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'...post-colonialism, multi-culturalism, structuralism, feminism, post-modernism and so on so forth' – vague language in academic discourse, a comparative analysis of form, function and context

The use of vague language is one of the most common features of everyday spoken English. Speakers regularly use vague expressions to mark shared knowledge (e.g., *pens, books, and that sort of thing*) as well as to make approximations (e.g. *around sevenish, he's sort of tall*). Research shows that many of the most common single word items in a core vocabulary form part of vague language fixed expressions (e.g. *kind: that kind of thing*). This paper will address the use of vague language in a new corpus of academic English, namely the Limerick-Belfast Corpus of Spoken Academic English (LI-BEL case). The LI-BEL corpus comprises one million words of spoken data collected in two universities on the island of Ireland, one in the Republic of Ireland and one in Northern Ireland. Analysis of the LI-BEL corpus will identify forms and functions of vague language in an academic context and these findings will then be compared with two corpora of everyday spoken language from the Republic of Ireland and the United Kingdom, namely the Limerick Corpus of Irish English (LCIE) and the Cambridge and Nottingham Corpus of Discourse in English (CANCODE). Using cross-corpora comparisons, we will show how forms, frequencies, functions and range of vagueness differ between casual and formal/institutional contexts because it is highly context-sensitive and is relative to the participants, their shared knowledge and their relationship. Building on Walsh's work (see for example Walsh 2002), we will also show how vague language use is also relative to mode of discourse at any giving stage of classroom interaction.

Walsh, S. (2002) 'Construction or Obstruction: Teacher Talk and Learner Involvement in the EFL classroom'. *Language Teaching Research*, 6/1.