of *I think that* where *that* functions as a complementiser, being more widely used by the PSLE than the CSLE and the L1 speaker. From the cultural perspective, PSLE prefers not to directly express a proposition specially when there is uncertainty in it. *That* here can reinforce the speaker's doubt which is expressed by *I think*, or it indicates that the speaker is going to express disagreement or contrast and probably *that* helps him/her to be more indirect to avoid being offensive.

Culturally, Persian speakers always try to be more conservative when expressing disagreement or contrast, especially in academic settings. It means they try to express themselves hesitantly. The claim can be evidenced when as in (6.20) and (6.21), it is found that many cases where *I think that* are preceded by either *but*, *huh* or *you know*.

(6.20)

S2: Also, by fathers and mothers. For example, if in the school or kindergarten the instructor sees the children that do the opposite things and you must pay attention and say for him or her fathers or mothers. (P: 6:324)

S8: But <u>**I think that**</u> we as we are a traditional country, we can't change. Ok. Two or three centuries later, maybe this happens. (P: 6:325)

(6.21)

S6: Actually, huh, it is more than here we can say. You don't, you say that it is not <u>but **I think that**</u> it is. My question is that are all these common with human structure? I mean structure of spirit. Huh? ... (P: 4:110)

S3: Is it good for us? (P: 4:111)

As can be seen in (6.20) and (6.21), S8 in (6.20) and S6 in (6.21) are opposing what their interactants are stating, but the *that* after *I think* seems to be used as a device to help transit from a firm disagreement to a less stern mode.

As stated in Section 6.2, the complementiser *that* after *I think* is quite frequent in the PSLE data, but the L1 speaker and CSLE prefer *that* as a subject after *I think* more often than the PSLE in their classroom interaction.

'Cultural conceptualisations' can also move to the L2 learning (Sharifian, 2003) which in the case of the PSLE entails VL use. The three main salient cultural schema in the Persian language are, *aberou* , *taarof*, and *shekaste-nafsi* (Sharifian, 2007). All these schema are closely associated with politeness. Furthermore, *'aberou'* has something to do with 'face'.

> This schema is manifested in the in the communicative behaviour of many Iranian people, partly through repeated attempts to refuse offers and

invitations, hesitation in asking for services and favours, hesitation in rejecting requests, etc. Another reflection of *tarof* is the use of plenty of hedges (Sharifian, 2007, p.39).

As O'Shea maintains "Iranian society revolves around *tarof*, a formalised politeness that involves verbal and nonverbal forms and clues" (2000, p.122). Koutlaki (2002, p.1740) asserts that it means 'mutual recognition' which means "that ta'arof functions as a tool for negotiating interactants' relationships". This can be one reason why PSLE uses more vague expressions than the L1 speaker, as these cultural schema may require more such words.

'shekaste-nafsi' commutated with 'modesty' is defined as 'broken-self' or 'breaking of the self' (Sharif Ian, 2005; 2007).

> The schema associated with *shekaste-nafsi* encourages speakers of Persian to show modesty through the denial or downplay of any praise or compliment that they receive, while trying to reassign the praise to either the initiator of the praise/compliment, family members, God, or simply to luck. (Sharifian, 2007,  pp. 41-42).

Shirinbaksh and Eslami Rasekh (2013) give the following extract which includes several instances of *shekaste-nafsi*

(6.22)

> W1: This is a **very** beautiful dress. Did you sew it yourself?
>
> W2: Yes.
>
> W1: Well done. What an artist.
>
> W2: It's not as skilful as your sewing.
>
> W1: Thanks, but it's not true. You are a professional who has surpassed me. I have become old.
>
> W2: You are welcome. I take my hat off to you.                    (pp.100-101)

The other example they provided appears in (6.23)

(6.23)

    W1: Your hair is **<u>very</u>** nice.

    W2: It is by chance, this time it became like this.

    W1: No, you're beautiful so **<u>anything</u>** suits you.

    W2: Beauty comes from your eyes.          (pp.102-103)

The manifestation of *shekaste-nafsi* mainly occurs through intensifiers (especially *very* and *actually*) by which the speaker tries to emphasize a feature and also placeholders to generalise a concepts. This might be one possible reason for the heaviest occurrence of *actually* and *anything* in the Persian data.

(6.24)

S1: She doesn't know **<u>anything</u>** how to turn, how to switch the computer on.

                                        (P: 7:213)

S2: I am **<u>worse</u>** than your mom, dear. Because before I bought a computer for my children. First of all, I went to computer classes. You've got that.      (P: 7:214)

S1: You know that, you know what you should do but what can my mother do about it. You went to university, you know that, but my mother is, has left school. My mother had a child when he was seventeen.          (P: 6:215)

 S2: And I had it, **<u>actually</u>**, when I was eighteen.           (P: 7:216)

In (6.24), S1 in turn 213 is explaining that his mother is not educated and by *anyhting* is emphasising the fact that she even does not know the basics of using computers. Insisting to demonstrate that she is no better, S2 is downgrading herself by *worse*, as it is clear that she has taken computer courses and knows how to use a computer. In the next turn, S1 tries to convince S2 that she is in a better

situation than his mother. First he asserts that she knows at least enough about computers and then refers to her tertiary education, which his mother lacks. He then adds his mother had a child at a very young age, which S1 counts as a demerit. S2 in turn 216 again downgrades herself by referring to the fact that she had a child at a young age as well. This is emphasised by *actually*. The purpose of downgrading by S2 is to show respect to S1's mother and to state that she should not be criticised because of her situation.

Chinese cultural norm in using VL can emerge in the overwhelmingly high frequency of vague expressions in the CSLE interaction. As Chan (2013) argues, Chinese tend to use indirect and circular styles when they interact, as this can allow them to avoid direct confrontation. In so doing, they use different strategies such as contrary-to-face-value (CTFV), or use vague expressions. Ma (1996, p. 258) defines CTFV communication as " any communication in which what is said is the opposite of, or different from, what the speaker believes to be true or what he or she is 'logically' expected to say". This phenomenon can be realised in 'yes' for 'no' or vice versa. The other strategy to achieve the same goal is to remain vague and avoid a direct statement. This seems to be a norm in Chinese politeness practice encouraging more VL use.

## 6.7 Impact of language incompetence

In general, it seems that a number of VL patterns which occur due to the lack of competence actually appear as a result of being non-existent in the L2 learners' first language, because otherwise, the L2 speakers would already have the structure or the expression internalised due to the availability of that item in the their first language.

The first instance is related to the occurrence of *so* and *too* among the three groups of participants: 154 tokens of *so* by the CSLE, 75 occurrences by the PSLE and 40 occurrences by the L1 speaker. The L1 speaker can be assumed to have resorted to the lexical density of English words classified as intensifiers to

compensate for the low frequency of *so* in their data. For instance, 'he was *highly* pleased to hear the news' but the CSLE and the PSLE might have demonstrated less lexical density due to the limited lexical diversity of intensifiers in their language, giving rise to the heavy use of *so*. What this implies is that both L2 speaker groups need to develop competence in lexical diversity in English. This trend might also have arisen from the point that due to being easily usable with all kinds of adjectives, negative and positive, *so* is more widely used by the CSLE and the PSLE.

Both L2 groups use *very* excessively due to the underdeveloped vocabulary diversity in the spoken English. This, therefore, leads to the concentration of the intensifying task around a couple of vague words in the L2. The L2 speakers use *very* instead of *really* as the latter comprises less than one-fifth of the overall vague intensifiers by each L2 speaker group, whereas the L1 speaker has the overall intensifiers comprised of this item twice as often. This appears in the interaction by both groups of L2 speakers but with different concentrations around adjectives.

Discrepancies in collocations are also observed besides concentrations when L2 speaker groups are compared with the L1 speaker. For instance, PSLE collocate the adjective *important* with *very*, while the L1 speaker prefers *really* with important in such contexts. This is quite distinct in the frequency of collocations of *very* and *really* whereby *very important* occurs 15 times by the PSLE but 4 times by the L1 speaker. The L1 speaker, on the contrary, employs 4 tokens of *really important*, which PSLE interaction lacks.

A similar instance occurs with *interesting* occurring after *very* and *really* by the CSLE and the L1 speaker. Reference to the collocation tables of these two intensifiers reveals that, while CSLE prefers *very interesting* with 17 tokens against 3 occurrences by the L1 speaker, the latter uses *really interesting* with the frequency of 9 against the 1 accidental appearance of this collocation. Though it is evident that the L2 speaker groups are able to use *really* appropriately, this

intensifier does not seem to have been fully integrated into their competence in the spoken discourse.

The other trace of incompetence appears in the successive occurrence of *very* to elevate the degree of intensity. In other words, the L2 speakers' insufficient active vocabulary in the L2 leads to the overuse of some common items which can serve the same purpose. This can be viewed in (6.25) and (6.26).

(6.25)

S4: Have you been there?                                                      (Ch: 4:72)

S1: Yes, <Laugh>. It is **very, very, very** hot.                            (Ch: 4:73)

S4: And (xx)                                                                  (Ch: 4:74)

(6.26)

S12: Somehow (xx)                                                            (L1: 1:319)

S6: When it's **too** hot to go to work then you'll be, <S1: LAUGH>[S12: yeah ] complaining all right?                                                                      (L1: 1:320)

SU-f: I think it's important                                                 (L1: 1:321)

S12: And you can't have air conditioning cuz the ozone is totally, screwed so.  (L1: 1:322)

In (6.25) and (6.26), the CSLE has not acquired the applications of *too* in the spoken discourse and feels that *very* does not show the intensity of the adjective it collocates with, and as a result the only option at her disposal is found to be the repetition of this *intensifier* more than once. This is observable in the PSLE as well, but the L1 speaker data lacks the collocation of two *very*s. It should be emphasised this does not mean the L2 speakers fail to make appropriate uses of *too* in their interaction, but that *too* has been underused in the spoken discourse due to incompetence.

L2 speakers in this study make a wider use of different vague words. However, when it comes to *anything,* the PSLE and the CSLE reveal that they have not yet acquired all the applications of this placeholder in the spoken discourse, as they mainly use it in negative sentences. In this regard, the L1 speaker shows more variation in the use of this placeholder by using it negative, interrogative and, affirmative statements. This means that the elasticity of *anything* has not been paid attention to by the L2 speakers, mainly due to incompetence in L2.

## 6.8 Impact of cognitive processing focus

As reviewed in Section 2.4.2, one of the main pillars of the Relevance Theory is based on the cognitive processing effort needed to achieve maximum effect. It focuses on how human communication system behaves in regard to his mental performance. A key concept related to RT which can be used in how communication occurs is the notion of 'cognitive load'. Sweller (1988) defines cognitive load as the total amount of mental activity imposed on working memory at an instance of time. The effect of cognitive load can emerge in the speaker's preference for particular words or phrases in communication.

VL has also been used as a tool to meet the speakers' needs to fill the gap created as a result of concentration on cognitive processing. The impact of this emerges in the inconsistency of the use of negation of *I think* across the three groups. As was discussed in the discussion chapter the *I think + negative sentence* is dominantly used by the CSLE and the PSLE classroom interaction, while *I don't think + affirmative statement* is popular with the L1 speaker and the CSLE. The PSLE also uses it but with very few occurrences and in particular contexts. All the *I don't think* combinations turn up in formulaic expressions such as,

(6.27)

S1: It was one kilo I think .Yes?                                    (P: 5:616)

S5: All of them? No, **I don't think so.**                           (P: 5:617)

S3: One kilo.                                                        (P: 5:618)

Or

(6.28)

S1: … I believe in them, Ok? **I don't think** they are. I don't know they should be deleted.

                                                                     (P: 6:516)

S5: Yes, of course not. Not deleted.                                 (P: 6:517)


In (6.27) and (6.28), *I don't think so* and *I don't think they are* count as the formulaic expressions, which are explicitly taught in ELT books and are the results of explicit instructions.


The PSLE needs to focus on what he is saying and this demands memory load. Hence, he resorts to using the negation after the utterance following *I think*. In other words, this syntactic structure seems to be cognitively more convenient for the PSLE, as he is trying to use the negation with the utterance which is the literal representation of what he means. As *I don't think* seems to be a more processed result of the utterance, demanding less cognitive load, the PSLE tries to use it less often. The inadequate linguistic competence seems to have raised the cognitive load by the PSLE.


The other impact of cognitive processing focus is viewed in the occurrence of *I think* in the final position in sentences, where a remarkable difference between L2 speaker and the L1 speaker is displayed. The CSLE shows 21 tokens and the PSLE 16 of the expression *I think* in the final position. L1 speaker shows a slight tendency, using it twice, meaning that final position *I think* is not found working in the L1 speaker utterances. It seems the PSLE uses *I think* at the end of the

sentence as a device to help relieve memory load, giving the opportunity to seek the time to think about the next segment to come.

(6.29)

S3: Ok. I think, huh, for developing, all the things return to the personal culture **I think**. You know if you want to develop, huh, all the people one by one should start from themselves and (Huh) and to have the culture to be, for being a developed country and , huh, find the capacity of it. You know I think there are lots of problems in, in even this class, in this small society that we have. For example, he says that < laugh>.

(P: 1: 270)

S7: Giving ideas. (P: 1:271)

As (6.29) shows, the PSLE has used the subjectiviser *I think* once in the sentence initial position and doesn't need to use it once again. He then feels need for a kind of filler at the end of the sentence which due to the popularity of *I think* for the reasons discussed thus far, he prefers to use this subjectiviser in that position This filler can be used to compensate for the lack of the appropriate word or the need for preparation to make the transition from one sentence to another. The claim is reinforced by the DM *you know* used immediately following that, which indicates the speaker needs to meet his need in one way or another, but the L1 speaker is likely to use DM only in such positions when the need arises.

The other pattern associated with the impact of cognitive processing effect focuses on the use of VL and is shown in the frequency of *I think that* where *that* functions as a complementiser. This occurs more frequently in the PSLE data, implying that the PSLE uses the complementiser *that*, to fill the pause in speaking, thereby getting the chance to think of the word needed next. What it implies is that the complementiser *that* behaves like a DM for the learners of English, if it can be used in the right optional position.

The CSLE even goes beyond this and uses *I think* twice or even 3 times to handle the memory overload. As can be seen in the example below, S1 *I think* in CSLE is repeated twice so that the speaker can have enough times to think, but once he uses the pause marker *huh* and he still feels unrelieved, he prefers to be consistent in using the third *I think*. There are cases of such repetitions of *I think* in CSLE which can be one reason why *I think* occurs pretty much more in the CSLE than the PSLE or the L1 speaker data.

(6.30)

S6: …There exist too much difference between Chinese and, huh, Western culture. For some more, I think, huh, I think we can, we can, huh, we can enjoy the nature, huh, relax ourselves. And we, as we know, tourist can earn more money and, huh, strengthen, strengthen our body. Thank you so much.                                    (Ch: 6: 13)

S1: But many just said that it is just too funny to be real. Yeah, **I think, I think,** huh **I think** it is right to some degree because every career needs much, much effort and, and, and we have limited energy as well as limited time. So if I have to choose one as my career, I still want to be a good learner because linguistics is all, is really, really, very useful.                                    (Ch: 6: 14)

Cognitive processing can lead to the rise of the frequency of a particular word like *maybe* by the CSLE. Like *I think*, CSLE uses *maybe* as a device to seek time to think about the next word to occur. As is clear in the example below, even he may proceed beyond that and give multiple functions to this possibility indicator in which the first *maybe* functions as turn-taking device and the second one to handle memory load.

(6.31)

S2: It can be connected to the nation's interest. Our country, our government will, huh, have some special benefits to us. That's why.                                    (Ch: 7: 137)

S1: **Maybe, maybe** another reason is, huh, our people, our society provide, huh, higher principle of our teachers and want people in various (xx) to teachers and the, huh, yes. This is why it is safer. (Ch: 7: 138)

S6: I think is is very different to, huh, foreign countries because, huh, from our English, our teachers think that, huh, teachers in foreign country their jobs are very.

(Ch: 7: 139)

As mentioned previously, to facilitate cognitive processing in speech, the PSLE uses the complimenting *that* after *I think*, which could provide them with the momentary pause to unload the memory constraints. This seems to be a reason why the PSLE collocates this subjectiviser with complementing *that* the most often

(6.32)

S2: Let's say, let's say that in the process we cheat, ok? Who is cheating again? We are cheating us, people again. (P: 1: 112)

S4: But **I think that** people that are cheating, they should be separated from people that are living and are, huh. (P: 1: 113)

S2: Maybe that's the biggest problem in Iran. Maybe that is one of the biggest problems. That crime does pay in Iran because there is no way of (xx) people. Ok. (P: 1: 114)

But as in (6.33), the CSLE handles the memory load by repeating *I think* in a row, thereby an overuse of *I think* by the CSLE.

(6.33)

S: 2: I want to be a teacher. I, I like children. Yeah. They are lovely. (Ch: 3: 135)

S4: **I think, I think t**he children will like you at the same time. They are lovely, too.

(Ch: 3: 136)

Similar to *I think*, *maybe* is picked up by the CSLE as a two-fold device, the first one basically as a turn-taking device and the second and the third repetitions of this possibility indicators are associated with cognitive processing effect. This is another reason why *maybe* despite being preferred by L2 learners, is more frequently used by the CSLE. This suggests the insufficient use of DMs is to some extent compensated for by the heavy use of this possibility indicator.

## 6.9 Different communicative approaches among the three

The pattern *I think+ negative statement* vs. *I don't think* confirms the speaker-oriented approach by the L1 speakers, demonstrating that the L1 speakers emphasise their view and accommodate the statement to it. In other words, they make all the necessary modifications in the part which directly concerns them, *I don't think*. On the other hand, the PSLE shows more inclination to the listeners or the third party in the utterance, giving more emphasis to part of the utterance which applies to the speakers than to what is more linked with themselves.

(6.34)

S2: I think every person must have strong position to change themselves. I must try to change myself and I improve my culture. **I think we can't** improve others' cultures, can't change others. We can just make some rules and, huh, and encourage people to respect that rule and just this. I, **I think by force, we can't** change people.          (P: 6:463)

S7: We must make aware people to know and understand beds of rules. Just advantages of rules not just thinking about themselves. We must be aware to think about others, other persons.                                                                    (P: 6:464)

As (6.34) clearly shows, the PSLE tries to highlight the inability in improving others' culture or changing people, but the role of *I think* is deemphasised and more focus has been given to the negative proposition. However, in (6.35) below

the L1 speaker is giving more emphasis to his negative view by using *I don't think*, rather than to a negative proposition.

(6.35)

 S10: **I don't think** it's really a difference I think that, in bands tribes and chiefdoms, they had to do that, to get people to follow 'em. And, support 'em but if they could've, like just kept it all to themselves they would've.                                      (L1: 2:40)

S1: Maybe so. I mean I'm not saying that's not true but it was a, it's a standard of that society right?  Yeah.                                      (L1: 2:41)

(6.35) shows  that the L1 speaker reduces the negativity of the proposition and attaches it to his view by using *I don't think*, making it more personal, whereas using *I think+ negative statement*  the PSLE underlines the negative preposition, reducing the weight of the personal view *I think*. There seems to be a trade-off between the preferred negative pattern of *I think* between the two groups. There is a negative correlation: when the 'personal status' rises, the 'negativity of the preposition' falls; and when 'the negativity of proposition' grows, the 'personal status' decreases. In general, the PSLE seems to give more weight to the 'negative view', while the L1 speaker appears to insist on the 'personal view' in their interaction. The CSLE uses both structures roughly evenly, however.

It appears that *I don't think+ affirmative statement* is more speaker-centred than *I think+* negative sentence. Here *I don't think* is a stronger claim, giving more weight to the speakers' view than involving the listener directly or concentrating on the proposition. In other words, *I don't think* seems to emphasise the speakers' view, but *I think + negative sentence* appears to be more listener-centred, mainly focusing on the proposition in the second sentence. This can imply that *I don't think+ positive sentence* is more a speaker-oriented approach of interaction, while *I think+ negative statement* less involves the speaker, giving more attention to the listener or emphasising the proposition of the sentence.

Persian language seems to encourage a more indirect strategy in which the speaker tries to adopt a less authoritative position. Therefore, the PSLE opts to use *I think + negative statement*. But the L1 speaker striving to be more assertive from the cultural perspective, adopts a more direct mode which makes their voice heard more loudly.

(6.36)

 S1: Yep                                                                                          (L1: 1:48)

 S2: Well, **I don't think** the newspapers should be granted access to the photos because um, like basically we live in a morbid society so if one newspaper has them even if they don't publish 'em it's gonna get out, be on the net or something like that, [S1: mhm ] and so so people are gonna go see it and I think that is a gross invasion of privacy, [S8: mhm ] to have your pictures of your_ like if I was dead and I had a autopsy       (L1: 1:49)

In (6.36), the speaker seems to be highlighting his own stance by using *I don't think* at the beginning of the sentence. Indeed, by *I don't think* he is reducing the negative load from the proposition and adding it to his personal view but in example 6.34), the PSLE is giving the negative load to the utterance after *I think*, which can reduce the effect of the personal view.

The more listener-oriented approach by the PSLE contrasting against the more speaker-dominated approach by the L1 speaker can be more distinctly viewed when *I think* occurring before DMs is analysed. The 'listener involvement marker' *you know* (Remero Trillo, 2002) located before *I think* by the PSLE with the frequency of 9 indicates the fact that the PSLE prefers to orient toward the listener in the talk and create intimacy, but the L1 speaker data lacks this combination. By contrast, the L1 speaker uses the speaker dominated combination *I mean I think* 7 times, by which the speaker seems to be highlighting his own view. This combination is non-existent in the PSLE interaction. CSLE again adopts a middle position between the two groups by avoiding choosing either combination.

The claim that the Persian language is more listener-oriented can be supported by other patterns occurring in the PSLE classroom interaction as well. The investigation of the collocation of *something* reveals 21 occurrences of *something you*, which the L1 speaker fails to use in the classroom context and the CSLE uses only 2 tokens as such. In other words *something you* does not turn up in the L1 speaker's classroom interaction.

(6.37)

S2: You can do everything a- . (P: 2:72)

S7: How do you feel easily with this? For example, with speaking you can transfer your felling easily or you'll ne writing or sometimes you can write or **something** you can speak with us. (P: 2:73)

S2: It depends. (P: 2:74)

The collocation shows that the PSLE uses *something you* to address the listener more directly than the L1 speaker or the CSLE. In other words, the language PSLE uses in English shows traces of getting the listener involved in the interaction more often than the L1 speaker. It means the speaker is leaning toward the listeners by giving them a more active role in the conversation.

There is a flexible or middle position by the CSLE where the CSLE has 1 trend in common with the PSLE and 1 with the L1 speaker. The trend which the L2 speakers are sharing is associated with the preference to include the listener in what they are talking about. This is clearly manifested in the investigation of what occurs after *I think* linked to cultural protocols in that to show respect, the PSLE and the CSLE prefer to use *we* rather than *I*. This can be used to create the intimacy first and express disagreement after that which can be to 'keep face', but it seems the L1 speaker can be more direct. The listener-oriented approach also occurs in the single authored papers by the Chinese authors where the author uses *we* to involve the reader in the communication process.

The equal percentage of *I think we* (6%) by the PSLE and the CSLE against the 2% by the L1 speaker highlights the difference between the L2 speaker groups and the L1 speaker. At the same time, CSLE is also found to be sharing a pattern in common with the L1 speaker, e.g. *I think I*, CSLE and the L1 speaker show speaker-oriented preference with 9% and 8%, respectively, against the 2% by the PSLE, using *I* dominantly more often than any subject pronouns involving the speaker.

This can also be seen in the occurrence of *I may* which accounts for 7% of the overall occurrence of *may* by the L1 speaker and 4 % by the CSLE, whereas as the PSLE fails to collocate *I* with *may*. The PSLE, on the other hand, has around half of the overall occurrences of this possibility marker, comprised of *you may* which involves the listener, whereas this accounts for around one-third with the CSLE and the L1 speaker. This finding contradicts Zarei and Mansoori's (2007) claim that "while English academic discourse relies on the writer's responsibility to provide appropriate transition statements for the reader's convenient tracking of the writer's logic, some other cultures such as Japanese, Korean and Chinese display an opposite trend, giving over much of the responsibility to the reader to grasp the writer's intention" (p. 26). The discrepancy, however, might be attributable to the different discourse mode through which communication happens, spoken versus written language.

The other pattern of the same kind is observed in the subject pronouns occurring after *actually*. While PSLE shows inclination in using *actually we* to involve the listener in the statement, the L1 speaker does not show any interest in using this collocation and the CSLE uses only an accidental collocation of such type. On the other hand, the presence of *actually I* in the interaction by the L1 speaker and CSLE approves the premise that they prefer a listener-dominated approach.

# 6.10 The representation of elasticity of VL

The elasticity of VL (Zhang 2011) in this study manifests in the following aspects: linguistic elasticity (turn-taking, turn-shifting position, and collocations), pragmatic elasticity (serving interconnected and elastic functions), and the versatility between VL's linguistic realisations and pragmatic functions.

## 6.10.1 Linguistic elasticity

The L2 speaker seems to make a more dominantly versatile use of VL than does the L1 speaker. In other words, some vague words provide the speaker with more opportunities to make a strategic use of the expression to enrich communication. Elasticity allows vague words to stretch; the first instance of such a use lies in the employment of *maybe*. Of all the possibility makers examined in this study, *maybe* seems to be the most flexible in use, as it has the potential to appear in clause-initial, clause-mid, and clause-final positions. CSLE prefers to place *maybe* in the sentence initial position as a turn-initiating device 59 times, accounting for 19% and PSLE 44 times, accounting for 28%, while this device is sparingly used by the L1 speaker, accounting to 5 times equivalent to 8% only.

(6.38)

S8: Yes, it is an ideal career. I think I am forced to be a teacher. This is a good job, and now as I am studying, I feel I will succeed in my life. I feel, I have the feel to succeed, so

(Ch: 7: 42)

S6: **Maybe** that comes from our education. (Ch: 7: 43)

As is clear in (6.8), S6 uses *maybe* as a turn-initial device to interrupt S8 and begin his turn.

Elasticity of VL also links with the multifunctional feature of VL to serve different purposes. For example, *maybe* occurring more frequently at the beginning of a clause by the PSLE seems to be used to give indirect advice or express disagreement, while *maybe* serving another function within the sentence tends to acknowledge uncertainty or emphasise possibility.

(6.39)

S2: Right, we're forcing everyone to speak.                    (P: 4:149)

S1: You are forcing. **Maybe** now she doesn't have anything to say.    (P: 4:150)

S6: **Maybe**, we are respecting you ladies.                  (P: 4:151)

As can be seen in (6.39), the clause initial position *maybe* in S1's utterance expresses disagreement or disapproval, meaning that she is not happy with what S2 is doing, whereas S6 is showing respect to S1 by using *maybe* in the same position. Example (6.40), on the other hand presents a context in which *maybe* appearing in the sentence mid-position is used to express uncertainty or possibility.

(6.40)

SU-m: three.                                    (L1: 3:317)

S1: Three-W. I could **probably** make it five-W or seven-W or ten-W or eighteen-W, and I'm sure there's an upper limit **I think** the upper limit was twenty-two or something I- I never can remember. But, you know it's a sort of rule of thumb. If you want it adjacent, it's W. If you want it sort of, nearby three-W and if (xx) you know you're willing to sorta **maybe** make it, **maybe** in adjacent sentences I may say something like nine-W, butI rarely use that. Okay? Is everyone clear, up to this point?          (L1: 3:318)

S2: I have one question.                               (L1: 3:319)

In (6.40), S1 in turn 318 uses different vague expressions to express possibility or uncertainty. The first possibility indicator, *probably,* is followed by repeating numbers that indicates uncertainty. The next clause also contains a vague item, *I think,* the uncertainty in which is reinforced by the approximating *twenty-two or something* following it.

The clause mid position *maybe* in turn 318 follows another vague word *sorta* which seems to have occurred as a result of uncertainty as well. The second *maybe* in the same turn is also followed by another clause to indicate uncertainty "I may say something like". The comparison of (6.39) and (6.40) can demonstrate that the PSLE attaches more diverse roles to *maybe* and finds this possibility indicator considerably more versatile due to the reason discussed, whereas L1 speaker tries to use more diverse expressions. The occurrence of other possibility indicators such as *probably*, *may*, *maybe*, and the subjectiviser *I think* in S1's utterances act as a confirmation to this claim.

The data reveals that the overall frequencies and the frequencies of individual possibility indicators among the three groups different, and their patterns reveal discrepancies as well. The tendency towards using lower frequency of possibility indicators by L2 speakers of English might result from the fact that their lower proficiency level in comparison to the L1 speaker may have impeded using hedges (Mauranen, 1997). This seems to be true to a large extent, although a look at the overall frequency of possibility indicators demonstrates that one of the L2 speakers uses more possibility indicators than the L1 speaker, while the other uses it less often.

The justification for this different distribution is that the concentrated distribution on one single item due to its versatility has raised the overall frequency of possibility indicators, while all the other items occur less frequently. However, it can also originate from their culturally specified paradigms and frameworks of the speakers (Hinkel, 1997), which will be discussed in 6.6 and 6.9.

Elasticity also emerges in the employment of *I think* in the sense that both L2 groups use it as a strategy to take turns more often than the L1 speaker. While the L1 speaker allocates the turn-taking task to this vague expression, only as much as 17%, CSLE and the PSLE prefer more than a quarter of the overall occurrences of *I think* at the beginning of the sentence to take turns to speak. Even in the final position, both groups find it more popular, whereas the L1 speaker does not show much interest in ending a clause with *I think*.

This is manifested in the use of *I believe* in the clause initial and mid position by the L2 speakers versus the occurrence of all tokens of *I believe* in the clause initial position only by the L1 speaker. The L2 speakers use *I believe* as a versatile tool for communication. The mid position *I believe* might have taken the position of some DMs in the L2 speaker interaction.

The fact that the L2 speakers use vague expressions more openly than the L1 speaker due to the inherent vagueness and consequent elasticity in such words gives them the chance to achieve the goal the speakers have set for their talk by using them in the clause initial, mid and final positions.

Elasticity inherent in the vague words enables the consistent pattern by the L2 speaker versus the L1 speaker groups in the positions where they occur more frequently. The L1 speaker might have felt the need for less elasticity in such regards, as they may have other features at their disposal.

Elasticity in the use of VL can also be witnessed in quantifiers where all instances of *some of* by the L1 speaker occur in the clause mid-position but the L2 speakers prefer to use them both in the initial and the mid-position. As with the subjectivisers just discussed, the L2 speaker groups give the key role of turn-initiator to this VL, as in the example in (6.41) where S2 uses turn-taking *some of* to take-over from S6 in the interaction.

(6.41)

S6: They killed themselves.                                                      (P: 1: 178)

S1: They committed a suicide?                                                    (P: 1: 179)

S2: **Some of** them died. Some of them got killed. The one who was supposed to throw the bombs didn't like to do that to happen, so these guys threw the bombs.

                                                                                 (P: 1: 180)

Additionally, PSLE stretch more in the employment of *something* as contrary to other groups, this group uses this placeholder highly frequent in the clause final position. This is also applicable to the placement of conjunctions after *something* which occurs almost twice as often by the PSLE as do the other two groups.

While the L1 speaker does not use *things* in negative sentences, the two L2 speaker groups prefer to make strategic uses of this placeholder by using it in such contexts. This strategic use is not confined to the negative sentences as even the distribution of this placeholder in interrogative sentences by the two L2 speaker groups is also found to be proportionately more common than the L1 speaker.

Although the PSLE and the L1 speaker use *thing* relatively evenly, 74 and 72 times, the L2 speaker uses this placeholder twice as often as the L1 speaker in the clause final position. This can be viewed in the CSLE interaction as well whereby the clause final position *thing* turns up thirty times, while the CSLE used only 10 tokens more than the L1 speaker. This may reveal that the L2 speakers find features inherent in the final position 'things' which can facilitate communication.

The data shows that speakers, especially L2 speakers, consistently attempt to utilise the elasticity of VL by digging into the most flexible areas of VL use and then stretching it to tailor it to their communicative needs. This can be illustrated by the following contrasts between the overall frequency continuum of a category and the elastic continuum of a category member.

The most frequent                              The least frequent
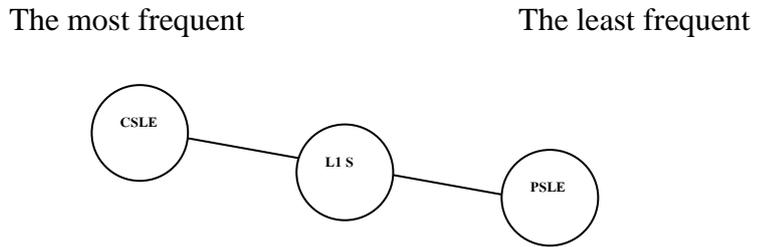


Figure 6.2: Overall frequency continuum of *possibility indicators*

The most frequent                              The least frequent
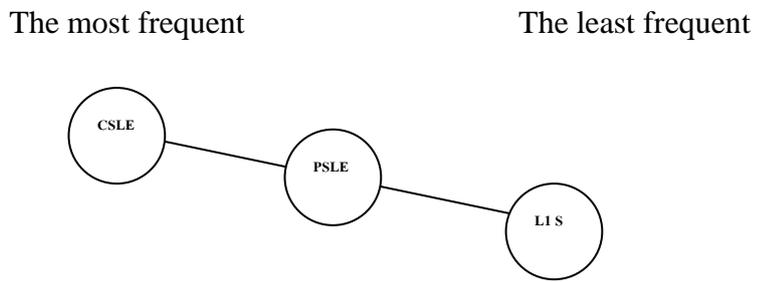


Figure 6.3: Elastic continuum of *maybe*

The most frequent                              The least frequent
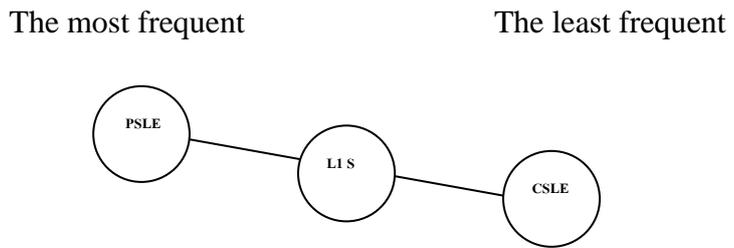


Figure 6.4: Overall frequency continuum of *placeholders*

The most frequent                              The least frequent
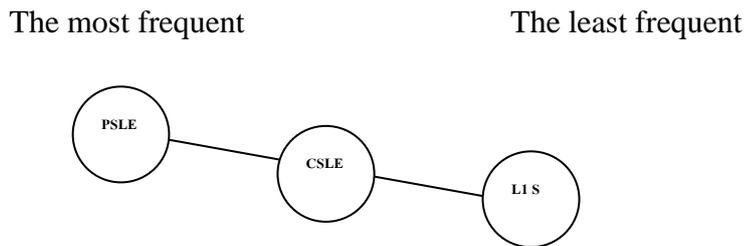


Figure 6.5: Elastic continuum of *things*

The above two contrastive examples in the overall frequency and the individual frequency are due to elasticity of the vague items. For example, as Figures 6.3 and 6.4 show, the overall occurrence continuum of *placeholders* stretches as PSLE, L1 speaker and CSLE, but emerges as PSLE, CSLE and L1 speaker when the elastic continuum of *things* is drawn.

## 6.10.2 Pragmatic elasticity

This elasticity of language is not confined to linguistics elasticity. The analysis of pragmatic functions of VL revealed that the feature of one vague item serving different functions is a blessing in language. This can be viewed in the examples discussed in chapter 5, where each function is fulfilled by a different vague word in each group. For example, politeness is expressed through *possible* by the L1 speaker, *maybe* by the CSLE, and *something* by the PSLE (see section 5.1.2). This diversity can also be realised in the consecutive occurrence of different vague expressions to heighten one single function.

(6.42)

S2: But, you know this level of intellectuality if I am right, you know here if we have the maximum, one hundred, ok? I think in Iran it is twenty. **I think, I don't know** European countries maybe it is thirty but it is much more. Ok? Maybe it is fifty. I agree. **Maybe** it is the same as here but there are differences.                    (P: 1: 502)

In (6.42), speaker 2 is trying to make a claim, but to be safe he prefers to use multiple self-protecting tool to protect himself if the opposite is proven right. These tools, despite serving the same function, do not belong to the same vague category. As can be seen in example (6.42), the self-protection is initiated a by clause that does not contain a vague word "if I am right" but the speaker does not find it sufficient and resorts to some vague words to fulfill this function. The first subjectiviser seems not to have met his expectation and he appears to have felt the

need to be more protecting. This might have caused the used of the second subjectiviser.

To sum up, in communication, sometimes the function can be served by one expression, and sometimes the speaker might realise the word does not express the desired degree intended and makes use of several. This allows him/her to stretch the pragmatic elasticity and align the langue to the required degree in mind.

## 6.10.3 Versatility between VL's linguistic realizations and pragmatic functions.

The analysis of the pragmatic function of VL in this research is strongly in line with the result of the study of elastic nature of VL (Zhang, 2011). It was revealed that there is an interconnection between the linguistic realizations and the pragmatic functions of VL. In other words, it seems a particular vague category is used to serve a specific pragmatic function. This does not mean that there is a one-to-one correspondence between a lexical item and a pragmatic function, but that a lexical item primarily serves a range of limited functions that depend on the communication context. "VL is stretched in varying directions to serve pragmatic functions and maxims" (ibid, p. 592). For instance, placeholders typically refer to right amount of information, mitigation and downtoning. Quantifiers serve the right amount of information or mitigation functions.

## 6.11 Concluding remarks

The discussion in the present chapter is around the indication that VL appears as an appropriate tool to enrich communication. Using this versatile tool, both L1 and L2 speakers try to handle the potential communication pitfalls. And as the pitfalls each group encounters is different from the other groups, they demonstrate contrastive VL realisations in their communication. VL has a substantial manifestation in the language of EFL speakers and is in line with Zhang's (2011)

interpretation of the elasticity of VL; the speakers may on many occasions stretch the rubber band to hit the target spotted in more distant positions.

# Chapter 7 Conclusions and implications

With the fast-growing literature in the study of VL over the past few years, the inadequacy of studies of this feature of natural language in ELT has become more conspicuous and more research in this field has been inspired. This study is a small step towards a more adequate account of VL in the context of academic settings, with a special attention to L1 versus L2 use of English.

## 7.1 Conclusions

Based on the naturally occurring classroom data among L1, CSLE and PSLE groups, the findings of this study challenges Nikula's (1996) and Ringbom's (1998) claims that VL is more extensively used in the L1 speaker's interaction, as both L2 learner groups in this study showed greater tendencies for VL use in their interaction. VL was found to overwhelmingly be a part of the communicative competence of speakers. This research study revealed that VL occurs even more frequently in the ELT contexts. However, each group revealed trends unique to their data set.

1. How is VL realised among L1 speaker, CSLE and PSLE?

One of the most striking findings of this study is the fact that the PSLE always adopts a listener-oriented approach and is less authoritative, as opposed to the L1 speaker whose speaker-dominated approach is evident in the more assertive language used. The CSLE adopts a middle position in this regard.  The less assertive language by the PSLE is manifested in the frequent application of *but I think* to softly express disagreement and indicate contrast, and the common use of *I think* + negative clause to mitigate negativity. This is further reinforced by the more dominant use of   *I think we*, and *you know I think* used to establish intimacy

and create sense of cooperation. Another supporting piece of evidence is the non-existent *I mean I think* in the PSLE data.

The study also revealed that elasticity of a VL category or an item is determinant of the frequency of that category or item in the data. Elasticity refers to the usability of the category or item in multiple positions, which can contribute to the diverse functionality of it. This feature seems to provide the speakers with the opportunity to more appropriately achieve communication needs. With its elastic nature, VL can be stretched further and enhance communication in this regard.

It was found that the most versatile category and items are consistently used as the most and the second most popular with L2 speakers in classroom interaction. *Subjectivisers*, are able to occur in different positions; initial, medial and final, and are found to be the most popular category with CSLE and the second most popular with the PSLE. This seems to be because of the multiplicity of functions *subjectivisers* possess, due to having the potential to appear in different positions; turn-taking, turn-yielding and turn-giving.

This study points out that elasticity is a factor contributing to the frequency of VL in the L2 speaker's interaction. Versatile items are the most preferred by L2 speakers, and elasticity seems to be processed by such speakers in line with ease of use and the potential to meet the communication needs. The former involves how easily the item can be used, such as if the item is identical in L1 and L2, or if it has been obtained sufficiently to be used effectively in L2 interactions. The latter is judged according to how the item can convey the intended meaning and enhance communication. It appears that learners have more diverse communication needs than the L1 speakers. Therefore, they find the elastic nature of VL the richest to satisfy these needs.

2. How frequently is VL used and what are the more fluently used lexical items? Are they overused or underused compared to the L1 speaker group?

It was found that the overall frequency of VL revealed significant differences across the three groups with the L2 learners, in particular CSLE overusing it compared to the L1 speaker and the PSLE taking the middle position. The individual categories as well, are used the most heavily by the CSLE, with the PSLE standing in the second position for half of the categories. This can be interpreted in terms of the elasticity of VL, in that speakers stretch VL to the point where their needs are met. Besides the natural reasons for the occurrence of VL, the needs in this study were found to have arisen from different sources mainly for learners of English.

3. What kinds of vague expressions are used? How are they different from the L1 speaker group?

With regard to the ranking of the categories, it was revealed that the three groups did not have any categories in common as far as the ranking position was concerned. Furthermore, only two categories were found to be in common when the investigation was narrowed to two groups only; DMs holding the first position for L1 speakers and the PSLE and *vague quantifiers* standing as the third most frequently used category by CSLE and the PSLE. However, the ranking of subcategories showed a more consistent pattern than that of the main categories. The L1 speaker used each subcategory more evenly but the L2 speaker groups showed more desire in employing some items far more frequently than others. This can mirror the effect of such factors as L1 influence, cultural norms, cognitive effects, and pedagogic context influences on VL use.

4. How and why is VL strategically mobilised? What are the discrepancies among the three groups?

The functional analysis of VL revealed a diversity of options speakers possess in using VL in classroom interaction. What is obvious in the data sets is that not only can VL contribute to more convenient communication but it also can facilitate the structural management of interaction in both L1 and L2 communication.

5. What are the cultural and linguistic factors underlying the interlanguage and intercultural diversities in VL use?

Cultural and linguistic backgrounds of the L2 speakers can also emerge in the employment of VL when they communicate in English. An example of the context where cultural realisations of VL can occur is politeness. PSLE uses VL as a cultural concept called 'taarof', and in the same way CSLE prefers indirectness as a cultural norm, whereas L1 speaker would rather directness and frankness. In terms of the L1 linguistic realisation of each participant group on VL use in English, it can be referred to the noun system in each language that is closely linked to how the collocation of quantifiers and other nouns can occur.

The lexical analysis reveals statistically significant differences among the three groups, along with frequency distribution of the subcategories and VL patterns used, all attributable to cultural, linguistic, and pedagogic factors. The functional investigation acknowledges the diversity of VL expressions whereby the speaker has at their disposal diverse VL words to deal with each specific function in each data set. This verifies the fact that there exists no monotone but an elastic matching between lexical and functional categories.

Elasticity of VL can also create a versatile continuum. In this study two sets of continua have been explored. The first one, *lexical continuum*, displaying lexical elasticity, shows none of the items in this study is the most frequently used by the L1 speaker. As a second continuum, *versatility continuum*, more dominant in the L2 speaker data, is to a large extent in contrast with the lexical continuum for CSLE and PSLE. This is where the L2 speakers show more concentrated use of each category such as subjectivisers, due to the versatility of items such as *I think*. This is where the maximum potential of VL elasticity is fulfilled to address the speakers' needs and their goals in communication.

What this implies is that, in addition to the overall VL continuum which indicates VL elasticity, there exists an intra-category continuum (in terms of different order of ranking) within each group that is arranged according to the item's versatility, which reveals the more versatile an item is, the more frequently it occurs. L2 speaker data reveals that elasticity of VL leads to the versatility of a vague item and versatility of the item contributes to the frequency of the item in communication.

The elasticity of VL emerges as a result of the uneven distribution of items in each vague category, by which the L2 speaker performs in communication. By contrast, the even distribution by the L1 speaker downplays the continua in the data. The reason why there is no or little evidence showing L2 speakers having difficulties in communication might lie in the fact that they always resort to the elasticity of VL to compensate for any inadequacies. Therefore, the overall heavier use of VL by the L2 speaker groups does not mean they chose to remain vaguer and indeed remained vaguer, but that they resorted to VL as a more versatile and more reliable tool to secure enhanced communication.

This research confirms the interconnection between the linguistic realisations of each vague item and the particular functions it can serve. Although there does not seem to be a correspondence between each vague item and a function, this study revealed a continuum of particular functions in relation to the linguistic realisation of each vague item. The function of each vague word is determined by the context.

This research can shed some light on the difference linguistic behaviours of L1 and L2 groups, especially in improving the pragmatic competence of EFL learners. Even when the concept of English as a global language is taken into account, that rejects the L1 speaker as the norm, the need for VL teaching can be significantly felt in the demand for awareness-raising of different universal varieties of English. Furthermore, despite the fast-growing evolution of English as a global language whereby the uniformity of discourse verities outstandingly

emerges, some discrepancies in the varieties are inseparable from discourse communities. As a result, differences such as VL use need to be highlighted among the discourse communities with the aim of fostering better communication among speakers, whether L1 or L2 groups.

## 7.2 Limitations of the study

There are some potential limitations to this present study. Firstly, L1 speaker data was from a ready-made transcript, the researcher was unable to make any changes in the restricted transcription conventions. Thus, this provided pre-established conventions which the researcher had to follow for transcribing the CSLE and the PSLE data. One of the features which could have contributed to a more elaborate transcript was the indication of overlap between two turns or the lengths of pause, therefore the researcher had to follow the same conventions for the transcription of the L2 speaker sets for the purpose of comparability of data sets.

The other limitation beyond the control of the researcher was the number of words each data set was comprised of. Around 50,000 words set by the L1 data may not be large enough to provide an accurate account of each group's VL use in classroom interaction, but as the study required three data sets, a total of more than 150,000 words would be sufficient for a credible analysis.

The other discrepancy among the data sets is the presence of teacher in the L1 speaker data, which does not exist in the CSLE data and exists minimally in the PSLE, due to the reasons given above. The teacher language in the L1 speaker group still reflects the L1 speaker language. The L1 speaker data is composed of L1 speaker teacher/student as well as student/student interaction. In the PSLE data, the Persian speaking teachers of English have near native fluency in English, but the main focus in the PSLE class is on the learner language, the teacher performs only the facilitator role and has minimum speech production, as to prevent the distortion of the learner language. As with PSLE data, CSLE data consists of learner language, but as all the teachers at that level are L1 speakers of

English, and their participation in the discussion might distort the naturalness of the Chinese data, all classes were run by senior students who performed facilitator roles.

The other limitation in this study was that even though a great effort was made to keep the topics of discussions the same among the three groups, topic shifts occurred unexpectedly and unintentionally. The shifted topics were not totally different from the original topics, but other aspects related to them. Despite the infeasibility of keeping the topics the same, the efforts made to keep the topics almost similar, to a large extent,  overcame the problem.

# 7.3 Implications

Despite the growing body of literature in the area of VL, and the tacit acknowledgements of its crucial role in the academic discourse, still very little has been written on VL in language pedagogy. Based on the naturally-occurring data, this research as a pioneering study attempts to fill in the gap in the existing literature. It investigates the VL manifestation from the VL elasticity perspective to find how the fluid nature of VL can enhance communication by speakers from three different linguist and cultural backgrounds. The findings of this research can lend support to the study of language from the linguistics perspective and the pedagogic view.

## 7.3.1 Elastic communicative competence

The present study contributes to a fuller understanding of what comprises communicative competence. VL should be instructed to learners of English, not necessarily adopting the L1 speaker language as a model but to focus on how VL elasticity can be taken advantage of in the process of communication. This can be carried out as teaching all the four components of communicative competence: grammatical competence, discourse competence, sociolinguistic competence, and strategic competence. They can be instructed on the appropriate use of VL

elasticity to compensate for the potential inadequacies in their communicative competence. Learners can be taught discourse management strategies through VL use. For instance, how VL can be used to direct spoken discourse like turn-taking, turn-yielding and turn-giving. VL is overwhelmingly needed in academic contexts and explicit instruction on its appropriate use is required.

This study can also help develop new concepts on the mechanism of VL operation in communication. Rather than viewing VL as a static phenomenon, attention needs to be paid to the dynamic nature of VL in classroom interaction. It has been argued in this study that versatility of a vague word is important in the frequency of the word. In other words, the more elastic an item is, the more frequently it occurs. Therefore, another implication of this study is that VL should be looked at from the elastic perspective, rather than mainly focusing on the mere frequency occurrence. A continuum-based approach can be adopted in the study of VL.

### 7.3.2 Intercultural understanding

The other implication of this study will be a contribution to an overall understanding of how VL can be employed by the learners of English to help them meet their needs and reflect their linguistic and cultural backgrounds. This can help prevent miscommunication or misunderstanding in ESL classes where learners come from diverse countries. It can promote the co-existence of different varieties of English living side by side in a single context where each variety can maintain its VL use pattern and at the same time tolerate a pattern different from theirs.

### 7.3.3 Language pedagogy

The findings can shed some light on classroom interaction, curriculum development, and teacher education. The competency in such areas should be

obtained through formal instructions. This responsibility lies partly with the curriculum developers and partly with the teachers.

With regard to curriculum development, this study provides ELT curriculum developers with conceptual frameworks for designing academic materials with the due attention to VL teaching to improve language learners' pragmatic competence. This study reveals that students also need to gain mastery over the collocation patterns of VL. Therefore, the developers need to incorporate exercises VL collocations into the material they plan. The awareness of VL elasticity can contribute to improvement in both written and spoken modes. The written mode can in particular be required in academic writing where precision with regard to the truth condition of a statement is strongly needed.

With regard to teacher responsibility, this study suggests that teachers may need to provide learners with supplementary material and design supplementary classroom exercises to enhance the appropriate use of VL. It also indicates that learners need to learn the use and the positions of VL. Therefore, the present study encourages the explicit instruction on three important features on VL; where, when, and how to use it. This can contribute to a more developed pragmatic competence by the learner of English.

This study informs teachers what kinds of linguistic and cultural trends in VL use can be brought along by learners to ESL settings. This can prevent VL from raising potential student/student or students/teacher misunderstandings or miscommunication in ESL contexts. This leads to identifying the potential cultural or linguistics conflicts by international students or teachers in advance. The elastic nature of VL confirms the crucial role it plays in communication. Hence, another implication of this study can be incorporating VL instruction into language pedagogy.

## 7.4 Suggestions for further research

With the significant differences found among the three groups, a potential area for further research could be an investigation of VL within each group which neutralises such factors as linguistic and cultural differences, seeking whether individual psychological factors such as personality type may cause differences in the frequency of VL categories or VL patterns.

The other area still open to be investigated is the examination of other vague categories such as approximators and general extenders among the same three groups to add a more comprehensive view to the conceptual dimension of VL study across the three groups.

The data for the present study is comprised of spoken language in classroom interaction but future research can focus on the written discourse across the three groups to confirm if the discourse mode is a source for differences in the frequency and the pattern of VL use. In other words, a comparison of the spoken language and the written language can provide a more detailed account of this feature of language.

Future research can also investigate whether different topics can affect the frequency or the elasticity of VL use in both L1 and L2 contexts.

With the significance of VL in the communicative competence as shown in this study and also acknowledged in the literature, there is currently no question that VL should be included in the curriculum and placed in language pedagogy. Therefore, the future research can address a question one step further, whether explicit teaching of VL can lead to an enhanced mastery of this elastic and important feature of language.

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# Appendices

# Appendix I Consent Form for the Director and All the Teachers

**THIS CONSENT FORM WILL BE HELD FOR A PERIOD OF FIVE YEARS.**

**Title: An investigation of vague language use in academic settings**

**Researcher:** Peyman Ghassemi Pour Sabet

- I agree to give access to the researcher for recording the classes in my language centre.
- Students and teachers may participate in the above study if they so wish.
- I acknowledge that the nature of the study and the recording procedure has been explained to my satisfaction by the researcher and my consent is even voluntarily. I have had the opportunity to ask questions and have them answered.
- I understand that the data will be stored in a secure place to safeguard confidentiality.
- I understand that the data will be stored for any possible future research.

Signature: -------------------------------------

Name: ----------------------------------

(Please print clearly)

Date: -----------------------------------

Contact number/ E-mail: -------------------------------------

APPROVED BY CURTIN UNIVERSITY HUMAN RESEARCH ETHICS COMMITTEE FOR…………….YEARS ON………(DATE)……………….,
REFERENCE NUMBER………………………. .

(This is to be completed by the researcher, after receipt of the letter of approval and prior to distribution to the participants).

# Appendix II Consent Form for All Participants

**THIS CONSENT FORM WILL BE HELD FOR A PERIOD OF FIVE YEARS.**

## Title: An investigation of vague language use in academic settings

- I agree to take part in this research and to be audio or video taped.
- I acknowledge that the nature of the study and the recording procedure has been explained to my satisfaction by the researcher and my consent is given voluntarily. I have had the opportunity to ask questions and have them answered.
- I am aware that all the information I provide for this research project is confidential and my identity will be protected at all times.
- I give permission to record about 2 hours.
- I understand that I can choose to have the recorder turned off at any time and I am free to delete all or parts of my recordings as I wish. I can withdraw all the information I give by …………………without giving a reason.
- I understand that the data will be stored in a secure place to safeguard confidentiality.
- I understand that the data will be stored for any possible future research.


Signature: ---------------------------


Name: -----------------------------

      (Please print clearly)


Date: -------------------------------


Contact Number/E-mail: -----------------------------

APPROVED BY CURTIN UNIVERSITY HUMAN RESEARCH ETHICS COMMITTEE FOR…………….YEARS ON………(DATE)………………., REFERENCE NUMBER………………………. .

(This is to be completed by the researcher, after receipt of the letter of approval and prior to distribution to the participants).