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I MEAN AS A FILLER IN ACADEMIC SPOKEN AMERICAN ENGLISH

Diploma Thesis

Brno 2019

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Abstract

The diploma thesis investigates pragmatic functions of the verbal filler *I mean* in academic spoken American English. Two types of speech events, namely student presentations and seminars, were chosen from the *Michican Corpus of Academic English* and analysed in terms of the frequency of *I mean*. Further, the author attempts to identify possible pragmatic functions of *I mean* in the two speech event situations. The findings of both speech event types are compared and the reasons for their differences are described.

Keywords: discourse markers, verbal fillers, interactional devices, *I mean*, pragmatic function, discourse analysis, spoken language, academic English, American English

Abstrakt

Diplomová práce zkoumá pragmatické funkce vycpávkového slova *I mean* v akademické mluvené americké angličtině. Dva typy mluvených situací, studentské prezentace a seminář, byly vybrány z databáze textů akademické angličtiny Michiganské univerzity a analyzovány v souvislosti s četností výskytu vycpávkového slova *I mean*. Dále se autorka pokouší identifikovat možné pragmatické funkce *I mean* v obou mluvených situacích. V závěru práce jsou porovnány oba analyzované texty a popsány jejich rozdíly.

Klíčová slova: diskurzní ukazatelé**,** vycpávková slova, interaktivní prostředky, I mean, pragmatická funkce, analýza diskurzu, mluvený jazyk, akademická angličtina, americká angličtina

Acknowledgements

I would like to thank to doc. PhDr. Renata Povolná, Ph.D., for her kind supervision, highly valuable and expert advice. I would also like to thank to my husband Mgr. Jiří Beran for his immense support and patience.

Prohlášení

Prohlašuji, že jsem diplomovou práci vypracovala samostatně, s využitím pouze citovaných literárních pramenů, dalších informací a zdrojů v souladu s Disciplinárním řádem pro studenty Pedagogické fakulty Masarykovy univerzity a se zákonem č. 121/2000 Sb., o právu autorském, o právech souvisejících s právem autorským a o změně některých zákonů (autorský zákon), ve znění pozdějších předpisů.

Pavlína Beranová

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1. Introduction

Spoken language plays a vital role in any language. Everyday communication among people is not only about conveying information, but also, and more importantly, about social integration and interaction.

Leech and Svartvik (2002) distinguish two main uses of spoken English, private conversation and public speaking. Private conversation is the most commonly used kind of communication, which is also the least artificial and most neutral kind of English (Crystal, 1969). Conversation can be described as an interactive spoken exchange between two or more participants who take turns and it can be realized, either face-to-face or via a technical device, such as a phone or a computer. On the other hand, public speaking occurs when one person talks to an audience of people who interact less than in conversation or not at all. Leech and Svartvik claim that "public speaking is intermediate between conversation and writing, in that a speech can be prepared in advance in writing, and read aloud to an audience" (2002: 12). In public speaking we can encompass lectures, radio talks or TV news broadcasts.

Biber, Johansson, Leech, Conrad, and Finegan (2000: 430) point out that "speakers usually share a lot of contextual background, especially a large amount of specific social, cultural and institutional knowledge." Stenström calls it shared knowledge and adds that "without a certain amount of shared knowledge, communication would hardly be possible" (1999: 28).

Owing to the fact that spoken interaction is spontaneous communication delivered on the spot while speakers take turns, they do not have time to think over what to say next, which communicative items to use; therefore, they tend to use different types of hesitation markers, such as silent and voice-filled pauses, false starts, repetitions, incomplete utterances, and verbal

fillers. Some of the last mentioned hesitation markers, that is verbal fillers, will be investigated in detail in the current work. I will use the term verbal fillers in my work as they could be said to belong among discourse markers, which is, in my view, too broad a term.

Verbal fillers fill in a gap in an ongoing speech but carry little or no semantic meaning. They frequently occur in conversation because their functions are "tied to the naturalistic, unplanned, unrehearsed, collaborative nature of spontaneous talk" (Fox Tree & Schrock, 2002). Stenström refers to these words as interactional signals and views them as an important part of communication because "the conversation is much less lively and less personal without items signalling receipt of information, agreement, and involvement" (1994: 17).

1.1. Subject and the aim of the research

The present work aims to contribute to the study of academic spoken American English, specifically to the study of the pragmatic functions of the filler *I mean* when used in an academic environment. I have chosen to investigate the filler *I mean* as Biber et al. claim that *I mean* belongs among three primary discourse markers in spoken American English (2000: 1096). The research aim of the work is to investigate the use of the filler, its frequency of occurrence and the role of the filler *I mean* in spoken communication.

As any part of a language, also spoken language has developed. Speakers use devices that help them express their intentions and these are the so-called discourse markers or fillers. They have a wide range of functions, and this work attempts to identify all the possible functions of the verbal filler *I mean* and describe the situations in which it is used.

1.2. Hypothesis

As stated above, the work aims to explore the pragmatic functions of *I mean*, the contexts in which it occurs and its role in spoken communication. The following research questions will be investigated and answered in the conclusions of the thesis:

a) Is the filler *I mean* one of the most common fillers used in American spoken English used in academic environment?

b) What is the frequency of use of the filler *I mean* in the different types of speech situations compared in the present study and what are the reasons for the differences?

c) What are the pragmatic functions of the filler *I mean*?

1.3. Content of the study

The study is divided into several chapters. In the introductory part, the aims of the work and hypotheses are stated. The second chapter presents to the reader the methods used for the analysis of the data. The third chapter provides an insight into spoken interaction and its principles as well as an investigation of typical features of academic and American English.

The fourth chapter discusses the previous research on discourse markers and, more specifically, the verbal filler *I mean*. The following chapter deals with the analysis from the point of view of discourse analysis and pragmatics, based on the texts selected from the *Michigan Corpus of Academic Spoken English* (MICASE), i.e. the texts representing transcribed speech used in an academic environment. Two types of speech event categories are analysed – seminars and students' presentations.

The last part of the current work summarizes the whole research and its findings and offers tentative conclusions.

2. Theoretical framework

2.1. Approaches to analysis

Since my work carries out the analysis of transcribed texts while using two approaches – approaches from the viewpoint of discourse analysis and pragmatics, these branches of linguistic studies are briefly discussed in the following subsections.

2.1.1. Discourse analysis

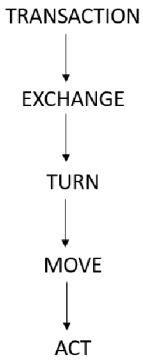
Discourse analysis (DA) is a branch of linguistics that focuses on the study of language in use, typically the use of spoken language. The analysis not only describes the speech situations, events, and acts, but also takes into account "what people are doing and what they think they are doing when they speak" (Cameron, 2001: 66). Discourse analysts look for regular patterns in the use of a subject of interest, particularly where in discourse it tends to occur, and what it is used to do (ibid.).

Stubbs (1983: 1, as cited in Schiffrin 1987: 1) points out that discourse analysis "attempts to study the organization of language above the sentence or the clause, and therefore, it studies larger linguistic units, such as conversational exchanges." He adds that DA also deals with language in use in particular social contexts, especially with interaction or dialogue between speakers.

From the interactional perspective, conversation can be viewed as a set of turns that the speakers take. Stenström (1999: 4) defines a turn as "everything that the current speaker says before the next speaker takes over." It can be long or short or consist of one single word. Two

or more turns, each produced by a different participant, form an exchange. All the exchanges in conversation on one single topic create a transaction. Therefore, in one conversation there may be one or more transactions depending on the variety of topics.

The structure of spoken interaction is illustrated in the figure below, where the five hierarchical levels of spoken discourse are shown (Stenström, 1999):



Smaller units within a turn are referred to as moves and acts. A move is a way the speaker interacts in a turn, for instance, how the speaker calls the listener's attention, starts and finishes the exchange, and of course, holds the floor. An act is a part of a move, there can be one or more acts in a move, and they indicate the speaker's intentions, what they want to communicate.

This is an example of a transaction, a conversation between a husband and wife:

A: "Have you bought bread and some biscuits for the kids?" Line 1

B: "Oh, err... I got the biscuits only." Line 2

A: "Can't you ever remember buying everything?" Line 3

B: "Let's not get into this again. You know I have a lot on my plate." Line 4

A: "Yes. Some things never change." Line 5

This transaction is made up of two exchanges, the first one consisting of two turns (lines 1 and 2), the other of three (lines 3, 4 and 5). Each turn consists of one move. Three of the

moves contain more than one act (lines 2, 4, 5). The exchanges are part of the same transaction, as they are both related to what Speaker A asked about in the first exchange.

Let us now focus on the speech acts concerning verbal fillers. Stenström (1999) recognizes three categories of speech acts: primary, secondary and complementary acts. The first two can make up a move on their own. However, the third type of act usually only accompanies primary or secondary acts. Verbal fillers belong to the group of complementary acts; therefore, they can accompany primary acts but can rarely replace them. The example below demonstrates the previous explanation:

A: *"Can you give me a hand with this?"*

B: *"Well, I can't as I'm running late for work."*

This exchange consists of two turns. In Speaker's A turn there is one single move, which is the primary act. Speaker's B turn comprises of one move as well. It includes the complementary act *well*, the primary act *I can't* and the secondary act *I'm running late for work*.

Without the primary act, the exchange would be interrupted:

A: *"Can you give me a hand with this?"*

B: *"Well, as I'm running late for work."*

As can be seen in the example above, the communication is problematic. Speaker B did not give a clear answer to the request and Speaker A may be confused. The secondary act functions as additional information or explanation of the decision made. However, secondary act standing alone without the primary act might not be understood. The complementary act *well* does not carry any semantic meaning and it is not necessary for the understanding of the exchange. Complementary acts are often realized by discourse markers and verbal fillers. They are examined more closely in Section 4.1 of the current work.

Next, I would like to introduce the principles of discourse analysis. DA of spoken language is based on recorded spoken interactions which are transcribed to a text in the following step. Subsequently, prosodic and paralinguistic features are added to the text. Prosodic features include intonation or stress; the examples of paralinguistic features are laughing, coughing, whispering, articulation, etc. Nevertheless, some features, such as pace, loudness, pitch or physical paralinguistic features (facial expressions, gestures, posture) are lost. Such a transcript with prosodic and paralinguistic features functions as a basis for DA.

To sum up this subsection, conducting discourse analysis is an attempt to find regularities in the data and to describe them. It also "involves doing syntax and semantics, but primarily pragmatics" (Brown & Yule, 2003: 26) because the main task for analysts is to discover how people use linguistic means to communicate their intentions and meanings.

2.1.2. Pragmatics

Cameron (2001) sees pragmatics as a study of how language can be used to do and mean things in real-world situations. Thomas provides her definition of pragmatics as the study of "meaning in interaction" (1995: 22). She criticises previous approaches to pragmatics because they only reflect the view of either the speaker, the hearer or semantic meaning of an utterance. According to her, making meaning is a process between the speaker and the listener, their negotiation of the meaning in a context of utterance and its potential (ibid.).

Crystal explains pragmatics simply as "the study of the choices you make when you use language, the reasons for those choices and the effects those choices convey" (Hay Levels, 2014). When talking about pragmatics, we ask *why* something was said the way it was said and not any other way. All the choices we make when speaking are connected to context, meaning or emphasis.

In the previous section, we investigated structure of spoken interaction and its smallest unit – acts. Now, let us look at speech acts in terms of pragmatics.

Speaking a language means performing speech acts, such as asking questions, offering apologies, making promises, giving commands, etc. We perform these verbal acts in conversations in order to accomplish our communicative goals. The acts speakers perform when they make an utterance are called speech acts. Austin (1962, as cited in Thomas, 1995) formulated these insights into a theory that is known as the Speech Act Theory. According to Austin, each utterance consists of three related acts: (1) locutionary act, which is the basic act of producing a meaningful linguistic expression, (2) illocutionary act, which is an utterance produced with certain function in mind and performed by means of communicative force, (3) perlocutionary act that is produced on the assumption that the listener will recognize the intentions of the speaker.

The following example: *"I'm hungry"* is a meaningful linguistic expression and it can be counted, for instance, as a complaint, a request or a warning. However, we do not know what function the utterance carries unless we know the speech event, in which the speech act has been performed. Speech events are the circumstances surrounding the utterance which help in recognizing communicative intentions and how they are interpreted. By analysing speech events, we can study how more gets communicated than is said.

Another important term in pragmatics is illocutionary force. It is used to refer to the speaker's communicative intention. Thomas shows an example, a simple question: *"Is that your car?"* (1995: 18). The listener has no problem understanding the utterance meaning, yet they may not understand the force behind the question. Is the speaker expressing admiration, or indicating contempt? Is it a complaint that the car is blocking the driveway? Alternatively, is

the speaker asking for a ride? These are all examples of the different pragmatic forces which one utterance might have.

When conveying a message, speakers sometimes do not say directly what they mean; therefore, they often use indirect speech acts. According to Thomas, "indirectness occurs if there is a mismatch between the expressed meaning and the implied meaning" (1995: 117). Indirectness can be intentional or unintentional. The latter may be caused by linguistic inadequacy, for instance, when the speaker does not know the right word or expression in their own or a foreign language. On other occasions, indirectness could occur due to some performance error, e.g., if the speaker temporarily forgets a word, or through fear, excitement or nervousness cannot get the right word out. However, in pragmatics, we are interested merely in intentional indirectness, although, it is not always conceivable to recognize whether indirectness is intended or not.

Dascal points out that indirectness is "costly and risky" (1983, as cited in Thomas, 1995: 120). As costly he means that "indirect utterance takes longer for the speaker to produce and longer for the hearer to process" (ibid.). And it is risky because the hearer may not understand what the speaker's message is. Furthermore, Dascal claims that everyone makes use of indirectness on certain occasions, even though it "costs them unnecessary effort" (ibid.: 122).

Indirectness can occur in all natural languages. Even though, individuals and cultures differ in how, when and why they use indirect speech act rather than direct one, there are some universal factors that determine its use. According to Thomas, these factors are (1995: 124):

a) relative power of the speaker over the listener

b) social distance

c) degree of imposition

d) relative rights and obligations

There is a general tendency to use a higher degree of indirectness when talking to people who have some power or authority over those who do not. It can be seen most significantly in hierarchical settings, such as military, courts, workplaces, even in classrooms. One of the reasons may be that people in power can influence the life and/or career of those who do not have that power. By social distance, it is meant the degree of respectfulness in a given situation determined by factors, such as social status, age, gender, a degree of intimacy, etc. The level of imposition means 'how great is the request we are making?' We tend to use a higher degree of indirectness when asking, for instance, to borrow 50 dollars than to request one dollar note only. In terms of relative rights and obligations between the speaker and the listener, it is important whether or not the speaker has the right to make a particular demand and if the listener has the obligation to comply. Thomas (ibid.: 131) provides an example of a situation on a bus. In the case of a request stop, the passenger's request is made with a minimal degree of indirectness: *"Next stop, driver!"*. However, when asking a driver to stop between official bus stops, the passenger applies a great deal of indirectness: *"Do you think you could possibly let me out just beyond the traffic lights, please?"*

All the factors mentioned above are not determined in advance; therefore, they might not be accepted by all members of a community. For this reason, people use language to change other people's perception of generally shared norms and conventions.

Next, let us investigate people's motivation for employing indirectness. A variety of reasons were brought forward for the common use of indirectness, which include, according to Thomas (1995: 143), the desire to make speaker's language more/less interesting, to increase the force of one's message, competing goals and politeness (on politeness see Subsection 3.1.1). Interestingness is one of the reasons people may use indirectness, simply because they enjoy having fun with language. Only occasionally we find examples of using indirectness to be

uninteresting. Increasing the force of one's message by using indirectness is closely related to the previous point because speakers can increase the impact or effectiveness of their message. This is often used in poems, jokes or irony. Also, indirectness is often employed when there are two goals, which compete – a clash between the speaker's propositional goal and their interpersonal goal. An excellent example comes from a classroom, where a teacher needs to tell a student that his or her work is not up to standard. The teacher has to communicate it in a way that does not hurt student's feelings, does not discourage their effort or decreases their motivation for further work.

All the reasons stated above are genuine underlying motivations that determine linguistic choices. Nevertheless, another explanation can be that speakers want to avoid expressing impolite beliefs. Therefore, they only imply their intentions but do not say them directly.

Whatever reasons are behind people's motivation for using indirect utterances, the use itself is rational. It gives speakers the means to achieve their communicative goals and to avoid unpleasant situations.

3. Academic spoken American English

Academic spoken American English can be viewed as a combination of three language varieties – academic English, spoken language and American variety of English. In this chapter, we look closely at each of these varieties and their features. First, let us start with the spoken language and its principles.

3.1. Spoken interaction

As already mentioned in the first chapter, spoken communication does not only convey some information, but also maintains social contacts. Brown and Yule (2003) describe these as two language functions. The former called transactional function expresses the content of the communication while the latter which refers to social relationships and personal attitudes is labelled as interactional language function (ibid.). The authors also add that it is very unlikely in any natural language that an utterance fulfils only one of these functions. Furthermore, a large part of "everyday human interaction is characterised by the primarily interpersonal rather than the primarily transactional use of language" (Brown & Yule, 2003: 1-3).

Besides Brown and Yule, there are other linguists who also point out the sociolinguistic role of spoken communication. For example, Spolsky (1998) claims that a lot of talk is used to establish, maintain and improve social relationships.

And what is actually happening during a conversation on both sides of participation? In general, speakers control the production of communication and process it under circumstances that are significantly more demanding than those of writers. Brown and Yule (2003) state the following reasons. Speakers monitor what they have said and decide if it corresponds with their intentions while the person is delivering their current expressions and simultaneously planning

their next phrase that needs to fit into the overall form of speech. Furthermore, speakers have to monitor not only their performances but also the reception by their listeners. Speakers are under considerable pressure to talk during the time provided because they know that every word they say will be heard by their interlocutors and thus, they take the risk of exposing their own feelings, and give immediate reply clearly and concisely. However, there are also great advantages for the speakers, and that is if the need arises, they can modify what they are saying as they monitor hearers' reactions minute by minute and make them more understandable or acceptable to their listeners. Verbal fillers certainly help with these issues, as they can either signal a change or correction, or help to gain time to think about their next move. All these functions are discussed later in the fourth chapter of this work.

During any conversation, the speakers are expected to obey certain rules of spoken interaction. These are, according to Stenström (1999), 1. speakers co-operate and 2. speakers take turns. That means that participants do not usually talk at the same time and they wait for the other to finish what they intended to say. The rules of spoken interaction are called the Cooperative principle (CP) and were introduced by Grice (1975). The CP was explained by Grice in the following way: "Make your contribution such as is required, at the stage at which it occurs, by the accepted purpose or direction of the talk exchange in which you are engaged" (Grice, 1975 as cited in Thomas, 1995: 61-62). In other words, speakers are expected to follow four conversational maxims, which are included in the CP: the maxim of quality, the maxim of manner, the maxim of quantity and the maxim of relation, which means that conversational participants' contributions should be true, brief and orderly, as informative as it is required and relevant. When accepting and following these rules, people's interaction can look like this:

Husband: "*Where are my keys?"*

Wife: "*They are on the tea table in the living room."*

The wife has answered her husband's question truthfully, clearly and has given the right amount of information. She has answered her husband's question so that she has met his communicative goal in asking that particular question.

However, people sometimes do not observe these maxims, not because of deceiving or misleading, but because the speaker encourages the hearer to search for a meaning that is very different from the expressed meaning, or it is additional to the meaning expressed by the words (See Subsection 4.2.2. for differences between semantic and pragmatic meaning). Grice called this 'flouting a maxim'. Let us have a look at an example of flouting:

Husband: *"Where are my keys?"*

Wife: *"You know, you should always put them in one place and then you won't have to ask me all the time where to find them. Mine are in the hallway."*

The wife could have simply answered *I don't know*, but she has chosen to give a piece of advice about keeping the keys in one place. Furthermore, she is obviously annoyed by this question, which implies that she is asked about this matter regularly. She flouted the maxim of manner as she did not answer her husband's question at all. Moreover, she gave an unnecessarily long response to a very simple question.

The Cooperative principle is complemented by the Politeness principle. Yule claims that politeness principle can be referred to as a set of "general principles for being polite in social interaction within a particular culture" (1996: 60). These may include being tactful, modest, sympathetic to others, etc. He adds that politeness can be also defined by using all the means available "to show awareness of another person's face" (ibid.). Both external and internal factors influence what the speaker says and how the speech is interpreted by the hearer. External factors relate to social distance and closeness. They usually involve the relative status of the participants and are associated with things, such as age and power (Yule, 1996). Internal factors

include the amount of imposition and degree of friendliness, which are usually negotiated during communication.

In an academic environment, participants are expected to follow the rules of both cooperative principle and politeness. Of course, communication in a classroom interaction is influenced by the social distance as the teacher has more power than students. The teacher has the privilege to control and modify the interaction and to provide evaluative feedback. For this reason, the turn-taking process in the classroom is different from that of free conversation outside the class. During the class interaction, the teacher's task is to keep social distance in the teacher-students relationship, maintain positive atmosphere in the teaching and learning process and create favourable teacher-student as well as student-student social interaction.

3.2. Language of spoken interaction

The medium of communication in any language is either spoken or written. Let us present the characteristics of spoken language, which, according to works of Crystal and Davy (1969: 95-120), and Leech, Deuchar, and Hoogenraad (1982: 135-140) vary significantly from the written production. A great advantage of speech is fast and direct communication with instant feedback from the listener. Therefore, the message can be repeated, rephrased or clarified. It is usually accompanied by non-verbal communication, such as gestures and facial expressions. Furthermore, speech includes non-linguistic noises, rhythm and intonation. All these features of spoken language lead to inexplicitness as the speaker can refer to the immediate environment and their shared knowledge makes explicitness redundant. Only telephone conversation needs more explicitness as there is no visual contact.

From the grammatical point of view, speakers use simpler sentence structure and active declarative forms, rarely passive or cleft sentences. Moreover, it is difficult to clearly define

sentence boundaries as there are no capital letters and punctuation marks as in written language. The utterances may be unfinished because the shared knowledge makes it possible to use uncompleted utterances. As the speech is not permanent as written production, repetitiveness is applied more. Especially the important pieces of information are often repeated because the listener cannot refer back to what has been said before. Owing to the unprepared and spontaneous nature of speech, non-fluency is very common. Crystal and Davy call this phenomenon of conversation "normal non-fluency" (1969: 104). It is characterised by a very high number of 'errors' compared to other speech situations. It includes false starts, hesitation, unintended repetitions, simultaneous speech, grammatical blends, slips of the tongue, fillers and other features. In general, spoken production tends to be less formal than written one, but, of course, depending on the relationship between the speakers in the given conversation.

In both spoken and written language, discourse markers (DMs) are used. According to Stenström, they are used to "organize and hold the turn and so mark boundaries in the discourse" (1999: 63). Some are used in both varieties, spoken as well as written, others typically occur in spoken language. Some DMs are more common in informal speech and writing, as examined by Swan (2005), for example: *anyway*, *in any case* (dismissal of previous discourse), *by the way*, *all right* (change of subject), *as I was saying* (return to the previous topic), *another thing is* (adding), *so*, *then* (logical consequence), *I reckon*, *kind of*, *I guess* (softening and correcting); while others are typically used in a formal style, such as *regarding*, *with reference to* (linking), *whereas*, *on the other hand*, *however*, *nevertheless* (contrasting), *on the contrary* (contradicting), *moreover*, *furthermore* (adding), *as a result*, *consequently*, *therefore* (logical consequence), *in conclusion* (summing up). However, linguists cannot agree on which expressions can be considered DMs and the category is open to discussion (Biber et al., 2000).

I would also like to mention the interactional strategies used by speakers. While communicating, the participants of a conversation take turns. Stenström (1999) recognizes three basic strategies: these are taking the turn, holding the turn and yielding the turn. When speakers have not planned well before starting a turn, they will need to either stall or give up their turn. Most speakers do not abandon their turn, therefore they take the advantage of available stalling devices, such as voiced-filled pauses (*mm, mhm, err*), verbal fillers (*well, I mean, you know*) or their combinations (*well I mean, mm*). These devices show that the speaker has an intention to talk but needs some time to formulate his or her utterance.

When the listener wants to take his or her turn, they can do it by interrupting the others when they think that the speaker either has nothing more to say or they need to speak up at a particular point in the talk before it is too late, or they think there is no need to elaborate. However, these reasons can result in a competition for the turn. Typical interrupters are so-called alerts, such as *hey*, *listen*, *look* or metacomments, which comment on the speech itself and have a face-saving effect (*can I just tell, let me just*). Not always needs the taking-over be dramatic as it is often realized by uptakes (*ah, no, yes*), links carried out by conjunctions (*and, but, because*) or conjuncts (*so*).

When the speaker is holding the turn, it means they wish to carry on speaking. Since it is difficult to plan the next move while talking, the speaker may need time to stop and plan what to say next. However, silence should be avoided as it may give space for a take-over. Therefore, the speaker needs to play for time by using stalling devices mentioned above (voiced-filled pauses and fillers). Moreover, they can also use silent pauses that are strategically placed and thus, emphasize the upcoming information. Another device used to stall for time is lexical repetition of either single words, clause partials (*I was I was …*) or their combinations (*I I mean they you know they ..*).

Yielding the turn usually comes at a completion point when the speakers realize they have nothing more to say or they believe it is the listener's time to talk. The completion point serves as a hint for the hearers to take their turns. Nevertheless, if the hearer does not take the hint, there is a silent pause, and the listener gets under strong pressure to speak. Another situation when the speaker yields their turn willingly is when they request some kind of response or feedback, realized by prompts (by saying *hello*, by asking a question) or appeal (*all right*, *you know* or by using question tags).

3.3. Language of academic spoken American English

This section focuses on two language varieties only, that is, academic English and American English as the features of the spoken language have been described above.

There are many differences between American (AmE) and British English (BrE), such as those in pronunciation, grammar, vocabulary, spelling, etc. Let us have a closer look at these generally known differences.

One of the first distinctions that people notice is the pronunciation of the letter 'r' at the end of a word. In British English 'r' is usually not pronounced at the end, such as in words *computer* or *teacher*. However, it is usually pronounced in American English, in most dialects. Another common characteristic is the pronunciation of the letter 't' or 'tt' in American English so that it sounds more like 'd,' such as in *bitter*, *litter* or *butter*. In British English, this is less common; the t's are pronounced more clearly.

Other differences are in the field of grammar; specifically, the use of *have* and *have got*. The British usually use the verb phrase *have got (I have got a new car)*, but the Americans would say *I have* only. This would be most obvious in a question: BrE - *Have you got a car?*, AmE - *Do you have a car?*. There is a tendency in American English to say *I got* meaning *I*

have, which is not considered correct grammar. It probably comes from saying quickly *I've got* and not pronouncing the *'ve* part clearly.

Another distinction in grammar is in the forms of past tense verbs. Most irregular verbs are the same in both English varieties; however, there are some exceptions, for instance *get - got* (BrE) / *gotten* (AmE), *burn – burnt* (BrE) /*burned* (AmE), *dream – dreamt* (BrE) / *dreamed* (AmE).

Speakers of American English use present perfect tense far less than speakers of British English. In spoken American English, it is common to use past tense as an alternative in situations where the present perfect would usually be used in British English, e.g., *I have lost my keys.* AmE: *I lost my keys.* There is also a difference in the usage of collective nouns, in AmE collective nouns are always followed by a singular verb, e.g., *Our staff is very experienced.* However, in British English, both a singular and plural noun can be used depending on whether the group is thought of as one group or as many individuals. Therefore, in British English, we can say both: *Our staff is* or *are experienced.*

There are also variations in prepositions. The most common are *at* (BrE) / *on* (AmE) *the weekend*, *different to* (BrE) / *from* (AmE), *Friday to* (BrE) / *through* (AmE) *Sunday*.

As mentioned above, there are some spelling differences, especially with words ending *-our* in BrE and *-or* in AmE, such as *colour* / *color*, *favourite* / *favorite*, *neighbour* / *neighbour*. Another spelling distinction is with doubling consonants. Some words in British English have two consonants in a row, while the same words in American English only have one consonant. Among these words belong, for instance: *travelling* (BrE) / *traveling* (AmE), *cancelled* (BrE) / *canceled* (AmE).

Significant differences between these two varieties of English are in vocabulary, such as *aeroplane* (BrE) / *airplane* (AmE), *biscuit – cookie/cracker*, *chemist – drugstore/pharmacy*, *chips – (french) fries*, *film – movie*, *fizzy drink – pop/soda*, *flat – apartment*, *holiday – vacation*, *lift – elevator*, *lorry – truck*, etc. (note: all the first words in a pair are BrE, the second AmE)

With regard to the differences in the use of discourse markers in both English varieties, the most significant distinction is in the frequency of usage. In both varieties, certain DMs, as stated by Biber et al. (2000) are used very often, such as the interjection *oh*, primarily DM *well*, response forms *yeah* and *no*. However, there are major differences when using DMs, *you know* and *I mean*; these are more common in AmE as well as the response form *okay* and the hesitator *uh/er*. On the contrary, more frequent in British English are the response forms *mm, eh, aye*, the DMs *now* and *you see*.

As regards American English, Scarcella (2003) claims that many features of academic English are dependent on the development of the basic English proficiency that is necessary for participation in everyday situations. Even though some components that are associated with everyday and academic English overlap, there are many differences, as Scarcella adds. In contrast to ordinary English, academic English is "cognitively demanding and relatively decontextualized" (Scarcella, 2003: 27). Students must rely on their prior knowledge of not only advanced grammar and vocabulary, and pragmatic functions in order to understand and interpret academic English, but also, and more importantly, academic English requires much greater mastery of the language accuracy. While some words and phrases might be used in ordinary English inaccurately, academic English requires their accurate use.

Furthermore, users of academic English are required to know and use an increased number of language functions, such as hypothesizing, generalizing, comparing and contrasting, explaining, describing, defining, justifying, signalling cause and effect, evaluating, etc.

McCarthy (2017) in his talk for Cambridge University Press states that spoken academic English is similar to a social conversation and that there are not many differences. However, we can find some contrasts in using key words. Among the top twenty words, according to McCarthy (ibid.), which are used notably more in academic English are expressions, such as *progress, between, important, section, sense, within*, *example, which*, etc. He also highlights clusters or "chunks" of language used frequently, especially some remarkably vague expressions, such as *sort of you know*, *quite a lot of*, *a bit of*. Furthermore, McCarthy claims that the scope of expressions is within particular disciplines and particular academic fields. There are other markers used significantly more in academic English, for instance*: in terms of*, *in the sense*, *to what extent*. As for personal pronouns in academic English, *I* is less frequent than *you*, which is the opposite to conversational social communication. Nevertheless, these depend on the degree to which people project themselves personally and interpersonally while talking.

In general, academic requirements of students is a certain linguistic competence because they need to acquire specialised vocabulary, field specific or technical language. They are expected to produce coherent and cohesive texts and communicate both in spoken and written English. Since most relationships in an academic environment are between teachers and their students, the language tends to be rather formal and impersonal. Nevertheless, the above features are more apparent in written academic English.

4. Previous research

This chapter is divided into two main sections. First section deals with DMs, fillers and interactional signals, and the second section examines semantic and pragmatic meanings of *I mean*.

4.1. Fillers, discourse markers and interactional devices

Fillers and discourse markers have been researched before but mostly not into great depth. This section looks into some monographs and research papers that deal with DMs and interactional devices and which I consider important for my work.

Discourse markers are slot inserts that often occur at the beginning of a turn and according to Biber et al. (2000), they combine two roles: (a) signal a transition in the ongoing conversation and (b) indicate an interactive relationship between speaker, listener and message. The authors also clarify that words and expressions that are DMs are often ambiguous. That means they share the DM function with an adverbial function. For instance, *well* is both a DM and an adverb. Some DMs are treated under different labels, such as interjection (*oh*), comment clause (*you know*), attention signal (*hey*), response elicitor (*okay?*), hesitator (*er*), etc. Biber et al. also point out that "the items included as DMs are open to debate" (ibid.: 1086).

Montgomery explains that DMs "seem to be designed specifically to move the talk on, to effect transitions between one kind of talk or activity and another" (1995: 32, as cited in Pridham, 2001: 32). Stenström claims that these items have a positive effect on the smooth flow of conversation as they help the speaker to "take, keep and yield the turn and to appeal for feedback" (1999: 1). Moreover, DMs are pragmatic phrases that are used in everyday conversations and they do not contribute much to information content. However, they perform

a number of valuable functions in communication, which are discussed later in Subsection 4.2.2.

Stenström also explores interactional signals. They are "used to start, carry on and terminate the conversation" (ibid.: 61). They can appeal for feedback (*right*), give feedback (*I see*) or they involve the hearer in the conversation (*you know*). Another interactional device is backchanneling, which is part of the hearer's active participation in conversation. The listener is expected not to remain passive or give only non-verbal feedback. Backchanneling can reflect enthusiasm, empathy, annoyance, impatience, etc.

Schiffrin in her work *Discourse Markers* (1987) defines DMs as "sequentially dependent elements which bracket units of talk" (ibid.: 31). By brackets she means "devices which are both cataphoric and anaphoric whether they are in initial or terminal position" (ibid.). According to Schiffrin**,** her analysis of DMs is part of more complex analysis of discourse coherence, which means "how speakers and hearers jointly integrate forms, meanings and actions to make overall sense out of what is said" (ibid.: 49). She investigates several DMs: *oh* as a marker of information management, *well* as a marker of response, or discourse connectives *and*, *but*, *or*. Further she studies *so* and *because* as markers of cause and result, temporal adverbs *now* and *then* and finally, she analyses jointly DMs *you know* and *I mean*. The last two are examined in detail (Subsection 4.2.2. below).

Erman in his work *Pragmatic Expressions in English* (1987) studies three DMs *you know*, *you see*, and *I mean* in face-to-face conversations from the point of view of pragmatics. In his work he introduces a new term for these items, i.e. *pragmatic expressions* (PEs). His analysis focuses on the contexts and functions of the three PEs and studies them with regards to phonology, syntax, semantics and discourse. He points out that PEs serve various functions and they can be linked to their position in the syntactic structure.

According to Erman, there are three types of syntactic environment for DMs. Discourse markers can be found: between clauses, in incomplete structures and within the boundaries of a clause either between or within constituents. The PEs are then called connective, disruptive and intrusive elements, respectively.

Other linguists who researched DMs were Fox Tree and Schrock (2002). They investigate together the expressions *you know*, and *I mean*, similarly to Schiffrin. These linguists try to identify only the basic meanings of *I mean* and *you know* as they "do not believe that these markers are doing as much as it has been claimed, and what they are doing can be reanalysed in terms of basic meanings" (2002: 742). In their paper, they claim that the apparent uses can emerge from the basic meanings and divide the use of DMs into those that can be randomly sprinkled into speech and those that are used at the moment of a need for a particular function. Further, they claim that sprinkling these two DMs into speech provides three types of interpersonal information: (1) information about the speaker, e.g. implication that the speaker is anxious, uncertain or not confident. (Also, it marks the speaker to a certain social class, gender or age group.) (2) information about the situation, such as its formality and (3) information about the level of politeness (ibid.: 729).

Among more recent linguists who study DMs belong Fernández-Polo (2013). He focused on the expression *I mean* in conference presentations and his results confirmed that the major function of *I mean* is self-repair. However, his analysis reveals more extensive set of functions: the presenters used *I mean* also for purposes related to scientific argumentation, such as introducing background knowledge, justifying claims and actions, interacting with audience to create good rapport, marking salience or reinforcing commitment.

Nevertheless, Fernández-Polo's study showed some problematic uses of the DM *I mean*, especially when speakers correct their lexical and grammatical mistakes or speech dysfluencies.

The reason is these mistakes may be taken as flaws because speakers are expected to have prepared and rehearsed their presentations in advance. Furthermore, making too many justifications can be a sign of anxiety or lack of confidence, and thus, they can "undermine the speakers' ethos and, consequently, the convincingness of their presentation" (Hyland, 2005: 78, as cited in Fernández-Polo, 2013: 65).

Another linguist worth mentioning here is Swan (2005). He points out a high number of DMs and the impossibility to give their complete list. He mentions twenty-one functions of DMs, three of which are important for my research. These are the functions of the expression *I mean*: (1) "making things clear and giving details", (2) "softening and correcting", and (3) "gaining time". These are illustrated below in the same order as listed:

(1) *"It was a terrible movie. I mean, lots of shooting and bloody scenes."*

(2) *"You need to pay 350 pounds for the tickets, I mean 250 pounds."*

(3) *"Why did you do that?" "Well, you know, I mean.."*

4.2. I mean

This section tries to investigate possible origins of the use of the expression *I mean* and provide an overview of its semantic and pragmatic meanings.

4.2.1. Possible origins of the use of *I mean*

Written records of *I mean* as a colloquial expression were found as early as 1892, according to Dictionary.com (2018). It originates from the old literal verb phrase *I mean*, in the sense *what I'm saying is.*. The use of the phrase has since grown rapidly in spoken language and colloquial writing, and it also extended the range of its meanings. In the 1990s, *I mean*

became a stereotype, used by rich white girls whose life-focus was on appearance and materialism. They used the phrase especially in dramatic expressions of disbelief, exasperation or judgement: *"I mean, come on!", "I mean, really?"* A classic example can be found in teen films and TV shows, such as *Clueless* (1995) or *Gossip Girl* (2007-12). For example, the latter features the character Georgina who says: *"I'd say I'm great – I mean, look at my hair, my body, my clothes? But I've become a Bedford wife, and it's really just the worst thing."*

Nowadays, *I mean* is used widely in speech and writing by people of any age and social status, from teenagers to university educated specialists. However, linguists criticise the overuse of *I mean* in speech because speakers tend to seem unprepared or unintelligent. Moreover, its overuse in writing is viewed as too casual.

4.2.2. Semantic and pragmatic meaning of *I mean*

In the following subsection I examine the semantic and pragmatic meaning of *I mean*. In textbooks of linguistics, the semantic meaning is perceived as the word-by-word meaning, which can be found in dictionaries and the pragmatic meaning is believed to involve the broader context of a speech situation and its communicative intention. However, this distinction is not sufficient enough for my work. Therefore, it is necessary to make a clear distinction of the meanings as it is used in this work. The most accurate explanation provides Thomas (1995) who distinguishes several levels of meaning. There is an abstract meaning which can be referred to by what we find in dictionaries, what sense the particular sentence has (semantic meaning). Furthermore, there are the first and second levels of speaker meaning, which are also called utterance meaning and force, respectively (pragmatic meaning). The first level of speaker meaning - utterance meaning is what speakers actually do mean by their words on a particular occasion. Gazdar defines utterance meaning as "a sentence-context pairing" (1979, as cited in

Thomas, 1995) and it is the first component of speaker meaning. The second component, the second level of speaker meaning, is force. It refers to the speaker's communicative intention. According to Thomas (1995), this level of meaning is a source of misunderstanding and difficulty in communication more often than not understanding words that are uttered. These two levels of speaker meaning are closely related, but must not be confused.

Semantic meaning of *mean* and *I mean*

This subsection outlines semantic meanings of the single word *mean* and the expression *I mean* standing on its own and in phrases. The meanings and examples are taken from the *Longman Dictionary of Contemporary English (2005: 1020-1021)* if not stated otherwise.

According to *Longman Dictionary* (ibid.), *mean* belong to three word classes:

Verb: *"It's pretty obvious what she means."*

Adjective: *"I felt a bit mean asking him to help."*

Noun: *"It's a case of finding the mean between firmness and compassion."*

Most frequent word class is a verb, followed by an adjective. On the other hand, *mean* as a noun is used rarely, typically as a technical term (*Longman, 2005: 1021).*

The verb *mean* belongs among the three thousand most common words in English and is not used in progressive, with the exception of the meaning "intend to do something or intend that someone else should do something" (see Example 1).

(1) "I've been meaning to ask you if you want to come for a meal next week."

Other common meanings of *mean* when used as a verb, based on *Longman Dictionary of Contemporary English* (2005), are as follows (see Examples 2-9 below): (2) "have a particular meaning", (3) "intend to say something", (4) "to have a particular result or involve

something", (5) "be familiar with something or understand it", (6) "say something seriously", (7) "how important something or somebody is", (8) "show something is true or will happen", (9) "say or point at which particular person or thing you have in mind".

(2) "The red light means 'stop'."

(3) "I meant we'd have to leave early – that's all."

(4) "The merger will mean the closure of the company's Sydney office."

(5) "You need to use analogies which will mean something to the reader."

(6) "You don't really mean that, do you?"

(7) "I know how much your work means to you."

(8) "Just because he's been in prison, it doesn't mean that he's violent."

(9) "I meant the pink dress, not the red one."

Let us also investigate the very common spoken phrase with *mean* as a verb: "What do you mean…?" which is used in three different situations: (10) "when you do not understand what someone is trying to say", (11) "when you are very surprised or annoyed by what someone has just said", and (12) "when you are very annoyed by what someone has just done".

(10) "You'll be careful, won't you?" "What do you mean?"

(11) "What do you mean, you've cancelled the trip?"

(12) "What do you mean by calling me at this time of night?"

Mean as an adjective and noun are not relevant for my work, therefore I will not discuss them here. Now, more importantly, I examine the expression *I mean* used in spoken phrases and its semantic meaning. *Longman Dictionary of Contemporary English* (2005) covers four phrases and expressions:

Three of them are (13) "see what I mean?", (14) "that's what I mean", and (15) "I mean to say" (See Examples 13-15 below).

(13) "See what I mean? Every time she calls me up she wants me to do something for her."

(14) "We might not have enough money." "That's what I mean, so we'd better find out the price first."

(15) "Of course, she wants to see the children, I mean to say, it's only natural, isn't it?"

The last expression is "*I mean*" standing on its own. According to *Longman Dictionary of Contemporary English* (2005), it is used in two situations, firstly (16) "when explaining or giving an example of something, or when pausing to think about what you are going to say next", and secondly (17) "to quickly correct something you have just said".

(16) "You are more of an expert than me. I mean, you've got all that experience."

(17) "She plays the violin, I mean the viola, really well."

Apart from the semantic meanings, *I mean* has also taken some pragmatic functions, which are presented in the upcoming subsection.

Pragmatic functions

As all discourse markers have their pragmatic functions, let us have a look closely at the functions of the verbal filler *I mean*. Pragmatic functions cannot be derived from semantic meaning because several factors must be considered, such as communicative intentions of the speaker, social context and broader situational context. Stenström (1999) claims that pragmatic functions are not dependent only on the position of a filler in a turn, but also on the position in a sequence of turns. Therefore, the whole situational context plays a vital role in determining pragmatic functions.

First, I examine the functions of *I mean* in dictionaries. Having looked up the expression *I mean* in various well-known dictionaries, I was surprised by the fact that some of them do not even mention the phrase, e.g. *Collins English Dictionary, 21st Century Edition* (2000) or *Oxford*

Advanced Learner's Dictionary (1995). Other dictionaries include the expression *I mean*, nevertheless each dictionary provides different meanings. Only some of these meanings, such as correction, overlap. For instance:

According to *Meriam-Webster online dictionary*, there are three basic meanings of *I mean*: (a) it emphasizes a statement (b) it corrects a previous statement (c) it is used when the speaker is unsure what to say or how to say it. These are illustrated in the following examples, respectively:

(a) "He has to stop drinking. I mean, he's going to kill himself if he keeps it up."

(b) "We met in Toronto – I mean Montreal."

(c) "I'm not mad. It's just that, I mean, I think you've been acting a little selfishly."

BBC English Dictionary (1992: 720) also recognizes three meanings of the expression *I mean,* apart from correction it adds two more: (a) it explains something more clearly (b) it justifies what has been said.

(a, b) "*If you haven't any climbing boots, you can borrow them. I mean dozens of people have got boots..*"

Furthermore, *Cambridge International Dictionary of English* (1995: 878) describes the following meanings of *I mean*: (a) it explains something in a different way to make it more exact or easier to understand, (b) it introduces something, or answers, in a disapproving way.

(a) *"These people live a very sheltered life – I mean completely cut off from the outside world."*

(b) *"I mean, I think he could have asked me before he borrowed my bike!"*

Apart from functions introduced in the dictionaries, as described above, the following linguists carried out more extensive research into the pragmatic functions of *I mean*. Probably

the most comprehensive and in-depth research was carried out by Erman (1987) and Schiffrin (1987) at the end of 20th century. More recent research papers, written by Fox Tree and Schrock (2002), Fernández-Polo (2013) and Kaur (2011), provide additional views, clarify and extend the possible pragmatic functions of *I mean*.

Linguists agree that the most common function of *I mean* is repair including self-repair. Schiffrin (1987) suggests that the use of *I mean* in repairs is identical to explicit meta-linguistic expression 'in order words'. Also, Schiffrin distinguishes two types of repairs: background and replacement repairs. According to her, background repairs are "subordinate asides" (ibid.: 300) that provide additional information that help with listener's understanding of surrounding material. After the speaker's insertion of an aside, they repeat or rephrase material that had been interrupted, therefore background repairs lead back to the discourse. On the other hand, replacement repairs "lead forward to the ideas of the upcoming discourse on the basis of the material in the repair itself" (ibid.: 301). They substitute prior material and they change the direction of the developing discourse to that started by the substitution.

It is important to distinguish repair and correction. Kaur (2011) points out that correction occurs in a presence of a mistake or an error, but repair may be present even if there is no apparent mistake or an error in an ongoing turn. In such cases, the repair serves to prevent any possible problems. Therefore, as Kaur claims, the function of repair is not only to "get things right" (ibid.: 2706), but also, and this is important for my analysis, to try to make things clear, explicit and specific so that nothing goes wrong in the first place. Furthermore, Mauranen (2006, as cited in Kaur, 2011: 2706) in her research found self-repair as a very common and effective strategy to prevent misunderstanding.

Fernández-Polo (2013) puts forward a separate function of *I mean* to prevent misunderstanding, which he calls "enhancing clarity and explicitness" (ibid.: 62). By this

function, *I mean* marks some proactive behaviour, such as "preventive remedial action" (ibid.), reformulation of the preceding statement, adding new and complementary information, or the speaker's heightened sensitivity for the needs of their audience and making their communication more explicit. Schiffrin (1987), Erman (1987) and Swan (2005) see this function as clarification of a vague statement. Under this function we can find: making things clear, giving details, expansion of the speaker's own prior ideas and explanations of intentions.

Another function of *I mean*, highlighted by Erman, is turn management. This function includes turn-taking function, especially in combination with a DM or a conjunction, and turn-holding function. *I mean* can occur turn-initially, turn-medially or turn-finally because at any point within a turn, speakers may wish to "forewarn adjustments" (Fox Tree & Schrock, 2002). For instance, *I mean* at the beginning of a turn may signal that the speaker will make an adjustment to their previous turn while skipping the other speaker's turn in-between.

Text organization**,** as called by linguists, such as Fox Tree and Schrock (2002) and Fernández-Polo (2013), may include topic changes, personal commentaries, explanations or justifications or providing support for a previous statement. Fernández-Polo (ibid.) gives a warning against justification that can sound self-justificatory, which "eventually projects the impression that the speaker is not fully convinced of the adequacy of their approach" (ibid.: 63).

Another function of *I mean* is hesitation and stalling labelled in this way by Swan (2005), Stenström (1999) and Erman (1987). It is used when speakers need time to think about what to say next and plan their next move, therefore they stall for time. The verbal filler tends to be accompanied by a voice-filled pause (*um, uh*) or by a silent pause. Voice-filled pauses usually indicate that the speaker has not finished his turn and has no intention to give it up. Stenström (1999) suggests that verbal fillers occur at the beginning of a turn if the speaker takes

the turn without being fully prepared. That is why, verbal fillers tend to cluster in the "global planning area" (ibid.: 69). There are lots of combinations of pauses and fillers, such as *well I mean, um* or *well I mean, you know*.

Stenström (1999) and Povolná (2010) also mention *I mean* as an empathizer in a phrase *If you see what I mean*. Empathizer involves the listener and by using it, the speaker intensifies the relationship with the listener.

Furthermore, Stenström (1999) recognizes digression from the topic as one of the functions of *I mean*, which involves moving away temporarily from the current topic. Digressions can be either spontaneous or deliberate and they could be related to the topic or completely unrelated.

When *I mean* is used at the very end of a turn, it can function as an appealer. It appeals for understanding and sympathy, and it is used as means of getting some feedback. Povolná suggests that appealer indicates speaker's effort "to make the hearer co-operate and accept the propositional content of the utterance, thus enabling the establishment of discourse coherence" (2010: 92).

Monitoring function is referred to by Fox Tree and Schrock (2002), Stenström (1999) and Povolná (2010). It is connected with increased monitoring of the listener's understanding after *I mean*. On occasions, speakers need to make a new start or rephrase what they were about to say in the middle of a turn because the listener indicates that they do not follow or are not convinced of what they hear. In such situations, the monitor *I mean* comes in either on its own or in combination with other fillers, such as *well I mean*, *well I mean you know/ you see*. By monitoring, speakers control what they communicate.

I mean was suggested as function of marker of certainty and salience by Fernández-Polo (2013) and Schiffrin (1987). Marking certainty is related to speaker's commitment to an idea and their claim. It implicitly indicates that the speaker is certain about the reported information. Therefore, *I mean* structures are part of speech where the speaker tries to "support claims and persuade audience" (ibid.: 64).

Further, the marker of salient information can occur when speakers are elaborating or adjusting a point and create a main focus on a given topic, claiming (indirectly) that it is worth paying attention to. Moreover, it encourages the audience to focus on the highlighted information. The use of structures with *I mean* gives speakers an opportunity to stress the importance of their findings, emphasize the strength of their arguments or highlight information which is considered important (Fernández-Polo, 2013).

I mean tends to co-occur with other DMs, especially with *you know*. Schiffrin (1987) investigates these DMs together and states that there are several reasons for this consideration. First, Schiffrin claims that the semantic meanings of these DMs influence the functions of both *you know* and *I mean*. *You know* "marks interactive transition in shared knowledge" (ibid.: 309), and *I mean* indicates "speaker orientation toward the meaning of their own talk" (ibid.). Second, the functions of these two DMs are complementary, *I mean* focuses on the speaker's own adjustments when they talk, and *you know* proposes that listeners "adjust their orientation, specifically knowledge and attention, toward the reception of another's talk" (ibid.) Therefore, combinations of these two, such as *I mean, you know* and *you know what I mean* may actually accomplish the same interactive goal, only in the opposite order. Third, "whereas *you know* works basically within the information state of talk, with secondary effects on the participation framework, the functioning of *I mean* may be the reverse" (ibid.: 309). That means that *I mean* shows speaker orientation, and as a secondary product it invites attention of the listener. *You*

know mainly invites the listener's attention; therefore, it directly requests the listener's assessment. And as a by-product, *you know* shows the speaker orientation.

Fox Tree and Schrock conclude that *you know* and *I mean* "may serve nondetrimental and even beneficial functions" (2002: 744) when they occur in small doses, but when they are frequent, they impede comprehension. Using *I mean* frequently may cause that the hearer focuses on the speaker more often than they would like and that may make the speaker appear self-focused and impolite.

5. Corpus data analysis

5.1. Introduction

This section of the work presents the criteria used for my classification of *I mean*, and possible pragmatic functions of the verbal filler. Further, it states methods used in the analysis and it provides description of the MICASE corpus and the selected analysed data.

5.1.1. Classification of *I mean* in the current work

The criteria used for my classification of *I mean* are based on my investigations into previous research of DMs, fillers and interactional devices carried out by linguists discussed particularly in Chapter 4 above. The present analysis applies the following criteria to the classification of *I mean*:

1. position within the turn
2. syntactic structure
3. entire situational context
4. impact on the listener

Turn position

Pragmatic functions of *I mean* are closely connected to its position in a turn. It needs to be stressed that by a turn it is meant everything a particular speaker says before another speaker takes over. Therefore, an utterance that is produced during another speaker's ongoing speech is not recognized as a turn in the present study. In the example below, everything S1 says is taken as one turn:

S1: *"so this studio floor was, inside the space. [S7: that's a good idea] and then this, studio floor had an exterior [SU: exterior] wall. [S6: I mean it's north light] and so you don't have something that comes in [S7: right] between but you, you do, use"* (T1)

There is a lot of simultaneous speech, shown in brackets [], where S1 is going on talking while other speakers insert backchannels or comments into S1's speech.

I mean can occur turn-initially, turn-medially or turn-finally as speakers may forewarn some adjustments that may be done at any point within the turn. However, the position of *I mean* at the beginning and at the end of a turn is rare, in comparison to the occurrence of *I mean* in the medial position.

As already mentioned, the position of *I mean* is closely connected to its pragmatic functions which are discussed in more detail in Subsection 5.1.2 below.

Syntactic structure

The position of *I mean* in the syntactic structure also influences its pragmatic functions. Erman (1987) suggests three syntactic positions: between clauses, in incomplete structures and within the boundaries of a clause either between or within constituents.

In the following example, the syntactic structure is incomplete:

> S11: *"okay, I would definitely, I mean there's no reason, actually why this couldn't be five feet lower and just, slide right in there…"* (T1)

The speaker starts his turn with an agreement to a comment of the previous speaker and then he intends to produce rather a strong statement using the adverb *definitely*. Nevertheless, he changes his mind in the middle of the utterance and places *I mean* after the incomplete structure *I would definitely* and starts a new utterance, this time softening his statement. Therefore, in this example *I mean* functions as marker of repair and softening device.

The most frequent position of *I mean* in the syntactic structure is between clauses. Below is an example of *I mean* placed between two clauses:

S12: *"uh_yeah that's true. I mean you could just hold the corner with the building, would be another [S5: well] option instead of, plinth"* (T1)

The third option of syntactic position is a verbal filler within the boundaries of a clause. Below is an example of such position of *I mean*, where it appears within the boundaries of the clause due to the repetition of the definite article:

S1: *"mhm. [S7: yeah?] oh, no, the, well, the I mean the the fairness issue is something like um, why are giving opportunities to get F-E-Ds and [S7: mhm] to get all this treatment and so on, to people who've committed crimes, …"* (T2)

As can be seen in the corpus analysis of this work (see Section 5.2.), the last mentioned syntactic position of *I mean* is extremely rare.

Entire situational context

The entire situational context is one of the main criteria for the classification of *I mean* in the current work. The most accurate explanation of situational context was presented by Halliday and Hasan (1989: 45-46) who claim that situational context can be described in terms of three components. They are the field of discourse, tenor of discourse and mode of discourse. Let us focus on these components and try to explain them.

Firstly, the field of discourse is, according to Halliday and Hasan, "the kind of activity, as recognized in the culture, within which the language is playing some part" (1989: 45). In our case, it is the classroom situation at the university of Michigan and what is going on there, for example: examination process, students giving presentations, discussing and arguing, debating,

pointing at drawings hanging in front of the class; members of faculty giving feedback, evaluating, asking questions etc.

Secondly, the tenor of discourse as described by Halliday and Hasan refers to "the interacting roles that are involved in the creation of the text" (ibid.). The tenor alludes to the participants, in this case to students and members of the faculty interacting with each other, while their personal relationships are involved. The type of relationships and the aim of interaction influence choice of mood and types of sentences used and how they are formulated.

Finally, the mode of discourse refers to "the particular functions that are assigned to language in this situation, and the rhetorical channel that is therefore allotted to it" (Halliday & Hasan, 1989: 46). The mode refers to the medium, in our case, it is spoken language in academic environment with certain differences according to the classroom situation and its objectives.

Defined by these components, the context of situation is "the immediate environment in which a text is actually functioning" (ibid.). This concept is used to explain why certain things were said on a particular occasion and what else might have been said that was not. Halliday and Hasan (1989) claim that the reason for this is not only retrospective but also prospective. Due to the close connection between text and context, listeners make predictions, they listen with expectations for what is coming up next. For example, if a person listens to learn, the ability to predict becomes very important and without it, the learning process is slower. The meaning of a certain part of a speech might be missed if the listener does not bring to it appropriate presumptions derived from the situational context.

5.1.2. Pragmatic functions of *I mean*

After the application of the classification criteria as described in Subsection 5.1.1. above, the following pragmatic functions of *I mean* are recognized:

1. marker of repair
2. marker of clarity and explicitness
3. marker of turn-management
4. marker of hesitation and stalling
5. empathizer
6. marker of digression
7. appealer
8. marker of monitoring
9. marker of certainty and salience
10. marker of organization

It must be stated here that assigning only one function to the individual tokens of *I mean* was not easy as *I mean* tends to perform more than one function at the same time in any occasion, therefore the categories are not mutually exclusive. The determination of just one function of *I mean* was based on evidence provided by the context and some other language indicators in the co-text, such as co-occurrence with other fillers and hesitation markers.

Marker of repair is considered to be one of the most common functions of *I mean*. It is used in this work in a broader sense that may include possible grammatical, lexical or phonological corrections. Marker of repair is often connected with pauses, both voice-filled or voiceless, repetitions, hesitations or new starts.

In the following example, repair also includes grammatical correction.

S2: *"yeah it's a, I mean it's we, we perceive it as a as a back because (we) say the cars are coming back there and.."* (T1)

Marker of clarity and explicitness occurs in the absence of any apparent mistake and it tends to be used to prevent misunderstanding. Speakers may sense that some element(s) may cause a problem, so they proactively clarify their statements or make things more explicit.

In the following example S4 is talking about where crack markets can be found in cities and after using *I mean* he makes clarification of the previous statement.

S4: *"..i think the crack market in many cities are certainly concentrated in areas where it's not likely, uh, on a random sweep, that you might find a high percentage of white, uh, people I mean they're mostly minority neighbourhoods they're mostly poor. so I think, um, yeah there's gonna be, you know, there's gonna, you know, it's gonna be hard to, pinpoint, uh where white people are getting crack, in some cities.."* (T2)

Furthermore, speakers may give reasons and/or provide explanations. In the example below, S11 is giving the reasons for creating rather a small model and he is explaining the reasons for the choice he has made.

S11: *"..but's that's one of the reasons why I made the model this size I mean even though the detail's not there yet I wanna get there. because at the, thirty-second size you just couldn't see anything but this. so.."* (T1)

Another function of *I mean* recognized in this work is marker of turn-management. It can occur at any position within a turn as the speaker may want to forewarn upcoming adjustments at any point of the speech. Typically, it is also connected with holding and taking the turn. The latter is shown in the following example:

S2: *"we- well it think that in those thirteen guidelines, I didn't read them all, but, they are like, some of them are like, wer- like, they address those concerns, who, who was targeted, I can, even I can find them, I don't know where they are, but."*

S9: *"but I mean those would be different between coc- you you would, say that those should be different between cocaine and crack then right?"* (T2)

S2 is talking about guidelines of sentencing policies for drug sellers and distributors, and she is interrupted by S9 who takes the turn abruptly and provides his input of the sentencing policies. Here *I mean* functions as a typical turn-taker, especially when the verbal filler is preceded by a starter that is a conjunction, in this case by *but*. By a starter in this work I consider any word at the beginning of a turn.

Marker of hesitation and stalling can be used to prevent other speakers from taking over while the speakers think about their next words or formulate their thoughts into expressions that can be produced. The next example contains repetitions, new start after inserting *I mean*.

S5: *"I I definitely I mean I can appreciate that notion too, I, I just feel like in order to really try to make that, a little bit more successful.."* (T1)

By using Empathizer speakers invite listeners to be more active in an ongoing interaction and it tends to have a form of *if you see what I mean*. However, no occurrences were found in the analysed texts.

Marker of digression is used by speakers to temporarily move away from the topic. In the example below, the participants are talking about the possibility of placing log cabins in the building and S7 makes a deliberate digression after using *I mean* when he is trying to figure out how many people could possibly be in the building and use a parking lot close to the log cabins.

S7: *"other than blocks of the (xx) once you make that huge gesture of going into the road to get to this other realm, this other wooded, agrarian"*

S6: *"log cabins <SS: LAUGH>*

S1: *"yes log cabins"*

S7: *"log cabins, something I mean you do you do you do PhD_ do you uh do uh, uh P-Cs when you graduate in the master programs?"*

S1: *"(some people)"* (T1)

Another function recognized in this work is Appealer. It can be used to invite feedback from the listener as in the example below:

S5: *"they don't have to convert it in large quantities, with yeah, and with really, <SS: LAUGH> yeah, they could sell it in really really, in a lot smaller quantities, that will be converted into the quantities into the gram, [S1: mhm] quantit- I think it's sold in grams, <S5: LAUGH> that it will be, turned into crack. I- I mean"*

S4: *right, my opinion, yeah, we should make penalties so harsh, and so certain that even those on the street know, [S1: mhm mhm] uh that you know, that r- risk, uh you know, five years in jail for a ve- a very small amount.* (T2)

Monitoring function is typically used to monitor listener's understanding when the listener indicates that they don't follow or are not convinced about what they hear.

S7: *"..um, support floors that have not only cable and conduit but they also have duct work, and that the registers are no longer, these things, but they're literally things that come up as part of the furniture. so you could have just the amount of ventilation and cooling and heating that you want. it may even come out of your computer. I mean, it's happened. [S11: yeah] and so so you're quite right in saying that the floor is becoming more, latent. and thick.."* (T1)

In the example, S7 is stating options where ventilation could be placed and after *I mean* he uses *it's happened* to persuade the listener about the possibility of the previous statements.

The expression *you know what I mean* can also be used as marker of monitoring. In the example below, the juror S7 is providing an evaluation of S3's work and by using *you know what I mean* he is trying to get a signal from S3 that she follows and understands his talk.

S7: *"..if you now are going to adjust I think, you need to go further. Okay I think at least you're you're, targeting… some useful, questions to get at. and I think that that's good so… don't think of yourself as dumb. even though today's the (big day.) you know what I mean I think you have these serious questions (to ask.)"* (T1)

Marker of certainty and salience implicitly indicates that the speaker is certain about the information being said. In the example below *I mean* is accompanied by the filler *so*, which strengthens the statement.

S2: *"..they concede a lot that there may well be things, that, or public health risks with crack that mean maybe, there should be a higher punishment but then maybe they think that's overwhelmed by that, that should be determined, [S1: by the individual] by the individual offender, I mean, so."* (T2)

Another function recognized in this work is marker of organization. Below is an example of one of the markers of organization, specifically a personal commentary. It is inserted in the speech after using *I mean*.

S5: *"(complicated.) I don't know how long you've been going but I, I specifically wanna come back and, comment on this scheme cuz I saw it briefly the other day. I mean basically I really like it. ironically I think Al Talbert was actually right about some of the duplication"* (T1)

This subsection discussed all the functions *I mean* recognized in the current work while using real examples from the analysed texts, and the next part focuses on the methods of the analysis used.

5.1.3. Methods

The analysis presented in the current study was carried out by combining both quantitative and qualitative methods. First, all the occurrences of *I mean* were recorded, then those that function as fillers were identified according to the position within the turn and position in the syntactic structure while considering whether or not their meaning is context dependent and what their impact on the listeners is. The entire situational context and language indicators in the co-text were other factors that helped to draw the distinction of *I mean* between its use as fillers (and subsequently recognize their pragmatic functions) and its use with its semantic and pragmatic meaning (see Subsection 4.2.2.). Further, the following items were counted: all tokens of *I mean*, the tokens of *I mean* as a verbal filler in all positions within a turn (initial, medial, final) and the tokens of other verbal fillers. Regarding the qualitative analysis, the functions of *I mean* were defined using the methods of discourse analysis and pragmatics, and applying the findings adopted from other linguists described in Chapter 4 Previous research.

5.1.4. Description of the *Michigan Corpus of Academic Spoken English*

Michigan Corpus of Academic Spoken English (MICASE) is a collection of almost two million words of transcribed speech from the University of Michigan. It was compiled between years 1997 and 2002 and the primary aim of the project was to collect the corpus data as there had been nothing similar available before. The secondary aim was to create a tool to research

the grammar and lexis of academic speech since the corpus provides authentic materials in sufficient quality for research. Thirdly, the corpus was intended as a resource to be used by teachers for English as a second language classes.

The corpus includes a wide range of academic speech in four major academic divisions (humanities, social sciences, physical sciences and engineering, and biological sciences). It consists of 152 speech events, including seminars, lectures, study groups, class discussions, lab sections, student presentations, colloquia, defences, meetings, etc.

The prosodic features are not marked off in the transcripts. However, the paralinguistic features are signalled as follows:

Pause	,
Falling intonation marking unit boundaries	.
Ellipses indicating a pause (2-3 seconds)	…
Short pause	_
Paralinguistic features	< LAUGH>
Unintelligible word(s)	xx
Cut-off words	-
Word(s) that might not be understood correctly	( )
Simultaneous speech	[ ]

5.1.5. Description of the data analysed

In the current research, transcripts of two speech event types from the *Michigan Corpus of Spoken American English* were used for a comparative analysis, more specifically student presentations and a seminar. They are of approximately the same length and word count, which was one of the main factors that influenced my choice. Each speech event contains slightly

more than 20,000 words. The interactivity rating is not as important because *I mean* is assumed to be used not only in spoken interaction, but also in longer monologues, such as presentations. Therefore, the first speech event analysed here, i.e. Architecture critiques, is of high interactivity rating (average 20 words per turn), while the second one is of mixed interactivity rating (average 58 words per turn).

These speech events were recorded at an American university; thus, it is assumed that the language has got features of spoken American academic English. All the participants were informed about the events being recorded and some demographic data were collected, for instance, data about gender, age, position at the university or native language.

An overview of the speech events used for the analysis can be found below, more information is provided in the particular subsection of the transcript analysis.

Table 1: Overview of speech event types

No. of the text	**Speech event**	**No. of words**	**No. of speakers**
T1	Architecture critiques	22,596	12
T2	Graduate public policy seminar	24,180	11

5.2. Corpus analysis

This section presents the findings of the analysis. There are two speech event types analysed, namely: student presentations (Architecture critiques) and seminar (Graduate public policy seminar).

Each speech event type contains characteristics of the event and information about the participants. Further, there is frequency of *I mean*, its occurrence in individual speech turns, its positions within a turn and its syntactic position. Moreover, each speech event type contains pragmatic functions of *I mean* and occurrences of other fillers. Lastly, the impact on the listener(s) is discussed.

5.2.1. Student presentations

Student presentations (STP) is a recording from discussion and seminar class, in which a large part of the period is dedicated to presentations prepared by students. STP are the oral part of a final research project and they represent examples of extended monologic discourse by students.

Architecture critiques
Number of speakers: 12
Academic division: Humanities
Interactivity rating: Highly interactive
Recording date: December 11, 1998
Recording duration: 123 minutes
Word count: 22,596

The recording of Architecture critiques takes two hours and it comprises four student presentations. All presentations but one are given by pairs of students, always followed by a long question/answer and discussion period. The presentations and discussions refer to designs, drawings and other visual material hung up at the front of the room in which the presentations take place. The presentations are given in front of a jury panel consisting of a professor, three jurors and an architect. These panel members do all the questioning and discussing. Each presentation begins with a description of the building's location and how it is integrated with the chosen site, followed by an explanation of the "structural composition, layout, traffic flow and other design features of the proposed building" (Simpson-Vlach, 2006). Some metaphors typical for the field are used as well as occasional technical terms.

Characteristics of the participants

There are thirteen speakers in this speech event, five faculty members and eight students. All participants are American native speakers, with the exception of Speaker 6 who is a British native speaker. The demographic information about Speaker S10 is restricted as well as all the spoken production of Speaker S3. The age of participants ranges from 24 to over 51. Eight speakers, all of them students, are in the age group of 24-30, three speakers in the group of 31-50 and one speaker is over 51. There are six male and six female participants. The overview of all the participants is summarized below:

S1: Professor, female, native speaker, Senior Faculty, age 51 & over
S2: First presenter, male, native speaker, Junior Graduate, age 24-30
S3: Juror, female, native speaker, Junior Faculty, age 31-50
S4: First presenter, male, native speaker, Junior Graduate, age 24-30
S5: Juror, male, native speaker, Junior Faculty, age 24-30
S6: Juror, female, native speaker – British, Senior Faculty, age 31-50
S7: Juror, male, native speaker, visitor - architect, age 31-50
S8: Second presenter, male, native speaker, Junior Graduate, age 24-30
S9: Second presenter, female, native speaker, Senior Graduate, age 24-30
S10: information restricted
S11: Third presenter, male, native speaker, Junior Graduate, age 24-30
S12: Fourth presenter, female, native speaker, Junior Graduate, age 24-30
S13: Fourth presenter, female, native speaker, Junior Graduate, age 24-30

Frequency of *I mean*

There is quite a low frequency of *I mean* in the participants' turns. There are 66 tokens of *I mean*, out of which 56 tokens function as a verbal filler. The normalized frequency of *I mean* as a verbal filler is approximately 25 tokens per 10,000 words.

Table 2: Frequency of I mean

Total no. of words	22,596
Total no. of *I mean*	66
Total no. of *I mean* as a verbal filler	56
No. of *I mean* as a verbal filler / 10 000 words	24,78

The tokens of *I mean* as a filler in individuals' turns

What is striking here is that 32 tokens of *I mean*, which is more than half of all tokens identified in the transcript, are produced by the faculty members - the professor and jurors (four people), while the students (eight participants) make up mere 24 tokens of *I mean* (see Table 3 below). Therefore, it can be stated that the four faculty members were more productive users of *I mean* than all the students together. This can be explained by the fact that the students prepared and rehearsed their presentations in advance, thus, they worked out most flaws and adjustments already. On the other hand, the members of the jury panel interact with students spontaneously, their speech is unprepared and contains many features of "normal non-fluency" typical for interactive conversations (Crystal & Davy, 1969: 104).

Table 3: The tokens of I mean in individuals' turns

Participants	**No. of *I mean* as a filler**
S1 (professor)	6
S2 (student)	8
S3 (juror)	information restricted
S4 (student)	2
S5 (juror)	9
S6 (juror)	7
S7 (juror)	10
S8 (student)	3
S9 (student)	0
S10 (student)	0
S11 (student)	9
S12 (student)	2
S13 (student)	0

The most productive users of *I mean* were jurors S7 and S5 who used *I mean* in their speech 19 times together, which represents one third of all the tokens found in this transcript.

On the other hand, three participants, all of them students, did not use *I mean* at all, as shown in Table 3 above.

Position of *I mean* within a turn

As expected, the most frequent position of the verbal filler *I mean* is in the medial position within the turn with 48 tokens. There are five occurrences at the beginning of a turn and three at the very end of a turn.

Table 4: Position of I mean as a filler within a turn

Position	**No.**	**%**
Initial	5	8.93
Medial	48	85.71
Final	3	5.36
Total	56	100.00

At the beginning of a turn, two functions have been recognized: *I mean* as the marker of turn-management in four instances and marker of hesitation and stalling in one instance. The following example shows marker of turn-management:

S2: *"yeah, before all this was, was solid (rock) so you don't see the actual"*

S7: *"I mean one one possible reason for the walls, you didn't say this, one one answer you could have given, is this thing, could compete formally with this, this thing. If it was read… (on that side) of the building now you're you're trying to get us to believe that it will be read on that side of the building."* (T1)

Speaker S7 is taking his turn by interrupting S2 who is trying to provide solid arguments for his decisions in the architecture project. Speaker S7 does not let S2 complete his utterance and takes the turn over rather abruptly and keeps challenging S2's decisions from previous turns.

Most tokens of *I mean* were found in the medial position performing eight different functions. The most common are marker of repair in twelve instances, marker of clarity and explicitness in nine cases and marker of hesitation and stalling in eight instances. An example of *I mean* in medial position is given below, in this case functioning as marker of clarity and explicitness:

S12: *"..it's kind of_it's also the major circulation. [S13: path] through the back I mean you can cross through studios but we sort of felt that that was, the main way to get through them."* (T1)

The smallest number of occurrences of *I mean* was found at the very end of the turn and it functions as appealer in two instances and as marker of monitoring in one case. An example of appealer is shown in the following example, where S5 appeals for feedback from the professor. In order to recognize this function, further context must be considered.

S5: *"um, thesis-based little idiosyncratic cute you know, places, as a further extension of this idea, I but I don't know know their quality I mean"*

S1: *"I think in theory that's uh an okay idea they're actually,"*

S5: *"pretty bad?"*

S1: *"they're real junkers."* (T1)

Position in the syntactic structure

In student presentations, the position of *I mean* in the syntactic structure is either between clauses, which occurs in 30 cases, or in incomplete structures, which has been found in 26 cases. There was no occurrence of *I mean* within the boundaries of a clause.

In the position between clauses, the following functions of *I mean* were recognized: marker of clarity and explicitness, marker of turn-management and marker of organization.

These three functions were found in six cases each, followed by marker of monitoring in five cases. Other functions were identified with occurrences of one or two.

In incomplete structures, the most frequent function of *I mean* is marker of repair in ten cases, followed by marker of hesitation and stalling in seven cases. All other functions occurred rarely, in one to three cases.

The occurrences of *I mean* as a filler in comparison to those of other fillers

The most frequent fillers are voice-filled pauses, such as *uh* and *um* as hesitation devices making up about 33 percent of all the fillers in the current speech event. There is also a high frequency rate of *so* (12.2%). *I mean* constitutes 5.3 percent of all fillers, which is rather low. Two more fillers whose frequency is above five percent are *you know* (6.6%) and *well* (6.3%). The frequency of other fillers is under 5%, therefore rather insignificant (see Table 5 below for more details).

Let us mention three occurrences of *you know what I mean* which functions as marker of monitoring in two instances and appealer in one instance. An example of appealer can be seen below:

> S7: *"o-one of the things that occurs to me in looking at the model, how it's made, is I'm wondering if the if somehow if the land contours, could have more influence (to) steps and may have even come into the auditorium. so that some of the contours of the site [S8: (coming up toward)] I would have worked its way and resolved itself at at these_ you know what I mean?"*
>
> S8: *"yep"*

Speaker 7, one of the jurors, is commenting on the entrance of a model and giving his opinion on how some architectural features could be resolved. Towards the end of the talk he makes a pause where he might be expecting some reaction from the listener and when it does not come, he uses *you know what I mean* at the end of his turn. By using the verbal filler, he is checking whether the listener understands and appeals for feedback from him that comes straightaway.

Table 5: The tokens of I mean as a filler in comparison to other fillers

Filler	**No.**	**%**
uh	110	10.9
oh	18	1.8
actually	18	1.8
basically	10	1.0
okay, mkay	34	3.4
um	219	21.8
sort of, sorta	39	3.9
kind of, kinda	49	4.9
so	123	12.2
yeah, yes	47	4.7
like	36	3.6
I guess	16	1.6
I think	46	4.6
well	63	6.3
you know	66	6.6
right	40	4.0
mhm	15	1.5
you see	0	0
I mean	53	5.3
you know what I mean	3	0.3
Total	**1005**	**100%**

Pragmatic functions of *I mean*

The most frequent function of *I mean* in the speech event Architecture critiques is marker of repair, which is used in 21.5 percent of cases. They include instances of both repair with and without correction. The next most common function, applied in nine cases (16%), is marker of clarity and explicitness. Both these functions can be used to prevent misunderstanding by making things clear, explicit and to clarify possible vague statements.

Marker of hesitation and stalling also occurred nine times (16%) in the analysed text. These three functions together represent 53.5 percent of all the functions identified in this speech event.

Table 6: Pragmatic functions of I mean

Pragmatic function	**No.**	**%**
marker of repair	12	21.5
marker of clarity and explicitness	9	16.0
marker of turn-management	7	12.5
marker of hesitation and stalling	9	16.0
empathizer	0	0
marker of digression	2	3.6
appealer	2	3.6
marker of monitoring	7	12.5
marker of certainty and salience	1	1.8
marker of organization	7	12.5
Total	**56**	**100**

Marker of turn-management and marker of organization, which are connected with the text organization, occur seven times (12.5%) each in the text, as well as marker of monitoring. Marker of turn-management is used in the analysed text to either take a turn or hold a turn, making sure that nobody else takes over. Marker of monitoring occurs when the speaker wants to make sure that the listener follows the talk.

Next, there are less frequent instances of other functions. Marker of digression and appealer have two occurrences each in the transcript and marker of certainty and salience only one occurrence. There is no occurrence of empathizer.

The impact on the listener

Based on my results, it can be stated that in student presentations, *I mean* is not used frequently, therefore the impact on the listener is not negative. On the contrary, it often helps with understanding and interpretation of the speaker's intentions. However, there is still quite a high number of other fillers used and very frequent voice-filled pauses and repetitions, which make the participants' spoken production sound inexplicit and dysfluent. Nevertheless, this can

be considered as “normal non-fluency” (Crystal & Davy, 1969: 104), which is one of the features of spoken language.

Summary of the analysis of the student presentations

Student presentation speech event involves a low number of occurrences of *I mean* as a verbal filler (only 56). Based on the results drawn from the analysis, there is a higher frequency of *I mean* among the faculty members whose speech was unprepared and spontaneous. On the other hand, the students’ presenters, who often have long but prepared monologues, used *I mean* less frequently.

The highest number of tokens of *I mean* was found in the medial position in a turn, while only rare occurrences in the initial and final positions. *I mean* makes up mere 5.3 percent of all the fillers used in the text, the most common were *um* and *uh* as hesitation devices.

It is generally believed that DMs are used mainly by younger people. However, *I mean* is different as it is used across the whole spectrum of age groups in this work, including the age group 51 and over. Therefore, what influences the use of *I mean* rather than the age of speakers is participants’ preparedness and spontaneity. The impact on the listener in terms of *I mean* is positive as it often supports the understanding and interpretation of the intended meaning. Nevertheless, there is still a high frequency of other fillers, hesitation markers and voice-filled pauses that make the speakers seem dysfluent. Moreover, the speaker appears less confident and uncertain as it takes them longer time to express their thoughts and opinions clearly and understandably.

The three most common functions were recognized as those of marker of repair, marker of clarity and explicitness and marker of hesitation and stalling. All these functions are related

to the features of spoken language and represent “normal non-fluency” (Crystal & Davy, 1969: 104) and vagueness.

5.2.2. Seminar

Graduate public policy seminar
Number of speakers: 11
Academic division: Social Sciences and Education
Interactivity rating: Mixed
Recording date: November 11, 1999
Recording duration: 143 minutes
Word count: 24,180

The Graduate public policy seminar lasts more than two hours and it consists of student presentations followed by a discussion. Firstly, three students present arguments for harsher sentencing of drug users. Secondly, other three students argue for lighter sentences and more funding for the prevention. Then there is a short break, during which the professor meets with other groups of students, giving advice on their preparations for the following week’s debate. After the break, he asks if there are any questions from the rest of the class. The team members express disagreements, support their positions and argue against each other.

Characteristics of the participants

There are eleven speakers in the seminar, all American native speakers, apart from S6, who is a non-native speaker. There are six male and five female speakers. Four speakers are at the age group of 17-23, five of them 24-30 and two participants are between 31 and 50. S1 is a professor at the faculty, the other speakers are students – junior graduates, only S11 is a senior graduate. The overview of participants can be found below:

S1: Professor, male, native speaker, Junior Faculty, age 24-30
S2: Student, female, native speaker, Junior Graduate, age 24-30
S3: Student, male, native speaker, Junior Graduate, age 31-50
S4: Student, male, native speaker, Junior Graduate, age 24-30
S5: Student, female, native speaker, Junior Graduate, age 17-23
S6: Student, male, non-native speaker, Junior Graduate, age 31-50
S7: Student, female, native speaker, Junior Graduate, age 17-23
S8: Student, male, native speaker, Junior Graduate, age 24-30
S9: Student, male, native speaker, Junior Graduate, age 17-23
S10: Student, female, native speaker, Junior Graduate, age 24-30
S11: Student, female, native speaker, Senior Graduate, age 17-23

Frequency of *I mean*

In total there are 107 tokens of *I mean* in the seminar, out of which 104 were classified as verbal fillers. The normalized frequency of *I mean* in the seminar is 43 tokens per 10,000 words.

Table 7: Frequency of I mean

Total no. of words	24,180
Total no. of *I mean*	107
Total no. of *I mean* as a verbal filler	104
No. of *I mean* as a verbal filler / 10 000 words	43,01

The tokens of *I mean* as a filler in individuals' turns

The highest number of *I mean* was used by the professor (S1), in 44 cases, followed by students S2 and S4 with 23 and 20 tokens, respectively. The rest of the students used *I mean* rarely. The majority of all the tokens of *I mean* in the seminar, 83.7 percent, were produced by the three speakers (S1, S2 and S4). Moreover, all the three speakers belong to the age group 24-

30. The remaining eight speakers used the verbal filler rarely or not at all. Detailed information can be found in Table 8 below.

Table 8: The tokens of I mean in individuals' turns

Participants	**No. of *I mean* as a filler**
S1 (professor)	44
S2 (student)	23
S3 (student)	4
S4 (student)	20
S5 (student)	2
S6 (student)	0
S7 (student)	4
S8 (student)	2
S9 (student)	5
S10 (student)	0
S11 (student)	0

Position of *I mean* within a turn

In the graduate public policy seminar, the majority of tokens of *I mean* were found in the medial position within a turn, in 98 cases. There were four cases in the initial position and only two tokens of *I mean* in the final position within a turn.

Table 9: Position of I mean as a filler within a turn

Position	**No.**	**%**
Initial	4	3.85
Medial	98	94.23
Final	2	1.92
Total	104	100.00

Position in the syntactic structure

In the seminar, *I mean* was found in three positions in the syntactic structure. The most frequent was between clauses in 67 cases, followed by the position in incomplete structures in 36 cases. There is also one case where *I mean* is placed within the boundaries of a clause.

In the position between clauses, *I mean* functions the most often as marker of clarity and explicitness in 26 cases. Other functions that occurred frequently were markers of turn-

management in nine cases and marker of hesitation and stalling in eight cases. Other functions are evenly spread with two to five occurrences.

In incomplete structures, *I mean* often functions as marker of repair in 20 cases, which is about 56 percent of all the functions in incomplete structures. Other frequent function is marker of hesitation and stalling in nine cases. The rest of the functions have rare occurrences.

The tokens of *I mean* as a filler in comparison to the tokens of other fillers

Overall, the number of all the verbal fillers in the text is high, it is 1892 cases, which makes up about 782 tokens per 10,000 words. The highest number of fillers in the seminar belongs to hesitation markers *uh* and *um*, which together make up 739 cases (39%) of all the fillers used in this speech event. The verbal filler *you know* is represented in 229 cases (12.1%), followed by *so* in 120 cases (6.3%) and *I think* in 110 cases (5.8%). Other frequent fillers are *I mean* with 104 tokens (5.5%) and *yeah* and *yes* together with 98 tokens (5.2%).

Table 10: The tokens of I mean as a filler in comparison to other fillers

Filler	**No.**	**%**
uh	317	16.7
oh	21	1.1
actually	29	1.5
basically	23	1.2
okay, mkay	53	2.8
um	422	22.3
sort of, sorta	58	3.1
kind of, kinda	54	2.9
so	120	6.3
yeah, yes	98	5.2
like	73	3.9
I guess	17	0.9
I think	110	5.8
well	56	3.0
you know	229	12.1
right	39	2.1
mhm	69	3.6
I mean	104	5.5
you know what I mean	0	0
Total	**1,892**	**100**

Pragmatic functions of *I mean*

The most frequent function of *I mean* in the public policy seminar is marker of clarity and explicitness used 28 times (27%), closely followed by marker of repair in 24 cases (23%). Another function often used is marker of hesitation and stalling in 18 cases (17%). These three functions make up about 67 percent of all the functions in the analysed text and are mostly associated with the speakers' effort to be precise and express themselves clearly and explicitly. For details, see Table 11 below.

Table 11: Pragmatic functions of I mean

Pragmatic function	**No.**	**%**
marker of repair	24	23.08
marker of clarity and explicitness	28	26.93
marker of turn-management	9	8.66
marker of hesitation and stalling	18	17.30
empathizer	0	0
marker of digression	5	4.80
appealer	2	1.92
marker of monitoring	6	5.77
marker of certainty and salience	6	5.77
marker of organization	6	5.77
Total	**104**	**100.00**

Other functions of *I mean* are represented infrequently: marker of turn-management in nine cases, marker of monitoring, marker of certainty and salience, and marker of organization were all found six times each. One more function worth mentioning is marker of digression used five times in the seminar. On the other hand, there was no example of empathizer and only two cases of appealer.

Below is an example of the most frequently used pragmatic function of *I mean* in the seminar, which is marker of clarity and explicitness.

S4: *"..and they have declared them constitutional. so I think that's important to look at when you when you talk about issues of equity. um, I mean equity also, goes to,*

protection under the law. um, and, I think that we need to you know prosecute people who are committing crimes in low income neighborhoods, as well."

In this example, Speaker 4 uses verbal filler *I mean* after which he explains his ideas slightly more deeply and in more detail and expresses his thoughts more clearly to make sure that the listeners can understand.

The impact on the listener

Using *I mean* in small doses in speech can be beneficial. However, if it is overused it tends to sound disruptive and dysfluent, especially when used with other verbal fillers, as shown in the following example:

S1: *<LAUGH> "alright. um, the_b- bef- bef- before you step back into your your your assigned role, do you wanna, um, uh I I mean, do you wanna relate that to, I mean how should drug policy and, I mean, how should the sentencing policies be different? Are you suggesting that they should not be as strong as they are? um, I mean if, that, yeah, I mean, is that is that what you're, what you're what you're pointing to there?"* (T2)

Speaker 1, the professor, uses *I mean* five times, together with lots of repetition and voiced-filled pauses. It shows that the speaker is not sure what to communicate or how to express his intentions. He is thinking about what to say next and he is formulating his thoughts while trying to speak and organise his class at the same time.

Summary of the seminar

The graduate public policy seminar contains 104 tokens of *I mean* as a verbal filler, which is 43 instances per ten thousand words.

The highest number of *I mean* was used by S1, the faculty member, with 44 tokens. Other speakers who used *I mean* significantly were S2 and S4, the students, in 43 cases together. That means 83.7 percent of all tokens of *I mean* were produced by these three speakers.

Regarding the position of *I mean* within a turn, the vast majority of instances were found in the medial position (98 tokens), while instances in the initial and final positions were infrequent, with four and two tokens, respectively.

In the seminar, there were 1,892 fillers, out of which thirty-nine percent were hesitation markers *uh* and *um*. Other fillers with a significant frequency were *you know* (12.1%), *so* (6.3%), *I think* (5.8%). *I mean* occurred in 104 cases, which is 5.5 percent. The overall number of verbal fillers in the analysed text is very high and it constitutes 782 tokens per ten thousand words.

The most frequent pragmatic functions recognized in the seminar is marker of clarity and explicitness with 28 cases (26.9%), followed by marker of repair in 24 cases (23%). Another function used a lot is marker of hesitation and stalling in 18 cases (17.3%). Other functions are represented infrequently. The three above mentioned functions represent 67 percent of all the functions of *I mean* in the text and they are connected with the speakers' effort to be precise and to express themselves clearly and explicitly in order to avoid any misunderstanding.

5.2.3. Comparison of the two speech event types

This subsection compares and sums up the two speech event types, that is student presentations and a seminar.

Frequency of verbal filler *I mean*

The frequency of *I mean* is significantly higher in the seminar, almost double the frequency of occurrences than in student presentations. The reason is that more time is allocated to discussions, debates and question and answer sections in the seminar than in the student presentations. In the seminar, students express disagreements, support their positions and argue against each other. Therefore, there is more spontaneous and unprepared communication from both the students and the professor. A typical example is the professor who manages the class organization, comments on students' arguments and provides feedback. Furthermore, after the debate, the professor provides a detailed narrative about an actual drug sentencing recommendation. Therefore, his speech contains occasional monologues, is unprepared and shows signs of "normal non-fluency" (Crystal & Davy, 1969: 104), which means he uses many repetitions, new starts and verbal fillers. The professor uses *I mean* 44 times, which constitutes approximately 42 percent of all the instances of *I mean* in the seminar.

On the other hand, the speech event of student presentations consists primarily of rehearsed and prepared presentations by the students, only commented and questioned by the panel members who use the verbal filler *I mean* more than all the students together. The reason is that the jurors and the professor do all the questioning and discussing, their comments tend to be evaluative and occasionally instructive. Therefore, the panel members react spontaneously and their speech is unprepared.

Table 12: Frequency of I mean in both speech event types

	Student presentations	**Seminar**
Total no. of words	22,596	24,180
Total no. of *I mean*	66	107
Total no. of *I mean* as a verbal filler	56	104
No. of *I mean* as a verbal filler / 10,000 words	24,78	43,01

Another finding worth mentioning is the actual number of speakers who used *I mean* in their speech. In student presentations, a large number of tokens of *I mean* was produced by the faculty members, the jurors and the professor (four people), who use *I mean* in their speech 32 times, which makes about 57 percent of all the tokens of *I mean* in the speech event. On the other hand, three participants, all of them students, did not use the verbal filler *I mean* at all.

In the seminar, as mentioned above, a significant number of tokens of *I mean* was produced by the professor (S1) in 44 cases, and two students (S2 and S4), all three together make up 83.7 percent of all tokens of *I mean* in the seminar. The other seminar participants (8 people) used *I mean* in their speech rarely, three of them not even once.

Position within a turn

As can be seen in Table 13 below, the vast majority of occurrences of *I mean* in both speech events are placed in the medial position within a turn. There are only rare occurrences in the initial and final positions.

Table 13: Overview of the position of I mean in a turn

Turn position	**Initial**	**Medial**	**Final**
Student presentations	5	48	3
Seminar	4	98	2
Total no.	9	146	5
Total %	5.6	91.3	3.1

The most frequent pragmatic function of *I mean* in the initial position is marker of turn-management in seven cases out of nine in both speech events together. This means that *I mean* tends to be used to take a turn from the other speakers and the take-over is done either by abruptly interrupting another conversational participant, or naturally and spontaneously when one of the other speakers finishes their turns.

Even rarer occurrences of *I mean* are at the very end of a turn. The analysis shows that the most common pragmatic function at the end of a turn is appealer in four cases out of five. The reason might be that appealer often invites feedback from the listener and thus, the speaker gives opportunity for the other person to express their thoughts and ideas.

Position in the syntactic structure

Table 14: Overview of the position of I mean in a syntactic structure

Position	**Between clauses**	**In incomplete structures**	**Within the boundaries of a clause**
Student presentations	30	26	0
Seminar	67	36	1
Total no.	97	62	1
Total %	60.6	38.8	0.6

My analysis shows that the most frequent syntactic position of *I mean* is between clauses in 60.1 percent of cases and in incomplete structures in 38.8 percent of cases. The position within the boundaries of a clause is very rare. *I mean* placed between clauses in student presentations is usually marker of clarity and explicitness, marker of turn-management and marker of organization with six tokens each. Other functions with *I mean* between clauses are rather rare or do not occur at all, such as marker of digression.

On the other hand, in the seminar *I mean* placed between clauses tends to function as marker of clarity and explicitness with 26 instances. The second and third most common functions in this syntactic position are marker of turn-management in nine cases and marker of hesitation and stalling in eight instances. Other functions are evenly distributed with two to five occurrences.

My findings in both speech events reveal that *I mean* placed between clauses tends to forewarn upcoming adjustments, specifically to clarify and explain previous statements and to

make them explicit. Further, marker of turn-management between clauses shows an effort of the speakers to indicate that they have not finished their turn yet and they wish not to be interrupted.

In incomplete structures in student presentations, *I mean* usually functions as marker of repair in ten cases and marker of hesitation and stalling in seven instances. The rest of the functions are very rare, for example, appealer or marker of turn-management in one instance each, or none at all, such as marker of certainty and salience.

In the seminar, the vast majority of functions in incomplete structures is marker of repair in 20 instances, marker of hesitation and stalling in nine cases. On the other hand, in incomplete structures there are no occurrences of marker of turn-management, appealer and marker of certainty and salience. These findings in both speech events clearly show that *I mean* in incomplete structures forewarns adjustments, specifically repairs and is also used to stall for time while the speaker thinks about what to say next.

Frequency of *I mean* in comparison to other fillers

Table 15: Overview of frequency of I mean and other fillers

	Student presentations %	**Seminar %**	**Average occurrence in % in both speech events**
uh	10.9	16.7	13.80
um	21.8	22.3	22.05
so	12.2	6.3	9.25
I think	4.6	5.8	5.20
well	6.3	3.0	4.65
you know	6.6	12.1	9.35
I mean	5.3	5.5	5.40
yeah, yes	4.7	5.2	4.95
mhm	1.5	3.6	2.55
like	3.6	3.9	3.75
sort of, sorta	3.9	3.1	3.50
right	4.0	2.1	3.05

In Table 15 above, there is an overview of the frequency of verbal fillers in both speech events, first separately in the first two columns and then of both events together in the last column. Only verbal fillers with the frequency of occurrence above three percent in at least one of the speech events are compared in the table. The most frequent were hesitation markers *um* and *uh* with frequency of 35.8 percent of all the fillers used by speakers. Other frequent fillers were *you know* (9.3%) and *so* (9.2%), followed by *I mean* (5.4%). One more verbal filler that reached the frequency of occurrence above five percent is *I think* (5.2%). This shows that *I mean* belongs among the most common verbal fillers used in spoken American English in academic environment.

Pragmatic functions

Table 16: Overview of pragmatic functions in the speech event types

	Students Presentations		**Seminar**		**Both events together average**	
Pragmatic functions	**No.**	**%**	**No.**	**%**	**No.**	**%**
marker of repair	12	21.5	24	23.1	18	22.3
marker of clarity and explicitness	9	16.0	28	26.8	18,5	21.4
marker of turn-management	7	12.5	9	8.7	8	10.5
marker of hesitation and stalling	9	16.0	18	17.3	13,5	16.6
empathizer	0	0	0	0	0	0
marker of digression	2	3.6	5	4.8	3,5	4.2
appealer	2	3.6	2	1.9	2	2.8
marker of monitoring	7	12.5	6	5.8	6,5	9.2
marker of certainty and salience	1	1.8	6	5.8	3,5	3.8
marker of organization	7	12.5	6	5.8	6,5	9.2
Total	**56**	**100.00**	**104**	**100.00**	**80**	**100.00**

The analysis shows that the most common pragmatic functions of *I mean* in the texts studied are marker of repair with 22.3 percent, closely followed by marker of clarity and explicitness with 21.4 percent. The third most common function is marker of hesitation and stalling (16.6%). Hesitation is one of the features of spoken language and stalling is used to prevent other participants from taking over while the speakers are thinking about their next words or formulate their thoughts into expressions that can be produced.

Three other pragmatic functions of *I mean* with the frequency rate around ten percent are markers of turn-management (10.5%), marker of monitoring and marker of organization (both 9.2%). The frequency of occurrence of the remaining functions is below five percent, empathizer was not identified in the speech events at all.

The results of analysis imply that the verbal filler *I mean* is used mainly to forewarn adjustments in terms of repairs – new starts, grammatical or lexical corrections, repetitions etc. The other significant function of marker of clarity and explicitness is connected to an effort of speakers to express themselves clearly, to clarify their communicative intentions if necessary and make sure that the listeners understand their message.

Impact on the listener

With regard to the frequency of *I mean* in the analysed texts, this verbal filler is not used too frequently to disrupt the natural flow of speech. On the contrary, *I mean* often helps with the understanding and interpretation of the speaker's intentions. However, in both speech events *I mean* is accompanied by other verbal fillers, pauses, repetitions and hesitation markers and, when combined too often, the speech may sound rather disruptive and dysfluent. Especially when giving presentations the excessive use of *I mean* might make the speech seem unprepared, which can undermine the speakers' credibility, harm their public self-image and weaken the outcome of otherwise successful and professional presentation.

6. Conclusion

The aim of this diploma thesis was to investigates pragmatic functions of the verbal filler *I mean* in academic spoken American English. Two speech event types, namely student presentations of architecture critiques and graduate public policy seminar, were chosen from the *Michican Corpus of Academic English* and analysed in terms of the frequency of *I mean* in the two speech situations and the reasons for their differences were described. Further, possible pragmatic functions of *I mean* were identified and the findings of both speech event types compared.

The analysis confirmed that *I mean* is one of the most common verbal fillers used in American spoken English in academic environment. Its frequency is above five percent in both speech events and *I mean* was found to be the fifth most common verbal filler used. The first two were hesitation markers *um* and *uh*, followed by *so* and *you know*.

The frequency of the use of the filler *I mean* in both types of speech situations in the present study is aproximately 34 tokens per 10,000 words and it can now be stated that *I mean* is used significatnly more in the graduation public policy seminar than in student presentations of architecture critiques. The reasons for the differences are that *I mean* is mainly used in natural, spontaneous and unprepared speech, thus, it is used in discussions, debates and question and answer sessions where the speakers have to formulate their thoughts on the spot. Since it is not easy to clearly and explicitly formulate one's communicative intentions straightaway, speakers use the verbal filler *I mean* to forewarn upcoming adjustments. On the other hand, *I mean* is used less frequently in student presentations because presentations are expected to be prepared and rehearsed in advance, and, therefore, the speakers had already worked out most flaws and adjustments.

The verbal filler *I mean* occurs mostly in the medial position within a turn and performs a great variety of pragmatic functions. The most frequent pragmatic functions of the filler *I mean* identified in this work are marker of repair, marker of clarity and explicitness and marker of hesitation and stalling. These functions are associated with the features of spoken language and represent "normal non-fluency" typical for interactive conversations (Crystal & Davy, 1969: 104). The speakers use *I mean* in these functions to make effort to express their intentions clearly, explicitly and precisely while trying to prevent any misunderstanding.

Other functions recognized in my work with a higher frequency rate are markers of turn-management and marker of organization which are related to the text organization. Further, marker of certainty and salience and marker of monitoring are mostly used by the speakers who are trying to make sure the right message is being perceived by their listeners. Moreover, some instances of marker of digression and appealer were recognized in the analysed texts, but examples of empathizer were not found at all.

To sum up, the verbal filler *I mean* has become a natural component of spoken interaction, not only in everyday situations, but also in academic environment. It has proven to be a valuable tool that helps with the understanding and interpretation of the speakers' intentions. However, it is often accompanied by other fillers, hesitation markers, repetitions, voice-filled and voiceless pauses and when overused, it may affect the smooth flow of speech and, therefore, be perceived negatively by the listeners. *I mean* is used by both teachers and students and its use is typical for natural and spontaneous spoken communication.

I am aware that the current analysis is based merely on two speech event types, therefore, only further analysis involving other types of speech events could prove that my conclusions are generally valid.

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