



Second language pragmatics: a corpus-based study of the pragmatic marker like

Pragmática da segunda língua: um estudo de corpus do marcador pragmático like

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ABSTRACT

This paper presents the extent to which *like* is used as a pragmatic marker (PM) by Brazilian university students living in Ireland. This is a case study which is part of a broader PhD research project on L2 pragmatic development within a study-abroad context. The results and reflections of this study are based on a sample corpus of spoken language, which comprises four 30-minute informal interactions between 6 participants and the researcher. Drawing on the Limerick Corpus of Irish English, a representative corpus of spoken Irish English (IrE), the interpersonal functions and procedural meanings of the PM *like* in the participants' L2 are compared and contrasted against those of the IrE data. Quantitatively, the PM *like* is found to be a keyword in the L2 corpus and three times more frequent by comparison to the IrE data. Qualitatively, this study shows evidence of *like* being used multifunctionally by the L2-speakers of English, with all functions of the PM also previously described in the literature on IrE. However, some specific functional patterns also emerge from the L2 data, which indicates the pragmatic needs and linguistic demands which may arise during communication when using an L2.

KEYWORDS: pragmatic markers; L2 pragmatics; corpus pragmatics; like.

RESUMO

Este artigo apresenta a extensão com que *like* é usado como marcador pragmático (MP) por brasileiros universitários na Irlanda. Este é um estudo de caso, e parte de um projeto de pesquisa de doutorado sobre o desenvolvimento da pragmática da segunda língua (L2) no contexto de intercâmbio. Os resultados e reflexões deste estudo são embasados em uma amostra de um *corpus* de língua falada, que é constituído de quatro interações informais de 30 minutos entre 6 participantes e o pesquisador. Tendo como referência o *Limerick Corpus of Irish English*, um *corpus* representativo do inglês irlandês falado, as funções interpessoais e os significados procedurais do MP *like* usados pelos participantes são comparados e contrastados. Quantitativamente, o MP *like* se encontra como uma palavra-chave no *corpus* de L2, e é três vezes mais frequente se comparado com os dados do inglês irlandês. Qualitativamente, este estudo evidencia a multifuncionalidade de *like* na L2 dos participantes, sendo todas as funções usadas pelos participantes também previamente descritas na literatura sobre o inglês irlandês. Contudo, alguns padrões funcionais específicos também emergem do *corpus* de L2, o que indica as necessidades pragmáticas e exigências linguísticas que podem surgir durante a comunicação quando usando uma L2.

PALAVRAS-CHAVE: marcadores pragmáticos; pragmática da segunda língua; pragmática de corpus; *like*.



1 Introduction

Studies on spoken language have benefited greatly from Corpus Linguistics over recent years. In fact, it would be fair to observe that one of Corpus Linguistics' major contributions has been helping bring to light important features of spoken language that, otherwise, would not have been easily accessed or uncovered – especially from unnatural elicited data. Although still a challenging endeavour, due to issues with participants' willingness and the work entailed in transcription, building spoken corpora has been hugely facilitated by technological advances. Researchers can, consequently and more easily, draw on rich resources of naturally occurring spoken language, and systematically retrieve reliable data, in order to investigate the uniqueness of spoken interactions. As Sinclair (1991, p. 4) aptly puts it, “the ability to examine large text corpora in a systematic manner allows access to a quality of evidence that has not been available before”. This is particularly true of spoken corpora as they provide the researcher with natural language in use with all its distinctive features which arise during online interaction between interactants.

Today, it is widely recognised that spoken language has many features distinct from the written form (Carter & McCarthy, 2006). Among such features is found a body of language that may be employed in order to maintain the relationship between speakers and listeners, which O’Keeffe *et al.* (2007) refer to as *relational language*. The umbrella of relational language covers a broad range of pragmatic strategies, a component of which are pragmatic markers (PMs). PMs play an important role in the relational and interactional nature of spoken language in flagging “speakers’ intentions and interpersonal meanings” (Carter and McCarthy, 2006.). PMs are, consequentially, essential linguistic features in contributing to the development of pragmatic competence in second languages (Fung and Carter, 2007).

It is against this background that the present paper addresses the extent to which *like* is used as a PM by Brazilian university students living in Ireland. This is a case study, part of a broader research project on second language (L2) pragmatics within a study-abroad context. The results and reflections of this study are based on a sample corpus of spoken L2 (unscripted natural conversations) and draws

on the Limerick Corpus of Irish English (LCIE) (Farr *et al.*, 2004), a representative corpus of spoken Irish English (IrE), in order to compare and contrast the frequency, distribution and functions of *like* in the participants’ L2 against those of the IrE data.

It is important to note, however, that although this study compares and contrasts the patterns and functions of the PM *like* between L2- and L1-speakers of English, it does not view the L2-speaker within a “native-centric” deficit model. Instead, it aligns with Prodromou (2008) by analysing L2 pragmatic production in its own right for the purpose of understanding why, though successfully used, the PM *like* can deviate from what has been described in L1-English, especially the Irish variant.

Before delving deeper into the research aspects described above, it is necessary to provide a descriptive overview on PMs and position this research within a theoretical framework regarding such linguistic items. This follows in section 2 below. Section 3, in turn, reviews some studies on the PM *like* with a focus on its use in IrE as well as in L2. Section 4 presents the data and methodology applied in this study, while section 5 describes the quantitative and qualitative results. Finally, section 6 discusses the results of this study and the paper concludes in section 7 with some suggestions on future research possibilities within the field of studies on PMs in L2.

2 Pragmatic Markers

Pragmatic Markers are a broad and eclectic class of linguistic items (words, chunks of words or even clauses) which operate outside the sentence level. They mark the speakers’ attitudes and stances while also helping in the structural organisation of the discourse (Carter and McCarthy 2006, p. 208; Pichler 2013, p. 4). These linguistic items are not part of the propositional content of an utterance. In fact, PMs are separate units of language that can be easily removed from the sentence without changing the conceptual value of the proposition. In other words, although PMs do not add to the content and concept of a proposition, they are essential interpersonal tools which help in the utterance interpretation as well as in the discourse management (O’Keeffe *et al.*, 2011).

Consider the illustrative examples taken from the LCIE:

- (01) *Thankfully*, those days have gone by the wayside.
 (02) She used to wear, *like*, peach shirts and jumpers.
 (03) *I think* it's just the way they make the bag.
 (04) He's still not safe at all, *you know*.

The examples above can be divided into two types of PMs, namely those which perform a pragmatic function while still having their semantic meanings easily recovered from a dictionary (1 and 3), and those whose semantic meanings have weakened giving place to pragmatic functions (2 and 4). It is important to note, however, that even though the PMs in (1) and (3) can have their semantic meaning recovered, they do not add to the main proposition. Instead, as much as (2) and (4), they contribute to the utterance interpretation by marking the speakers' attitude and guiding the hearer through the interpersonal meanings encoded in the utterances and intended by the speakers. As Fraser (1996, p. 188) sums up, "the sentence [...] meaning is comprised of two parts: [a] propositional content; and [b] a set of pragmatic markers". This view echoes McCarthy (1998, p. 59) who points out that "hardly any stretch of informal conversation is without [pragmatic] markers".

O'Keeffe *et al.* (2007, p. 159), in their investigation of spoken English with the aim of informing English language teaching and learning, also reports that "the most frequent items found in the data had pragmatic functions in the organisation and management of conversation and in the speaker-listener relationship". From this, there is an argument to be made in that PMs are a pervasive feature of spoken language that can be found in any language, language varieties or even develop new pragmatic functions in the oral production of specific linguistic groups within a language variety (McCarthy, 1998; Andersen, 2015).

The terminology encompassing the concept of PMs is as vast as the studies on the topic – and as heterogeneous as the proper nature of such linguistic features. Some of the terminology found in literature are *pragmatic expressions* (Erman, 1987), *pragmatic devices* (Stubbe & Holmes, 1995), *pragmatic markers* (Fraser, 1996), *discourse markers* (Sankoff *et al.*, 1997), *discourse particles* (Fisher, 2006), *discourse-pragmatic features* (Pichler, 2013), and *smallwords* (Hasselgren, 2002). However, it can be argued that the two most common terms are *pragmatic markers* and *discourse markers* – sometimes used interchangeably, sometimes used to describe different sub-groups of PMs.

This paper subscribes to Fraser (1996) on the concept of PMs as a major umbrella under which many types of pragmatic markers constitute the class of "items which mark speakers' personal meanings, their organisational choices, attitudes and feelings" (Carter and McCarthy 2006, p. 207). PMs can, therefore, range from discourse markers to hedges, stance markers, interjections, response tokens, vague language, vocatives, *etcetera*. This broad view of PMs is taken to allow for flexibility towards the concept of PM, as this is a versatile class of items which is "in constant flux, recruiting new lexical members from other word classes" (Aijmer, 2015, p. 199).

As a result of their pervasive nature in spoken language, PMs have been analysed from different perspectives; which, in turn, has contributed in no small way to a better understanding of the patterns and behaviour of these linguistic features in use². However, while there is no shortage of studies on the use of PMs in different L1s, little research has been undertaken regarding the use of PMs in spoken L2, especially where addressing the accommodation of PMs through exposure to natural native language production. Most studies on L2 PMs look at learner language, rather than proficient adult language (a notable exception is Prodromou, 2008). These studies tend to compare learner data against native spoken data whose pragmatics features, such as PMs, are rarely dealt with in L2 classroom settings. Still, the results of studies using learner corpora to analyse PMs are not to be dismissed as they point to the relation between PMs and pragmatic competence in L2, thus building a strong link between PMs and their contribution to L2 fluency.

For instance, with a particular focus on the functional behaviour of *you know*, Buysse (2017) compares the PM used by advanced learners of English from different L1 backgrounds in their spoken productions against native spoken English. The comparative analysis is both quantitative and qualitative and the main objective is to confirm previous claims on the use of *you know* by L2 learners of English, i.e. learners of English use the PM much less frequently than native speakers of English, and learners use *you know* more as a discourse-management tool rather than at an intersubjective level. The results confirm the frequency of *you*

² See Amador-Moreno *et al.* (2015) for a collection of works on PMs analysed specifically within the language variety of IrE, and Aijmer and Simon-Vandenberg (2006), for a collection of works on PMs contrasted across different L1s.

know as a PM is lower in learner data than in native data. However, results also show that both learners and native speakers of English employ *you know* both intersubjectively and as a discourse management tool, the former being in more common usage by both populations. All functions used by native speakers are also employed by learners of English, although the variation lies in frequency of use.

Fung and Carter (2007), on the other hand, offer a comprehensive study of discourse markers produced by intermediate-advanced Hong Kong learners who showed a high use of some markers, while others would have been “underrepresented” in their oral production. What is more, their study reveals a much higher functional performance of markers by native speakers.

What these learner corpora studies on PMs commonly reveal is that, although with some limitations, PMs are also present in learners’ spoken discourse and play an important role in L2. As a result of equipping L2-speakers at an interpersonal level when successfully used, and limiting L2-speakers’ contribution to conversation when lacking or misused, PMs are arguably fundamental to successful communication. Indeed, on the issue of L2 fluency, by analysing pragmatic markers – or “smallwords”, as she terms them – in the oral production of Norwegian learners of English, Hasselgren (2002) confirms the importance of PMs as a fundamental part of the process to acquire “native-like” fluency. This is echoed by Fung and Carter (2007) who suggest PMs as essential features to help in the process of strengthening learners’ pragmatic competence in spoken language. PMs, therefore, have great potential to contribute to fluency (Aijmer, 2015). As Sankoff *et al.* (1997, p. 214) conclude from their study, “the ability to express oneself fluently and confidently in a second language entails the use of those discourse markers that native speakers produce so effortlessly”.

3 The pragmatic marker *like*

The PM *like* has had much attention recently, both among scholars and beyond academia. This is no surprise as it is a highly prevalent and versatile PM used across many varieties of the English language. As McWhorter (2016) notes, *like* is “entrenched in all kinds of sentences, used subconsciously, and difficult to parse the real meaning of without careful consideration” - different

from more conventional PMs such as *thankfully* and *I think*. This may explain why *like* has increasingly had so much consideration in language investigations but has also been subjected to so much criticism and negative views resulting from its perceived ‘overuse’ in spoken English – to the extent of being seen as a corruption of proper language. However, as McWhorter (2016) also points out, the “new like” – as he addresses the PM – “has all the hallmarks of a piece of grammar – specifically, in the pragmatic department”.

Indeed, in an analysis of the English spoken in Canada, D’Arcy (2007) challenges some of the myths that normally surround the PM *like* (*e.g.* it is redundant and meaningless language, it is sloppy adolescent language, it is more frequent among women). The author sets about demystifying the folk beliefs around *like* concluding that this is a multifunctional PM used by both males and females – though gender may play a role in favouring particular functions of the PM. The study also unveils that although *like* is more common at younger ages, it is found across all ages including seniors.

Like, as polemic as it may be, is undoubtedly a relevant and meaningful linguistic device which aids the interpersonal relations and discursal needs of spoken language. Andersen (2001), for instance, describes the important role this PM plays in spoken English, functioning as a tool employed by speakers in order to facilitate the interpretation of the proposition they wish to communicate with their hearers. *Like* can also contribute to the utterance meaning in different ways, which demonstrates its multifunctionality as noted by the author. Andersen (2001) classifies the PM *like* as a *procedural marker*. This means that *like* can function as a procedural constraint by delimiting the possible interpretations to which a hearer needs to resort in order to comprehend a proposition. Even though *like* itself, as a PM, has no conceptual meaning and does not add to the proposition at a conceptual level, it does have an essential value in signalling and guiding the hearer towards the interpretation of the utterance. In short, its relevance to the interpretation of an utterance is not conceptual but rather discursal.

Andersen (2001, p. 27) suggests a framework to analyse *like* in language-use as “a marker of less-than-literal use of language” which marks “genuine semantic discrepancy between the encoded lexical concept and the concept that figures in the speaker’s thought”. In this sense, *like* is a linguistic cue used by the speaker to signal that what follows the PM is a) vague and/or approximate,

b) an exemplified concept, c) a metaphor which requires inference, or d) something that may be replaced by a better expression or words. Within this framework *like* has a strong relationship with the idea of loose interpretation and “provide[s] the hearer with a cue that the most relevant interpretation in this context is a non-literal one” (Andersen, 2001, p. 22).

Like is, therefore, a flexible and multifunctional PM whose functions manifest according to the contextual and linguistic environment where it occurs. A review of the literature indicates a broad, and occasionally overlapping, use of terminology to describe the multifunctionality of *like*. However, from this diverse vocabulary a core set of functions emerge (see Andersen, 2001; Amador-Moreno, 2012; Murphy, 2015; and Schweinberger, 2015), namely a) hedge, b) approximate device, c) exemplifier, d) hesitation marker, e) focuser and f) quotative.

3.1 *Like* in Irish English

The PM *like* is by no means exclusive to IrE. It has, in fact, been widely reported among investigations across many different varieties of English, including American English (Romaince and Lange, 1991), Canadian English (D’Arcy, 2007), New Zealand English (Dragger, 2006), British English (Andersen, 1997), and Scottish English (Miller & Weinert, 1995).

However, despite its arguable ubiquity in spoken English, *like* has been noted to be a characteristic feature of Irish English as it is used by both males and females (Murphy, 2015) and, although less frequent among older groups, it is found in the spoken language of all age groups (Schweinberger, 2012). What is more, *like* is notable for performing a different structural and functional behaviour in Irish English. For instance, *like* has a clause-marginal preference, namely clause-initial and -final positions (Schweinberger, 2015) and it also functions as a hedge or a focuser pointing backwards rather than onwards in the utterance (Murphy, 2015).

Amador-Moreno & McCafferty (2015), for instance, investigate the use of the PM *like* in the Corpus of Irish English Correspondence (CORIECOR), a corpus made of letters written between 1750 and 1940 by Irish emigrants. The authors show evidence of the use of a multifunctional *like* distributed across clause-initial -medial and -final positions, which reinforces the argument of *like* as a common feature in Irish English as it can be traced back, at least, to the early nineteenth century.

The use of *like* as a PM is so prevalent in Irish English that it can be seen also as a marker of orality in modern Irish fiction. This is indicated by Amador-Moreno (2012) who analyses the presence of the *like* in contemporary Irish English writing. The author finds that the same pragmatic uses of *like* are seen across both the fictional and the spoken Irish English data examined. The article shows that *like* is used in narratives in order to bring the spoken language and its features into writing and also as an index of Irishness in the English spoken by the fictional characters.

Similarly, Millar (2015) investigated the use of PMs on an Irish beauty blog and also presents evidence of the pragmatic use of *like* distributed across clause-initial, -medial and -final positions. Quantitatively, she notes that the number of occurrences of *like* is much lower by comparison to previous research on spoken Irish English. Qualitatively, she observes that the functions found in the Irish computer-mediated communication (CMC) do not differ from those found in spoken Irish English. Indeed, *like* seems to have made its way into other types of CMC, as the Facebook message³ below presents:

(05) It should probably take *like* two weeks to arrive to you.

More recent studies have also specifically focused on the accommodation of *like* by L2-speakers of English living in Ireland. These are Nestor *et al.* (2012), Nestor and Regan (2015), Magliacane (2016) and Diskin (2017). The first two studies analyse the English language produced by Polish immigrants in Ireland. Their research reveals similar patterns of the PM *like* in their L2 discourse when compared to those found in IrE. However, there is great variability among the L2 speakers. Clause marginal use of *like* is more frequent than clause-medial in the L2 data, which supports the argument that PMs can be acquired through native exposure. Nestor and Regan (2015), particularly, focus on the regional influence (rural or urban) on the use of *like* by Polish L2-speakers of English in Ireland. They found that the pragmatic patterns of *like* used by the participants follow the same regional patterns to which they are mostly exposed, *e.g.* rural or urban Ireland.

³ Private message sent by an Irish female to this author. The original message presents other characteristics of CMC, *e.g.* emoticons and abbreviations, which are not represented here as they fall outside the scope of this study.

Magliacane (2016), on the other hand, compares the use of *like* in the L2 production of Italians living in Ireland against Irish English. The study investigates whether there is any change in frequency and functions of *like* in the participants' L2 over a time span of a semester being exposed to native Irish English. The results show that the change in the usage of the PM is strongly linked to personal experiences of living abroad. The study was small in scale with only 5 participants of which 2 of them did not show any difference in terms of frequency or functions of *like* in their L2 after a semester in Ireland, while 1 increased the frequency of *like* but did not use it in any other different function. However, the two remaining participants employed different pragmatic functions of *like* in their production after a semester of exposure to Irish English, including those functions that are described as characteristic to Irish English.

Finally, Diskin (2017) makes a comparison of the use of *like* between L1- and L2-speakers of English in Ireland (Polish and Chinese). The study is quantitative in nature looking at the frequency of *like* in both corpora as well as its distribution in the utterances, but also qualitative as it investigates the pragmatic functions in both L1 and L2 spoken productions. The results suggest that the frequency of the PM *like* in L2-discourse reaches the same level of L1-discourse after 3 years of exposure to the target language and its native environment. The study also notes that proficiency does not play a significant role in the acquisition of PMs, whereas native language exposure does. The author observes, however, that although highly frequent in the L2-discourse, the pragmatic functions of *like* are limited to explanations, introductions and exemplifiers, leaving functions such as hedges, as much as the clause-final position pattern, predominantly used by the native population.

4 Data and Methodology⁴

4.1 The corpus

The analysis for this study draws on a sample of data taken from a bilingual and comparable corpus (comprised of two sub-corpora: Brazilian Portuguese and L2-English) tailored and carefully designed for the investigation of L2 pragmatics. The sample data under scrutiny (henceforth L2 corpus; Table 1 below) is part of the L2-English component of the corpus. The objective of this study is to interrogate one of the research hypotheses for which the main corpus was built. That is, Brazilian university students are prone to absorbing some of the most frequently used pragmatic markers in Irish English by virtue of life experience and study in Ireland.

There is common consensus that the application of strict criteria to the selection of the corpus type and participants are fundamental to answer the questions set in the research (Granger, 2002; O'Keeffe *et al.*, 2007; Adolphs & Knight, 2010). This is especially true when undertaking a corpus-based investigation on L2 as this poses potential and significant discrepancy in its speakers' production (Granger, 2002). For instance, among L2-speakers of English there are learners and proficient speakers, users of English as a second or foreign language, those of different L1 backgrounds as well as different language learning experiences, *etcetera*⁵.

As seen in the Table 1 below, all the participants in this study are Brazilian university students. They also have successfully completed their English language programmes, have achieved an internationally recognised certificate of either advanced or proficient English, and, at the time of the participation, had spent at least 6 full months in Ireland. In addition, the participants can be described as Successful Users of English (SUEs) (Prodromou, 2008) as they communicate effectively within an international environment both with L1- and L2-speakers of English – be it at personal, professional or cultural levels. This does not mean, however, that the participants have ceased their L2 development. As a matter of fact, their process of L2 acquisition and development is in constant motion as a consequence of their exposure to the native environment of the target language.

⁴ Mary Immaculate College Research Ethics Committee (MIREC) Ethical Approval Reference Number: A16-048

⁵ As pointed by Selinker (2014, p. 229) as "different types of interlanguage".

TABLE 1: SAMPLE DATA

NUMBER OF PARTICIPANTS	6
GENDER	2 MALES AND 4 FEMALES
PARTICIPANTS' AGE	ADULTS (20-30 YEARS OLD)
NATIONALITY	BRAZILIAN
L2 CONTEXT	UNIVERSITY STUDENTS IN IRELAND
LEVEL OF L2 PROFICIENCY	C1-C2 CEFR (SUCCESSFUL USERS OF ENGLISH, PRODROMOU, 2008)
MINIMUM TIME OF EXPOSURE TO IRISH ENGLISH	6 MONTHS
TYPE OF DATA	AUDIO RECORDINGS OF UNSCRIPTED INFORMAL INTERACTIONS
TYPE OF INTERACTIONS	1 MULTI-PARTY AND 3 DYADIC
AVERAGE DURATION OF RECORDING	30 MINUTES IN L2-ENGLISH
NUMBER OF WORDS	21,752

The data represents naturally-occurring spoken language and was collected during casual meetings between the researcher and friends or fellow university students. Due to both the participants and the researcher being Brazilian university students in Ireland, the relationship was balanced as each participant shared similar experiences within a study-abroad context. This enabled open and free engagement between participants in unstructured conversations. The interactions

took place in public spaces such as pubs, coffee shops and parks, as well as in private spaces such as the participants' and the researcher's homes. All participants were briefed on and consented to having conversations recorded. However, they were not aware of which linguistic functions would be subsequently analysed. Conversations were mostly started by the researcher and were mainly initiated on a common topic: namely, their experiences and perceptions of travelling in Brazil and all around the world. Being unstructured, casual and natural conversations evolved and addressed many other topics, such as personal relationships, future goals, etc. The recorded material, in turn, was transcribed using a transcription convention adapted from that employed in the transcription of the LCIE

4.2 Methodology

The questions this study aims to answer are the following:

- (1) Have the Brazilian university students accommodated PMs found in Irish English?
- (2) Is there a difference in the use of PMs between the L1 (Irish English) and L2 corpora?
- (3) Are the L2-users pragmatically successful in their use of PMs?

To answer these questions, the main methods and tools of Corpus Linguistics are employed in a contrastive L2 analysis with the aid of WordSmith Tools 6.0 (lexical analysis software; Scott, 2011). The reference corpus with which the L2 corpus is contrasted is the LCIE as it represents the variant of English to which the participants have been exposed, thus being the most appropriate to this study.

The LCIE is a one-million-word spoken corpus of Irish English, which comprises a "collection of naturally-occurring spoken data from everyday Irish contexts" and "includes conversations recorded across a wide variety of predominantly informal settings throughout Ireland (excluding Northern Ireland)" (Farr *et al.*, 2004, p. 5-6). Although the LCIE is comprised of five different speech genres, the majority, 82% of the data is made of *intimate* and *socialising* contexts of communication, while only 18% of the data refers to *professional*, *transactional* and *pedagogic* contexts. The emphasis of LCIE is, therefore, on casual conversations between friends and/or family members

(i.e. speakers chatting or discussing a topic, speakers engaging in a task while interacting in a conversation, interview informal chats, etc.) (Farr *et al.*, 2004).

The steps involved in conducting the contrastive L2 analysis are: 1) the generation of frequency lists, where the top 15 words are highlighted in both corpora; 2) the generation of a keyword list of the L2 corpus contrasted against the LCIE, and 3) the generation of concordance lines in order to analyse both the distribution and the functions of the PM *like* in the L2 corpus.

The theoretical framework on which this study is grounded is, therefore, an intersection between Corpus Pragmatics (CP) and Second Language Acquisition (SLA) studies. The first, Corpus Pragmatics (Romero-Trillo, 2008), is a fusion of Corpus Linguistics as a method and Pragmatics as a model of interpretation which allows the researcher to look at the data both in a vertical quantitative way (corpus linguistics) as well as in a horizontal qualitative way (pragmatics) (Rühlemann and Clancy, 2018). This resultant synergy between corpus linguistics and pragmatics makes CP a significant framework for the reliable context-specific analysis of language use and language development. Within the CP framework, the researcher can generate software-driven statistics while, at the same time, undertake a detailed interpretation of the data taking into account the context of the language use.

Additionally, benefiting from the long-established field of SLA, this study utilises a method of analysing L2 namely Contrastive Interlanguage Analyses (Granger, 1996; 2015). Within this framework an L2 can be contrasted with its target language so as to identify linguistic differences and similarities. However, as previously mentioned, this study does not concur with the native-centric approach commonly taken in contrastive interlanguage studies, but rather investigates L2 in its own right. Furthermore, unlike most studies on contrastive interlanguage, which look at learner language and its deviation from native norms, this study analyses the language produced by SUEs and their L2 pragmatic competence.

5 Results

5.1 Quantitative insights

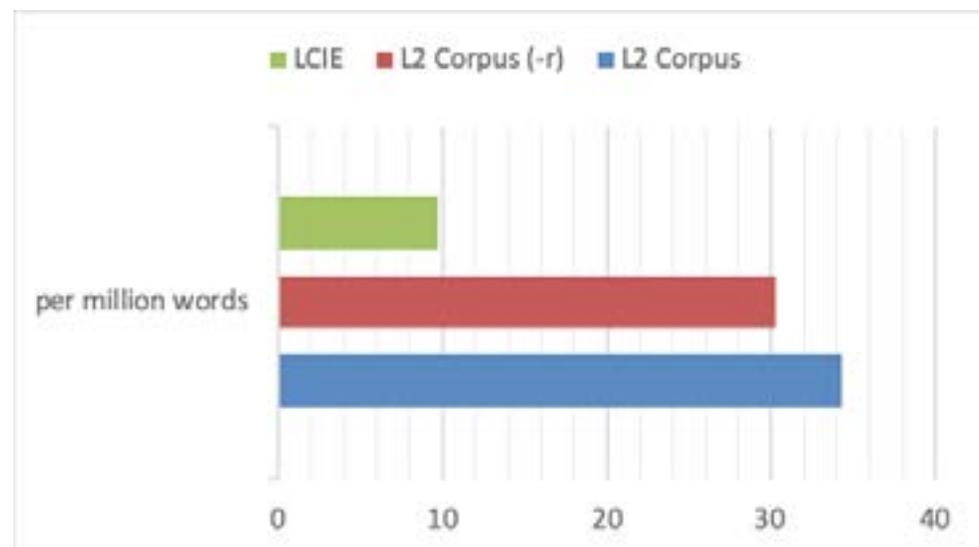
By retrieving a top 15 frequency list (Table 2 below) from both corpora, the LCIE and the L2 corpus, it is possible to see that *like* features as a highly frequent word in both the L1- and L2-spoken discourse analysed. However, it is striking that *like* takes a much higher position in the L2 corpus (3rd) by comparison to the LCIE (14th).

TABLE 2: FREQUENCY LIST

	LCIE	L2 CORPUS
1	THE	I
2	I	THE
3	YOU	LIKE
4	AND	TO
5	TO	AND
6	IT	YEAH
7	A	YOU
8	THAT	IN
9	OF	A
10	YEAH	WAS
11	IN	ER
12	WAS	WE
13	IS	IT'S
14	LIKE	SO
15	KNOW	OF

Considering that the LCIE is a much larger corpus, the frequency of *like* underwent a process of normalisation so that it was possible to set an average frequency of *like* per million words across both corpora. Owing to the fact that the researcher participates in all conversations with the participants, his contribution was extracted from the data in order to provide a more reliable account of the phenomenon in the L2 corpus, which is labelled as *L2 corpus (-r)* in Figure 1 below:

Figure 1: Frequency of *like* per million words



As seen in Figure 1, the normalisation process revealed that the Brazilian L2-speakers of English are prone to use the word *like* 3 times more than Irish speakers of English. That is, the latter use *like* in their spoken production nearly 10,000 times per each million words, while the former use *like* slightly over 30,000 times out of one million words. This means that the frequency of *like* is still much higher in the L2 corpus, even when the researcher's spoken contribution is removed.

Indeed, when conducting a corpus search for keywords in the L2 corpus compared to the LCIE, *like* still ranks an intriguing third position, as seen in Table 3, below:

TABLE 3: KEYWORD LIST – L2 CORPUS

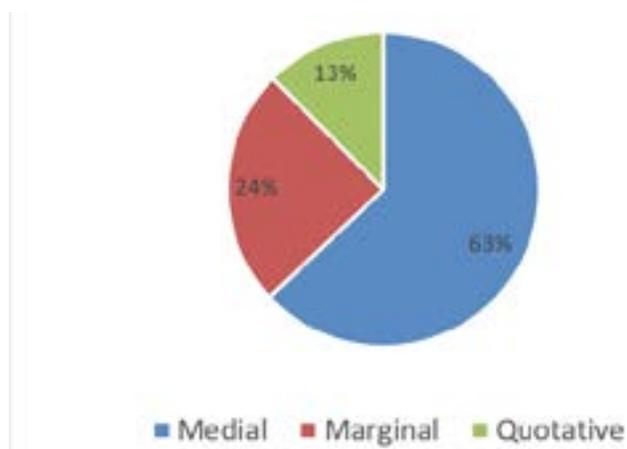
01	ER
02	MMHM
03	LIKE
04	OKAY
05	CHUCKLE
06	CUBA
07	LAUGH
08	BRAZIL
09	GIGGLE
10	QUE
11	BECAUSE
12	SO
13	COOL
14	SÃO
15	HAVANA

A keyword list highlights significantly salient words in a corpus when electronically crosschecked against a larger corpus (Culpeper, 2009). With that in mind, if vocalised pauses (*er* - not found in the LCIE due to transcription differences), extra-linguistic information (*chuckle, laugh, giggle*), topic-specific words (*Cuba, Brazil, Havana*), and Portuguese words (*que, são*) are excluded from the keyword list, then only potentially pragmatic markers remain as keywords in the top 15 list - including *like*.

Although the frequency and keyword lists highlight the high occurrence and saliency of *like* in the L2 corpus, they do not give evidence of its pragmatic function. To overcome such constraints, a sifting was performed to isolate the PM *like* from the grammatical functions of *like*, i.e. preposition, conjunction, noun, adjective and verb. Some 658 concordance lines were analysed which revealed that about 85% of the occurrences of *like* in the L2 corpus feature one or more pragmatic functions.

As regards the distribution of *like* in the L2 corpus, the position of the PM was allocated as either clause-marginal (initial and final) or clause-medial. In addition, the occurrences where the PM performs as a quotative marker were allocated to a category of their own (see Figure 2 below). Notably more than half of the occurrences (63%) were at a clause-medial position, while 24% of the distribution of the PM were at a clause-marginal position - be they -initial or final. The quotative *like*, in turn, amounts to 12.5% of the data analysed.

Figure 2: Clause-position distribution of *like* - L2 Corpus



5.2 Qualitative insights

The qualitative analysis shed light on the functions the PM *like* performs in the L2 corpus and confirms that the same functions described in the literature on *like* in IrE, feature in the L2 discourse examined.

First, addressing the **hedge** *like*, examples (6) and (7) present two different speakers employing the PM in clause-final position hedging their propositions. The speaker in example (6) is talking about her reaction towards her father telling her he is not walking her up the aisle if she wears a red wedding dress. By using the clause-final *like*, she both emphasizes her determination to wear a red wedding dress and mitigates her strong position towards it. In (7), the speaker hedges his opinion about São Paulo as he is aware that his hearer has lived there but is not completely sure about his hearer's perceptions of the city. The mitigating tone of the proposition is also evidenced by the use of *that much* which corroborates the function of *like* as a hedge.

(06) I can walk there myself *like*. I have legs.

(07) I don't like São Paulo that much to be honest *like*.

In regard to the **approximate** use of *like*, examples (8) and (9) show the L2-speakers using the PM before numerals where *like* could be replaced by the adverb *approximately*. This idea of an approximate number, rather than a precise interpretation of the numerals, is signalled by *like* but also reinforced by *something and I think* in (8) as well as *and a few* in (9).

(08) ... then we stayed *like* five hours in the car to come back or something, even more I think.

(09) I think I've been *like* to twenty, twenty and a few countries.

The approximate function of *like* is also seen pointing onwards while flagging the fact that what follows the PM should be loosely interpreted rather than taken as truth. This loose interpretation concept, put forward by Andersen (2001), is seen in three different contexts in the examples below:

(10) He had some perfumes that were *like* in a crystal.

(11) People are very nostalgic about *like* Fidel Castro era *like*.

(12) ... so he's *like* addicted to Lithuania oh he was talking about Lithuania all the time.

In example (10), the speaker is talking about unusual products she found while browsing the street markets in Morocco. When describing the type of bottles storing the perfumes, the speaker says *in a crystal* but warns the hearer that she is not confident about the term by using *like* which, in turn, invites the hearer to infer visual concepts of what a crystal perfume bottle looks like in the absence of a proper term. Similarly, the PM *like* invites the hearer to draw on their personal knowledge of Cuba and Fidel Castro to interpret the word *era* in (11). As Andersen (2001, p. 23) points out, this is a case where *like* “introduces new material that is conceptually loose but does not amount to approximation of a measurable entity”. In that sense, *Fidel Castro era* is a general description of a period when many events occurred in Cuba as well as on the global stage and it can be interpreted depending on the hearer's knowledge of that period. Finally, in example (12) *like* signals the discrepancy between the word *addicted*, which is normally collocated with words that communicate consumption (e.g. chocolate, coffee, drugs, alcohol), and the proper noun Lithuania. Here, the PM performs an approximate function by pointing that *addicted* may not be the best term thus the hearer can infer a more appropriate one based on the context given (*he was talking about Lithuania all the time*).

Considering *like* as an **exemplifier**, the speaker in (13) justifies the modules he had chosen to take at the university at which he was studying at the time of the conversation. He uses the PM, meaning *for instance*, to exemplify two of the programmes offered by the university after mentioning that they do not offer the programme he takes in Brazil (*environmental engineering*):

(13) A: But the thing is that they don't have environmental engineering in here. They have *like* civil engineering or some ocean geography.

B: Oceanography as well.

Some examples of the **focuser** *like* are (14), (15) and (16) below, where in (14), for instance, the speaker employs the PM to strengthen and boost the adjective phrase *way different*. On the other hand, when talking about why she should visit her friend in Galway, the speaker in (15) uses a clause-initial *like* to introduce new information considered to be important to her argument thus highlighted by the PM. A clause-final *like* is also seen in example (15) and functions as a retroactive focuser (*I never go there like*) while also mitigating any possible negative interpretation towards her never visiting her friend despite her friend's frequent visits to Limerick. Similarly, the clause-final PM in (16) also focuses on its preceding procedure giving emphasis to the unusual double-currency system in Cuba.

(14) The way they study here *like* is way different from Brazil.

(15) Yes, and she comes here all the time, *like* the first semester she came here four times and I never go there *like*.

(16) One money is for Cubans [...] and the other one is for tourists, so the price just changes *like*.

A function of the PM *like* that should not come as a surprise in L2 discourse is that of a **hesitation marker**, where the PM performs as a short break to give the speaker the chance to introduce new information required to clarify something previously said (17), or also as a short break to give the speaker the opportunity to change the structure of their proposition (18). In some cases, as in (19), it is a case of *like* buying the speaker some time until she organises what she wishes to communicate.

(17) We stayed the whole night there. We ate something uhm they played songs *like* traditional songs.

(18) I asked some friends that would be interested in going to Cuba for *like* to appreciate more things than only the beach and the weather.

(19) I talked to him *like* we've we always talk about we *like* we've got a deal with ourselves that we are going to talk about everything with each other because otherwise there is no point.

Cases of *like* as a hesitation marker signalling the speakers' difficulties communicating on a topic with which they have limited familiarity, or restricted vocabulary, are presented in (20) and (21). These are cases where the PM normally cooccur with another hesitation marker, namely the vocalised pause (transcribed as *uhm* in the data), or with occasional faltering speech (e.g. slight and short unintelligible breaks which are transcribed as *er*). The difficulty the speakers encounter in the face of vocabulary constraints is evidenced by the final sentence in (20) – *I forgot the word* – and the code switching in (21) when asking about the English word for earthenware pots.

(20) ... because *like* uhm all all *like* er how can I say that *like*. I forgot the the word.

(21) It's *like* uhm uhm how do you say *panela de barro*?

Finally, the **quotative** structure *be + like* is also found in the L2 data, as seen in examples (22) and (23) below where the former is a direct quote of reported speech, while the latter presents the speaker's feelings and attitudes towards visiting Cuba and having a local experience rather than staying in all-inclusive resorts easily found *anywhere in the Caribbean*.

(22) This guy passed by me and he's *like* "oh nice size welcome to Morocco", you know.

(23) I *was like* you can go anywhere in the Caribbean and see that.

6 Discussion

Hitherto, this paper has shown evidences of the presence of the PM *like* in the L2 data analysed. It has also presented naturally occurring examples of spoken language where it is possible to see similar functional patterns of this PM between the participants and what has been described in literature on IrE. However, differences also emerged during both the quantitative and qualitative analyses, namely a higher frequency of *like* among the L2-speakers (as seen in Section 3) and functional patterns in the L2 data which have not been previously described

among Irish speakers of English (see Amador-Moreno, 2012; Schweinberger, 2015 and Murphy, 2015 for functions and clause positions of *like* in IrE).

Addressing the higher frequency of *like* in the L2 corpus, although the participants make significant use of the PM in clause-marginal position, the clause-medial use of *like* is over double the number of clause-initial and -final positions accounted together. These results differ from findings on the clause-position distribution of *like* in IrE (Schweinberger, 2015) which point towards a clause-marginal preference of *like* in this English variety, especially at clause-final position. One reason for this variation – both in number and distribution – may be the fact that the L2 data analysed feature a large number of clause-medial *like* functioning as a hesitation marker, at different levels, aiding in the planning and structuring of the participants' discourse.

Consider example (24) below, which shows the difficulty the speaker is having when describing her experience of watching a sunset when visiting a desert in Morocco. It is also possible to see in this case that the topic may pose a certain challenge to the speaker, who is not sure about which verb collocates with the concept of sunset (*got* instead of *caught* or *watched*), thus employing the PM *like* marking her limited vocabulary before stuttering to produce the word *sunset*⁶.

(24) We *got* an awesome *like* sun= sunset.

This relation between the hesitation function of *like* at clause-medial position and unfamiliar topics about which the speakers may have limited vocabulary in their L2 is further evidenced in example (25) below. This is a conversation in which the speaker is describing his experience when walking on a frozen lake for the first time⁷. His unfamiliarity with such an experience, and therefore with the words to describe it, is demonstrated throughout his sentences marked by the hesitation *like* and corroborated by other markers, i.e. faltering speech (*er*), stuttering, mistaken choice of vocabulary (*height* and *huge*⁸):

⁶ In the transcription of the data, the equal sign (=) can mark either an incomplete word or an interruption to the speaker's turn by another speaker.

⁷ The plus sign (+) in the transcription marks that a speaker's turn is not finished but continues in their subsequent line.

⁸ The words after the bar were added by the author and present a correction of the previous words used by the speakers. This is to facilitate the reading of the examples as well as to avoid any misinterpretation.

(25) A: Yeah but you can you can see *like* the er the *like* the the *height* | *thickness* of the the the ice+

B: Mhm.

A: +*like* it was really hu= really *huge* | *deep like* it was a block with *like* at least one metre, so.

On the other hand, with regard to the functions of *like* at clause-marginal positions in the L2 data, it appears that clause-initial *like* is mostly employed to give focus to its following proposition in a sense of explanation and contextualisation. For instance, when not sure about the reasons why monkeys are kept on leash on the streets of Morocco, speaker A in (26) asks speaker B a question to which she answers by using a clause-initial *like* before an explanation and contextualisation of the story:

(26) A: But why do they have those monkeys on the streets?

B: *Like* for tourism to show people, you know.

Similarly, after saying that he was born in the countryside but had lived most of his life in a big capital, the speaker in (27) answers the question of whether he considers himself to be a country person or not, to which he also employs the clause-initial *like* followed by a justification and contextualisation of his emphatic affirmative answer.

(27) Yeah definitely. *Like* the way I speak *like*, I have the accent from a countryside person.

However, in (27) it is also possible to note a clause-final *like* which does not appear to be either hedging or focusing on the preceding information. Instead, although prosodically and syntactically linked to its previous proposition, this use of *like* informs the hearer that the previous information may not be clear or complete while also pointing onwards to a new piece of information that may clarify what the speaker is trying to convey. This marginal position of *like* functioning as a mediator between sentences can more clearly be seen in example (28) below, where the speaker is trying to explain the concept of a self-governing neighbourhood in Vilnius, the capital of Lithuania:

(28) A: It's not *like* their own government. I I don't know about [it] *like*+

B: Mhm.

A: +how it works *like*, how th= they government | govern it how they rule this neighbourhood, but they live by | on their own, you know.

7 Conclusion

This paper reports on an investigation regarding the PM *like* as produced by Brazilian university students in Ireland. The main objective was to examine to which extent PMs found in IrE are accommodated by Brazilian L2-speakers of English through their cultural immersion and exposure to the language. To do so, a sample corpus of spoken L2 English was contrasted to a corpus of spoken IrE in order to shed light on the differences and similarities in the distribution and the functions of *like* in both corpora.

Quantitatively, the PM *like* was found to be a keyword in the L2 corpus and at least three times more frequent by comparison to the IrE data. When looking at the distribution of *like*, over 60 percent of the occurrences of the PM took a clause-medial position; unlike what has been reported in previous studies of IrE which reflects the tendency of *like* in a clause-marginal position. Qualitatively, this study showed evidence of *like* being used multifunctionally by the L2-speakers of English, with all functions of the PM previously described in literature on IrE. However, some functional patterns also emerged from the L2 data which indicates the pragmatic needs and linguistic demands which may arise during communication when using an L2. Such differences found in the use of *like* by the L2-speakers when compared to L1-speakers of IrE – in frequency, distribution and functions – are mostly related to discourse management: i.e. when the speaker is not familiar with a topic and may have a limited range of vocabulary or when the speaker may feel like they need to clarify their contribution to the conversation.

These findings concur with Romero-Trillo (2017) who suggests that L2-speakers may present a higher frequency of PMs in order to make themselves better understood. On the development of new functions and patterns of a PM in the L2-discourse, Aijmer (2015, p. 204) points out that “[w]e can expect non-native speakers of English to extend the function of lexical elements in

ways which are unusual but fulfil the speakers' needs in the communication situation". Therefore, answering the questions set at the beginning of this investigation: a) the speakers seem to have accommodated functions of *like* from natural exposure to IrE; b) although the use of *like* found in the L2 corpus is similar to what is seen in IrE, there are also differences in the use of this PM by the L2-speakers; and c) although different from IrE, such differences in the use of *like* by the L2-speakers can be argued to be pragmatically successful as they seem to have undergone a process of adoption first and then adaptation according to the speakers' contextual and communicative needs and demands.

It is important to note, however, that some of these findings (especially the quantitative results and those regarding clause position of *like*) may result from the fact that the reference corpus (LCIE) may be considered dated: its data was collected between 2002-2004. This means that the patterns of *like* in IrE may have evolved over the years. Acknowledging this, the LCIE is currently being updated and forms the basis for a replication of this comparison with more current data.

As previously mentioned, PMs are a broad class of words and phrases that are fluid, spontaneous, multifunctional and pervasive in spoken language. Therefore, it is important that PMs are studied and analysed in as many contexts as possible and from different perspectives. This study adds to the body of work on PMs in L2 by analysing such language in its own right. However, much work still needs to be done in order to better understand the complex nature of PMs. This could and should include not only L1 and L2 English, but also other L1s and L2s as well as contrastive studies between L1s, between L2s and cross-linguistic studies involving an L2 considering both its target language and the speakers' L1. In the context of this study, next steps include the replication of this investigation with a larger cohort of participants, in addition to using the updated version of the LCIE as a reference corpus; furthermore, this work will consider the extent to which the participants' L1 may influence the adaptation of PMs into their L2-English.

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