

Chapter One: Introduction

1.1 Aims and motivations

The aim of this thesis is to provide a pragmatic analysis of the noun *thing* as an item of *vague language* (Channell, 1994) in L1 and L2 speech. In particular, the use of *thing* is explored in simulated employment interviews in Australia. In total 18 L1 and 25 L2 employment interviews were conducted to investigate two aspects of *thing*: its relationship with vagueness and the effects that speakers can generate by using *thing*. These aspects will be analysed in general and with respect to the speech event of job interviews in the cultural context of Australia. Since this study takes a comparative approach and investigates the vagueness and effects of *thing* in L1 and L2 speaker discourse, insights will not only be gained into vague language use, the notion of vagueness and implicature construction (i.e. the effects of *thing*) in one speech event, but also into how *thing* is used by L1 and L2 speakers. The results of this study will, therefore, also be valuable to interlanguage and cross-cultural pragmatics research.

One motivation for studying *thing* relates to general perceptions of vague language (henceforth VL):

“People have many beliefs about language. One important one is that ‘good’ usage involves (among other things) clarity and precision. Hence, it is believed that vagueness, ambiguity, imprecision, and general woolliness are to be avoided.” (Channell, 1994: 1)

Speakers using VL may, therefore, be perceived as careless about their speaking style as hearers may consider these items to be poor replacements for words such as “entities” or “phenomena” (Andersson and Trudgill, 1990: 193).

Research on VL has, however, argued that “vagueness is not a deficiency” (e.g. Rowland, 2007: 94). Rather, it has been described as an important means to convey interpersonal meaning (e.g. Carter and McCarthy, 2006: 202). Jucker,

Smith and Lüdge (2003) similarly describe interpersonal aspects of VL as they attribute a successful use of these items to the exploitation of common ground between interactants. Studies have also suggested that VL is often sufficient for the conversational purpose at hand, while more precise words would make conversation time-consuming (e.g. Drave, 2002; Jucker, Smith, and Lüdge, 2003). Some contexts such as presentations may, however, require a use of precise language (e.g. technical vocabulary) and VL would constitute an inappropriate linguistic choice in these speech events (McCarthy, 1991: 142–3). The discussion suggests that “vagueness in language is neither all ‘bad’ nor all ‘good’. What matters is that vague language is used appropriately” (Channell, 1994: 3).

On a general level, this study investigates how VL, i.e. the noun *thing*, is used in Australian job interviews. For the analysis of *thing* in this thesis, theoretical models on vagueness and implicature construction will be developed. Since the study compares the use of *thing* by L1 speakers of Australian English and L2 speakers of English, a contribution will be made to theoretical as well as applied aspects of VL research.

1.2 Rationale

VL use is challenging since the semantics of these items and expressions is only very broadly defined. The noun *thing* can, for example, refer to the animate (e.g. *cat*), the inanimate (e.g. *house*), and can also be used to refer to actions (e.g. *watch a movie*). This possibility to use *thing* to denote an almost infinite number of referents makes inferencing crucial so that a hearer can identify the particular referent(s) a speaker refers to in an instance of use. Pragmatic aspects such as the nature of the speech event, the cultural context of the interaction, the relationship between the interactants as well as the notion of *mutual manifestness* (Sperber and Wilson, 1986/ 1995) will be discussed as they are central to the successful use of VL items such as *thing*. With respect to L2 speaker use, it is expected that using VL may pose challenges for this speaker group since understanding the different variables outlined above as well as their complex relationship requires high pragmatic competence that they may not have acquired. The findings of this study will, therefore, make a valuable contribution to interlanguage pragmatics research.

Research on interlanguage pragmatics aims to provide insights into the *pragmalinguistic* and *sociopragmatic* competence (Thomas, 1983) of L2 speakers. A lack of such competence regarding the use of speech act strategies may, for example, lead to *pragmalinguistic failure* while *sociopragmatic failure* arises in part from cross-cultural differences in how social variables such as power and distance are defined in communications (Thomas, 1983). With respect to VL, *pragmalinguistic failure* may occur when speakers do not understand the multiple effects that an item such as *thing* can generate. *Sociopragmatic failure* in VL use, on the other hand, can occur in contexts where speakers choose VL items and expressions when more precise language would have been required or, conversely, use precise language when VL would have been the appropriate linguistic choice.

Studies in interlanguage pragmatics research have focused extensively on investigating speech acts such as requests (e.g. Barron, 2003; Hassall, 2003; Félix-Brasdefer, 2004; Barron, 2005; Shardakova, 2005; Yates, 2005). Several studies have also discussed L2 speaker use of parenthetical verbs like *I think*, modifiers like *sort of* (e.g. Nikula, 1996, 1997; Aijmer, 2004), and other items which have all been referred to as *discourse markers* (Fraser, 1990, 1999), *pragmatic markers* (Brinton, 1996; Fraser, 1996), *pragmatic force modifiers* (Nikula, 1996) or *pragmatic devices* (Terraschke, 2008). There is, however, little interlanguage pragmatics research that investigates VL items such as *thing* (see, however, for example, Drave, 2001 ; Terraschke, 2007 for L2 studies of these items). While speech act research has provided a solid foundation for studies in interlanguage pragmatics and has led to important insights into, for example, developmental issues in learner pragmatics, it is timely that this area of research extends to more detailed investigations of VL. Since some VL items share similarities with pragmatic markers such as *I think* and *sort of* (expressions which have also been included into some VL research), the findings of such a comparative VL study also contributes to existing interlanguage pragmatics research.

So far, the use of VL has primarily been discussed in informal contexts and these items have been described as characteristic of casual conversations (e.g. Cheng and Warren, 2001; Drave, 2001; Cutting, 2002; Jucker, Smith, and Lüdge, 2003). To my knowledge, no L2 study has focused on analysing items such as *thing* in

formal speech events. By investigating VL in employment interviews instead of casual conversations, this study aims to address this gap in the literature. The formal context chosen for the analysis of VL will allow for a discussion of whether and how contexts that differ with respect to variables such as power and distance influence VL use by L1 and L2 speakers of English.

Job interviews are challenging encounters for all interviewees but pose particularly high demands on L2 speakers of a language (e.g. Roberts and Campbell, 2005: 47). To some extent, the greater challenge for L2 speakers is a result of the cultural variability of language use in this speech event. Previous research has identified differences with respect to how interviewees from different cultural backgrounds engage, for example, in self-promotion or express modesty, and have proposed that these differences may influence the success of interviewees negatively (Roberts and Sayers, 1987; Gumperz, 1992; Roberts and Campbell, 2005). Since obtaining gainful employment is an important aspect of successful integration of migrants, knowing how to use language in job interviews is crucial.

While there is previous linguistic research on employment interviews in Great Britain (Roberts and Sayers, 1987; Roberts and Campbell, 2005; Campbell and Roberts, 2007) and Canada (Kerekes, 2006, 2007), few studies have discussed linguistic behaviour in employment interviews in the cultural context of Australia (see, however, Lipovsky, 2006; 2008, who analyses bilingual English-French job interviews in Australia). Teachers of L2 speakers who have migrated to Australia can, thus, only rely on few descriptions of linguistic behaviour in this speech event and cultural context. Since this study adopts a comparative approach and investigates L1 as well as L2 speech, the results of the analysis will add to the scarce L1 literature on Australian employment interviews.

Most VL studies discuss a wide range of items while research that provides a detailed analysis of specific VL items or categories is rare (Drave, 2002; and studies on *general extenders*, Overstreet, 1999; are exceptions). The range of items that have been categorised as VL is broad, and it seems that there are quite considerable differences between the lexemes and expressions that have been categorised as VL (compare, for example, the lexemes *some* and *stuff*). More investigations on individual VL items or different VL categories are, therefore,

necessary in order to better understand their similarities as well as their differences. In particular, a detailed theoretical consideration of the notion of vagueness and its relationship to the different VL items and expressions identified initially by Channell (1994) is required.

Most VL studies (with the exception of Jucker, Smith, and Lüdge, 2003) have used a Gricean approach to explore the use of these items in context. As the review of the literature will show, there are, however, issues with applying a purely Gricean framework to a VL analysis. With respect to *thing* in particular, Grice's maxims cannot adequately explain its relationship with vagueness since the notion of vagueness, as it will be defined in this study, relates to explicature construction for which the Gricean maxims do not seem to apply. Since the framework of Relevance Theory distinguishes between explicatures and implicatures it allows for a discussion of both inferential processes that seem crucial for an analysis of *thing*. The suitability of using Relevance Theory for VL research will, thus, be discussed in detail in this study.

To conclude, this study aims to provide different insights into VL research as it:

- provides a detailed discussion of one item (*thing*) that has rarely been investigated in its own right
- is one of few VL studies that provides a theoretical discussion, framework and definition of vagueness with respect to the item it analyses
- provides a vagueness analysis of the VL noun *thing* in L1 and L2 speaker discourse
- investigates the relationship of L1 and L2 speaker VL use with implicature construction in the context of Australian job interviews
- shows how the framework of Relevance Theory can be used for a discussion of explicature (i.e. vagueness) and implicature construction of VL nouns

One aim of this study is, thus, to discuss and define vagueness with respect to the VL noun *thing*. This includes a theoretical discussion of vagueness that will lead to a definition of this notion and a framework for its analysis. The definition and framework developed will then be applied to an analysis of the vagueness of *thing*

in L1 and L2 speaker employment interviews. The second aspect investigated in this study is the different effects (i.e. implicatures) that speakers can generate by using *thing* in discourse. A comparative perspective will again be adopted as the main effects that a use of *thing* generates in the Australian job interview context will be explored in the speech of L1 and L2 speakers of English.

The results of this study will contribute to research on interlanguage pragmatics as the notion of vagueness is discussed as a context-dependent phenomenon and because the VL item *thing* is investigated in L2 speech in a particular speech event and cultural context. At the same time, the analysis of the Australian English corpus allows for a discussion of the vagueness of *thing* from an L1 perspective. The L1 analysis will provide insights into the use of *thing* by L1 speakers in a speech event that is characterised by a high power difference and, thus, differentiates itself with respect to the notion of power from casual conversations, where a frequent use of *thing* is commonly found. The study will also discuss when and how speakers generate implicatures by using *thing* in this speech event and cultural context, given that a discussion of implicature construction is crucial in VL studies.

As the discussion in this chapter shows, a special emphasis is placed in this study on combining theoretical discussions with more applied aspects. In particular, theoretical discussions of vagueness and implicature construction are a substantial part of this investigation. This study, however, also explores *thing* from an applied perspective since L2 use is compared to L1 speaker use with respect to the notion of vagueness and implicature construction. The approach taken in this study differs from prior work on VL since, rather than generalising across all VL items identified by this area of research, one VL noun, *thing*, is investigated in detail by first defining the vagueness in relation to this noun and choosing a framework that appears suitable for its investigation. This approach will, thus, provide detailed insights into the use of one category of VL items: *general nouns* (Halliday and Hasan, 1976).

1.3 Outline of this thesis

In the present chapter (Chapter One) the main aims and motivations for the study have been presented and the rationale for this investigation has been presented.

In Chapter Two, the literature on VL research and the different contexts where these items and expressions have previously been investigated in L1 and L2 discourse will be reviewed. This will include an overview of the multiple uses of VL that these studies have identified. Theoretical semantic and pragmatic studies of vagueness will be evaluated in order to arrive at a definition of the phenomenon of vagueness with respect to *thing*. Furthermore, the potential for using Relevance Theory for an analysis of *thing* will be identified and discussed.

In Chapter Three, an introduction to Relevance Theory will be provided. Since this framework has rarely been used by studies that analyse language from a social and cross-cultural perspective, a discussion of its suitability to investigate such aspects of language in use will be included. The notion of *assumptions* (Sperber and Wilson, 1986/ 1995; Escandell-Vidal, 1996, 1998; Jary, 1998a) is introduced as particularly important for a discussion of implicature construction. This notion proposes that people hold assumptions about linguistic behaviour in different contexts. Assumptions about linguistic behaviour will be discussed in conjunction with the notion of behaviour as *politic* (Watts, 1989). In addition, a model will be developed to analyse implicature construction when VL occurs in Australian job interviews. The discussion of linguistic behaviour as politic (or not politic) links the present study to research on politeness where the concept of speech as politic was first introduced. Linguistic behaviour in employment interviews will, therefore, be discussed in general and with respect to the Australian cultural context.

In Chapter Four, the methodology of this study will be outlined. First, the research questions arising from the review of the literature in Chapters Two and Three will be presented. Second, the choice of simulated as opposed to naturally occurring job interviews as possible data collection techniques will be discussed and the data collection process for this study will be described. The detailed presentation of the data collection process includes a list of the set of job interview questions asked as well as biographical information about the L1 and L2 speakers of English, who participated in this study. Lastly, a brief overview of the main framework that will be used for the analysis of the vagueness and implicatures of *thing* in the L1 and L2 employment interviews recorded, is provided.

A detailed framework for the notion of vagueness will be developed in Chapter Five. This framework is based on Relevance Theory (Sperber and Wilson, 1986/1995; Carston, 2009), on studies on reference (Abbott, 2006), and also includes concepts from the framework of systemic functional linguistics (Halliday and Hasan, 1976; Halliday, 1994). The notion of vagueness will be defined further with respect to the vague language item *thing* in order to allow for a vagueness analysis of *thing* in L1 and L2 speaker discourse in Chapter Six. The vagueness of *thing* in both corpora will be compared and differences and similarities will be identified and discussed.

In Chapter Seven, examples from the employment interview corpus, showing the wide range of effects that a use of *thing* can generate in discourse, will be provided. The analysis will conclude that a use of *thing* can introduce effects with respect to conversation management and can also be used to generate interpersonal effects, thus, influencing the relationship between interlocutors. Conversation management effects include, for example, filling gaps in discourse when a speaker is faced with a memory lapse or when a topic change is introduced. The interpersonal uses identified include effects such as marking in-group membership and expressions of speaker attitude. Because of the wide range of effects that will be identified for the item *thing*, it will be defined as a multi-purpose noun rather than a vagueness introducer *per se*.

Chapter Eight will then explore the main effects generated by the L1 and L2 speaker use of *thing* in the employment interview corpus collected for this study. Chapter Eight will, thus, consider whether *thing* was used primarily to generate interpersonal or conversation management effects. In particular, it will be explored whether the use of *thing* introduced the effect of mitigation and marked in-group membership in the two speaker groups. Since the effect of *thing* as an in-group marker is closely linked to the notion of vagueness, as it has been defined in this study, the discussion in this chapter will also draw on the vagueness analysis of *thing* in the two corpora first presented in Chapter Six. The effect of *thing* to generate mitigation will, however, be the main focus of Chapter Eight.

In Chapter Nine, the results of the analyses of the vagueness of *thing* and the effects that the L1 and L2 speakers of this data set seemed to generate by using

this noun in employment interviews will be discussed in relation to previous research on these aspects. Possible motivations for differences in the use of *thing* by these two speaker groups will be considered, and practical implications of the differences identified in the use of *thing* by the two speaker groups in the Australian job interview context will be proposed. Finally, the limitations of this investigation and possibilities for further studies in this area of research will be outlined.

To conclude, this study investigates *thing* as an item of VL in order to provide insights into the notion of vagueness regarding the category of general nouns. It provides an analysis of the vagueness of *thing* in L1 and L2 speaker discourse, defines *thing* as a multi-purpose noun, and discusses its main effects in L1 and L2 discourse in the context of Australian job interviews, thus, combining theoretical and applied aspects. From a theoretical point of view, explicature and implicature construction are discussed as definitions and frameworks are developed to investigate these two aspects in the use of *thing*. From an applied perspective, these aspects are investigated in L1 and L2 speaker discourse with respect to an item (i.e. *thing*) and a context (i.e. Australian job interview context) for which little previous research exists. Moreover, taking an approach which first defines the vagueness with respect to the VL category analysed is novel and might fruitfully be applied in future VL research.

Chapter Two: *Thing*, *vague language*, vagueness and implicatures

2.1 Introduction

In this chapter the main research on *vague language* (Channell, 1994) will be reviewed. Studies from other approaches that have investigated the VL item *thing* will also be briefly discussed. Previous research has identified different uses of VL and has analysed these items in a wide range of contexts. This review will show that, although studies refer to *thing* and other VL items as *vague*, there has been little theoretical discussion on the selection of items that should be included, and few studies have provided a concise definition of the notion of vagueness or discussed its relationship with respect to the diverse list of VL lexemes and expressions categorised initially as *vague* by Channell (1994). In section 2.5 the phenomenon of vagueness will be discussed in detail and is followed by a definition of this notion with respect to *thing*. This will also include a discussion of a possible framework that may be suitable for an analysis of VL items such as *thing*.

2.2 The item *thing*: Previous research

Studies on *thing* are scarce, and those that exist have mainly investigated this noun as one of a wide range of items. Thus, only rarely has *thing* been analysed as an item in its own right (Fronek, 1982 ; Drave, 2002 are two exceptions). In the literature, *thing* has been categorised as a *general noun* (Halliday and Hasan, 1976), *vague language* (Channell, 1994) and, in one particular use (e.g. *and things like that*), as a *general extender* (e.g. Overstreet, 1999, 2005). Research that discusses lexemes as in-group markers (Cutting, 1999, 2000, 2001, 2002) as well as studies by applied linguists who refer to L1 linguistic choices from an L2 perspective (e.g. Crystal and Davy, 1975; Carter and McCarthy, 1997; Dörnyei and Scott, 1997) have also included *thing* among the range of items that they investigate. Below, I will briefly outline the main findings on VL items and expressions from each area of research and describe the range of contexts from which the data for these studies has been obtained.

2.2.1 *Thing* as a general noun and in applied linguistics research

Halliday and Hasan (1976) refer to *thing* in their discussion of *general nouns*. *General nouns* such as *people, person, thing, stuff, business* and *idea* are borderline cases of lexical and grammatical items and an “important source of cohesion” in speech (Halliday and Hasan, 1976: 274). While Halliday and Hasan chiefly discuss the cohesive function of these nouns, they also refer to strong interpersonal aspects of *general nouns*, such as the expression of speaker attitude. Mahlberg (2006), who also investigates general nouns, categorises these nouns into three groups: *Time nouns* (2006: 63-99), *People nouns* (2006: 99-141) and *World nouns* (2006: 141-161). She includes *thing* and *things* in her category *World nouns* and claims that this category is the least homogenous of the three. Like Halliday and Hasan (1976), she stresses the discourse cohesive functions of general nouns, and further proposes that they only receive meaning once contextualised (Mahlberg, 2006: 173). The focus of studies on general nouns is, thus, on the cohesive function of these nouns. However, they also briefly discuss interpersonal goals that speakers may want to achieve by using nouns such as *thing*.

While the studies on *general nouns* summarised above did not investigate L2 speaker use of *thing*, research by applied linguists has mainly discussed VL items with respect to their usefulness for L2 speakers of English in coping with lexical gaps. In an investigation of *advanced conversational English* for L2 speakers, Crystal and Davy (1975: 112-113), for example, draw attention to nouns such as *think-ummy, thingy, thingammaji, whatsit* which they claim express total vagueness. They (Crystal and Davy, 1975: 111) further propose that these nouns show a “lack of precision” and argue that the aspect of imprecision is characteristic of informal conversations. Crystal and Davy (1975) suggest that speakers can rely on items such as *thingy* when they are faced with a memory lapse or a lexical gap. Similarly, Dörnyei and Scott (1997: 188) refer to lexemes such as *thing, stuff, make* and *do* by the term *all-purpose words* in their review of research on L2 communication strategies. In particular, they focus on the use of these items in “contexts where specific words are lacking” (Dörnyei and Scott, 1996: 188).

Studies that take an applied perspective also comment on the social effects that speakers can generate by using *thing*. Crystal and Davy (1975: 112), for example,

suggest that a use of such lexemes indicates personal relaxation of the speaker since “the ‘choice’ of the vague lexical item [e.g. *thingy*] is conducive to maintaining the informal atmosphere of the situation where the use of a precise, formal word might jar”. McCarthy (2002: 108-118) also claims that *thing* contributes to the informality of everyday talk and proposes that using such lexemes makes an utterance appear more natural. Carter (1998) similarly highlights their social function, as he suggests that VL can influence the relationship between interactants. Like McCarthy (2002), he also stresses their role in making speech appear natural. Carter (1998), furthermore, suggests that their use can introduce social leveling.

Although research on general nouns and studies by applied linguists have provided some insights into lexemes such as *thing*, most studies of these items are found in VL research. In section 2.2.2, L1 and L2 VL studies will be reviewed and the use of these items in the range of contexts where they have been investigated will be discussed. This review will show that there is scope for further investigation of the notions of vagueness and implicatures with respect to VL. It will also raise questions regarding frameworks that may be suitable for an analysis of the vagueness and the implicatures of VL.

2.2.2 *Thing* as vague language

The item *thing* has chiefly been analysed as one of a wide range of lexemes in VL research. Items investigated in these studies include, for example, *approximately*, *heaps of*, *some*, and *things like that* as well as *thingy*, as outlined in Channell’s (1994) seminal book *Vague Language*. Uses of *and things like that* have also been analysed in VL studies and, thus, the findings of research on such *general extenders* (e.g. Dines, 1980; Overstreet, 1999; Terraschke, 2007; Fernandez and Yuldashev, 2011) are included in this VL review. While some research on VL strictly follows Channell (1994) with regards to the range of items that are investigated (e.g. Cheng and Warren, 2001; Drave, 2001, 2002), other VL studies (e.g. Jucker, Smith, and Lüdge, 2003; Adolphs, Atkins, and Harvey, 2007) also include items such as *I think*, *sort of* and *probably* which Channell (1994) and Drave (2002), for example, proposed to exclude. Some VL studies (Cook, 2007: 22; Cutting, 2007: 234) have, furthermore, also included formal nouns like

development, responsibility and technical expressions like *upper abdomen* in their investigations of VL which were not mentioned by Channell (1994).

Cutting's (1999, 2000, 2002, 2007) research is particularly interesting with respect to a taxonomy of VL items since, apart from studying nouns like *thing* and verbs like *do*, she also includes "grammatical, clausal and utterance-level features which are heavily context-dependent, and whose meaning is clear only to speakers who share the background context" (Cutting, 2007: 223). Cutting discusses pronouns like *him* as in 'Did you go and see *him*?' with no immediate previous mention of what *him* refers to (see also Jucker et al., 2003, who include pronouns) and metonymical proper nouns such as in *How's your Chomsky?*, in contexts where these nouns refer to the book by Chomsky but not Chomsky the person. Furthermore, she investigates uses of *superordinate nouns* (e.g. *How's the project?*) in contexts where these nouns refer to one particular and not simply any item. Since her investigations not only focus on particular lexemes but also include certain uses of language in context, the spectrum of possible VL research is broadened quite significantly.

In summary, a wide range of items have been included in VL research. The different categories include temporal expressions (e.g. *sometimes*), numeric quantifiers (e.g. *more than*), non-numeric quantifiers (e.g. *several*), generic items and expressions (e.g. *thing*), modifying expressions (e.g. *sort of*), items and expressions that express probability (e.g. *probably*), parenthetical verbs (e.g. *I think*), formal nouns (e.g. *issue*), pronouns (e.g. *he*), and general verbs (e.g. *do*). These different categories are shown in the taxonomy of *vague language* in Table 2.1 (next page).

Table 2.1: A taxonomy of *vague language*

<i>Vague Language: items and expression</i>
<p>➤ Temporal expressions Adverbs of frequency: <i>sometimes, often, recently, any time, usually, normally</i></p>
<p>➤ Numeric quantifiers Number approximators: <i>about, N or m, maybe n, N to m, probably n, around, N more or less, N or so, between n & m</i> Partial numeric specifiers (more & less): <i>more than, over, at least, N or so, a minimum of; nearly, almost, less than, a maximum of, up to not more than, under</i></p>
<p>➤ Non-numeric quantifiers Indeterminate non-numerical quantifiers: <i>a lot of, many, a bit of, a few, lots of, a little, a couple, several, a number of, loads of, some, most</i></p>
<p>➤ Generic items and expressions General non-numerical specifiers: <i>everything, everywhere, everyone, everybody, anything, anywhere, anyone, anybody, somebody, someone, all</i> General nouns (informal): <i>thing, stuff, guys, people</i> General nouns (formal): <i>issue, task</i> General verbs: <i>do, make, get</i> General extenders: <i>or something (like that), or whatever, and things (like that), and all (and that), or anything, and so on</i></p>
<p>➤ Modifying expressions Adverbs of degree: <i>kind of, sort of, quite, pretty, almost</i></p>
<p>➤ Probability items and expressions Modal adverbs: <i>probably, possibly, maybe</i> Modal adjectives: <i>It is probable that, It is possible that</i> Parenthetical verbs: <i>I believe, I think, I suppose, I reckon, I guess</i></p>
<p>➤ Context-dependent uses of language Common name used to refer to an item rather than the person himself/herself: e.g. How's <i>your Chomsky</i>? Definite noun phrase that refers to a unique referent and not any referent: e.g. How's <i>the project</i> going? Use of personal pronoun without previous mention of its referent in the exchange where it occurs: e.g. I saw <i>him</i> again.</p>

(adapted from Drave, 2002)

Most studies in VL research have investigated general nouns (*thing*), general extenders (*and things like that*) and a range of different quantifiers (*some, heaps*

of). Fewer studies have also included parenthetical verbs (*I think*), modifiers (*sort of*), personal pronouns (*it*), and certain uses of linguistic features in context (e.g. *the project* as opposed to *a lot of projects*) (see also Zhang, 2011: 574 for an overview of VL items in different studies).

The VL items and expressions identified in the taxonomy above have been investigated across a range of contexts. Channell's (1994) corpus, for example, consists of spoken and written L1 data from attested conversations, written examples, elicitation data, introspective data from discussions of elicited data and also includes invented examples. Most other VL studies have, however, only analysed VL in informal spoken discourse (e.g. Overstreet, 1999; Cutting, 2000; Drave, 2001; Jucker, Smith, and Lüdge, 2003; Terraschke, 2007; Terraschke and Holmes, 2007). This focus on informal speech events seems to be due to the claim that VL items occur most frequently in such settings (e.g. Crystal and Davy, 1975: 111; Cheng and Warren, 2001: 87; Cutting, 2007: 3). Some studies have also investigated VL (among other items) in more formal contexts such as offices (Koester, 2006, 2007), the British Courtroom (Cotterill, 2007) the Healthcare setting (Adolphs, Atkins, and Harvey, 2007), officer-passengers interactions at Australian Customs (Zhang, 2011) and, although only to a very limited extent, in employment interviews (Lipovsky, 2006).

The first VL studies (e.g. Crystal and Davy, 1975; Dines, 1980; Channell, 1994; Overstreet, 1999) seem to have been motivated, at least partly, by negative language attitudes. Dines (1980), for example, conducted experiments with working and middle class judges and female members (mothers) from these two social classes. As part of her experiments, she asked participants to comment on expressions such as *and stuff like that* and found that the middle-class judges of her study assessed speakers who used such expressions in terms of their social class. In further experiments, lower and middle class mothers were found to show "antagonism" towards general extenders (e.g. *and stuff like that*) as these expressions were perceived as working class speech. Thus, VL has a close relationship to "social deixis" (Levinson, 1979) as its use may index the social class a speaker belongs to (see Section 3.7 for a more detailed discussion of social deixis). Negative speaker attitudes were, however, not expressed by the control group from whose texts VL expressions such as *and stuff like that* had

been excluded (Dines, 1980: 19-20). While negative attitudes to VL still exist even nowadays, the focus of studies on VL items and expressions soon shifted from a discussion of language attitudes to a description of the high multifunctionality of VL.

A wide range of functions has been identified in VL research. Channell (1999: 186-194), for example, lists ten reasons for using VL:

1. Giving the right amount of information
2. Deliberately withholding information
3. Using language persuasively
4. Lexical gaps
5. Lacking specific information
6. Displacement (“uncertainty what they want to say”)
7. Self-protection (“against later being shown to be wrong”)
8. Power and Politeness (“deference”)
9. Informality and atmosphere
10. Women’s language¹

While sometimes the difference between some uses that Channell (1994) lists is not entirely clear (number four, five and six seem closely related), uses of VL like those she describes have also been identified by later research, and, thus, those studies support her claim (e.g. Overstreet, 1999, 2005; Cheng and Warren, 2001; Drave, 2002; Koester, 2007; Cutting, 2007; Zhang, 2011). Drave (2002: 74) categorises VL use according to two criteria which he terms *compensatory* and *strategic*. Such a categorisation has similarly been proposed by Zhang (2011: 573), who distinguishes between “have to” uses where speakers rely on VL because they lack other resources (Drave’s compensatory function), and “want to” uses (Drave’s strategic function) where speakers choose VL when they would have access to other lexemes but prefer VL to achieve interpersonal effects.

¹Channell’s (1994: 194) respondents suggest that women use VL more frequently than men. Channell did, however, not control this variable in the actual language data she analysed. Cutting ((2007a)2007: 228) investigated her dialogues in terms of gender and found that in mixed gender groups, females used VL twice as frequently as males while in single sex groups the female only conversations show a seven times higher frequency of VL than the all male group.

Koester (2007: 53) suggests that using VL helps a speaker express solidarity as it makes “discourse more friendly and informal” and “establish[es] familiarity in a new relationship”. This use of *thing* is, thus, similar to Channell’s (1994) discussion of power and politeness (use number eight above). Koester (2006, 2007) found a greater frequency of VL in unidirectional office conversations such as briefings, service encounters and requesting, compared to collaborative office conversations such as making arrangements and decision-making where fewer VL items and expressions were used. She explains this higher frequency in terms of relational factors that come into play in unidirectional encounters. In particular, she suggests that such encounters are often characterised by a power imbalance and this increases the risk of *face threats* (Brown and Levinson, 1987). She, therefore, argues that VL might have been used by her participants to mitigate this risk and weaken potentially detrimental implicatures.

In a study on casual conversations between university students, Cutting (2000, 2002) discusses the use of lexemes such as *thing*, as students try to assert in-group membership or, conversely, exclude participants from their interactions. This use also relates to issues of closeness versus distance and the notion of power. Furthermore, Cutting (2002: 78) refers to the use of VL as a “shorthand” strategy which allows interactants to communicate efficiently and suggests that such a use follows the Gricean maxim of quantity (don’t say too much, don’t say too little) (See also Channell, 1994: 194, function number one above). Like Channell (1994), she proposes that VL can be chosen to create an informal atmosphere. Thus, speakers can influence the relationship between interactants by using such items and expressions (Cutting, 2002: 79).

Further uses not explicitly described by Channell (1994) have also been identified in VL research. Cheng and Warren (2001: 93-94), for example, claim that, VL is less demanding on listeners than technical vocabulary which makes processing such items easier. They, therefore, discuss VL as one kind of “foreigner talk” in their analysis of L1 and L2 conversations in Hong Kong (Cheng and Warren, 2001: 93). Drave (2002), who worked on the same corpus as Cheng and Warren (2001), further suggests that VL (e.g. *thing*) can be chosen to express pejorative evaluation (See also Jucker, Smith, and Lüdge, 2003: 1750 for the same claim). Hence, speakers wanting to convey low appreciation of an issue can do so by

replacing a more precise lexeme with a VL item (e.g. *I have to work on the thing now* versus *I have to work on the essay now*). Drave (2002) also proposes that certain uses of *thing* are conducive to conversation management as effects such as discourse framing can be generated, a use of VL not previously described by Channell.

Applying a relevance theoretic approach, Jucker, Smith and Lüdge (2003) propose that VL can guide a hearer to the most relevant interpretation. By using VL, a speaker can “convey meaning that is different from and more relevant than a precise expression would [be]” (Jucker, Smith, and Lüdge, 2003: 1766). Among a range of other uses which previous research has also identified, they suggest that the choice of VL indicates to a hearer that s/he can focus her/ his processing effort elsewhere since the information conveyed by the VL item is backgrounded in context (i.e. is not relevant/ important), while precise items are foregrounded (Jucker, Smith, and Lüdge, 2003: 1743). Overall, they claim that VL is used primarily as an interactional strategy by the L1 speakers of English of their corpus (Drave’s, 2002, “strategic” and Zhang’s, 2011, “want to” use).

While most VL research has focused on L1 discourse, Drave (2001, 2002) takes a comparative approach and investigates both L1 and L2 VL use. In his corpus of naturally occurring L1 and L2 casual conversations in Hong Kong, he found that VL occurred twice as frequently in the L1 than in the L2 speech (Drave, 2002: 200).² He also identified a greater functional variety of VL in the L1 data and concludes that this group used items such as *thing* to express *pejorative evaluation* and when more specificity was not required (Drave, 2002: 200). While he also identified some strategic VL uses in the L2 speaker group, he suggests that this group primarily relied on VL to “compensate for expressive deficiencies” (Drave, 2002: 200).

Terraschke (2007; Terraschke and Holmes, 2007; Terraschke, 2008, 2010) also compares L1 and L2 discourse in her study on general extenders such as *and things like that* and other items that she refers to by the term *pragmatic devices*.

² See also De Cock et al. (1998)(1998) who find that L1 speakers use *vagueness tags* almost four times as frequently as the learners. However, they also find that the French learners of English overused some tags (e.g. *and so on*).

She suggests that the L2 speakers of English of her corpus used general extenders for a range of interpersonal purposes in a very similar way to how the L1 speakers of her study used them. While some non-standard uses of general extenders occurred in her L2 data, she could not find examples where the use of general extenders led to communication breakdown. Regarding non-standard uses, she shows that L2 speakers used the device *or so* in a non-native like manner, but this did not seem to cause problems of understanding (Terraschke, 2010). In particular, while in L1 speech *or so* was used to express numerical approximation, she suggests that in her L2 data *or so* seemed to have interpersonal functions similarly to *or something* and *or whatever* in the L1 speech (but not *or so*).

Other studies that investigate some items which are closely related to VL, also comment on differences between L1 and L2 speaker use. Romero-Trillo (2002), for example, shows that there is an increase in *involvement markers* (e.g. *you know, I mean*) in children compared to adult native speaker data of English, but did not find this in the L2 data where very few such items occurred in both children and adult speech. Aijmer (2004: 188) also observed a difference in the use of pragmatic markers by L2 speakers: “Learners use vague and uncertain markers to express uncertainty or hesitation and not for face-saving or to signal politeness”. She found that these items tend to co-occur with pauses in learner speech and claims that this shows that they are used to overcome “cognitive and verbal planning problems” (Aijmer, 2004: 183). The studies discussed, therefore, suggest that L2 speakers may mainly use VL when other items fail them. L1 speakers, however, use VL purposely to achieve (interpersonal) effects in discourse (see also Gilquin, 2008; House, 2009; Aijmer, 2011 for the same claim).

As the review of the literature in this section indicates, VL is highly multifunctional. On the one hand, these items can be used as compensatory tools when speakers need more time to plan their utterances and also when they encounter a memory lapse or a lexical gap. On the other hand, speakers can use VL to generate a wide range of interpersonal effects as these items can, for example, express in-group membership or function as a politeness strategy. Most comparative research on VL claims that there are differences between L1 and L2 speaker use. In particular, these studies often find that multifunctional items such as VL are mainly used in

their compensatory function by L2 speakers while L1 speakers choose them for both compensatory and strategic reasons.

2.3 A framework for *vague language* research

Although most previous studies on VL (with the exception of, for example, Jucker, Smith and Lüdge, 2003) have taken a Gricean approach (e.g. Channell, 1994; Overstreet, 1999; Drave, 2002; Cheng and Warren, 2001), they describe the relationship between VL and implicature construction, that is, its effects in discourse, differently. Channell (1994), for example, suggests that using VL flouts the maxim of quantity (i.e. informativeness) so that implicatures are introduced (Channell, 1994: 164). Drave (2002: 49) agrees that a use of VL can flout the maxim of Quantity but questions whether all VL lexemes and expressions flout the same maxim. In particular, he (2002: 49) distinguishes scalar quantifiers such as *some* from “category identifiers and placeholders, or non-scalar quantifiers”, and questions whether the latter three also flout the Gricean maxim of Quantity.³ He, thus, proposes that there might be different types of implicatures that arise when speakers use VL, but does not question the fact that a use of such items generates implicatures.

Overstreet (1999, 2005) also uses a Gricean framework for her analysis of expressions such as *and things like that*. Rather than suggesting that a use of VL flouts Grice’s maxims she, however, describes VL (i.e. general extenders such as *and things like that*) as hedges on maxims:

“A hedge on the Maxim of Quality works in the following way: a speaker may assert something that he or she thinks is potentially inaccurate (in danger of not strictly adhering to the Maxim of Quality), but the speaker indicates in some conventional way a lack of commitment to the necessary truth of the content of the utterance, or part of the utterance – thus **maintaining cooperation**.”

(Overstreet, 1999: 112; my emphasis)

³ Drave (2002: 48) refers to Horn’s scale “where saying one implicates the negations of the others (negation of possibilities) – Q-implicatures” and compares it to “‘Enrichment’ utterances, where saying one allows for enriched implications (encouragement of possibilities) – I-implicatures (Levinson, 1985)”.

She suggests that expressions such as *or things like that* function as hedges on the Maxim of Quality while expressions such as *and things like that* are hedges on the Maxim of Quantity. In either case, the speaker still adheres to the Cooperative Principle.

Cheng and Warren (2001: 84-85) propose that by using VL, “Grice’s (1975) Cooperative Principle is being observed rather than flouted” as VL “helps the participants to tailor their contributions to what they think is appropriate for the purposes of the current exchange” (Cheng and Warren, 2001: 84-85). They, furthermore, refer to the construction of scalar implicatures that VL use can generate (see also Channell, 1999). Nevertheless, their discussion of the relationship between VL and implicatures does not make it clear whether or not they consider that using VL generates implicatures, since the Cooperative Principle, which they claim to be maintained when VL is used, can be maintained when implicatures are generated but also when they do not arise.

In contrast to most VL research, Jucker, Smith and Lüdge (2003) use Relevance Theory for their analysis of items such as *thing*. They stress the importance of VL in “managing conversational implicature” (Jucker, Smith and Lüdge, 2003: 1765), and claim that these items and expressions are closely linked to the relevance theoretic concept of “looseness” (Jucker, Smith and Lüdge, 2003: 1740). In Relevance Theory, the term *loose talk* (Sperber and Wilson, 1986/ 1995: 233-7) refers to non-literal uses of language such as metaphors (e.g. *She is a rose*). Jucker, Smith and Lüdge (2003: 1766) suggest that VL use constitutes a non-literal use of language:

“They [VL items and expressions] all designate loose uses of language. As such they mark a discrepancy between an utterance and a thought the speaker has in mind. The marker indicates to the hearer that he should not process the utterance in the most literal sense. That is, the utterance will achieve optimal relevance if it is not interpreted literally by the hearer.”

However, this does not seem to apply to the VL item *thing* because *thing* cannot be used in a non-literal way as it can refer to anything (e.g. an animal, a human being or an action) literally.

While the studies discussed so far have tried to situate an analysis of VL within already existing frameworks such as the Gricean maxims or Relevance Theory, Zhang (2011) proposes a novel approach. She suggests that speakers adhere to four maxims when using VL, all of which are based on one main maxim. She claims that this maxim prescribes that speakers should: “Stretch language elastically in discursive negotiations to achieve communicative goals” (Zhang, 2011: 578). Zhang then distinguishes four VL *elasticity maxims*:

- “(1) Go just-right: provide the right amount of information (e.g., That tall woman is very kind.)
 - (2) Go general: speak in general terms (e.g., Do you have any convictions or *anything*?)
 - (3) Go hypothetical: speak in hypothetical terms (e.g., It could be him.)
 - (4) Go subjective: speak in subjective terms (e.g., I think she is dishonest.)”
- (Zhang, 2011: 579)

While I agree that VL is, as Zhang terms it, *elastic* it seems that elasticity is not an aspect which is unique to items such as *thing*, since most lexemes can be used in an elastic manner (see, for example, the discussion on pragmatic narrowing and loosening in Relevance Theory; Carston, 1996). Moreover, while Zhang (2011) discusses cultural influences that determine the use of VL, it does not become clear how her framework can be applied to investigate VL use with respect to the cultural context where it occurs.

2.4 Previous research on *thing*: Main findings and issues

In conclusion, VL studies that follow Channell (1994) as well as research on general nouns and studies by applied linguists have highlighted the multiple uses of items such as *thing*. Most distinguish between compensatory and strategic, i.e. interpersonal, uses of VL, and discuss effects such as the expression of in-group membership or compensatory goals in contexts where speakers are faced with a

memory lapse or a lexical gap. However, few discussions of these effects focus on particular VL categories such as general nouns like *thing*.

Most VL studies have investigated the use of these items in informal discourse, as used by L1 speakers of English. Research on L2 speaker VL data is, thus, scarce. Drave (2002) and Terraschke (2007 on general extenders) are two recent exceptions with, in particular, Drave devoting a considerably large section of his thesis to the analysis of *thing* in informal L1 and L2 conversations. No study to date has, however, focused exclusively on the use of *thing* and items that are similar to *thing* in the specific context of formal L1 and L2 employment interview discourse.

This section has also highlighted theoretical issues with respect to implicature construction and VL. Although most VL studies use the Gricean maxims for their analyses, the relationship of VL with implicatures is not quite clear. It appears that this may partly be due to a lack of a concise definition of vagueness in this area of research, and this may have led to the choice of a framework (i.e. Grice) that might not be ideal for the investigation of VL items in all their diversity. The semantic and pragmatic literature on phenomena that these studies term *vagueness* is reviewed in the next section and the choice of an appropriate framework for the analysis of VL items such as *thing* is discussed.

2.5 *Vague language* and vagueness in language

Overall, there has been little theoretical discussion as to why certain items should be included or excluded from VL studies. The rationale for investigating items such as *thing* or *stuff* in VL research has mainly rested on the argument that they are vague or that they generate vagueness. However, how the relationship between the notion of *vagueness* and the rather diverse range of VL items and expressions can be defined, and what vagueness really is for that matter, has received little theoretical attention. Below a short review of the discussion on vagueness in VL studies will be provided, followed by a review of recent theoretical literature on this notion.

2.5.1 Vagueness in *vague language* studies

Channell (1994: 20) proposes the following definition of what it means for a word to be vague:

“An expression or word is vague if:

- a. it can be contrasted with another word or expression which appears to render the same proposition.
- b. it is ‘purposely and unabashedly vague’
- c. its meaning arises from ‘intrinsic uncertainty’ referred to by Peirce.”

The quotation *purposely and unabashedly vague* that Channell uses in her definition links her study to Sadock (1977), while the expression *intrinsic uncertainty* relates back to research by Peirce (1902). Channell’s (1994) definition is somewhat problematic since point a) seems to describe the possibility of assigning synonyms to lexemes, but this applies to all lexical items. Point b) is circular since the term *vague* is used in a definition of the notion of *vagueness* and point c) requires more detailed discussion of the concept *intrinsic uncertainty* in order to fully understand how this concept is applied in Channell’s definition of vagueness.

In her discussion of VL that follows the definition provided above, Channell (1994: 17) appears to equate vagueness with imprecision: “The varied work referred to so far has suggested that there are a number of different ways in which speakers can avoid being precise or exact” (see also Crystal and Davy, 1975; Cook, 2007). Jucker, Smith and Lüdge (2003) similarly contrast vagueness with precision. However, they (2003: 1739) further suggest that there are different types of vagueness: vagueness as an inherent property and vagueness as a strategic use of language. Although Channell (1994: 19) notes that different types of vagueness seem to exist, she does not pursue this line of argument. In particular, she does not follow the claim that all language could be categorised as vague (Channell, 1994: 19; see also Drave, 2002: 17, who reaches the same conclusion).

Drave (2002: 52) refers to the “non-specificity” of VL, and introduces the notion of “speaker exactitude”. He further compares VL items such as *thing* with parenthetical verbs such as *I think*, and concludes that while VL relates to

“speaker exactitude”, hedges refer to “speaker commitment” and, due to these differences, proposes to exclude hedges from VL studies (Drave, 2002: 52). Cheng and Warren (2001: 82) similarly relate vagueness to non-specificity and contrast it to, what they termed, “inexplicitness”:

“We wish to make a distinction here between *vague language* which is non-specific regardless of the context in which it is uttered and forms of “inexplicitness” (Warren 1993) which achieve specific meaning from the negotiation of context between participants in conversations.”

They, thus, propose that without contextualisation, items such as *it* and *this* are inexplicit but once used in context they receive a “specific interpretation” (Cheng and Warren, 2001: 82). They contrast these items to VL which they claim retains its vagueness even once contextualised (Cheng and Warren, 2001: 82). However, Zhang (1998) suggests a different view regarding the influence of context on vagueness as she claims that vagueness may be “contextually eliminated”. Zhang proposes that it is the notion of *fuzziness* which is inherent and not resolvable even once contextualised.

Other studies that comment on VL items discuss a relationship between vagueness and the notion of implicitness or, conversely, explicitness. Koester (2007: 41), for example, suggests that “precise and explicit language” is the opposite of VL, while Cutting (2007: 4) claims that the relationship between VL and implicitness is complex: “Implicitness can be expressed with VL [*vague language*] and other language features; VL can express implicit meaning, but it can be taken at its face value.” Therefore, Cutting proposes that while vagueness and implicitness can overlap, they do not necessarily do so.

The discussion in this section shows that several concepts have been used to refer to the notion of vagueness. Vagueness has been contrasted with inexplicitness and has also been categorised as non-specific and imprecise speech. Some studies have referred to vagueness as implicitness, contrasted it with implicitness/ explicitness or have suggested a complex relationship between implicitness and vagueness. Thus, in general, little consensus has been reached on the notion of vagueness and a concise definition of vagueness with respect to

VL items is still lacking. In order to define vagueness more thoroughly, a review of recent relevant literature from semantic and pragmatic studies will be provided in the following section.

2.5.2 From semantic studies on vagueness to pragmatic vagueness^P

Using the terms *vague* and *vagueness* in a linguistic analysis is problematic since these terms also occur in everyday speech. They, thus, have non-technical meanings and appear to be used to describe a range of different phenomena. In this section, the linguistic literature on phenomena that previous studies term *vagueness* will be considered. First, an overview of recent semantic studies on vagueness will be provided. Following this overview, vagueness will be discussed as a pragmatic phenomenon in order to define this notion more clearly. The discussion will also consider a framework that could be used for an analysis of VL.

Semantic studies discuss vagueness as an inherent property of certain lexical items and investigate adjectives such as *bald*, adverbs like *approximately*, numerals as in *six o'clock* and nouns such as *heap* (Pinkal, 1995; Kennedy, 2007; Sauerland and Stateva, 2007). These semantic studies consider vagueness as a dualistic phenomenon, but differ in how they propose to distinguish between the two types of vagueness they identify. Pinkal (1995) and Kennedy (2007), for example, differentiate between *indeterminacy* and *vagueness* (Kennedy, 2007: 6). According to Kennedy (2007), the positive form of gradable adjectives like *expensive* and *tall* lead to vagueness, whereas adjectives such as *skillful* and *clever*, which are not gradable, introduce indeterminacy.

Kennedy claims that indeterminacy, which he later refers to as *imprecision* (Kennedy 2007: 43), and vagueness interact since the resolution of vagueness requires indeterminacy to be resolved first (Kennedy, 2007: 6). According to Kennedy (2007: 43) imprecision (i.e. indeterminacy) is a “general matter of use” that is pragmatic, while vagueness is a semantic phenomenon that only arises “when the conventional meanings of particular constituents conspire to produce it”. Hence, Kennedy distinguishes between two different but interacting phenomena: semantic vagueness and pragmatic imprecision/ indeterminacy.

Sauerland and Stateva (2007) also describe two types of vagueness which they term *scalar vagueness* and *epistemic vagueness*. They, however, draw the distinction between vagueness types differently to Pinkal (1995) and Kennedy (2007):

“Footnote1: The term *imprecision* in work by Pinkal (1995), Kennedy (2007) partially overlaps with what we refer to as scalar vagueness, but not completely so. For example, *bald* is usually regarded as vague rather than imprecise. Hence, we introduce two new terms in this paper. Our terminology also reflects that we regard both phenomena as a kind of vagueness.” (Sauerland and Stateva, 2007: 228)

Sauerland and Stateva (2007) describe vagueness as either scalar or epistemic. Scalar vagueness is generated by “expressions that denote a point on a scale” and rely on a “contextual parameter of granularity” (Sauerland and Stateva, 2007: 232). The expression 5 meters, for example, “could, in a given context, be a good description of the length of a rod the actual length of which we believe to lie somewhere in the interval between 4.5m and 5.5m”, that is, the granularity intervals are 0.5 meter (Sauerland and Stateva, 2007: 231). They propose that items such as *definitely* and *maybe* (2007: 234) introduce epistemic vagueness and claim that these “epistemically vague predicates differ in their extensions even across worlds where physical object properties (i.e. the number of sand grains in a heap) do not differ.” They discuss that the minimum amount of sand that constitutes a *heap* can, for example, differ as the:

“extension of *heap* may include in a possible world w_1 any pile of more than 20 grains, but in a possible world w_2 it may include only objects consisting of more than 30 grains even though the two worlds are indistinguishable in terms of the location and size of objects” (Sauerland and Stateva, 2007: 234).

They, therefore, show how the lexeme *heap* can refer to a slightly different pile of sand.

It appears that neither type of vagueness discussed by Sauerland and Stateva can be categorised as purely semantic. The notion of *scalar vagueness* seems somewhat problematic since, in principle, most, if not all, lexemes can be ordered on a scale (cf. Levinson, 2000 and his discussion of ad-hoc scales) and, as Sauerland and Stateva also note, such scales depend on contextual information. The notion of *epistemic vagueness* is also problematic, since it seems to apply to what Lakoff (1973) terms *fuzziness*, which he claims to be a context-dependent phenomenon. This has similarly been suggested by Sauerland and Stateva themselves as they discuss the use of items in different *worlds* (w_1, w_2) i.e. different contexts. Hence, it appears that epistemic vagueness is also closely linked to pragmatics, i.e. context. Categorisation issues become apparent, since Kennedy (2007:42) describes nouns such as *heap* and *pile* as scalar, while Sauerland and Stateva (2007) include these in their discussion of epistemic vagueness. This also suggests that distinguishing between the different types of vagueness that these studies identify may be problematic.

Although the studies discussed above have taken a semantic approach, pragmatic aspects of the phenomena they refer to as *vagueness* can be identified. It, thus, seems challenging (or maybe even impossible) to discuss vagueness as a purely semantic notion. Kennedy (2007), in particular, clearly identifies one type of vagueness (imprecision i.e. indeterminacy) as pragmatic. He proposes, furthermore, that pragmatic vagueness needs to be resolved first before semantic vagueness can be discussed. Such positions suggest that even semantic studies on vagueness recognise the important role played by pragmatics with respect to this phenomenon.

Lasersohn, who is usually regarded as a semanticist, also discusses the phenomenon of vagueness. He distinguishes truth-conditional vagueness from a phenomenon that he terms *pragmatic slack*, claiming that the latter is a “separate phenomenon over and on top of it” (Lasersohn, 1999: 533). Therefore, unlike Kennedy (2007), Pinkal (1995) and Sauerland and Stateva (2007), he describes vagueness as one phenomenon and not two and defines it as pragmatic (See, for example, also Lakoff 1973 who only uses fuzzy logic to analyse all forms of vagueness). According to Lasersohn (1999: 548), pragmatic slack is a

“pragmatically licensed deviation from the truth” that arises since lexical items produce *pragmatic halos*:

“Given an expression α denoting some object x , I like to think of the set the context associates with x as arrayed around x in a sort of circular cluster, so I will call this set, together with its ordering relation, the PRAGMATIC HALO of x , or, extending the terminology, as the pragmatic halo of α .”

(Lasersohn, 1999: 527; original emphasis)

A halo contains the pragmatic slack of a sentence and can either be *widened* or *narrowed* in the particular context where an item occurs (Lasersohn, 1999: 537). Lasersohn (1999), therefore, describes a type of vagueness that is not an inherent feature of certain lexical items but rather a phenomenon which is context-dependent (i.e. pragmatic) and that arises when most if not all lexemes are used in context.

Lasersohn claims that the amount of pragmatic slack allowed in a particular context varies and is determined as well as modified by so called *slack regulators* which “serve to readjust the pragmatic halo of the expressions they combine with” (Lasersohn, 1999: 527). Slack regulators guide hearers in their decision of how much of the pragmatic halo of a lexical item should be ignored (Lasersohn, 1999: 526). He argues that scalar adverbs (e.g. *perfectly*) or quantifiers (e.g. *all*) and even hedges (e.g. *loosely speaking*) can be included in the list of slack regulators. Thus, quantifiers (e.g. *some, a lot of*) and approximators (e.g. *approximately, about*), which also feature in Channell’s (1994) VL taxonomy, as well as certain adverbs discussed in semantic studies on vagueness by, for example, Kennedy (2007) would be termed *slack regulators* following Lasersohn’s theory.

Lasersohn’s (1999) argument is reminiscent of claims made by Carston (1988, 2002, 2009) who, unlike the studies above, analyses language from a purely pragmatic perspective. In particular, Lasersohn’s concept of pragmatic slack seems to parallel what Carston refers to as *underdeterminacy* (Carston, 1988, 2002; Atlas, 2005). Carston does not describe underdeterminacy as an inherent

property of certain lexemes, but as an aspect of all language in use. The *underdeterminacy thesis* (Carston, 2002: 19-20) states that:

“[...] the linguistic semantics of the utterance, that is, the meaning encoded in the linguistic expressions used, the relatively stable meanings in a linguistic system, meanings which are widely shared across a community of users of the system, underdetermines the proposition expressed (what is said).”

Carston (2002: 29) claims that “Underdeterminacy is universal and no sentence ever fully encodes the thought or proposition it is used to express.” Since what is expressed underdetermines what is meant, in all contexts a pragmatic process of inferencing is necessary to reach a fully propositional form (Carston, 2009: 59).

Carston describes six ways in which encoded linguistic meaning can underdetermine the proposition expressed:

- “1. multiple encodings (i.e. ambiguities)
 2. indexical references
 3. missing constituents
 4. unspecified scope of elements
 5. underspecificity or weakness of encoded conceptual content
 6. overspecificity or narrowness of encoded conceptual content”
- (Carston, 2002: 28)

Two types of underdeterminacy from Carston’s list seem particularly crucial for a discussion of *thing* and the notion of vagueness: underspecificity or weakness of the encoded conceptual content (point five above) and indexical referencing (point two above).

Underspecificity as a weakness of the encoded conceptual content applies to *thing* as it has a low semantic specificity (i.e. low precision) and can, thus, be used to refer to an almost unlimited range of referents in context. However, underspecificity of the encoded conceptual content is not restricted to items such as *thing*. Furthermore, different degrees of underdeterminacy (i.e. underspecificity)

exist, as examples (1a.) and (1b.) exemplify. Sentence (1a.) does not appear to be underdetermined, i.e. underspecified, and should be comprehensible for everyone who has some command of the English language.

1a.) The *thing* about working at university is that there are often no deadlines.

Compared to sentence (1b.), sentence (1a.) is, however, underdetermined (i.e. underspecified) as its determinancy could be increased (see bold):

1b.) The *thing* about working **as a junior member in the IT department at Australian** universities is that there are often no deadlines.

This process of decreasing the underdeterminacy of utterances could be continued indefinitely and, hence, as Carston (2002: 59) says, “the progression is asymptotic”. Since language in use is never fully determined, it follows that it always underdetermines to some degree what is expressed (see also Levinson, 2000, and his discussion of the *bottleneck of communication*). If underdeterminacy, i.e. underspecificity, as an aspect of all language in use were defined as synonymous with vagueness, all language would have to be categorised as vague. This makes a discussion of this type of vagueness somewhat difficult.

It appears that some VL studies have, however, proposed to investigate vagueness as underspecificity and relate it to hearer expectations and perceptions of appropriate levels of precision. Cheng and Warren (2001: 83-84), for example, argue that interactants “make judgements about what is appropriately vague and what is not” in discourse. They relate their claim to Cook’s (1989: 71) concept of “expectation driven understanding” and claim that “standards of precision” differ across contexts, with some speech events requiring a high standard of precision (i.e. little underspecificity), whereas for others a low standard of precision is sufficient (Cheng and Warren, 2001: 84). According to Cheng and Warren (2001: 83-84):

“Conversational participants tailor their conversational contributions based on moment-by-moment judgements as to the demands of the developing discourse, and vague language is one linguistic tool available for doing this. When the participants in a conversation make judgements about what is appropriately vague and what is not, they are using their own expectations about what would normally happen in interaction, and their understanding of the expectations of their interlocutors.”

Drave (2002: 41), who worked on the same corpus as Cheng and Warren (2001), further quotes Moxey and Sanford (1993: 15), who comment in a similar vein that: “what counts as acceptable precision depends on the situation, and it is possible to be overprecise.” (Drave, 2002: 41). It appears that these studies propose to analyse a phenomenon that could be described as *perceived vagueness*, as its introduction depends on hearer perceptions. Since ultimately the distinction between underspecified vague uses and underspecified non-vague uses appear idiosyncratic, a perception study would be required for its investigation. The idiosyncrasy of this type of vagueness makes its occurrence rather difficult to predict.

There seems to be an aspect of underdeterminacy that, however, allows for an analysis of one phenomenon of vagueness which can be distinguished from other underdetermined uses of language and can, thus, be analysed without relying on hearer perceptions. This type of underdeterminacy is *indexical referencing* (number two in Carston’s, 2002, list), that is, reference assignment. In my examples (2a.) to (2c.), uses of language that require reference assignment are bolded.

2a.) I had a chat with **that man** again.

2b.) I do not like **that black stuff** Australians eat on toast.

2c.) I really like **that dress** Sue’s wearing today.

In all of these cases reference assignment can be successful but problems arise in contexts where hearers are unable to assign a referent to the items in bold. In (2a) a hearer might, for example, not be able to identify the man that the speaker refers

to, in (2b) a hearer might not know what that black stuff is and in (2c) a hearer might not have spotted Sue yet and would, thus, not be able to know what kind of dress she is wearing.

Indexical referencing is underdetermined (i.e. vague) as referents have to be identified to reach a fully propositional form. If problems in reference assignment arise, that is, if a hearer cannot identify the referent required, the underdeterminacy of indexical referencing cannot be resolved and vagueness is introduced. I refer to this type of vagueness as *pragmatic referential vagueness* (henceforth vagueness^P). Unlike perceived vagueness, this type of vagueness does not rely on perceptions of hearers, but is determined by the accessibility of those items required for successful reference assignment in an instance of use. Vagueness^P, thus, occurs when a hearer cannot identify the referent of an item that requires reference assignment because the referents are not accessible to him/ her. Since this type of pragmatic vagueness is not idiosyncratic or influenced by hearer perceptions, it seems to offer a more promising basis for an analysis.

A discussion of indexicality cannot avoid making reference to the notion of *deixis*: "The term deictic in traditional grammar designates (roughly) linguistic elements which specify the identity or placement in space or time of individuated objects relative to the participants in a verbal interaction" (Hanks, 1990: 5)⁴. With respect to vague language items, two types of deixis can be identified. On the one hand, vague language is closely related to social deixis as its use can index the social class of a speaker (see Section 2.2.2 above and Section 3.7). On the other hand, as discussed in this section, vague language items such as *thing* have an inherent "discourse deictic" (Levinson, 2006: 118) property similarly to pronouns like *it*, since their use in context requires reference assignment to avoid vagueness^P. Hence, deixis, vague language and vagueness^P are closely related.

In summary, the review of literature on semantic and pragmatic studies on vagueness suggests that pragmatics is a crucial aspect of this notion. Unlike

⁴ In a later paper, Hanks (2009: 10) elaborates that the basis of deixis should be seen as the "access (perceptual, cognitive, social) that participants have to the referent" rather than only "the spatial contiguity of the referent".

semantic studies on vagueness which appear to use the term *vague* to refer to lexemes that are characterised by a low inherent semantic specificity, the type of vagueness defined in this section has been linked to reference assignment. It can, thus, be generated by uses of all lexemes that require reference assignment in context. In particular, vagueness, i.e. vagueness^P, has been defined as a pragmatic phenomenon arising from failure in reference assignment.

2.5.3 Analysing vagueness^P

Reference assignment was not discussed greatly by Grice (1975) whose framework has chiefly been used in VL research. Grice (1975: 44; 50) refers to reference assignment as a crucial aspect of communication, but does not mention the maxims when discussing this process and, hence, does not seem to consider them to play a role in it. Relevance Theory (henceforth RT), however, has discussed reference assignment as one of three subtasks (disambiguation and enrichment being the other two) that are necessary to identify a fully propositional form, and refers to it as *explicature* construction (Sperber and Wilson, 1986: 183-193). Using RT terminology, vagueness^P is introduced if one type of explicature construction (i.e. reference assignment) fails and a fully propositional form cannot be identified. RT, furthermore, provides a framework to investigate implicatures, another important aspect that would benefit from further attention in VL studies as discussed in section 2.3 above.

2.6 Conclusion: Previous findings of *vague language* studies

While VL studies have identified a wide range of effects that speakers can generate by using these items in context, some theoretical aspects in this area of research have received little attention. Few studies have, for example, provided a detailed discussion of the relationship between vagueness and items that VL research investigates. Also a concise definition of the notion of vagueness has not been provided. In particular, previous VL studies have not distinguished clearly between semantic vagueness (i.e. low semantic specificity) and different types of pragmatic vagueness (e.g. perceived vagueness, referential vagueness^P).

Since VL studies investigate items in context, the analysis of pragmatic vagueness (vagueness^P), i.e. failed explicature construction, is central with respect to uses of *thing*. Furthermore, a more detailed discussion of how and when implicatures arise

when speakers use VL also seems beneficial for this area of research. Since RT provides a framework to analyse both explicatures and implicatures, a detailed discussion of its potential for the analysis of *thing* will follow in Chapter Three. Chapter Three also reviews previous research on the particular context where *thing* is investigated in this study.

Chapter Three: Framework, speech event, cultural context and the L2 speaker

3.1 Introduction

The discussion in Chapter Two has identified the potential for further research of different aspects in VL research. In particular, the lack of a concise definition of the notion of *vagueness* has been discussed and a preliminary definition of vagueness as a pragmatic phenomenon (vagueness^P) that refers to one type of explicature construction has been proposed. Since Relevance theory (RT) investigates explicatures while Grice does not, RT will now be explored as a potential framework for an analysis of VL. The discussion of RT will also focus on its suitability for an investigation of language in relation to its socio-cultural context. This will be followed by a review of the literature on job interviews in Australia which is the context where the VL item *thing* will be analysed in this study. From this review, the notion of mitigation will be identified as crucial for job interviews and the Australian cultural context. Different approaches to this notion from past to present will then be compared in order to provide insight into the range of items that have been categorised as potential mitigators in previous studies. Since a use of VL can also introduce an effect of mitigation (see section 2.2.2), the relationship of this notion with VL will be discussed in section 3.5.2, before it is explored from the perspective of L2 speakers of English in section 3.6.

3.2 Relevance Theory: A framework for *vague language* research

As discussed in Chapter Two, most previous VL studies have used a Gricean framework. RT, however, lends itself to the analysis of these items since the vagueness^P that VL items such as *thing* can introduce into discourse is closely linked to explicature construction and, as argued above, this cannot be explained satisfactorily by using the Gricean maxims (see section 2.5.3). Since RT views reference assignment as one of type of explicature construction, it allows for an analysis of the relationship between VL and vagueness^P. Furthermore, this framework seems suited to an investigation of VL as it distinguishes between

explicature and implicature construction, and both of these inferential processes are of concern to VL studies.

Like the Gricean framework, RT (Sperber and Wilson, 1986/ 1995) is an inferential model of communication. While Grice (1975) explains inferencing with respect to four maxims, Sperber and Wilson (1995) claim that human communication only relies on the principle of Relevance:

“1. First (cognitive) principle of relevance:

Human cognition is geared towards the maximization of relevance (that is, to the achievement) of as many contextual (cognitive) effects as possible for as little processing effort as possible.

2. Second (communicative) principle of relevance:

Every act of ostensive communication (e.g. an utterance) communicates a presumption of its own optimal relevance.”

(Carston, 2002: 379)

The main claim of RT is that “human cognition *tends* to be organized so as to maximize relevance” (Sperber and Wilson, 1995: 262, original emphasis). Hearers interpret “an act of ostensive communication” under the presumption of its own optimal relevance, and it is under this presumption that hearers will invest effort as they expect their processing of an utterance to lead to cognitive effects. Moreover, hearers will invest effort, as they expect the effects to be large and the required effort to be small and worthwhile. Consequently, Sperber and Wilson determine relevance in terms of a trade off between effort and effect.

A central concept in RT is the notion of *assumptions*. Assumptions are “thoughts treated by the individual as representations of the actual world” (Sperber and Wilson, 1995: 2). Relevance is achieved when assumptions are made *manifest* to the hearer: “(39) A fact is *manifest* to an individual at a given time if and only if he is capable at that time of representing it mentally and accepting its representations as true or probably true.” (Sperber and Wilson, 1986: 39). Sperber and Wilson (1986: 19), thus, use the term *mutual manifestness* to replace the notion of *shared knowledge* since:

“By the very definition of mutual knowledge, people who share mutual knowledge know that they do. If you do not *know* that you have mutual knowledge (of some fact, with someone), then you do not have it. Mutual knowledge must be certain, or else it does not exist; and since it can never be certain it can never exist.”
(Sperber and Wilson, 1986: 19-20)

The notion of *mutual manifestness* is, therefore, weaker than the notion of *mutual knowledge* (Sperber and Wilson, 1986: 40). The facts that are manifest to the individual form his/ her *cognitive environment*. If the cognitive environments of two individuals intersect, facts are mutually manifest to the two individuals involved in the exchange (Sperber and Wilson, 1986: 39).

Assumptions that become manifest to the hearer result in a change of his/ her⁵ cognitive environment (Sperber and Wilson, 1995: 38-46). This means that information “connects up with one’s existing representations [i.e. assumptions] of the world so as to effect certain improvements on it” (Carston, 2002: 240). These improvements are termed *positive cognitive effects* as they make “a worthwhile difference to the individual’s representation of the world” when they arise (Wilson and Sperber, 2006: 608). There are different ways in which assumptions can change the cognitive environment of hearers and introduce effects:

“Cognitive effects (or contextual effects) include the **strengthening** of existing assumptions of the system, by providing further evidence for them, the **elimination** of [existing] assumptions that appear to be false, in the light of the new evidence, and the **derivation of new** assumptions (‘contextual implications’) through the interaction of the new information with existing assumptions.”
(Carston, 2002: 44; my emphasis).

⁵ This thesis will not follow the RT convention to always use the female pronoun *she* to refer to the speaker and *he* to refer to the hearer but use both (e.g. s/he) or indicate whether the speaker/ hearer is male or female.

Hence, cognitive effects are generated as old assumptions are strengthened, eliminated, or as new assumptions arise (see also Wilson and Sperber, 1996: 608; who refer to a “strengthening, revision or abandonment” of assumptions).

Both explicatures and implicatures can generate cognitive effects. An *explicature* is “an ostensively communicated assumption which is inferentially developed from one of the incomplete conceptual representations (logical forms) encoded by the utterance” (Carston, 2002: 377). This includes, for example, reference assignment and disambiguation of linguistic ambiguities (Carston, 2002). Implicature construction is also crucial since in context explicatures as well as implicatures can arise. An *implicature* is defined as “an ostensively communicated assumption which is not an explicature; that is, a communicated assumption which is derived solely via processes of pragmatic inference.” (Carston, 2002: 377). The same inferential process is involved in both phenomena and is guided by the Communicative Principle of Relevance.

Explicatures occur since a hearer must rely on further inferencing to develop a full logical form of the utterance expressed. Unlike explicatures, implicatures are fully inferential processes and do not only constitute a development of a logical form. Example (1a) below shows an instance of explicature construction (reference assignment) whereas example (1b) provides an example of implicature construction (simplified representations of both processes). In (1a) the explicature of the noun *thing* is italicised and one implicature that may be generated when sentence (1b) is uttered is also shown in italics.

1a.) I saw that thing again.

I saw *the possum* again.

1b.) We have to do that thing again.

I lack motivation to complete the task that we were assigned to do.

Implicatures can, thus, be generated when a speaker chooses a proposition that is not highly informative in a context where a more informative proposition would have been available to him/ her and expected by the hearer. In this case, the less informative proposition “will be taken to implicate either that the speaker is unwilling, or (more commonly) that she is unable to provide the more relevant

information.” (Sperber and Wilson, 1986/ 1995: 277). Since both explicatures and implicatures can arise in context, the main cognitive effects, i.e. the relevance of an utterance, can either lie in the explicated logical form (explicature) or the implicated enrichment (implicature).

With respect to the VL item *thing*, explicature construction is central to the analysis of its vagueness (i.e. vagueness^P) since reference assignment, which has been categorised as one type of this inferential process in RT, generates vagueness^P if a referent cannot be assigned in context (see Section 2.5.2). Previous VL studies, that have chiefly taken a Gricean approach, have furthermore claimed that speakers who use VL may generate implicatures. Their results, thus, suggest that a discussion of this inferential process is also crucial for an analysis of such items. Since this particular study on *thing* is interested in failed explicature construction (i.e. vagueness^P) but also in implicature construction, the RT framework seems useful as it discusses both inferential processes.

3.2.1 Relevance Theory and culture

Previous studies have investigated VL in different speech events in L1 and L2 speaker discourse. The use of these items has, therefore, been compared between speakers from a range of cultural backgrounds. Since comparative VL studies identified differences in VL use (see Section 2.2.2), the notion of *culture* is likely to be an important variable in investigations of these items. The suitability of the framework of RT for an investigation of VL is addressed, as RT is regarded as a cognitive approach to communication, and this has led to claims that it cannot be used for an analysis of cultural aspects of language use (e.g. Mey and Talbot, 1988; Talbot, 1993; Haugh, 2003). Sperber and Wilson (1986/ 1995, 1997), however, suggest that this is not the case. Indeed some scholars have already used RT to discuss social phenomena such as politeness, that is, language use with respect to its social context (e.g. Jucker, 1988; Escandell-Vidal, 1996; Coupland, 1997; Escandell-Vidal, 1998; Žegarac, 1998; Jary, 1998a, 1998b; Žegarac and Clark, 1999).

The notion of *context* is particularly crucial for the framework of RT. Sperber and Wilson (1995: 15) describe *context* as consisting of assumptions that hearers have

about the world. It not only refers to the immediate linguistic text or environment, but also includes:

“expectations about the future, scientific hypotheses or religious beliefs, anecdotal memories, general cultural assumptions, beliefs about the mental state of the speaker, may all play a role in interpretation [...] all members of the same cultural group share a number of experiences, teachings and views.” (Sperber and Wilson, 1995: 15-16)

Sperber and Wilson illustrate this point using social activities such as driving in traffic and gossiping. These actions are only possible because interlocutors share assumptions, i.e. because their cognitive environments overlap (1995: 61, cf. footnote 32). The context, thus, consists of sets of assumptions that are linked to the interactants' socio-cultural background. These assumptions also include expectations about what language may or may not be appropriate in different speech events. With respect to VL items such as *thing*, this means that assumptions about what constitutes an appropriate use of such lexemes are determined by the context where they occur and are also dependent on a hearer's cognitive environment, which is socio-culturally determined. Context is, therefore, inherently linked to culture and can define what constitute appropriate uses of VL items.

Jary (1998a) uses the notion of *assumptions* to explore how issues of closeness and distance can generate effects in discourse. In particular, he argues that the nature of the relationship between speakers and hearers is made manifest in assumptions and these assumptions are expected to be mutually manifest to the interactants. Assumptions can, for example, relate to how rights and obligations are defined in a speech event. With respect to *thing*, assumptions, thus, exist about how this noun should be used in different speech events. According to Jary (1998a), assumptions need to be confirmed by speakers in context, that is, an item such as *thing* needs to be used in accordance with the assumptions of linguistic behaviour that apply. If these assumptions are not confirmed then implicatures are generated. Relying on the notion of *assumptions*, Jary (1998a) describes how linguistic behaviour (e.g. a use of VL) can give rise to implicatures. He claims that

the relationship between interactants is influenced when speakers confirm or contradict assumptions previously held by the hearer.

Jary (1998a) proposes that assumptions about the relationship between speakers and hearers can either be *compatible* or *incompatible* with assumptions that they believe to be mutually manifest (Jary, 1998a). Hence, hearers may feel that a use of, for example, *thing* in a particular context is compatible or incompatible with what they assumed to be manifest. Jary argues that if assumptions are compatible with what a hearer expects to be mutually manifest, then this constitutes unmarked linguistic behaviour (Jary, 1998a). If assumptions about the relationship between the interactants are incompatible and contradict assumptions that were held previously, then this constitutes marked linguistic behaviour. According to Jary (1998a), if linguistic behaviour is marked, it achieves relevance and, as a result, gives rise to implicatures. Unmarked linguistic behaviour, however, does not generate implicatures and goes unnoticed.

Escandell-Vidal (1996: 644) argues in a similar vein, and relates an absence of implicatures when assumptions are strengthened, i.e. confirmed, to the length of the inferential path that a speaker needs to follow for disambiguation. She argues that linguistic formulas such as *Can you pass me the salt?* are strongly conventionalised requiring a short inferential path and little effort from the hearer for processing (Escandell-Vidal, 1996). She claims that such linguistic behaviour is unmarked and goes unnoticed, as it does not hold the main focus of relevance. Consequently, like Jary, she suggests that unmarked linguistic behaviour does not generate implicatures because little effort is needed by the hearer for processing. If linguistic behaviour is, however, unexpected (marked), more effort is required and this offsets special effects, i.e. implicatures. With respect to VL this means that if its use is expected (unmarked) in a context, no implicatures should arise. If it is, however, unexpected, (marked) implicatures will be generated. If *thing* is, thus, for example, used by teenagers, no implicatures may be generated while a frequent use of *thing* by politicians may generate them.

While Jary (1998a) and Escandell-Vidal (1996) see compatibility (strengthening) or incompatibility (contradicting) of assumptions as a binary distinction, it seems more likely to be a continuum, as it is also possible for linguistic behaviour to be

weakly or strongly marked with the same applying for unmarked uses. Žegarac and Clark (1999: 325) make a similar point as they claim that information is communicated with different strengths so that weak communication “involves a small increase in the degree of manifestness of a particular set of assumptions” while strong communication makes something highly manifest. A highly manifest assumption can be strongly marked/ unmarked and vice versa.

Building on the discussion above, instead of distinguishing between marked linguistic behaviour (i.e. language use and content) that leads to implicatures and unmarked linguistic behaviour that does not, I argue that marked linguistic behaviour generates strong implicatures which hold the main relevance in an utterance and become noticed. Unmarked linguistic behaviour, however, introduces weak implicatures which only marginally affects relevance and, thus, unmarked uses of language do not become noticed in the same way as strong implicatures do. With respect to the example on *thing* in the speech of teenagers and politicians discussed above, this means that a frequent use of this noun by teenagers generates weak implicatures. A high frequency of *thing* in the speech of politicians may, however, generate strong implicatures.

Sperber and Wilson also discuss that implicatures can have different strengths:

“Some implicatures are made so strongly manifest that the hearer can scarcely avoid recovering them. Others are made less strongly manifest. It is enough that the hearer should pay attention to some of these weaker implicatures for the relevance of the intended interpretation to become manifest.” (Sperber and Wilson, 1986: 197)

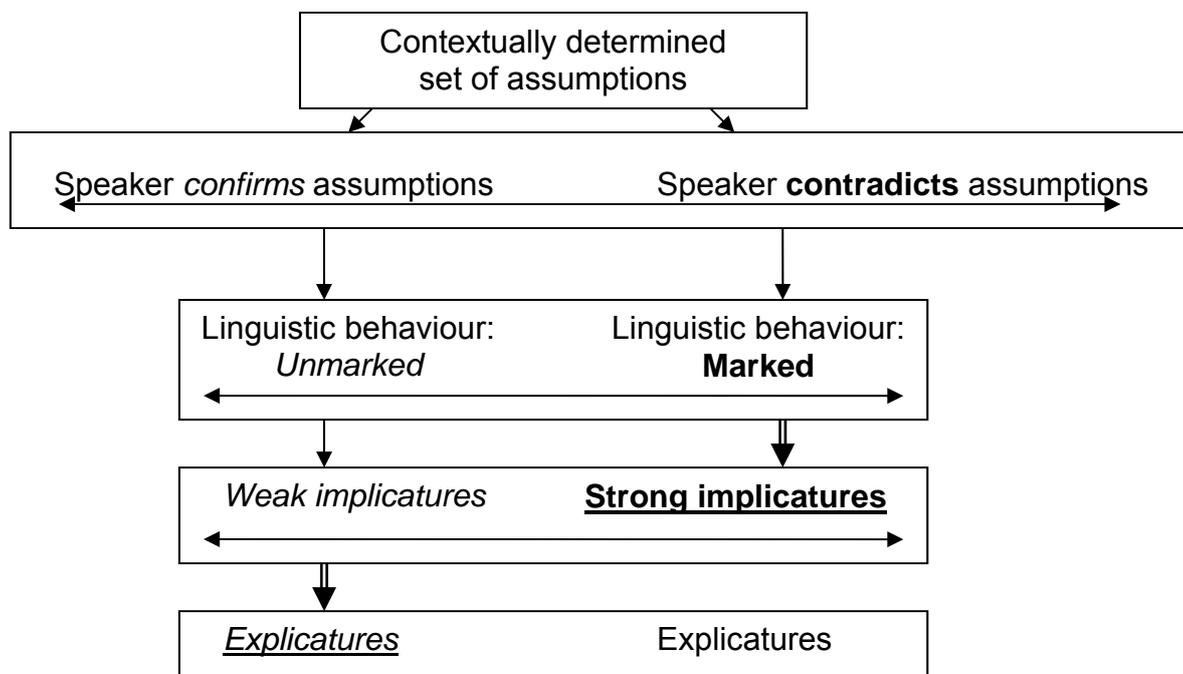
With respect to the model developed above, this means that weak implicatures are not instantly noticed in the way strong implicatures are. However, they appear to figure in the background and are perceived as part of the general atmosphere of an interaction. They could also be made more relevant and brought to the foreground if interactants were, for example, asked to evaluate their interlocutors after an exchange. With respect to *thing*, coming back to the previous example used, a frequent use among teenagers may generate a weak implicature of rapport as its use appears to be unmarked in this speaker group. However, this

weak implicature may be brought to the foreground when the particular teenagers involved in the exchange evaluate others, who also participated in the discussion, after they go home.

It seems that the markedness of linguistic behaviour in context determines whether strong implicatures that hold the main relevance, are introduced into discourse or only weak implicatures are generated, in which case the focus lies in the explicatures (e.g. reference assignment). Hence, implicatures of different strengths can arise in all utterances. What matters is whether the implicatures are strong or weak, since the strength of an implicature determines whether it gets noticed and holds the focus of relevance.

Figure 3.1, adapted from Jary's (1998a) model, sketches the interpretation process discussed above and relies on the notion of *assumptions* in determining marked and unmarked linguistic behaviour in an exchange. It also shows whether explicatures or implicatures hold the focus of relevance when linguistic behaviour is unmarked or marked.

Figure 3.1: Confirming and contradicting assumptions, an interpretation process



As can be seen from Figure 3.1, if a speaker confirms assumptions, his/ her linguistic behaviour is unmarked and as a result the main focus of relevance

(italicised and underlined) lies in the explicatures. The linguistic behaviour of a speaker who contradicts assumptions is marked and this generates strong implicatures which hold the focus of relevance (bolded and underlined). Whether a use of VL items introduces implicatures (i.e. whether strong implicatures arise which hold the main relevance), therefore, depends on whether their use confirms or contradicts assumptions about expected linguistic behaviour in the context where VL occurs.

Since assumptions are context-dependent, it is crucial to determine those assumptions that interlocutors expect to be unmarked and, conversely, those that are marked in a cultural context and speech event (see also Jary, 1998a: 13-14, and Escandell-Vidal, 1996: 641, for the same claim). Hence, as discussed above, assumptions also relate to the use of vague language such as *thing*. As discussed by Jary (1998b: 166), the set of assumptions that applies in a context relates to social variables such as distance and closeness and, thus, affects the power relationship between interactants. As the discussion of RT above indicates, assumptions may also exist with respect to linguistic behaviour that is expected, i.e. unmarked, in social events such as gossiping, and also apply regarding linguistic behaviour in speech events such as employment interviews.

Escandell-Vidal (1996, 1998) describes sets of assumptions as *frames* and proposes that frames exist for social relationships, events and situations. Such frames are part of the context which is selected in a particular speech event and are subject to cultural variability (Escandell-Vidal, 1996: 633-637). Therefore, the frames that speakers expect to apply are defined by the context (e.g. job interviews) where language is produced. In addition to the notion of a *frame*, terms such as *script* and *schema* have also been used to refer to sets of assumptions about linguistic behaviour (See Tannen, 1993: 14-21 for a review of the different terminology used in this area). These different terms share their most basic definition, which is that they refer to expectations that guide an interaction (See also Sperber and Wilson's, 1986: 82-88, discussion of *assumption schemas* and *frames* who agree with Tannen, 1993). It is the term *frame* that will be used henceforth to refer to a set of assumptions which describes expected i.e. unmarked linguistic behaviour in context.

3.2.2 Similarities and differences to other approaches

Section 3.2.1 identified the notion of *assumptions* as crucial for an analysis of language in a cultural context and speech event. The idea that interlocutors follow assumptions which determine expected linguistic behaviour and the claim that unmarked behaviour goes unnoticed has also been proposed by other approaches. The RT use of the notion of *assumptions* is, for example, closely related to the sets of understandings behind Brown and Levinson's (1987) variables P (social power), D (social distance) and R (imposition of a speech act) which they describe as determining the severity of a face threatening act (W). Both Goffman's (1955, 1967) notion of *face* and some aspects of Brown and Levinson's (1987) politeness model can, therefore, be captured by the notion of *assumptions*.

The RT approach discussed here differs from Brown and Levinson (1987: 95) who argue that polite behaviour consists of a deviation from the Gricean maxims and who claim that such linguistic behaviour generates implicatures. Hence, regarding VL, this theory suggests that in contexts where the use of VL is polite, implicatures are generated. According to the RT model developed in section 3.2 no strong implicatures (i.e. Brown and Levinson's *implicatures*), however, arise when language is used in a polite manner, since being polite is expected. The weak implicatures which are generated by such linguistic behaviour, are only in the background and are not noticed in the way strong implicatures are.

The RT model above also shows similarities with Fraser's (1990) definition of politeness. Like Escandell-Vidal (1996, 1998) and Jary (1998a, 1998b), whose discussions form the basis of the model developed, Fraser (1990: 233) also proposes that appropriate, i.e. unmarked behaviour, goes unnoticed. He terms such behaviour *polite behaviour* and describes politeness as:

“a state that one expects to exist in every conversation; participants note not that someone is being polite ~ this is the norm ~, but rather that the speaker is violating the C[onversational] C[ontract]. [...] The intention to be polite is not signaled, it is not implicated by some deviation(s) from the most 'efficient' bald-on record way of using the language.”

Fraser, thus, claims that unmarked behaviour, i.e. an unmarked use of VL, does not generate implicatures. Following an RT approach, this means that the hearer can find the main relevance of the utterance in the explicatures because no strong implicatures arise.

Kasper (1990: 193) seems to make similar claims on politeness as Fraser above. She argues that: “Competent adult members comment on the absence of politeness where it is expected, and its presence where it is not expected”. From this perspective, polite behaviour does not generate implicatures. In addition to distinguishing between marked and unmarked behaviour, Kasper (1990), however, proposes a three part division of linguistic behaviour. Therefore, her approach differs from the two part division proposed by RT. In particular she claims that polite behaviour is above the norm and cannot simply be equated with appropriate i.e. unmarked behaviour. Locher and Watts discuss a similar three part division and describe the notion of politeness as a “surplus” and as a positively marked version of appropriate behaviour (Watts, 1992: 69; Locher, 2004: 73). Hence, unlike Jary (1998), researchers such as Kasper (1990), Watts (1992) and Locher (2005) propose that some appropriate uses of language (i.e. polite uses of language) are positively marked, and should lead to strong implicatures according to the RT framework discussed.

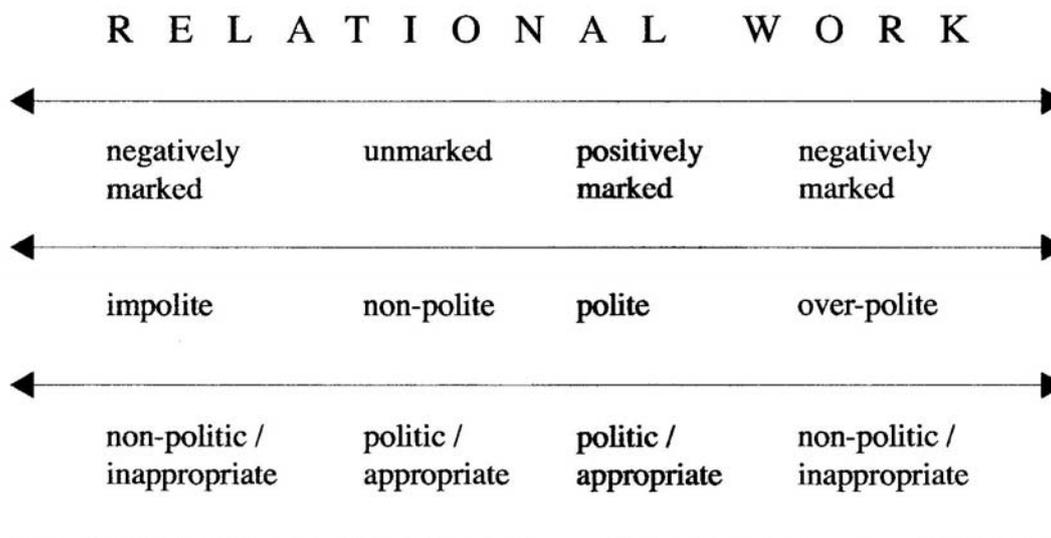
Figure 3.2 shows that appropriate, unmarked linguistic behaviour is referred to as *politic* which is defined as:

“socially determined behavior directed towards the goal of establishing and/ or maintaining [in] a state of equilibrium the personal relationships between individuals or a social group.” (Watts, 1989: 5)

Locher and Watts (2005) distinguish politic behaviour that is non-polite and unmarked, from politic behaviour that is polite and positively marked. They further distinguish these two uses from non-politic behaviour that is negatively marked and of which two types exist. They, thus, propose a four part division and differentiate between negatively marked behaviour which is impolite and non-politic, unmarked behaviour that is non-polite but politic, positively marked

behaviour that is polite and politic, and negatively marked behaviour that is over-polite but non-politic (see Figure 3.2).

Figure 3.2: Relational work



(Locher and Watts 2005: 12)

There are, however, some issues with this approach. Regarding the notion *over-polite* it is possible that some interlocutors might not perceive such behaviour as negatively marked but, on the contrary, evaluate it positively and this would require the term *positively marked*. A frequent use of *please* and *thank you* by a child might, for example, be evaluated positively and, thus, be positively marked even though the person is over-polite. Locher and Watts (2005) only use the term *positively marked* to refer to the category of *politic-polite* behaviour but not to refer to over-polite behaviour which may, however, also be marked positively. In addition, both impolite and over-polite uses of language are categorised as negatively marked, and this is incompatible with a markedness continuum (from unmarked to marked) as proposed in RT-based accounts. Locher and Watt's model, thus, suggests a circular relationship (from negatively marked to negatively marked behaviour) with both over-polite and impolite behaviour receiving the same type of markedness.

It is also not quite clear from Locher and Watt's discussion how politic behaviour that is non-polite and unmarked can be distinguished from politic behaviour that is polite and positively marked (see also Terkourafi, 2006 for the same claim).

Locher (2005: 86) argues for a distinction between politic-polite and politic-non-polite uses by, for example, asking participants to evaluate linguistic behaviour at post offices. She finds that people indeed distinguish between normal, that is, appropriate behaviour and positively marked behaviour. Nevertheless, it does not become clear how this experiment proves that normal behaviour is not polite while positively marked behaviour is polite, and yet this would be necessary to confirm a politic-polite politic-non-polite distinction.

Since it is unclear how the discussion of markedness relates to the notion of *politeness*, the term *politeness* will not be used in this VL study. Rather, uses of VL that are expected, i.e. unmarked, will be referred to as *politic*. A use of such language that is, however, unexpected will be referred to as either *positively marked* or *negatively marked*, as it is not politic. As argued above, on this view, positively marked uses of language introduce strong beneficial implicatures, while negatively marked linguistic behaviour generates strong detrimental implicatures (see also Jary 1998a for a distinction between these two types). Consequently, markedness is seen as a continuum which is closely linked to the notion of relevance and is only determined in context by the interactants involved in a speech event. As a result, whether a use of language that is marked receives a positive or negative evaluation is also only determined by the context in which language occurs (see also Jary, 1998a).

Since the set of assumptions that applies in a particular context is at the centre of an implicature analysis, close attention to context is crucial. The particular context in which VL is investigated in this thesis, i.e. the job interview and Australian cultural context, and the respective assumptions that are expected to be mutually manifest with respect to language use in this context, will now be described. Speech event and cultural assumptions interact to produce an Australian job interview frame that describes unmarked and appropriate linguistic behaviour in this context. Identifying the set of assumptions that is unmarked will make it possible to determine whether or not a use of VL generates strong implicatures. Therefore, the extent to which using VL is considered politic in Australian job interviews is discussed.

3.3 The employment interview: Speech event assumptions

Employment interviews are gatekeeping encounters (Schiffrin, 1994: 146) which are characterised by a high power imbalance. Hence, “One of the features that differentiate an interview from a conversation is the fact that only one party to the conversation (the interviewer) controls the topic.” (Roberts and Sayers, 1987: 125; see also Gumperz, 1992). The interviewer who is the more powerful party decides on the questions asked and is in control of turn allocations (Button, 1992). This power difference allows interviewers to influence the opportunities interviewees have to engage in self promotion (see also Lipovsky, 2006: 1154-1155 for the same argument). Interviewees are also in a weaker position since they are required to answer all questions asked, including queries about negative professional or personal characteristics. Such queries are challenging to respond to in any context, but particularly so in a job interview where one expects that promoting strengths rather than weaknesses leads to success.

Speakers may bring other kinds of assumptions to a conversation. These include how freely information is expected to be volunteered and how elaborate answers should be. In particular, research found that interviewees who provide elaborate answers tend to be more successful than those whose answers are short and not very informative (Gumperz, 1992; Scheuer, 2001; Lipovsky, 2006). Roberts and Campbell (2005: 69), furthermore, found that in one British institution, job interview answers were expected to follow the Labovian (1972) narrative structure (abstract, orientation, complicating action, evaluation, resolution, coda). Interviewees who did not structure their speech in this way were less successful than those who did. Campbell and Roberts also found that an account of professional skills should be balanced with attention being paid to both “work-based and personal identities” in order to avoid presenting one’s personality as “hybrid” (Campbell and Roberts, 2007: 243). Speakers who struggle to synthesize more interpersonally oriented talk with formal institutional discourse are judged as “‘inconsistent’, ‘untrustworthy’ and non-belongers to the organization” in their study (Campbell and Roberts, 2007: 243). Assumptions, therefore, relate to several aspects of the interaction including the manner in which information is expected to be provided (see also du Du Gay, 1996; Gee, Hull, and Lankshear, 1996; Iedema, 2003).

Other assumptions relate to how interviewees use language to present information about their persona. Since, in principle, all applicants that are invited for an interview are (professionally) qualified for the position advertised (Lipovsky, 2006: 1148), little new “factual” information is exchanged in interviews (Gumperz, 1992: 325). Hence, it is likely that interviewers will show greater interest in the performance of candidates than in the information that is provided (Scheuer, 2001). Successful job applicants, therefore, not only need to prove that they have the necessary professional skills but also have to use language strategically when presenting their skills. This requires high pragmatic competence since, although assumptions are expected to be mutually manifest, these assumptions are not overt. On the contrary, they can rather be described as secret rules (Drew and Heritage, 1992: 43).

To sum up, the assumptions that interviewees are expected to confirm in employment interviews seem to influence the turn-taking system, the informativeness of information provided as well as the length of answers. Hence, using VL in accordance with these assumptions is crucial. In order to avoid an implicature of untrustworthiness, interviewees also seem to be expected to synthesise professional with more personal talk. Since the interview is a competitive speech event, interviewees are furthermore expected to showcase positive qualities rather than weaknesses. Questions that ask interviewees to describe their weaknesses, thus, require mitigation as answers to these questions contradict the assumption that an interviewee is a flawless candidate. Interviewees who use language, including VL, in accordance with these assumptions will not generate strong implicatures. In the next section the impact of cultural assumptions on these speech event-specific assumptions will be discussed, since the different sets of assumptions interact and influence each other (Tannen, 1993: 22).

3.4 The Australian context: Cultural assumptions

Wierzbicka (1994: 8-9) argues that speakers of Australian English have “a contempt and disparaging attitude towards articulated speech, towards social, intellectual, and verbal graces, towards words and ideas as opposed to practical action”. She refers to this attitude as a “distrust of words” in Anglo-Australian culture (Wierzbicka, 1994: 8-9). Horne terms this behaviour a “cult of informality”

(1964: 20) and argues that the ordinary Australian thinks that “most of what is pumped out of the word factories is ‘bullshit’” (1964: 4). Baker (1959: 51) similarly claims that speakers of Australian English prefer “terseness more than volubility, the short vulgar word more than the polite polysyllable”. In his study on informal diminutives in Australian English, Sussex (2004: 11) also comments that diminutives such as *sunnies* (sunglasses) or *barbie* (barbeque) occur particularly often in this variety of English, supporting claims that informality is highly valued. It, thus, appears that speakers of Australian English may favor lexical items such as *thing* as such language is characteristic of talk among intimates or equals because it does not foreground power differences. As a result, the use of such language should not generate strong detrimental implicatures.

Research on New Zealand English, a variety of English that shares similarities with Australian English, has identified a similar attitude towards informal language. Marra, Vine and Holmes (2008), for example, discuss how a New Zealander of Maori origin who is the CEO of a commercial organisation uses language that is commonly found in casual talk. This also includes highly informal lexemes such as swear words, which in other cultural contexts might not be considered a politic choice of language in the workplace, regardless of the power that an employee holds. Marra et al. (2008) claim that the use of informal language expresses *mateship* and can be conducive to rapport-building in this context (see Stapleton, 2010 for a recent discussion of the functions of swearing). In particular, they claim that by choosing language that is characteristic of casual talk, the speaker of New Zealand English downplays his high status in staff meetings (Marra, Vine and Holmes, 2008: 9)

Yates (2000) similarly refers to the notion of *mateship* when discussing linguistic behaviour of teachers in naturally occurring Australian classroom data. In particular, she suggests that teachers use informal language to downplay the power relationship between themselves and their students. While using informal language seems crucial to express mateship, this does not imply that speakers who choose an informal speaking style are close friends:

“In Australia, the key cultural ideal is that of “mateship”, which presupposes mutual good feelings, mutual support and unconditional loyalty based on shared experience (without any implications of fine tuning to each other’s psychological states). The prototypical “mates” are expected to **neither bare their hearts to one another** through talk **nor to understand each other’s hearts** through non-verbal empathy; but they are expected to stick together, to do things together, and to rely on one another for company and support.”

(Wierzbicka, 1994: 9; my emphasis)

Wierzbicka (1994), thus, stresses the importance of mutuality in feelings and support between interactants, and these kinds of expectations highlight the importance of establishing common ground in the Australian cultural context. She also suggests that using informal language such as *thing* does not imply intimacy (see also Wierzbicka 1991). This complex relationship between informality and intimacy means that informal language may also be used in formal domains where interactants are more distant. Hence, the formality of the lexis used in a particular context does not necessarily function as an overt indicator of power relationships in Australian English.⁶

According to Wierzbicka (2002: 1194 -1195), speakers of Australian English generally avoid claiming to be different from others. Goddard (2006: 68) similarly proposes that in the Australian cultural context, showing feelings of self-importance, that is, *specialness*, is discouraged. This general expectation that similarities should be highlighted is, thus, unmarked in the Australian cultural context, while expressing differences is marked, i.e. not politic. Employment interviews seem to require a description of specialness, since interviewees are competing for a position and interviewers evaluate the applicants’ strengths and weaknesses. The interaction between cultural and speech event frame, thus, calls for a strategic use of language, and the ability to mitigate when achievements and strengths are presented. By engaging in mitigation, interviewees can avoid strong implicatures of qualities such as boastfulness that are considered undesirable.

⁶ There may still be other features such as the turn-taking system or seating arrangements that remain and indicate to the interlocutors how the relationships between them is defined in terms of closeness and distance and, thus, power.

The expectation that speakers will downtone their achievements has been linked to the concept of egalitarianism (Renwick, 1983; Hirst, 1990; Kapferer and Morris, 2003; Peeters, 2004) and has also been called the *tall-poppy syndrome* in the Australian and New Zealand culture (see for instance Peeters, 2004; Sussex, 2004; Goddard, 2006). Treborlang, a satirist, describes this style as follows:

“Low key has to do with pretending that you’re a lot less than what others think you are (if this is possible) [...] Achievements, assets, attitudes, should only be referred to with badly constructed...**you know**...lots of punctuation marks...**sort of...obliquely**...and how can one put it...Ambition must also be heavily played down and its hard-earned fruit should always be attributed to...err...**luck?**”
(Treborlang, 1996: 56; my emphasis)

Reminiscent of Treborlang (1996) are three norms proposed by Béal (1992: 43-44) as underpinning Australian speaking style: “Be nice [...] Keep opinions and emotions toned down [...] Respect other people’s territory”. Béal discusses informality and the notion of “social harmony” as crucial aspects of the rule “be nice”. In line with Wierzbicka (e.g. 1991), she stresses that informality should not be confused with closeness.

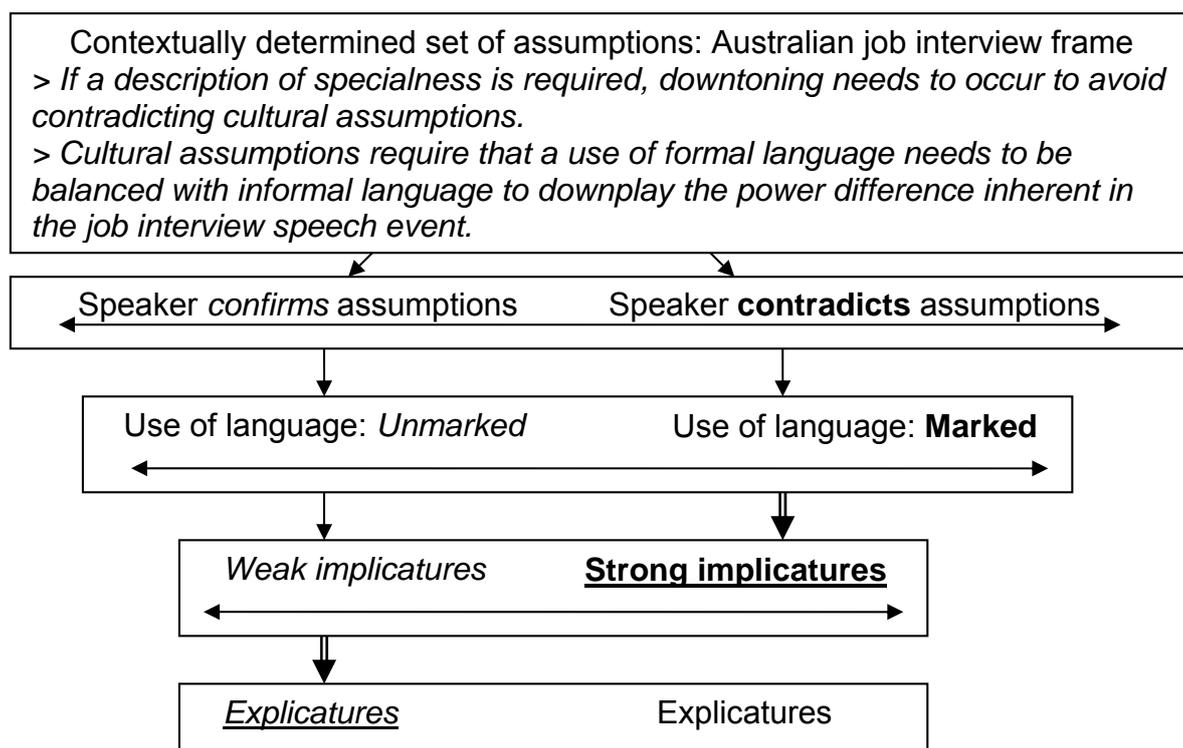
The discussion in this section suggests that in the Australian cultural context a modest presentation of one’s specialness, i.e. of one’s achievements, may be the expected, unmarked use of language. The competitive job interview speech event, however, requires applicants to showcase their achievements in order to be offered the position at stake. A careful use of conversational styles is required to negotiate the tension between showing competence and avoiding to be perceived as overconfident. In particular, the notions of *egalitarianism* and *mateship*, which seem to be valued highly in Australian culture, require a careful presentation of a self that is worth employing, without appearing boastful. This demands a skillful use of language that keeps a balance between making understatements while still asserting professional competence.

Assumptions about politic linguistic behaviour are also influenced by the formality of the speech event. Australian assumptions seem to allow, or even prescribe, a

use of (at least some) informal language such as *thing* as part of a communicative style that avoids showing status or knowledge. By the same token, formal language may be avoided as this can be perceived as claiming specialness and as a speaker showcasing his (high) educational background. Such linguistic behaviour can, therefore, generate an effect of distance. Job interviews are by definition formal speech events since interactants meet for the first time in a context that is characterised by a high power difference. This would suggest that formal language should be used. As this review of the literature on Australian English indicates, informality may, however, be acceptable and politic in an Australian job interview and this suggests that VL use is politic.

As discussed above, speech event and cultural assumptions influence each other. This results in an Australian job interview frame which provides a set of expectations about linguistic behaviour for the interviewee and interviewer. This frame highlights the tension between two sets of assumptions: First, the requirement to present achievements without claiming specialness, and second, the presentation of a fiction of egalitarianism despite inherent power differences between interviewee and interviewer. In order to avoid strong and potentially detrimental implicatures, interviewees need to mitigate claims of specialness and downplay the power difference that exists between the interviewer and themselves. The assumptions discussed in this section are shown incorporated in model 3.2 which was developed initially in section 3.2.1. From the model it can be seen how strong implicatures are generated in the Australian job interview context. Knowing when and how such implicatures arise is, thus, crucial for an analysis of the effects of *thing* in this context.

Figure 3.3: Confirming and contradicting assumptions in Australian employment interviews



Speakers who use language (e.g. *thing*) that confirms the assumptions of the Australian job interview frame, show politic linguistic behaviour and do not generate strong implicatures. If interviewees, however, fail to confirm the assumptions of the Australian job interview frame, or even contradict them by discussing achievements without engaging in mitigation, strong implicatures will arise. These implicatures achieve relevance and become strongly noticed by the hearers. Speakers can, however, use mitigation to weaken implicatures in context, and this also weakens a contradiction of assumptions. An overview of research on mitigation is provided in section 3.5 and will identify a link between the notion of mitigation and VL items such as *thing*. The discussion will show that a use of VL may not only be politic in the Australian job interview because of its informality but also because its use can generate an effect of mitigation.

3.5 Mitigation

One of the first approaches that refers to the phenomenon of mitigation is Lakoff's (1973: 471) concept of a *hedge*, which he defines as "words whose job it is to make things fuzzier or less fuzzy" (see also Fraser, 1975, who extends this to a discussion of hedged performatives). Lakoff refers to hedges in his discussion of

category memberships where he claims that category membership is not simply a matter of true or false as logicians have proposed. In his overview of “hedges and other related phenomena”, he refers to *sort of* which he terms a *deintensifier* but also lists *very* which he calls an *intensifier* (Lakoff, 1973: 471-472). This reference to both modifications of the pragmatic force as well as his definition of hedges suggests that he considers hedging to be a phenomenon that can both attenuate and aggravate the pragmatic impact of an utterance.

Labov and Fanshel (1977: 84), who also refer to the counterpart of mitigation (i.e. aggravation) in their description of requests, define mitigation as avoiding “creating offense” and suggest that it is generally used by speakers when they express “needs and abilities”. Fraser (1980) similarly discusses mitigation with respect to requests and defines it as a weakening of the force of an utterance used to avoid an imposition (“an unwelcoming effect”) on a hearer. Fraser acknowledges similarities between his notion of mitigation and Lakoff’s (1972: 195) *hedges*, but he also discusses differences. He suggests, for example, that hedges “can contribute to creating a mitigating effect, but they are not, in themselves, examples of mitigation, nor necessarily mitigating in use” (Fraser 1980: 344).

In a later study, Holmes (1984: 262-263) describes mitigation as a strategy that attenuates the force of an utterance and suggests that there are further attenuation strategies apart from Fraser’s notion of *mitigation*. In particular, she identifies four modifications of the illocutionary force, of which two attenuate and two boost (i.e. strengthen) the force of an utterance (Holmes, 1984). Attenuating uses of language (downtoners) and boosters can influence and modify each other’s strength when they co-occur and “such sensitive gradations of meaning are the very stuff of skillful communication” (Holmes, 1984: 363). Holmes, thus, refers to Fraser’s notion of mitigation (to avoid a negative effect, an imposition on the hearer) as one type of attenuation, but also includes attenuating uses of language that are expected to be welcomed by a hearer (e.g. *You are kind of pretty in a way*; Holmes, 1984: 347).

Caffi (1999, 2007) regards mitigation as synonymous to attenuation and does not restrict the term to only the weakening of the illocutionary force that may be

required when requests are used.⁷ She describes the notion of *mitigation* more broadly as a strategy that affects “the allocation and reshuffling of rights and duties triggered by the speech act, and, crucially, changes their intensity and cogency.” (Caffi, 1999: 882). In particular, Caffi distinguishes between two types of attenuating uses of language which are both conducive to “smooth interactional management”: mitigation towards the speaker’s obligations and mitigation that reduces the obligations of the hearer. Caffi (1999, 2007) refers to mitigation that can operate on the proposition, the illocution, and the utterance source (Caffi, 1999: 883-888). She calls mitigation on the proposition *bushes* (e.g. *sometimes*), mitigation of the illocution *hedges* (e.g. *probably*), and mitigation that operates on the utterance source *shields* (e.g. *one* worries instead of *you* worry). She, however, acknowledges that the distinction between these different uses is not always straightforward (Caffi, 1999: 888).

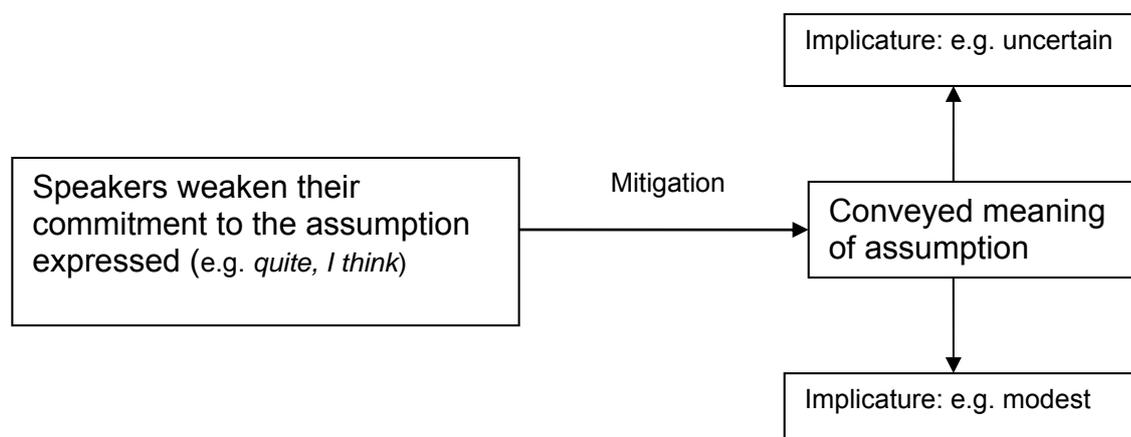
In Relevance Theory, Sperber and Wilson (1986/ 1995) do not describe mitigation as it has been discussed in this section. Nevertheless, they do refer to how speakers can influence the pragmatic impact of an utterance. They discuss the sentence “I shall never, never smoke again” and claim that:

“Realizing that her [the speaker’s] utterance will be skeptically received, she repeats the word ‘never’, the likely target of the skepticism, to convince the hearer that she means what she says. In other words, ‘never, never’ is here similar in import to ‘definitely never’ and reflects the speaker’s degree of commitment to the assumption expressed.” (Sperber and Wilson, 1986: 221)

Sperber and Wilson, thus, propose that the word *never* influences the commitment of the speaker to the assumption expressed and, in this case, mitigates a potential implicature of skepticism which the speaker fears her use of language will evoke. In Figure 3.4, this type of mitigation, often referred to as *hedging*, is shown using expressions such as *I think* and *sort of* as examples.

⁷ Caffi (1999: 882) calls her categorisation the “broad sense” of mitigation and discusses Fraser’s (1980) view of mitigation as the “narrow sense” which is, however, included as one type of mitigation in her broader view.

Figure 3.4: Hedging (mitigation)



As can be seen from the model, by engaging in mitigation speakers can weaken their commitment to the meaning of the assumption expressed, thus, influencing the implicatures that may arise.

With respect to the RT model discussed in Section 3.2, mitigation can be described as a weakening of the speaker's commitment to the (weak or strong) implicatures which are generated by his/ her confirmation or contradiction of assumptions (e.g. that a speaker is incompetent, boastful). By claiming to be, for example, *quite good at playing the piano* as opposed to describing that they are *good at playing the piano*, a speaker can downtone the strength of a potentially detrimental implicature of boastfulness. By engaging in mitigation a speaker can, thus, weaken the strength of implicatures (see also Section 3.2.1 above for a discussion of the different strengths of implicatures which RT also proposes).

This brief review shows that mitigation is crucial for interactional management. As Schneider says, "Mitigation expressions are fine-tuning-devices that achieve a compromise between what the speaker wants to say and what the interlocutor is willing to accept" (2010: 255). They are, therefore, vital for the management of interpersonal relationships. In the following section the main lexical items whose mitigation potential has been identified in previous research will be reviewed, including VL items such as *thing*. Since downtoning, i.e. attenuation, seems to be

particularly important in Australian English (see Section 3.4 above), the review will focus on items that have a potential to influence the pragmatic impact in this manner. As will be shown, VL items such as *thing* can also generate this effect.

3.6 Pragmatic fine-tuning devices

In this section, research on items whose potential to “fine-tune” (after Schneider 2010: 255) the pragmatic impact has been recognised, will be discussed. These items have been termed *pragmatic markers* (e.g. Brinton, 1996; Fraser, 1996; Aijmer, 2004), *discourse markers* (e.g. Fraser, 1990; Hays, 1992; Romero Trillo, 2002; Hellermann and Vergun, 2007), *pragmatic force modifiers* (Nikula, 1996), or *pragmatic devices* (Terraschke, 2008). Since some of these can both downtone and boost the pragmatic impact, they will be discussed as having a potential for pragmatic fine-tuning rather than described as mitigators or boosters, as the latter terminology suggests that pragmatic fine-tuning is an inherent characteristic of items (see also Fraser, 1980, for the same claim).

Holmes (1984, 1986) stresses the importance of contextual factors such as intonation for parentheticals like *I think* in determining whether an item functions as a downtoner or a booster (see also Kärkkäinen, 2003; Kaltenböck, 2008; Mullan, 2010 on 'I think' and intonation). Similarly, items such as *just* and *quite* can be used for either downtoning or boosting purposes (Holmes 1984: 353). These items can, however, also generate conversation management effects as speakers may use them to hold the floor when they need time to plan their utterances. Context is, therefore, crucial in determining whether items are indeed used for pragmatic fine-tuning, or for other reasons such as conversation management.

A wide range of pragmatic fine-tuning devices have been identified in the literature. Fraser (1980), for example, refers to adverbs such as *presumably* or *parenthetical verbs* (Urmson, 1952) like *I think*. Lakoff (1973), Prince, Frader and Bosk (1982) as well as Holmes (1984) also list parenthetical verbs, but add modifiers such as *sort of* and *quite* (called, for example, *adaptors* by Prince et al., 1982; and *downtoners* by Holmes, 1982), and modals like *could* (Holmes, 1984) to the list. While all these items can introduce pragmatic fine-tuning, they can have slightly different foci (e.g. focus on the hearer, the speaker or the content) (see also Holmes, 1984). *Parenthetical verbs* such as *I think*, for example, weaken the

speaker's commitment to the assumption expressed as their use can express uncertainty, while modifiers such as *sort of* operate on the content of the proposition (e.g. to *sort of* finish; I *sort of* finished my homework; the homework has not entirely been completed yet by the speaker).

Research has also addressed the mitigation potential of pronouns (e.g. Brown and Gilman, 1960; Haverkate, 1992; Caffi, 1999). Haverkate (1992), for example, describes how a speaker can use *one* or inclusive *we* (Haverkate, 1992: 517) as a “distancing technique in order to minimize his/ her own role or that of the hearer in the state of affairs described” (Haverkate, 1992: 513). He describes how pronouns can function as mitigators since their use avoids making the speaker's identity transparent (Haverkate, 1992: 513-517). Caffi terms such uses “objectivization” (1999: 896) and calls them *shields* (see example *one worries* instead of *you worry* in section 3.5 above). Caffi's *shields* are different from Prince, Frader and Bosk's (1982) *shields*, as they use this term to refer to items that Caffi terms *hedges*. Brown and Levinson (1987: 190-203) also refer to pronouns and claim that a “pluralization of you and I pronouns” can have a mitigating effect while uses of *we* as an inclusive pronoun “may become the conventionalized polite form more appropriate to formal situations and negative politeness” (Brown and Levinson, 1987: 203). Pronouns can, thus, also introduce pragmatic fine-tuning.

Phrasal expressions such as *if I am not mistaken* or *if you wouldn't mind* (e.g. Fraser 1980, Holmes 1984) have similarly been shown to generate an effect of mitigation. Holmes (1984: 361) refers to these expressions as *discoursal devices* and argues that phrasals such as *by the way* or *that reminds me* “may be used to de-emphasize or play down the importance of the speech act they introduce.” Brown and Levinson (1987: 174) term some of these phrases *Relevance hedges* (Grice's Maxim of Relevance) and claim that by using them, a speaker can apologise for providing information that might not be of great relevance to the hearer in a particular context.

3.7 *Vague language* as pragmatic fine-tuning devices

As noted earlier, Koester (2006) suggests that the higher frequency of VL items in unidirectional than collaborative genres in her UK and US office corpus can be explained by the mitigating effect that a use of these items can generate:

“Because of the discourse imbalance in these genres (one speaker has a dominant role), and in many cases a power imbalance (e.g., boss-employer, server-customer), the risk of performing face threatening acts is higher than in collaborative discourse, where participants are on a more equal footing. As we have seen, vague language, particularly vague tags [general extenders], can be used to mitigate potentially face-threatening acts.” (Koester, 2006: 93)

Although she refers primarily to general extenders (e.g. *or something*), she also provides one example of *thing* (*I'm just saying that this thing uh it's complicated*) and describes that *thing* functions as a shield, i.e. a hedge (Koester, 2006: 92-93).

While Koester (2006) only briefly refers to the pragmatic fine-tuning effect of VL items, Caffi (1999, 2007) provides a detailed account of such lexemes and refers to them as *bushes*. According to Caffi (1999: 890), bushes mitigate propositional content by influencing the precision of the assumption expressed. As discussed in the review of the literature on VL (Section 2.2.2), precision, or rather a lack thereof, has been claimed to be an inherent characteristic of VL. This suggests that VL can be described as prototypical bushes.

Caffi (1999: 894) provides items such as *sometimes* and *something like that* as examples of bushes. She also discusses the choice of different levels of formality of lexemes such as the Italian verb *dare* (*to give*) as opposed to the verb *prescrivere* (*to prescribe*) with respect to the notion of mitigation. In particular, she (Caffi, 1999: 891) proposes that doctors use bushes (e.g. *give*) instead of technical (medical) vocabulary (e.g. *prescrivere*) to make understatement when presenting a diagnosis to their patients (see also Adolphs, Atkins, and Harvey, 2007 for the same claim).

While Caffi (2007) claims that the downtoning function of bushes is linked to the low precision of these items, she does not discuss the notion of imprecision but refers to informality (i.e. stylistic choices) and its effects in discourse. She claims that bushes are informal items and proposes that their use redefines the

relationship and puts it “on a more friendly basis” in the formal context she analysed (Caffi, 1999: 891-892). Hence, it appears that rather than the notion of imprecision *per se*, the close relationship between imprecision and informality introduces mitigation because imprecise items are characteristic of informal talk (see, for example, the list of imprecise items Crystal and Davy (1975) discuss in their taxonomy of conversational English).

Caffi (2007: 101) refers to informal style and its mitigation potential as “empathic attunement” (2007: 123) in her discussion of doctor-patient interviews:

“Once a given rhetorical threshold is exceeded, a configuration of stylistic traits can be identified as a ‘figure of speech’ and be classified as litotes, understatement, euphemism, periphrasis, reticence, etc. From a psychological point of view, stylistic choices can be seen as cues that authorise hearers to make inferences about speakers’ positive or negative attitudes towards communication or its components.”
(Caffi, 2007: 124).

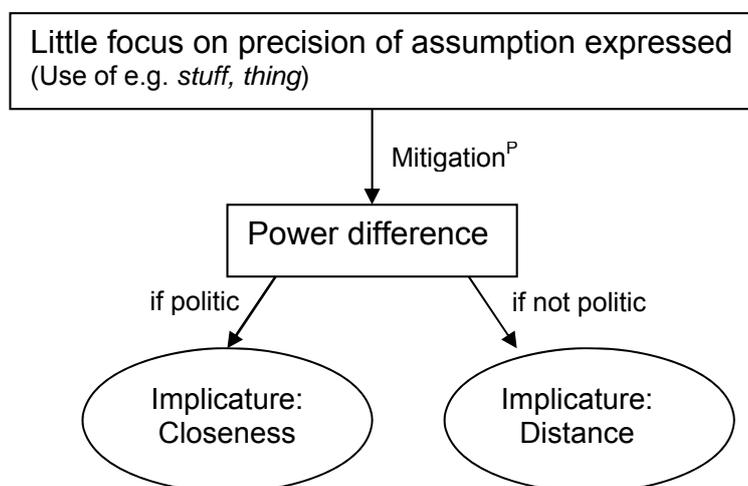
The use of non-technical language suggests that “the doctor, by giving up his knowledge [as indicated by the lack of technical words], also gives up his social role based on that knowledge: both seem temporarily suspended” (Caffi, 1999: 895). She, therefore, claims that the use of bushes can reduce the distance between speaker and hearer in this speech event which may generate an effect of solidarity (see also Yates, 2000; for a similar claim).

Huang (2007) also discusses the notion of style and attributes a social significance to choices of lexemes from different levels of formality. He refers to formality in his discussion of *social deixis* and describes it as including information about the status of speaker and hearer, their age, sex as well as their professional and ethnic background. This indexing has previously mainly been referred to in studies on pronouns and Japanese honorifics (Levinson, 1979; Hill et al., 1986; Matsumoto, 1988; Haverkate, 1992). Huang (2007) also compares the use of formal lexemes such as *dine* to lexemes such as *eat* (and *thing*) which do not imply formality. Discussions of politeness have similarly referred to the notion of *social indexing* as one way of introducing mitigation and expressing politeness

(e.g. Ervin-Tripp, Guo, and Lampert, 1990; Kasper, 1990). This type of mitigation has, however, not received much attention so far.

It appears that the type of mitigation that social indexing, i.e. stylistic choices, can introduce is focused on defining or re-defining the relationship between interactants. Informality is characteristic of equal power relationships and its use, thus, suggests closeness. Formal language can have a distancing effect as it mainly occurs in contexts where a power distance exists between interactants (Brown and Levinson, 1987: 70). The use of informal language such as *thing* in formal interactions suggests closeness and this can downplay the power difference in such contexts (See also, for example, Yates, 2000, 2005, 2010; Huang, 2007; Marra et al., 2008 above). The choice of formal or informal language in contexts that are characterised by an inherent power difference can, thus, generate different effects in discourse.

Implicatures of solidarity do not arise in all contexts when power differences are downplayed. They are only generated when it is politic to alter relationships in this manner. If it is not politic to downplay power differences, the effect of distance is generated. Whether pragmatic fine-tuning is introduced by stylistic choices (i.e. informal or formal language) is, therefore, determined by whether or not such behaviour is considered politic in a particular context. This type of mitigation which can be introduced by a use of informal items such as *thing*, downplays power differences will be referred to as mitigation^P (see Figure 3.5).

Figure 3.5: Mitigation^P: Downplaying power differences

As can be seen from Figure 3.5, quite contrary implicatures (closeness versus distance) may be generated when speakers use informal language such as *thing* in contexts that are characterised by an inherent power difference. The type of effect that is generated when power differences are downplayed depends on what is considered politic behaviour. Provided that downplaying power differences is indeed politic, an effect of closeness, i.e. solidarity, is generated as speakers use language in ways which confirm assumptions that are expected to be mutually manifest. In such contexts, future moves that introduce implicatures can also be weakened since in an atmosphere of closeness, the hearer is likely to grant more latitude towards behaviour that might otherwise be construed as non-politic. If downplaying power differences is not politic in the context where it occurs, an effect of distance rather than closeness is generated.

This discussion distinguishes two types of mitigation: mitigation and mitigation^P. Mitigation^P can be introduced when speakers use language that is imprecise, i.e. language that has a low semantic specificity such as *thing*, as it downplays power differences. Power differences are downplayed because informal lexemes are characteristic of equal conversations and, as a result, their use introduces an effect of closeness, provided that an informal speaking style is considered politic in

context. Pragmatic fine-tuning, i.e. mitigation, can also occur as speakers use items such as, for example, *I think* and *sort of* as these items and expressions can weaken the conveyed meaning of an assumption.

Both effects of mitigation discussed in this section can influence the rights and obligations of interactants which, according to Caffi's (1999: 882) definition, is one of the goals of mitigation. Furthermore, both can introduce a change in the "intensity" of the assumption expressed and this is another aspect that is required for mitigation to occur (Caffi 1999: 882). The two phenomena discussed have, therefore, been categorised as two types of mitigation in this review, as they influence the pragmatic impact of an assumption expressed in a downtoning manner. Items such as *stuff* and *thing* can be used for mitigation^P as they can downplay power differences and introduce implicatures such as closeness in circumstances where their use is appropriate. Items such as *quite* and *I think* can mitigate the pragmatic impact of the conveyed meaning of an assumption which weakens the beneficial or detrimental implicatures that may be generated in context.

Drave (2002) also compares VL with hedges (e.g. *I think*), and although he describes a link between these items, he also identifies differences. In particular, he suggests that "hedges are often directly attitudinal while VL is indirectly attitudinal" (Drave, 2002: 82). Therefore, Drave (2002: 82; my emphasis) similarly seems to stress the importance of politic behaviour with respect to VL. He also claims that VL:

"is directly concerned with propositional content and so any extrapolations to affective meanings rely on the **conventional association** of imprecision with friendliness, informality, uncertainty, modesty, deference and so on."

The notion of "conventional association" seems to relate to the different types of implicatures that can arise when speakers use VL. These depend on what is regarded as politic behaviour (i.e. what is "conventional") in a certain context. Drave's analysis, thus, also identifies a close but complex relationship between these two types of items and their influence on the pragmatic impact of an

utterance. His analysis supports the argument made here that a use of VL and hedges can generate the same (mitigating) effects.

3.8 Mitigation: Conclusion

In this section, a review of the notion of mitigation has been provided and two ways in which this type of pragmatic fine-tuning can influence the pragmatic impact of an assumption expressed have been identified (mitigation and mitigation^P). Reviewing potential mitigators (e.g. VL, *sort of* and *I think*), it seems that downtoning or boosting are not inherent characteristics of certain lexemes or expressions as these effects depend on contextual factors. Whether or not the effect of closeness, i.e. solidarity, is generated when, for example, VL downplays power differences is, therefore, determined by what is regarded as politic in context.

Below, the notion of mitigation will be reviewed with respect to L2 speaker use of language in the context of Australian job interviews. Challenges that these speakers may face are discussed as they might influence the use of *thing*, which, as discussed, is an item that can also generate an effect of mitigation.

3.9 Mitigation, the L2 speaker and the Australian job interview frame

Much research in the field of cross-cultural pragmatics (e.g. Blum-Kulka, House, and Kasper, 1989; Wierzbicka, 1991) has highlighted variation in assumptions of what constitutes acceptable, i.e. politic, behaviour across a range of situations in different cultures. Studies in variational pragmatics have also described variability of pragmatic norms across different varieties of the same standard language (e.g. Irish English and British English in Barron, 2005; Barron and Schneider, 2009). Hence, the acceptability of using VL items such as *thing* may vary cross-culturally.

RT scholars have similarly suggested that speakers may choose different frames in a speech event and have claimed that frame mismatches can result in misunderstandings (Escandell-Vidal, 1996: 644):

“In intercultural miscommunication, [...], even if both partners have usually selected the right script and are trying to act out the same scene, their scripts do not happen to contain the same "text" so to speak.”

Escandell-Vidal (1996: 644) highlights the importance of sociopragmatic issues and claims that when misunderstandings occur, the speaker is ascribed full intention, and this can have serious consequences for interpersonal relations.⁸ Miscommunication and unsuccessful outcomes in intercultural job interviews can, therefore, arise when interviewees follow different frames about what they consider to be politic behaviour in this speech event.

Frame differences can relate to assumptions about the level of formality that is acceptable, i.e. politic, in a speech event and refer to the type of lexis as well as syntax and prosody that are considered appropriate in context (Roberts and Sayers, 1987: 120, Gumperz, 1992, Roberts 2005, Drew and Heritage, 1992: 26). Since *thing* is an item that can generate an effect of informality, assumptions regarding its use are, thus, also related to style.

Frame mismatches in employment interviews have been discussed with respect to the degree of self-promotion that is expected of participants. In an intercultural job interview context with L2 speakers of English, Kerekes (2007: 1954) notes differences in how interviewees are expected to promote skills in the speech event of job interviews in Japan and America. She describes how Japanese interviewees opted for a modest presentation of their persona while American interviewees promoted themselves more proactively. She attributes this difference to the influence of their cultural assumptions on the speech event assumptions. Gumperz (1992: 322) similarly found differences in communicative strategies used for self-presentation in interviews by British L1 speakers of English and speakers of English from a different cultural background. In his study, speakers of English (from Northern India) chose a style that understated achievements more frequently than the speaking style that British interviewees adopted. Differences in frames

⁸ Escandell-Vidal (1996: 644) also discusses intracultural miscommunication using the notion of script/frame. She claims that such miscommunication occurs as “one of the partners misinterprets a key concept or the whole situation and selects the wrong "script", and as a result they are "acting out different scenes".”

can, therefore, determine the way interviewees engage in self-praise, and this influences the fine-tuning by items such as *thing* and *I think* of the pragmatic impact of their talk.

Several comparative studies of L1 and L2 speaker use of pragmatic fine-tuning devices show a tendency for L2 speakers to choose fewer such items than L1 speakers of English (e.g. Bardovi-Harlig and Hartford, 1990; Nikula, 1996; Drave, 2002; Yates, 2005, 2010). Some studies also found a smaller functional variety or a different functional focus in the L2 use of fine-tuning devices (Nikula, 1997; Drave, 2002). Bardovi-Harlig and Hartford (1990), for example, found in their study on Academic advising sessions with advanced L2 speakers of English that the L2 group used fewer downtoners than the L1 group. They also found “aggravators” (boosters) which they did not observe in the L1 corpus.

In Australian job interviews, politic linguistic behaviour seems to require a modest self-presentation (see Section 3.4 above). When presenting achievements, it is likely that speakers will have a tendency to downtone rather than boost pragmatic impact. Similarly, mitigation is also required when an interviewee is asked to describe weaknesses, since in the competitive job interview a description of strengths rather than weaknesses is expected to lead to success. Speakers can introduce mitigation by using items such as *sort of* and *I think* or by choosing informal vocabulary such as *thing* and *stuff* since, as discussed, the latter also creates effects that help a speaker avoid appearing boastful.

Applicants from different cultural backgrounds might, however, not consider that a downtoning of their achievements is a sensible strategy to follow in a competitive environment such as job interviews. The relationship between informal language and politic linguistic behaviour in the formal Australian job interview context might also be puzzling for L2 speakers since they may expect a use of formal rather than informal language, as this may be the norm in their L1 cultural context. The Australian job interview context, thus, poses challenges for applicants from different cultural backgrounds, and these challenges include the appropriate use of VL which also relates to its effect of mitigation.

Since assumptions about acceptable, i.e. politic, behaviour can vary cross-culturally, high *sociopragmatic* and *pragmalinguistic* (Thomas, 1983) competence is required of L2 speakers to cope with the demands of this speech event and the language use required. This is especially so if different assumptions require confirmation as part of the job interview frame in the L1 culture of applicants. Although L2 speakers might understand the requirement for downtoning, some might not be aware that certain lexemes (e.g. *thing*) can generate this effect, or they might not have a lexeme (e.g. *sort of*) which they can use for mitigation purposes as part of their linguistic repertoire. Job interviews seem to require a strategic use of language to mitigate contradictions of assumptions which inevitably occur because of the type of questions that are generally asked in this speech event. The *sociopragmatic* and *pragmalinguistic* competence required of L2 speakers to perform well in this speech event, thus, includes knowing how to use mitigation.

3.10 Conclusion

Following the definition of vagueness with respect to items such as *thing* in Chapter Two, the suitability of RT as a framework to investigate the vagueness and implicatures speakers can generate by using *thing* in context has been discussed. From this discussion, an RT model has been developed in order to analyse when a use of language (e.g. VL) generates implicatures in the context of Australian job interviews. Since the model relies heavily on the notion of *assumptions*, those assumptions that require confirmation in the Australian job interview context have been identified from a review of the literature on the speech event of job interviews and the Australian cultural context. The notion of mitigation has also been discussed as it appears crucial for the context in which *thing* is investigated in this study and since mitigation is an effect that can also be generated by a use of *thing*. The review of the literature identified two types of mitigation, and section 3.6 approached this notion from the perspective of L2 speaker use of language in the Australian job interview and discussed challenges learners of a language may have using language in a politic manner in this speech event.

In Chapter Four, the methodology used in this study will now be outlined and the research questions it addresses are presented.

Chapter Four: Methodology

4.1 Introduction and study design

The review of the literature in Chapters Two and Three identified some areas in VL research such as the notion of vagueness and implicature construction that would benefit from further discussion and analysis. No concise definition of vagueness has, for example, yet been developed, and potential differences between the range of VL items and this notion have not been addressed (See section 2.4). Rather, the term *vagueness* seems to have been used rather loosely to refer to a range of items such as *thing* that are characterised by a low semantic specificity (i.e. a low precision) but also to describe their use in context. In other words, the term *vagueness* appears to have been used in VL research to refer to items of a particular semantic characteristic and also to describe pragmatic context-dependent phenomena.

The previous chapters have also identified scope for research on VL use with respect to implicature construction. Most VL studies have so far used a Gricean framework to investigate implicature construction of these items and expressions in context. There is, however, no consensus on the exact nature of the relationship between VL and implicatures. As shown in Chapter Two, some studies claim that VL use introduces implicatures because maxims are flouted. Others suggest that a speaker who uses VL still follows the Cooperative Principle (CP). However, they do not make it clear what this means with respect to implicatures, since speakers can both follow the CP and generate implicatures, i.e. they are not mutually exclusive. Some studies also propose that VL expressions function as hedges or discuss them in general as items that can be used to manage implicatures. Questions, therefore, remain to be answered with respect to VL and implicature construction.

While previous research on VL has primarily investigated L1 use in informal contexts, this study will compare the VL item *thing* in formal L1 and L2 interviews. As discussed in Chapters One, Two and Three, research suggests that using VL is

important in casual conversations as it can generate interpersonal and discourse management effects. Since VL seems to be characteristic of informal discourse, few studies have analysed its use in formal contexts. Furthermore, the use of these items by L2 speakers has rarely been investigated. It is, therefore, timely to study both L1 and L2 use of the VL item *thing* in a formal context.

In particular, the following three questions will be addressed in this study:

1. How can the notion of vagueness be defined with respect to *thing*?
2. Does using *thing* introduce vagueness^P in the L1 and L2 corpus?
3. What are the main effects that the L1 speakers of Australian English and the L2 speakers of English generate by using *thing* in employment interviews in Australia?

In order to understand VL we must, thus, first have a good understanding of the notion of vagueness, since this also determines the framework that is suitable for its analysis. As the review of semantic and pragmatic literature shows (Section 2.5.2), the notion of vagueness can be understood as denoting different phenomena. However, some pragmatic aspects have been identified in all discussions of this notion. This study, thus, discusses vagueness as a pragmatic phenomenon and will analyse it as a problem in reference assignment, referred to by the term vagueness^P.

Reference assignment was only mentioned briefly by Grice (1975), who did not seem to consider the Gricean maxims to play a role in it. It is, however, discussed as one type of explicature construction in the framework of RT. Since vagueness has been defined in this study as a problem in reference assignment, i.e. failed explicature construction, a Gricean framework cannot be used for its analysis as the Gricean maxims only allow for a discussion of implicatures. As shown in the previous chapter, RT distinguishes between explicatures and implicatures, and, therefore, allows for a discussion of both phenomena. Consequently, RT is the framework against which the relationship of *thing* with vagueness^P (explicature construction) and implicatures will be investigated in this study.

Vagueness^P will be defined further in Chapter Five in order to provide a more detailed framework for an in depth analysis of vagueness^P in L1 and L2 uses of *thing*. As part of this framework, different types of reference assignment will be discussed. Some of these will be identified as more prone to failure and, thus, more likely to introduce vagueness^P due to factors such as mutual manifestness and accessibility of referents. For an analysis of the relationship of VL with implicatures it is, however, crucial to define linguistic behaviour that is unmarked (i.e. politic) and, conversely, behaviour that is marked in the particular context under investigation. Also, the effects that a speaker can generate by using VL items need to be understood to consider how their use confirms or contradicts assumptions that apply in context. The review of the literature (Chapter Three) has identified an Australian job interview frame, that is, assumptions relating to politic linguistic behaviour in the context where *thing* is investigated in this study. This will allow for a discussion of implicature construction in the Australian job interview in general and also help determine the relationship of the VL item *thing* with implicatures.

In order to answer the research questions outlined above, data from L1 and L2 speaker employment interviews was collected and uses of *thing* were analysed. A detailed definition of vagueness^P for an analysis of the vagueness^P of *thing* is developed in Chapter Five to understand how the L1 and L2 speakers of English use *thing* with respect to this phenomenon. This analysis is followed by a description of the effects that a use of *thing* can generate, since it appears that introducing vagueness^P is only one of a wide range of its possible effects in discourse. Therefore, those effects that the L1 and L2 speakers of English seemed to mainly generate by using *thing* are discussed. The discussion also comments on whether the use of the VL item *thing* constitutes politic behaviour in the Australian job interview context. Hence, it will be explored whether or not a use of *thing* generates strong or weak implicatures in this context. The different aspects analysed in this study, thus, are:

- 1) The item *thing* and its relationship with vagueness (vagueness^P)
- 2) The item *thing* and its potential effects in discourse
- 3) The item *thing*: its use with respect to vagueness^P and implicatures in L1 and L2 employment interviews in Australia.

The research questions posed will provide insights into VL research in general, the notion of vagueness in language use, implicature construction as well as interlanguage pragmatics.

4.2 Data collection: Elicited versus naturally occurring employment interviews

Employment interviews were chosen as the context in which *thing* is investigated in this study. The choice of this speech event is based on the fact that such interviews are particularly interesting for an analysis of pragmatic aspects of language since they are high stake speech events (Roberts and Sayers, 1987; Roberts and Campbell, 2005, 2006). The main focus of this study is, however, to provide a detailed analysis of the item *thing*, taking into account its relationship with the notion of (pragmatic) vagueness and the effects its use can generate. Hence, while the focus is not primarily on the job interview context itself, the investigation of *thing* is crucially linked to it, as language cannot be analysed in a vacuum. Therefore, in the qualitative analysis of specific examples (Chapters Seven and Eight in particular) continuous reference is made to the employment interview context and the assumptions that apply in this speech event. The discussion of the context, thus, allows for an analysis of effects that are generated when *thing* is used by the two speaker groups.

Studies that are interested in VL have used naturally occurring data (e.g. Overstreet, 1999; Cheng and Warren, 2001; Drave, 2002) as well as simulated conversations (e.g. Jucker, Smith, and Lüdge, 2003; Terraschke, 2007; Terraschke and Holmes, 2007; Terraschke, 2010). Similarly, job interview research (Roberts and Sayers, 1987; Gumperz, 1992; Roberts and Campbell, 2005; Kerekes, 2006; Roberts and Campbell, 2006; Campbell and Roberts, 2007) and studies on interlanguage pragmatics (e.g. Kasper and Dahl, 1991; Nikula, 1996; Kasper, 2001; Hassall, 2003; Terraschke, 2007) have also relied on both data collection techniques.

There are several advantages and disadvantages associated with choosing either simulated or naturally occurring data in job interview contexts. While VL research has relied on both data collection techniques, no such study has compared the usefulness of these techniques with respect to an analysis of these items.

Interlanguage pragmatics research (Kasper and Dahl, 1991), however, discusses different types of techniques used to collect data for comparative L1 and L2 studies on speech acts. Kasper and Dahl claim that role plays are most closely related to naturally occurring data since they show "oral production, full operation of turn-taking mechanism, impromptu planning decisions contingent on interlocutor input, and hence negotiation of global and local goals, including *negotiation of meaning* (in the SLA sense of the term) when required" (Kasper and Dahl, 1991: 19). They also propose that role plays which allow participants to "retain their own identities – might approximate authentic discourse even more closely than [pure] role plays" where participants act out any role that is assigned to them regardless of whether or not they can identify with it (Kasper and Dahl 1991: 41). The advantage that role plays are replicable is also noted by Kasper and Dahl, who suggest that this makes them particularly suited to comparative studies of L1 and L2 discourse.

Like studies on interlanguage pragmatics, research on job interviews has used both simulated and naturally occurring interviews, perhaps because gaining permission to record authentic job interviews is often difficult (e.g. Roberts and Sayers, 1987; Roberts and Campbell, 2005). One criticism of simulated data is that interviewees may not take the interviews seriously as there is no position at stake. A simulated set up might, therefore, decrease the tension that normally characterises contexts such as job interviews, and, as a result, the type of language used may be influenced. Roberts and Sayers (1987: 122), however, suggest that while a simulated set-up might downtone the tense atmosphere which often governs employment interviews, the presence of recording devices that are used in the data collection process may reintroduce it. They furthermore propose that:

"Interviewees (usually students on language courses for the unemployed) are as keen to present themselves at their best in these simulation interviews as they would be at a real interview"
(Roberts and Sayers, 1987: 122)

Similarly to Kasper and Dahl (1991), they suggest that the language used in simulated interviews with L2 speakers who are in the process of looking for

employment, should not differ greatly from naturally occurring job interview speech with the same speaker group. While motivation should not be an issue for L2 speakers in simulated interviews, L1 speakers may be less motivated in a simulated setting than in naturally occurring job interviews as the stakes are not as high for this speaker group. This issue will be discussed further in section 4.5.

Naturally occurring employment interviews are, furthermore, special encounters as they are highly scripted and standardised to a great extent (e.g. Iedema, 2003). In fact, the expectations that seem to govern naturally occurring job interviews show similarities with the rules of role plays. As in simulated interactions, candidates adopt a role to present themselves as interesting applicants to secure the position at stake in naturally occurring employment interviews. Natural job interview data, thus, seems closely related to simulated data. The notion of naturally occurring data is, however, in itself problematic given that no data is entirely natural.

Research participants will be aware that a study is taking place since they will have signed consent forms and recording devices will have been installed (Speer, 2002). As Labov's (1972) famous observer's paradox also suggests, it is almost impossible for data not to be influenced by the researcher.

Because complexities exist even with natural data, data collection techniques should be chosen according to their suitability to answer the research questions addressed (e.g. Kasper and Dahl, 1991; Yuan, 2001; Golato, 2003). Since, rather than a detailed analysis of the speech event of employment interviews, in this study the use of the item *thing* by two speaker groups is compared, it was important to provide comparable conditions for both populations. In particular, it was crucial to control the questions asked by the interviewer, as both the type of question and the wording of questions can influence the lexis used. Also, the speaking style of an interviewer can change the language an interviewee uses and, thus, the interviewer was another variable that needed to be controlled. Since it was not possible to use naturally occurring interviews only administered by one interviewer asking identically worded questions, it was decided to simulate job interview role plays instead.

4.3 The data

Role plays with 18 L1 speakers of Australian English and 25 L2 speakers of English were conducted between January and September 2009 in Australia. After the interviews were conducted, they were transcribed (see Transcription conventions in appendix A), the different VL items were categorised and tagged, and the frequencies of all items were compared between the two speaker groups (see Appendix H for a list of all VL categories tagged). The item *thing* was chosen as the main item for the analysis since it, rather surprisingly, occurs more than twice as frequently in the L1 than the L2 data. It was also selected for this analysis because, despite its highly interesting semantic and pragmatic properties, research on *thing* is very scarce with no study to date having investigated its use by L1 and L2 speakers in employment interviews.

4.4 Recruitment process and job interview set up

Both, the L1 and the L2 participants who volunteered to participate in this study were unknown to the researcher prior to the data collection process. The L1 interviewees were invited to participate using flyers (see Appendix B) and were contacted, using the same flyer, via email by people known to the researcher. The interviews were mostly conducted during lunch time at the participants' workplace, at a nearby café or at Macquarie University. The L2 participants were also recruited with a flyer (see Appendix C) similar to the one used for the L1 recruitment. This flyer was distributed to migrants who were enrolled in a course to prepare themselves for the Australian workplace and to receive help in their search for employment. Since workplace language can vary across disciplines and industries, only those with qualifications in IT or accounting were selected for an analysis. The selection of these two categories of professionals was purely due to quantitative reasons, that is, they constituted the largest group of L2 professionals who participated in the recordings. The interviews were audio-recorded, and in all interviews the researcher played the part of the interviewer. Interviewees were not interrupted, no follow-up questions were asked and backchannelling by the interviewer (e.g. *Interesting! Sounds good*) was also kept to a minimum for reasons of comparability.⁹

⁹ Research on naturally occurring interviews also finds that often no follow-up questions were asked in interviews (Button, 1992: 217). Button (1992: 228-229) claims that this results in a particular use of questions and answers in job interviews so that, by keeping his involvement to a minimum, the interviewer can objectively examine the interviewee's answer.

4.4.1 Job interview questions

The interviewer asked all interviewees who participated in the data collection for this study a standardised set of job interview questions. These had been adapted from Roberts and Campbell (2005) who identified the ten most asked questions in naturally occurring interviews in Great Britain. Since Roberts and Campbell's (2005) study investigated UK interviews, the questions they identified as common were adapted with the help of a human resource professional in Australia. The interview questions were then piloted to identify potential comprehension problems and to estimate the average length of an interview. Table 4.1 (next page) shows the final list of all questions asked in each interview.

Table 4.1: Set of job interview questions

Code #	Question
#1	Did you find your way to the interview without any problems?
#2	How do you normally get to work
#3	What were your main responsibilities in your last job?
#4	What were the main challenges for you at that job?
#5	What do you think you have done particularly well in your job?
#6a	Have you had much experience dealing with customers?
#6b	Tell me about a situation when you had to demonstrate good communication skills
#6c	Was it successful?
#7a	How about meeting deadlines, do you cope well with pressure?
#7b	Could you describe a situation where you were under a lot of pressure and how you dealt with it
#7c	Was it resolved successfully? (only sometimes asked)
#8a	Do you like working in a team?
#8b	Can you tell me about a time when you worked in a group, what was the group task, how many people were involved and what was your role?
#8c	Is there anything that the group could have done better?
#8d	What was the outcome? (only sometimes asked)
#9	Have you ever had a disagreement with one of your co-workers/superior?
#9r	If NO: What would you do if you had a disagreement?
#10	Tell me about a time when you made a mistake at work and how you reacted to it
#11	How do you feel about working overtime, on the weekend, working long hours?
#12	What do you think your weaknesses and strengths are?
#13	What salary are you looking for? What would be a minimum salary that you'd work for?
#14	Can you tell me why you are the best person for the job, why should we hire you?
#15	When could you start working for us?
Extra: #16	How do you cope with changes in the workplace?

Questions #1 and #2 are small talk, icebreaker questions, while the remaining comprise the main job interview questions. Question #16 was only asked if interviewees answered all other questions without providing much elaboration. Questions marked here as (b), (c), (d) were not asked if interviewees volunteered such further information freely in response to question (a). When referring to answers by the different participants, the codes of the questions in column one of

this table will be used. Code #15, therefore, refers to the question on starting dates while code #16 refers to the question on coping with changes in the workplace.

4.4.2 L1 and L2 participants

All interviewees volunteered to participate in the simulated job interviews, signed a consent form and received the transcript of their interview as compensation for their participation. In total 18 L1 and 25 L2 speakers of English took part in the job interviews. The L1 and L2 job interviews lasted between ten and 25 minutes and yielded an L1 corpus of about 40 000 words and an L2 corpus of approximately 35 000 words. As briefly discussed above, the L1 speakers who participated in the recordings were either trained in IT or accounting and all but one L1 speaker were employed in mostly junior positions in one of these two workplace areas. The L2 speakers, who had migrated to Australia from different South-American, Eastern-European and Asian countries, had similar qualifications but were unemployed and in the process of looking for junior positions regardless of their level of experience.

The L1 speakers had, on average, five years of work experience. All were native speakers of Australian English and had grown up in Australia. They were between 21 and 34 years old with a median age of 27. Five were IT professionals and 13 had accounting qualifications. Of the 18 L1 participants, 11 were male and seven female. Table 4.2 (next page) shows background information for the L1 participants of this study.

Table 4.2: Background information L1 participants

<i>ID #</i>	<i>Qualification</i>	<i>Work experience</i>	<i>Gender</i>	<i>Age</i>
1A	IT	4 years	m	24
2A	Accounting	5 years	f	28
3A	Accounting	3.5 years	m	24
4A	IT	5 years	m	26
5A	Accounting	10 years	m	33
6A	Accounting	3 years	m	25
7A	IT	4 months	f	23
8A	IT	3 years	m	23
9A	Accounting	3 years	f	26
11A	Accounting	3 years	m	31
12A	IT	8 years	f	34
13A	Accounting	8-10 years	m	31
14A	Accounting	6 years	f	28
15A	Accounting	10 years	m	28
16A	Accounting	3 years	m	23
17A	Accounting	13 years	m	33
18A	Accounting	1 year	f	22
19A	Accounting	1 year	f	21
Total: 18	IT: 5 Accounting: 13	Median work experience: 5 years	f: 7 m: 11	Median age: 26.8

In this table, IDs for the different participants have been provided. In the following chapters, a response to question number one by, for example, L1 participant one, will be abbreviated by the code 1A#1, while the code 1A#2 refers to a response to question number two which is given by the Australian L1 participant 1A and so on. The letter A indicates that the participant is a native speaker of Australian English. Only numbers are used to refer to responses of the L2 speakers of English.

The 25 L2 participants answered the same questions as the L1 speakers and were non-native speakers of English from different Asian, Latin-American and Eastern European countries. They had all migrated to Australia and were seeking employment at the time the interviews were conducted. They were between 25 and 45 years old (median age: 32) and 12 of them were female while 13 were male. Of the 25 L2 speakers, 16 held qualifications in IT and 13 were accountants. With the exception of four participants who had been in Australia for several years, the L2 speakers had spent on average four months in Australia.

As Table 4.3 shows (p.86), in the L2 group the median age was slightly higher than in the L1 speaker group (32 years compared to 27 in L1). The distribution of female-male participants was similar, although there were slightly more male interviewees in the L1 group. With respect to their qualifications, most L2 participants were IT professionals, whereas in the L1 group the majority of the interviewees had accounting qualifications. As noted above, the 25 L2 interviews led to a corpus of 35 000 words which is slightly smaller than the L1 corpus of 40 000 words even though there were more interviewees in the L2 corpus (25 L2 versus 18 L1).

Given that this study discusses L2 speaker use of *thing*, the issue of proficiency is addressed. It will be firmly established in this study that the item *thing* is a highly pragmatic item as a result of its low semantic specificity. Lexical competence, i.e. lexical proficiency, of *thing*, thus, requires pragmatic competence and relates to the *depth* of vocabulary knowledge, i.e. its pragmatic characteristics, rather than its *breadth*, i.e. its semantic meaning (see Meara, 1996; Qian, 1999; Haastруп and Henriksen, 2000; Read, 2000; Greidanus and Nienhuis, 2001; Vermeer, 2001; Read, 2004 for detailed discussions of 'breadth' and 'depth'). The lexicogrammatical proficiency of speakers was not specifically investigated in this study since there is no one-to-one relationship between lexico-grammatical proficiency and pragmatic proficiency. This view is grounded in the consistent finding that "high levels of grammatical competence do not guarantee concomitant high levels of pragmatic competence" (Bardovi-Harlig, 1999: 686). Pragmatic ability is, thus, seen as an independent component (e.g. Bardovi-Harlig, 1999; Rose, 2000; Kasper, 2001; Yates, 2005) and, as a result, is not a focal point in the analysis of items that require pragmatic competence for a native like use.

While VL will not be analysed with respect to proficiency levels, the English language competence of the L2 speakers who participated in the recordings is nevertheless briefly described. All L2 participants had been required to pass an English language test in order to be granted an Australian visa. The minimum requirement was an overall IELTS (International English Language Testing System) score of five on tests in reading, listening, speaking and writing. Since the visa application process is lengthy, some applicants had been tested quite some

time ago or could not remember their exact IELTS score. Consequently, the L2 speakers self-assessed their speaking and listening competence using a grid provided by the European Framework of Reference (see Appendix D). The results show that most participants (16) assessed themselves as intermediate speakers of English (Level B), however, quite a few (8) also categorised themselves as advanced speakers of English (Level C) and one participant felt that she was level A (beginner level). An overview of the background of the L2 participants is provided in Table 4.3.

Table 4.3: Background information L2 participants

ID#	Qualification	Nationality	Gender	Age	Time in Australia (months)	English competence
2	IT	Ukranian	m	36	3	C
3	IT	Russian	m	34	4	B
7	IT	Venezuela	f	30	3	B
8	IT	China	m	38.5	3	A
9	IT	Russia	m	31	2	B
12	Accounting	Chinese	f	34	12	B
13	IT	Korean	f	30	11	C
14	IT	Iranian	m	31	3	C
16	Accounting	Nepal	m	45	1.5	C
17	Accounting	Indonesia	f	29	42	B
18	IT	Iran	m	34	5	B
19	IT	China	m	32	1	B
21	IT	Mexican	f	32	2.5	B
22	IT	Mexican	f	30	2	B
23	Accountant	Peruvian	f	33	9	B
24	Accountant	Russian	m	29	2	C
25	Accountant	Chinese	f	30	3	B
26	IT	Chinese	m	29	3	B
27	Accountant	Peruvian	m	40	9	B
28	IT	Korean	f	28	3	B
29	accountant	Chinese	f	30	54	C
31	Accountant	Chinese	f	25	60	C
32	IT	Iranian	f	30	1	B
33	IT	Brazilian	m	30	2	B
34	IT	Iranian	m	30	60	C
Total: 25	IT: 16 Accounting: 9		f: 12 m: 13	Median age: 32.02	Median time: 12 months	A: 1 B: 16 C: 8

4.5 Validity and reliability

In this study, a multi-method approach is taken since quantitative as well as qualitative analyses are conducted. With respect to the vagueness analysis of *thing*, descriptive quantitative statistics are provided, statistical tests of significance are administered where possible, and a second rater was used to code the different uses of *thing* in the two corpora. Regarding the qualitative analyses conducted on the main effects of *thing* in the L1 and L2 speaker group, the issue of validity is more complex. Qualitative research is often under scrutiny regarding the generalisability of the results obtained and, hence, the validity of qualitative

results (see Davis, 1995; Lazaraton, 1995 for reviews on this issue). In order to increase the validity of the results obtained from the qualitative analyses in Chapter Eight, triangulation was used as a range of items that share semantic and pragmatic properties with *thing* were investigated in addition to *thing*. Moreover, prosodic features were analysed and descriptive statistics as well as statistical tests of significance were administered. The statistical tests conducted are briefly discussed below.

4.5.1 Statistical tests

The purpose of the statistical tests used is to compare means of the L1 and L2 speakers and test whether the difference between the means of the two groups are statistically significant at 5% significance level (i.e. $\alpha = 0.05$). In each test, scaled data was used, i.e. the use of total words per 1000 per subject. The null hypothesis of no difference between the two groups was rejected if the p-value of the test statistic was smaller than 0.05 (ie $p\text{-value} < 0.05$). Since the normality of the data is a very important assumption for the hypothesis tests and for the results to be valid, the normality of the data for each variable was checked by plotting histograms, and carrying out normality tests using Kolmogorov-Smirnov and Shapiro-Wilk Test.

If the Kolmogorov-Smirnov and Shapiro-Wilk tests showed that the data for both groups was normally distributed, then the Two-Sample T-Test (also called Independent Sample T-Test) was used in order to test whether the differences between the two groups were significant. If the normality assumption was violated, then it was not appropriate to use a Two-sample t-test, i.e. the results from Two-sample t-tests were not valid. In such cases, i.e. when the data was non-normally distributed, the Mann-Whitney U Test, a non-parametric test for non-normally distributed data which is equivalent to the Two-sample t-test, was used to compare the differences between the two groups. The results of these tests with respect to the statistical significance of the findings will be discussed in the respective sections in Chapters Six and Eight.

4.6 Limitations

Although simulated job interviews with participants who are allowed to keep their identity and are seeking employment in the real world are likely to produce speech

which is comparable to naturally occurring data (e.g. Roberts and Sayers, 1987; Kasper and Dahl, 1991), the same might not apply for interviewees who are already employed, as were most L1 speakers of this study. While the choice of a simulated set up with such participants may have influenced the data, this analysis will show that the language used by the L1 speakers parallels the results of previous studies on Australian English (e.g. Wierzbicka, 1994, 1996; Goddard and Wierzbicka, 2002; Sussex, 2004; Marra, Vine, and Holmes, 2008). Moreover, it was noted that as soon as the recording device was switched on, the L1 speakers entered into a 'job interview-mode', as one L1 participant described it. Nevertheless, studies cannot claim that simulated interviews are identical to naturally occurring data.

Since power is one variable that can influence the way language is used, the main goal in collecting a comparable set of L1 and L2 interviews was to limit the participants to those that were still junior in their positions as this allows for similar power relationships. Difficulties in finding L1 volunteers to participate in the study meant that the interviews of three L1 participants who were more senior were also included. On analysis, it was found that the style of these more senior L1 participants did not seem to differ greatly from the language used by less senior interviewees.

4.7 Study conduct: Theoretical framework and analysis

The analysis of *thing* in this study is mainly grounded in the framework of RT (Sperber and Wilson, 1986/ 1995) as this approach distinguishes between explicatures and implicatures and both inferential processes will be investigated in this study with respect to the item *thing*. The vagueness^P analysis in Chapter Six is focused on reference assignment which is described in RT as one type of explicature construction. However, some concepts from research on reference (e.g. Roberts, 2003; Abbott, 2006; Chen, 2009) and systemic functional linguistics (Halliday and Hasan, 1976; Hasan, 1984; Halliday and Hasan, 1985; Hasan, 1996) are also used to develop a framework in Chapter Five that allows for an analysis and comparison of the relationship of *thing* with vagueness^P in L1 and L2 speaker discourse. Hence, Chapter Five presents the method of data analysis that allows for a vagueness analysis of *thing* in Chapter Six.

In Chapter Six, the results of an analysis of reference assignment regarding all uses of *thing* in both corpora will be presented. This analysis was conducted in order to identify those uses of *thing* for which reference assignment seemed problematic for the hearer. As discussed in Chapter Two, if reference assignment fails, vagueness^P is introduced as the hearer cannot identify the item that *thing* refers to. This analysis will allow for a general discussion of the relationship between vagueness^P and *thing* as it investigates L1 discourse. It will, however, also provide insights into vagueness^P and its relationship to L2 speaker use of one VL item (i.e. *thing*).

Other effects that a use of *thing* can generate will then be explored in the second part of this study. First, detailed descriptions of the range of effects that speakers can generate by using *thing* in context will be provided. In order to investigate whether *thing* is used for the same effects in the L2 and in the L1 corpus, different types of analyses are conducted in both corpora. Based on the use of *thing* in the L1 corpus, it will also be discussed whether or not using *thing* seems politic in the Australian job interview context. Relying on the RT model developed from the review of the literature in Chapter Three, the relationship of *thing* with implicatures in this speech event and cultural context will be explored. In particular, it is discussed whether implicatures can be generated by its use and it is described how strong these may be.

The framework and models used will allow for a discussion of how L1 speakers of Australian English and L2 speakers of English manage explicatures (vagueness^P) and implicatures when they use *thing* in employment interviews.

Chapter Five: A theoretical framework for vagueness^P

5.1 Introduction

In Chapter Two, I distinguished the phenomenon vagueness^P from everyday uses of the terms *vagueness* and *vague* as well as from their use in semantic studies. As discussed, vagueness^P relates to indexical referencing, which is one type of underdeterminacy discussed by Carston (2002). In the preliminary definition offered in Chapter Two, vagueness^P was described as a pragmatic phenomenon that has different characteristics depending on the type of items affected. In relation to the item *thing*, vagueness^P was discussed as occurring when a hearer is unable to assign a referent in a context where reference assignment is crucial to identify a fully propositional form. In Relevance Theoretic terms:

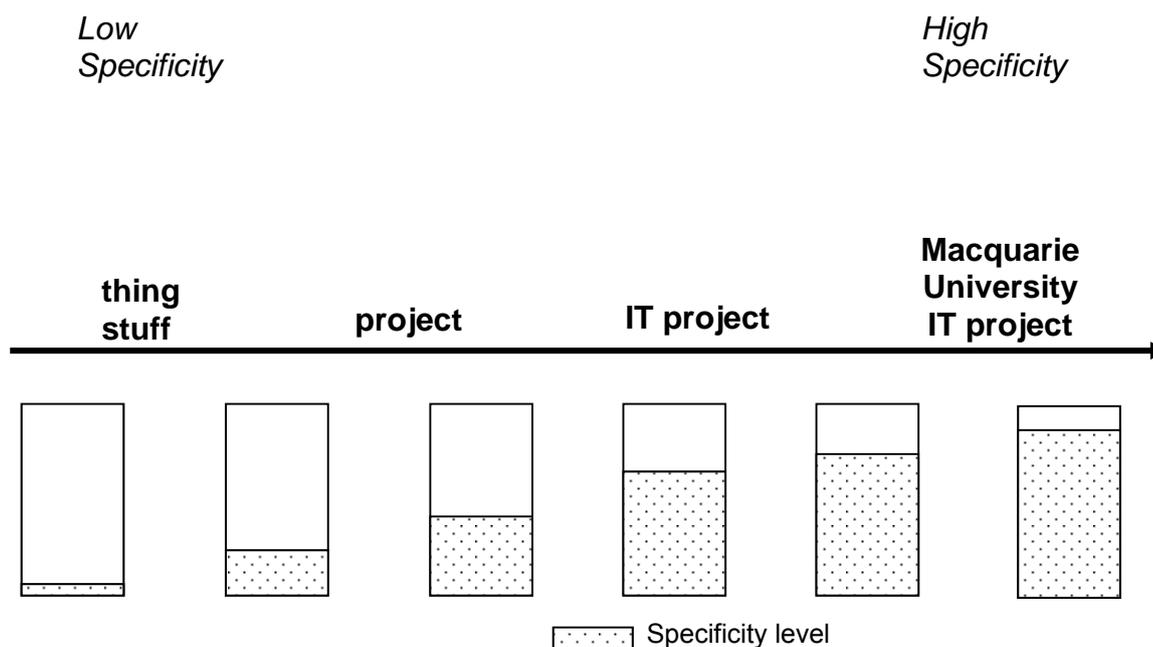
Vagueness^P occurs when a hearer cannot access a referent in a context where this is required. Consequently, vagueness^P is introduced into discourse when the necessary information for explicature construction is not mutually manifest to a speaker and a hearer but only manifest to the speaker. Thus, the hearer cannot assign a referent and explicature construction fails. This generates vagueness^P.

The type of vagueness^P that a speaker can generate by using *thing* is, therefore, referential. In order to avoid vagueness^P speakers need to consider the extent to which their own and the hearers' cognitive environments overlap. That is, they need to consider whether the required information for reference assignment is mutually manifest since only when referents are mutually manifest successful explicature construction is possible. A detailed method of data analysis for the investigation of vagueness^P with respect to *thing* is now presented in this chapter. Since *thing* is the focus of this study, its semantic properties will first be discussed which will be followed by an investigation of its relationship to the context-dependent phenomenon vagueness^P.

5.2 The item *thing*: Semantic properties

Describing or defining *thing* semantically is rather complex. Fronek (1982: 636), for example, claims that *thing* is characterised by poor “semantic content”. It appears that the low semantic specificity of *thing* might be one reason why it has been termed *vague* in previous studies and, hence, its categorisation may be attributed to semantic properties. Lexical items can, indeed, be listed on a continuum of specificity according to their semantic content. As Figure 5.1 illustrates, items such as *thing* have a low semantic specificity as they can refer to an almost infinite number of referents. Other items such as *project* or *IT project* have a higher semantic specificity than *thing* and *stuff* since they can only be used to refer to certain types of things.

Figure 5.1: Semantic specificity of lexemes



The exact position on a scale of semantic specificity of the lexical items in Figure 5.1 cannot be fixed. Lexical items can only be described as showing a higher or lower semantic specificity by being juxtaposed with other items. Only items with an exceptionally high semantic specificity and those with a particularly low specificity seem to be fixed on this (semantic) scale, since they are located at the extreme end points of it. VL items such as *thing* and *stuff* are found at one end

point of the continuum as their semantic specificity is particularly low. Highly technical vocabulary is, however, located at the extreme opposite end of the continuum. Lexemes such as *house* are intermediary items between the two end points on a scale of increasing semantic specificity.

Items of all semantic specificity levels have the potential to generate vagueness^P, since whether or not this effect is generated depends on the particular context where an item is used and the mutual manifestness of referents. It does not depend on the semantic specificity of the item itself. Below I will argue that, once contextualised, the item *thing* either needs to be linked to a referent or a set of referents to avoid vagueness^P.

5.3 *Thing* in context

Because of its particularly low semantic specificity (i.e. its imprecision), *thing* can refer to an almost infinite number of referents including inanimate, animate and human objects as well as, in a more abstract sense, events (Halliday and Hasan, 1976: 276; Fronek, 1982: 638-640). Halliday and Hasan (1976: 274) discuss *thing* as one item in their category *general nouns* and claim that these types of noun resemble substitutes such as *one* and *do*. Substitutes are “the highest points in the lexical taxonomy of nouns and verbs respectively” (Halliday and Hasan, 1976: 280) and are followed by items such as *thing* and *person*. The item *thing* can, therefore, also be described as a universal superordinate in the category of nouns. Fronek further compares *thing* to “personal pronouns, deictic words, limiting adjectives (e.g. *other*, *another*), verbs and nouns of general semantics (e.g. *do*, *make*, *man*, *person*)” (1982: 634) and calls it an example of an “ideal pro-form” (1982: 637). Quirk, Greenbaum, Leech and Svartvik (1985) who also comment on the substitute-like quality of *thing* similarly refer to its close relationship with pronouns. Thus, Halliday and Hasan (1976), Fronek (1982) as well as Quirk et al. (1985) recognise similarities between *thing* and pronouns and attribute a substitute-like function to *thing*.

5.3.1 Saturation: *Thing* and personal pronouns

Like personal pronouns such as *he* and *it*, *thing* can refer to a vast number of referents which need to be restricted in context to make reference assignment, i.e.

explicature construction, possible. Carston (1995: 240; my emphasis) describes personal pronouns as follows:

“What we know when we know the meaning of the lexical item ‘he’, what is stored in the ‘mental lexicon’, is **knowledge of the way** it delimits the field of possible referents in any context”

This description of pronominal reference assignment seems to apply equally to *thing*, suggesting a close similarity to personal pronouns and, in particular, to the pronoun *it*.

Pronominal reference assignment has been referred to by the term *saturation* which “involves finding the intended content (or value) for a linguistically indicated variable or slot” (Carston, 2009: 49). Carston (2009) distinguishes between saturation as an obligatory process, and free enrichment which leads to pragmatic narrowing (enrichment) or broadening (loosening). Recanati (2004: 7) discusses personal pronouns (e.g. *he*), genitives (e.g. *John’s book*) as well as nominal compounds (e.g. *burglar nightmare*) as typical cases of saturation. He defines saturation as follows:

“Saturation is the process whereby the meaning of the sentence is completed and made propositional through the contextual assignment of semantic values to the constituents of the sentence whose interpretation is context-dependent (and, possibly, through the contextual provision of ‘unarticulated’ propositional constituents, if one assumes, as some philosophers do, that such constituents are sometimes needed to make the sentence fully propositional). This process takes place whenever the meaning of the sentence includes something like a ‘slot’ requiring completion of a ‘free variable’ requiring contextual instantiation.”

Recanati (2004: 7), thus, sees saturation as a semantic requirement that needs to be fulfilled to reach a fully propositional form, and this does not require pragmatic inferencing. In contrast, in RT, saturation is discussed as part of explicature construction which is an inferential pragmatic process.

Both Carston (2009) and Recanati (2004) list uses of personal pronouns as typical cases of saturation. This suggests that any reference assignment and, consequently, also the use of *thing*, requires saturation. Recanati (2004: 8), however, discusses certain cases of reference assignment that he claims cannot be categorised as showing saturation:

“**The table** is covered in books.

Everybody went to Paris.”

(Recanati 2004: 8)

Recanati (2004: 8) proposes that these propositions are already complete without further implied forms (e.g. “the table of the living room”; “everybody in such and such group went to Paris”; Recanati, 2004: 8). Consequently, he claims that they are cases of free enrichment and do not show saturation. Recanati, therefore, distinguishes between types of reference assignment that qualify as cases of saturation, such as reference assignment of pronouns, and others which do not.

It seems that reference assignment of *thing* shows close similarities with reference assignment of pronouns. It, thus, appears that reference assignment of *thing* may be categorised as a case of saturation (i.e. requires pragmatic inferencing) which, as with pronouns, is mandatory. Consider the examples on the next page:

1.) I went to the garden and saw **it** again.

Disambiguation step 1: **it = (animate) object** that is mutually manifest to the speaker and the hearer since the hearer has seen it previously or has been told about it by the speaker.

Disambiguation step 2: **particular (animate) object** that sometimes comes into the garden and that both the speaker and the hearer have seen or that the hearer has been told about by the speaker

> **it = possum**

2.) I went to the garden and saw **that thing** again¹⁰.

Disambiguation step 1: **that thing = (animate) object** that is mutually manifest to the speaker and the hearer since the hearer has seen it previously or has been told about it by the speaker.

Disambiguation step 2: **particular (animate) object** that sometimes comes into the garden and that both the speaker and the hearer have seen or that the hearer has been told about by the speaker

> **the thing = possum**

Comparing these two examples we observe that a use of *thing* and *it* seem to require the same types of inferential steps to assign a referent. Relying on contextual information, the hearer has to disambiguate the items *it* and *thing* to access a more specific umbrella term such as *(animate) object* in the example above. Then, he needs to identify the particular referent for *it* and *the thing*, a process that is guided by the Principle of Relevance. Since the same inferential work appears to be required for *thing* and pronominal reference assignment, uses of *thing* can be considered as cases of saturation.

I have argued in this section that, regarding reference assignment, i.e. explicature construction, *thing* is most closely related to personal pronouns and in particular to the pronoun *it*. These two items should, therefore, show similarities with respect to the introduction of vagueness^P. Like personal pronouns, *thing* has to undergo a

¹⁰ The use of *that thing* can indicate speaker attitude. Such interpersonal effects, that can be generated when *thing* is used, are discussed in Chapter Seven.

process of saturation in context to avoid generating vagueness^P and to limit the vast range of items that it can potentially refer to. Saturation is obligatory for *thing* because of its low semantic specificity (i.e. its low precision). Only successful saturation allows for a non vague^P use of *thing*. Below I will now discuss the saturation process of *thing* in more detail.

5.3.2 Unique referent or referent set: Determiners

Depending on its use, the saturation of *thing* either needs to be achieved by a unique referent or a referent set. Whether one referent or a set of referents is required for saturation is influenced by the presence or absence of a determiner and the nature of that determiner. Certain uses of determiners as part of noun phrases (e.g. *the thing*) introduce a requirement to saturate *thing* with a single referent. Other determiners do not pose such a requirement on reference assignment, i.e. explicature construction, as referents from a more easily accessible broad referent set saturate *thing* sufficiently. Referents from referent sets do not need to be identified uniquely, as *thing* can simply be saturated by more specific umbrella terms (e.g. *some things – some workplace tasks*).

The use of certain determiners in a particular context can, therefore, mean that noun phrases (e.g. *the thing*) may have either a definite or an indefinite reading (Abbott, 2006). These two possible readings have been referred to in this section as requiring saturation by a particular referent (definite reading) or by a set of referents (indefinite reading). Since Chapter Six will show that the L2 speakers in this study find using *thing* as part of a definite noun phrase (e.g. *the thing*) particularly challenging, and because these are uses which are most prone to vagueness^P, I will focus the discussion in this section on these types of noun phrases.

Studies on reference assignment put a strong focus on the role of grammatical forms in distinguishing between definite and indefinite noun phrases (see Abbott, 2006: 123-124 for a list of definite and indefinite NPs). Since it is insufficient to rely only on grammatical features to capture the distinction between noun phrases with a definite as opposed to an indefinite reading adequately, further notions such as *uniqueness* (Russell, 1905), *familiarity* (Heim, 1982) and *identifiability* (Birner and Ward, 1998) have been advocated. According to Russell's (1905) famous

uniqueness claim, developed from an analysis of definite noun phrases, the item *the* only allows for one reading:

“the definite article expresses the idea that whatever descriptive content is contained in the NP applies uniquely, that is to at most one entity in the domain of discourse.” (Abbott, 2006: 125)

Russell (1905), therefore, claims that a uniquely identifiable referent is required for reference assignment of such noun phrases.

Russell’s claim has been challenged (e.g. Strawson, 1950; Donnellan, 1966) and has led to the notion of *familiarity* (e.g. Heim, 1982), an idea influenced by Stalnaker’s concept of *common ground* (1971: 199-200 and 1979: 321; quoted from Roberts, 2003: 294). While the uniqueness claim has been associated with semantics, the familiarity claim has been linked to pragmatics (Abbott, 2006). According to the notion of familiarity, a use of *the* + singular noun prescribes prior acquaintance with the item it refers to, but not necessarily to the uniqueness of an entity in its most restricted definition, that is, as being the only item in the universe that it can refer to (Abbott, 2006: 132-34). Birner and Ward (1998) have, however, questioned the notion of familiarity and developed the concept of *identifiability*. The identifiability claim proposes that a hearer is able to identify the required referent which, however, does not necessarily mean that a hearer has prior acquaintance of it. This allows for an explanation of, for example, cataphoric uses of language where the noun phrase is introduced prior to the entity that saturates it (Abbott, 2006: 135).

It appears that definite readings of noun phrases can be explained by what Roberts (2003) terms *informational uniqueness*, which can be described as “uniqueness relative to the discourse situation” (Abbott, 2006: 130). However, the concepts of *uniqueness* (Russell, 1905), *familiarity* (Heim, 1982) and also *identifiability* (Birner and Ward, 1998) are nevertheless important for noun phrases which require a definite reading, except that individually their definitions seem too restrictive:

“Russell was right in arguing that definite NPs are not referential, and that their logical form involves both existence and uniqueness. Strawson and Kadmon were right in arguing that the uniqueness in question is in some way presuppositional. Kripke and Lewis were right in arguing that the interpretation of unbound pronouns is licensed by a salient individual in the context of the utterance, and Christophersen and Heim were right in arguing that the use of a definite presupposes familiarity. It’s just that none of them told the whole story.”
(Roberts, 2003: 345-346)

In the vagueness^P analysis presented in Chapter Six, uniqueness will be regarded as *informational uniqueness* (henceforth simply referred to as *uniqueness* or *unique*) following Roberts (2003). The uniqueness condition can apply to singular definite noun phrases (I refer to Abbott’s, 2006; list of definite NPs) but also to plural uses (e.g. the + *things*): “plural definites are also unique, in the sense that an instantiation must be the maximal set satisfying the description” (Roberts, 2003: 289). If a uniqueness condition applies but cannot be fulfilled in context, vagueness^P is introduced as explicature construction fails.

While a singular use of, for example, *thing* as part of a definite noun phrase can refer to one and only one referent in context, it is not necessarily the case that definite noun phrases introduce such a uniqueness requirement in all contexts. Regarding *thing*, there are, for example, grammaticalised uses such as *you do your thing* or *do the right thing* which, like indefinite noun phrases such as *some things*, only seem to require an indefinite reading, that is, saturation by a referent set whose individual referents do not need to be identified uniquely. Often a more specific umbrella term (e.g. *workplace tasks*) seems to saturate *thing* sufficiently. Grammaticalised uses could be treated as a separate category. Since this study, however, focuses on vagueness^P, which these uses do not seem to be prone to generating, they will not be categorised separately from other uses which are also unlikely to lead to vagueness^P.

As discussed above, apart from uses of *thing* which require saturation by one or several unique referents, *thing* can also be saturated by a set of referents whose

individual items do not need to be identified uniquely. Grammaticalised uses and indefinite noun phrases such as *some things* (I refer to Abbott's, 2006; list of indefinite NPs), for example, require saturation by referent sets. Furthermore, some uses of *thing* (e.g. *chocolate and things like that*) require, on the one hand, saturation by a particular item (*chocolate* in this case) and, on the other hand, saturation by a referent set (e.g. *chocolate-like things*). They, thus, have at the same time a definite (particular referent) and an indefinite (referent set) reading. Examples of these different saturation processes are now discussed in section 5.4.

5.4 Accessibility of referent(s): Manifestness

While different determiners influence whether a unique referent or a referent set is required for saturation, the accessibility (i.e. familiarity) of referents is another crucial factor in determining whether vagueness^P has been introduced into discourse. Only a referent that is accessible to a hearer can be manifest to her/him, and only when saturation information is manifest to a hearer can vagueness^P be avoided. The accessibility of the particular saturation information that needs to be mutually manifest to a speaker and hearer, therefore, determines the level of underdeterminacy that is acceptable in a particular context. The less accessible, that is, the more restricted the information needed for saturation in a particular context, the more careful speakers need to be in their choice of language. Conversely, the more accessible, (i.e. less restricted) the information required for saturating *thing* the less likely it is that vagueness^P is introduced. Consider these examples:

- 3.) The *thing* on 9/11 took the world by surprise.
- 4.) We went to look at those massive *things* in Egypt where the kings are buried.
- 5.) Sue ate the same *thing* she had last time.
- 6.) Steven went to get his favourite *thing* and will be back in a second.

In example (3), *thing* denotes a terrorist attack whereas *things* refers to the pyramids in Egypt in example (4). Both saturation items are easily accessible (at least for readers of this thesis) since the required saturation information is mutually manifest on an almost universal level among a certain group of

people. As a result, inferring the particular referents that saturate *thing* should be unproblematic for these readers. However, the item *thing* is impossible to saturate for readers of this thesis in sentences (5) and (6) because the information required is highly restricted and only manifest to a small group of people. According to Sperber and Wilson (1986/ 1995: 77):

“A more accessible assumption is one that is easier to recall. [...] As a result of some kind of habituation, the more a representation is processed, the more accessible it becomes. Hence, the greater the amount of processing involved in the formation of an assumption, and the more often it is accessed thereafter, the greater its accessibility.”

This quote is reminiscent of Heim’s familiarity claim discussed above, since it describes the link between familiarity and accessibility of information: the more familiar information is, the more accessible it becomes.

Sperber and Wilson (1986: 142) distinguish between different sets of contexts with respect to the notion of accessibility:

“The initial, minimal context is immediately given; contexts which include only the initial context as a sub-part can be accessed in one step and are therefore the most accessible contexts; contexts which include the initial context and a one-step extension as sub-parts can be accessed in two steps and are therefore the next most accessible contexts, and so on.”

In examples (3) to (6) above, the initial minimal context does not provide access to the saturation item that is required for *thing*. However, if we can rely on saturation by information that is almost universally manifest to interactants from the wider context, as in example (3) and (4), then accessibility should be a two step process. Reference assignment in examples (5) and (6), however, needs a further extension of context since the information required to saturate *thing* is not available in a universal sub-set.

This discussion shows that there seems to be a continuum of contexts and, hence, a continuum of underdeterminacy which influences the complexity of saturation processes. Halliday and Hasan (1976: 31-36) distinguish between two types of saturation processes which they term *endophoric* and *exophoric*. Endophoric saturation is achieved by items from the *co-text* (Halliday and Hasan, 1985: 10), that is, the immediate linguistic text as part of which language is uttered. Endophoric saturation processes are, therefore, marginally underdetermined uses of language which should rarely be problematic (i.e. introduce vagueness^P) because the linguistic co-text is easily accessible to a hearer as it is immediately given. Exophoric uses are, however, highly underdetermined since they require saturation items from the *con-text* (Halliday and Hasan, 1985: 5), that is, the environment of the utterance excluding the immediate linguistic co-text. Accessibility of exophoric saturation items is, therefore, more restricted and this makes such uses more prone to vagueness^P.

In the following section, different saturation processes will be discussed with respect to uses of *thing*. In particular, processes where *thing* receives saturation endophorically by items that are part of the immediate linguistic co-text, will be distinguished from more underdetermined uses which require saturation by items from the extralinguistic con-text (i.e. exophoric). These exophoric uses of *thing* are of several types. Some require saturation by a unique referent, whereas others can be saturated successfully by referent sets. Some uses of *thing* are partly exophoric and at the same time partly endophoric and, thus, require saturation by items from the co-text as well as from the wider con-text.

5.4.1 Different uses of *thing* and their saturation processes

Five different uses of *thing* have been identified in the data used to develop this framework of vagueness^P: Endophoric uses, partial exophorics (i.e. partly endophoric – partly exophoric) and three fully exophoric uses of *thing*. As can be seen in Table 5.1, and as has also been discussed above, the main distinction made is between endophoric and exophoric uses. The former require saturation by items from the immediate linguistic co-text, while the latter need to be saturated by items from the extralinguistic con-text. A third main category is endophoric-

exophoric uses which require saturation from both the co-text and the con-text. Table 5.1 furthermore shows whether saturation by a unique referent or a referent set is needed in each use, and provides examples of different uses of *thing* which tend to be associated with these different types of saturation processes.

Table 5.1: Saturation processes of *thing*

<i>Use</i>	<i>Saturation</i>	<i>Example</i>
1. <i>Endophoric use</i>	Unique referent i.e. items or a description of events provided in the co-text	e.g. I love my dog. The <i>thing</i> sleeps by my bed at night.
2. Partial exophoric (endophoric - exophoric use)	Unique referent from the co-text in addition to a set of referents from the con-text	e.g. <i>and things like that</i>
3. <i>Exophoric uses:</i>		
3.1. General exophoric	Referent set from the con-text	e.g. <i>certain/ some things, things</i> with no saturation items provided in the co-text
3.2. Non-unique definite exophoric	Referent set from the con-text	e.g. <i>do the right thing, do your thing</i> without any saturation items provided in the co-text
3.3. Restricted exophoric	Unique referent from the con-text	e.g. <i>the thing that I do, these things</i> without any saturation items provided in the co-text

Examples of these different types of saturation processes will now be discussed in turn, placing a focus on exophoric uses as they have the closest relationship with vagueness^P. Of all exophoric uses discussed, it is in particular restricted exophorics that are under the scrutiny of this study, as they are most likely to generate vagueness^P.

In an endophoric use, the hearer saturates *thing* with a single item or a description of an event which is either part of the anaphoric or the cataphoric linguistic co-text. In answer 15A#3 (response three by the Australian interviewee number 15; see Chapter Four for an explanation of these codes), for example, *thing* can be

saturated by several referents (see bold) which are provided in its immediate cataphoric co-text.

15A#3; L1 speaker

Int: What were your main responsibilities in your last job?

15A: Um, .. I was in corporate transactions at Xname, .. at property accounting? .. our role was to grow the Xname group? .. by acquiring other property trusts and by rising capital so I worked .. directly for Xname who, .. ran our division, .. and .. um .. together we looked at opportunities for acquisitions for the group, .. to () buy other property trusts and expand our asset base, .. so we also undertook some capital risings .. to try and reduce our gearing in the current climate, .. so .. I guess **the two things would be ... corporate transactions planning acquisitions and sales and capital risings were .. um .. our largest requirements in the job.**

In this response, it is the referents *transactions planning acquisitions* and *sales* as well as *capital risings* which saturate *things*.

In response 15A#8c, *thing* also receives saturation by information from its co-text. However, in contrast to answer 15A#3, in 15A#8c the saturation information (*I'd probably do it with the short form document second time round*; bolded in text) has been provided anaphorically by the speaker.

15A#8c; L1 speaker

Int: Is there anything that the group could have done better?

15A: Ah, .. we could've raised more money we could have rested at a higher share price, .. but specifically to me, .. I think we probably could have used a slightly different form of document, .. there were two forms of documents available, .. there was a long form and a short form, .. and we were the first to go out with the long form document, .. but a lot of our contemporaries ended up going with the short form, .. and if we'd chosen the short form document there would have been more risk for the board, .. but at the same time we would have get it out quicker so we might have raised more cash, .. so that was one *thing* we probably, .. well if () raised again a second time, .. **I'd probably do it with the short form document second time round**, .. so this could have been one ***thing*** that could have improved.

Since in both examples saturation items are provided in the immediate linguistic co-text which is easily accessible to all hearers, vagueness^P should not be introduced as saturation is expected to be successful.

Partial exophorics (endophoric – exophoric uses) require saturation both by referents from the linguistic co-text and also from the extralinguistic con-text. A particular referent from the co-text saturates *thing* to some extent and guides the hearer to a referent set in the con-text that provides further saturation items (e.g. chocolate *and things like that* -> referent set ‘chocolate-like *things*’ i.e. different types of sweets). A use of a partial exophoric that occurred in the data of this study is shown below.

Speaker 1A describes the different tasks he was responsible for at a previous workplace, and these endophoric referents saturate *thing* to some extent (see bold in answer). He, however, implies that he was responsible for further tasks by using *things + like that*. These additional tasks are part of a referent set that has not been provided endophorically and must, therefore, be saturated exophorically.

1A#3; L1 speaker

Int: What were the main responsibilities at your last job?

1A: Um, .. well .. I guess **maintaining the computer labs for teaching**, .. and .. um .. that’s pretty much it, .. um .. like the other side of it is, .. if I have some spare time left, .. **I man the helpdesk and, .. um .. you know program some tools to help me out with the labs**, .. general *things like that*, .. it’s it was quite a small team so I had a lot of freedom.

Since several items of the referent set are provided endophorically, and because speaker and hearer have knowledge of the context discussed, it should not be difficult for a hearer to infer further referents from the exophoric referent set should s/he wish to do so.

While in partial exophoric uses of *thing* some easily accessible saturation items are still part of the co-text, fully exophoric uses (Uses number three in Table 5.1) are saturated by the con-text. As Hasan (1996: 199) describes it, such uses are “mediated through the relevant extra-linguistic situation”. In exophoric uses, the linguistic co-text only guides the hearer’s search for relevant referent sets or unique referents which need to be inferred from the con-text as they are not provided endophorically. If this inferential search for reference assignment makes saturation possible, then the high underdeterminacy of an exophoric use of *thing* is not problematic. If, however, the inferential search for a saturation item is

unsuccessful, vagueness^P is introduced as this type of explication construction fails.

In exophoric uses, *thing* can collocate with quantifiers such as *some* or occur without a determiner (e.g. *things*). These uses are termed *general exophorics*. As their description in Table 5.1 illustrates (Use 3.1.), they do not introduce a uniqueness requirement which means that saturation can be achieved by a general referent set known to both interlocutors. In the example below, *thing* co-occurs with the quantifier *a lot of* which does not introduce an expectation of informational uniqueness. A general referent set, thus, saturates *thing* sufficiently.

15A#4; L1 speaker

Int: What were the main challenges at your last position?

15A: Well, .. it started off the main challenge was trying to assess all the opportunities, .. and choose opportunities that were a good fit for (), .. cos at the start of my few years there, .. we .. ah .. had a lot of capital available and a lot of opportunities? .. and it was more a matter of assessing which opportunities were a strategic fit for the group, .. I mean we looked at *a lot of things* outside of our standard asset base, .. which were a bit a bit unusual and a bit challenging

In this context, the required referent set relates to workplace experience. This type of information is expected to be mutually manifest given the role of an interviewer and, thus, reference assignment should be straightforward.

In a second type of exophoric use, termed *non-unique definite exophorics* in Table 5.1, *thing* collocates with a determiner (e.g. *the*, *your* or *one*) which may introduce a uniqueness requirement and require saturation by one unique referent. Some determiners (e.g. *the*, *a*) are, however, ambiguous with respect to whether or not they require saturation by a unique referent or a set of referents (Chen, 2009: 1658)¹¹, and it is only the context in which they occur that determines the required type of saturation. Non-unique definite exophorics occur with determiners which can introduce a uniqueness requirement, but this requirement is cancelled in context and saturation by a unique referent is not required. In such a use, *thing* is saturated sufficiently by a referent set.

¹¹ Chen refers to Fodor and Sag (1982), Partee (1970) and Lyons (1977) when making this claim.

It seems that in non-unique definite exophorics the uniqueness requirement (i.e. the definite reading) is cancelled because the definite noun phrase occurs as part of a conventionalised expression, and this allows for saturation by referent sets. Chen (2009: 1658) similarly discusses examples of conventionalised uses of language when he notes that:

“expressions that are generally taken to be semantically referential, such as demonstratives and personal pronouns, may have nonreferential uses, as in the following examples:

(1) HE who has a thousand friends has not a friend to spare, and HE who has one enemy will meet him everywhere.”

(See also Abbott, 2004).

In this example, *he* does not refer to a uniquely identifiable male human being but to a general referent set, i.e. human beings who have a lot of friends and those who have one enemy. Hence, the uniqueness requirement is cancelled. Similarly when definite noun phrases occur as part of grammaticalised expressions, the requirement for saturation by a unique referent also seems cancelled.

In example 3A#4 the speaker describes challenges that he faced at a previous position and uses *thing* in the phrase *doing the right things*. Since this is a conventionalised expression, either no uniqueness requirement is introduced or it is cancelled.

3A#4; L1 speaker

Int: Ok what were the main challenges for you at that job?

3A: Ahm I guess, ... ah .. early on .. it was .. ah .. looking after quite a few juniors, .. coz .. ah .. the main challenge was really, ... ahm .. looking after not just your work but also other people's works? .. ah .. coz ah .. because you are in charge of delegating, .. ah tasks to, .. ah more junior members you're also .. ah .. responsible for their outputs, .. ah .. so making sure that they were *doing the right things*

Consequently, in this conventionalised use of *thing*, vagueness^P does not occur since interviewers should be able to access the broad referent set 'the things junior members are responsible for' and, thus, *thing* can be saturated.

The third exophoric identified, termed *restricted exophoric* in Table 5.1, shows *thing* collocating with a determiner such as *the* or *this*. These exophoric uses introduce an expectation of uniqueness which means that the hearer has to identify a particular referent which must be mutually manifest between the interactants in order for *thing* to receive saturation. Hasan (1996: 204) referred to this use by the term *restricted exophoric* while Quirk et al. (1985: 266) termed it *situational reference* since they claim that “the reference of the *the* is derived from the extralinguistic situation”. Hasan argues that *restricted exophorics* such as the use of *the man* in the sentence *Did the man come?* are impossible to saturate for hearers who only eavesdrop on a conversation and do not know the man referred to, since the “meaning intended by **the** goes completely behind the here-and-now” (Hasan, 1996: 204; original emphasis).

Restricted exophorics can be more or less restricted. The restricted exophoric *the thing that I do* is, for example, less restricted than the use of the noun phrase *the thing* without the modification *that I do* since the modifier tells the hearer that the speaker may be referring to his workplace tasks. Chen (2009: 1659) also refers to such a continuum when discussing specificity, i.e. familiarity of referents:

“the specificity of an entity is often a function of accompanying modifiers, increasing in degree with the elaboration of the details of its identifying attributes (Fodor and Sag, 1982; Givón, 1982, 2001; *inter alia*).”

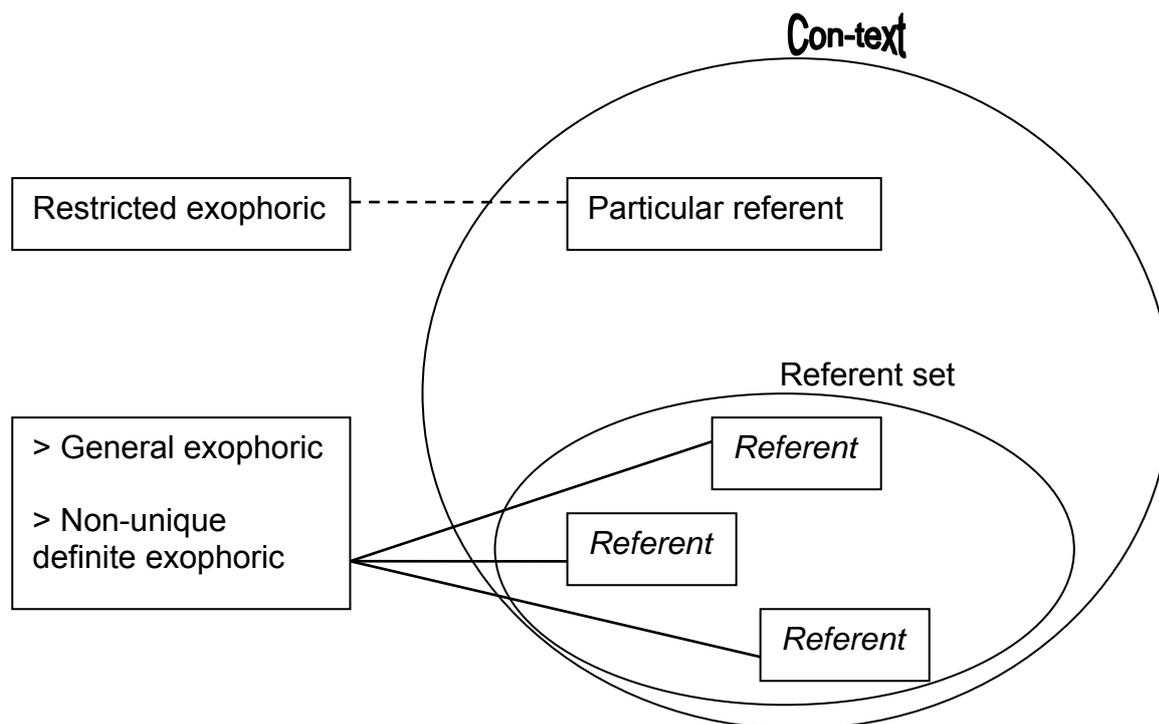
A restricted exophoric that collocates with a modifier provides the hearer with more guidance to access the referent required for saturation (i.e. increases the chance of accessibility) than a restricted exophoric without modification.

Of all exophorics discussed above, restricted exophorics are the most implicit uses (see also Hasan, 1996: 209, for the same claim) as they require that unique referents which are not part of the linguistic co-text be mutually manifest to the interactants involved in a speech event. Since the referents do not occur as part of the linguistic co-text, they need to be mutually manifest through common past experience of interactants:

“Correct retrieval of the intended meanings of **the** in (17) [(17) =‘Did the man come?’; restricted exophoric use] argues for the existence of interaction in the past, and for a consequent rapport between the speaker and the addressee.” (Hasan, 1996: 204)

Of all uses of *thing* discussed in this chapter, restricted exophorics run the greatest risk of introducing vagueness^P since a unique referent is required for saturation and the saturation item is not easily accessible to all hearers.

Figure 5.2 (next page), illustrates the saturation processes of the three fully exophoric uses of *thing* identified. As shown in this model, general and non-unique definite exophorics require saturation by referent sets which are not usually problematic since *thing* can simply be saturated by a more specific umbrella term (e.g. *things* > *workplace tasks*). It can, however, also be saturated by some referents of the referent set, but these referents do not need to be identified uniquely (e.g. two of the three referents shown in the model above). Restricted exophorics, on the other hand, need to be saturated by a particular referent as the uniqueness requirement applies. Particular referents may not be as easily accessible as referent sets (see dotted line in model), but their identification is crucial for saturation to be successful. If such unique referents cannot be identified then vagueness^P is generated.

Figure 5.2: Saturation processes of *thing*

We can compare the different types of exophorics identified in this chapter to a boat that is tied to a quay. If the boat is tied to the quay with more than one rope (general exophoric and non-unique definite exophoric) and one or two of the ropes do not hold, the boat is still safe at the quay. The link of the boat to the quay is looser, but the boat is not lost. If the boat is, however, only tied with one single rope to the quay (restricted exophoric) and that particular rope breaks, the boat is not safe anymore. The boat is lost, as is the referent. Vagueness^P is only introduced when the boat is lost as all ropes break (i.e. no referent can be assigned) and, thus, this type of explicature construction fails.

Reference assignment is more likely to fail in exophoric uses of language when a unique referent is required for saturation since accessing saturation items is not possible for all hearers. It is also more likely when the saturation item is highly restricted. On rare occasions, a hearer might also fail to remember what has been said previously in the linguistic co-text which can, thus, make reference assignment in endophoric uses impossible. Furthermore, speakers might struggle to saturate rather unusual general extenders such as “whales, candlelight and stuff like that” (Overstreet, 1999) and vagueness^P is generated. Nevertheless, it appears that restricted exophorics are most prone to introduce the phenomenon of vagueness^P into discourse.

5.5 Conclusion

This chapter has defined vagueness^P as one type of unsuccessful explicature construction, i.e. failed reference assignment, and discussed those variables which are crucial for its analysis. Mutual manifestness and uniqueness have been described as two aspects which are particularly important. The location of saturation items (endophoric versus exophoric), however, also determines the risk of introducing vagueness^P. Different types of saturation processes have been identified in uses of *thing*. Restricted exophorics have been categorised as most likely to generate vagueness^P, as they require saturation by a uniquely identifiable referent which is not easily accessible from the linguistic co-text. Saturation by broader referent sets should, however, be less problematic. Saturation processes other than in restricted exophorics can also lead to vagueness^P, although they do so less frequently (e.g. unusual partial exophorics which require referents sets that are difficult to access).

The L1 and L2 speaker uses of *thing* will now be analysed in Chapter Six in order to investigate whether vagueness^P is generated, as these two speaker groups use *thing* in employment interviews. This analysis will, thus, provide general insights into the relationship of *thing* with vagueness^P and also allow for a comparison of L1 and L2 speaker use of *thing* with respect to this phenomenon.

Chapter Six: Results vagueness^P analysis of *thing* in L1 and L2

6.1 Introduction

In this chapter, the results of a vagueness^P (pragmatic referential vagueness) analysis of *thing* in L1 and L2 job interviews will be discussed. While this chapter investigates the effect of vagueness^P in L1 and L2 speaker discourse, Chapters Seven and Eight focus on discourse management and interpersonal effects that a use of *thing* can also generate. In Chapter Five, vagueness^P was defined as a failure in reference assignment, introduced into discourse when a hearer is unable to saturate an item (e.g. *thing*) since the saturation information (i.e. referents or referent sets) is only manifest to the speaker, but not the hearer. Therefore, vagueness^P occurs when saturation information is not mutually manifest and obligatory explicature construction (i.e. reference assignment) fails.

In theory, all uses of *thing* can introduce vagueness^P into the discourse since there is no guarantee that saturation items will be mutually manifest to the interactants. Nevertheless, as also discussed in Chapter Five, certain uses are more prone to vagueness^P than others. The more underdetermined a use of *thing* and the more restricted its referent, the greater the risk of vagueness^P since underdeterminacy and restrictiveness of referents influence the accessibility of referents and, thus, ease of reference assignment. Restricted exophorics (e.g. exophoric use of *the thing* where there is a uniqueness requirement) seem to be the riskiest choice, particularly if they require saturation information that is not universally manifest, but manifest only to a small group of people. Other fully exophoric uses such as general exophorics and non-unique definite exophorics are less likely to introduce vagueness^P. This is because they depend on more readily available referent sets where individual items do not need to be identified uniquely which makes saturation easier. Endophoric uses should also be unproblematic, as the saturation items can be found in the immediate linguistic co-text making it most accessible for hearers (except if a hearer forgets what was said previously or did not pay attention).

In this chapter, the results of analyses on both endophoric and exophoric uses of *thing* will be discussed in the L1 and L2 corpus, and whether or not these uses introduce vagueness^P will be determined. For this investigation, all instances of *thing* were coded according to the saturation process (i.e. endophoric, partial exophoric, exophoric) that they require in context (see Appendix E for the coding system used for the analysis). The results were checked by a second rater, showing an inter-rater reliability for the L1 vagueness analysis of *thing* of 89 %, and a reliability of 80 % for the L2 analysis. This difference can be explained by the inherent underdeterminacy of language, making definitions of clear-cut categories regarding underdeterminacy difficult, and the general challenges of analysing L2 discourse. Below the results from quantitative and qualitative analyses of all four uses of *thing* are now discussed.

6.2 Results

Table 6.1 (next page) shows the results of the saturation analysis of *thing* in the L1 and L2 speaker job interviews collected. As can be seen from this table, 22 % of all uses of *thing* could be saturated endophorically in the L1 corpus compared to 38 % of endophoric uses in the L2 speech. Therefore, the L2 speakers provided the referent for *thing* more often endophorically than the L1 speakers. With respect to partial exophorics (endophoric - endophoric uses), the results are reversed since the L1 uses of *thing* required this saturation process more often than the uses of *thing* in the L2 corpus (L1: 20 %; L2: 13 %). Fully exophoric uses, where no saturation items are provided in the linguistic co-text, also occur more often in the L1 corpus (L1: 58 %; L2: 49 %) (the results of the statistical tests will be discussed in the respective sections).

Table 6.1: Saturation of *thing* in L1 and L2

<i>Saturation process</i>	<i>L1 speaker group</i>	<i>L2 speaker group</i>
<i>Endophoric</i>	51 = 22 % of all uses of <i>thing</i>	33 = 38 % of all uses of <i>thing</i>
<i>Partial Exophoric</i> (endophoric - exophoric use)	45 = 20 %	11 = 13 %
<i>Exophoric: successful?</i>	140 = 58 %	43 = 49 %
<i>Total thing</i>	236 = 100 %	87 = 100 %

As discussed in Chapter Five, explicature construction of endophoric and partial exophoric uses does not seem problematic since the information required for saturation of *thing* is easily accessible from the immediate linguistic co-text. Uses of *thing* for which no saturation items are provided exophorically, however, have a higher risk of introducing vagueness^P. Since in this chapter the focus is on vagueness^P, exophoric uses will mainly be discussed. Nevertheless, in the next section, some examples of endophoric and partly exophoric uses of *thing* are also shown to exemplify the successful use of these two saturation processes in the two speaker groups.

6.3 Endophoric uses

As can be seen from Table 6.1, the L1 speakers of this data set use *thing* less often endophorically than the L2 speakers (L1: 22 %; L2: 38 %). However, with respect to the statistical significance of the results on endophoric uses of *thing*, it can be concluded from Mann-Whitney U test that the difference on median endophoric uses of *thing* (per 1000 words) between L1 and L2 speakers is not significantly different (U statistic = 167, p-value = 0.146). One example of an endophoric use of *thing* from each speaker group will nevertheless be discussed briefly.

L2 speaker 21 uses *thing* endophorically in her response to a question on disagreements at work. *Thing* is used as part of the phrase *the first thing I do* as she starts by outlining the different steps she normally takes when such an issue occurs. The referent that saturates *thing* is a description of the action interviewee 21 takes first (see bolded).

21#9; L2 speaker

- Int: Have you ever had a disagreement with one of your co-workers/superior? What did you do to solve the issue?
- 21: First I try to fix it with she or he, .. I .. I .. the first ***thing*** I do, .. it's **it will be to speak to that person, .. to try to talk to that person** and well, .. and I will tell he or she what I don't .. ah .. agree with, .. and if the *things* doesn't seem to be: .. working better, .. I will speak with my boss.

The referent of *thing* has, therefore, been provided endophorically and, in particular, cataphorically, as the description of the action that saturates *thing* follows its use.

While *thing* is used by L2 speaker 21 to introduce a topic, some speakers also use it endophorically to refer back to and/ or to conclude a longer stretch of talk. Such a use is shown in the L1 response 15A#8c below. The item *thing* occurs twice endophorically (*that was one thing; this could have been one thing*) and refers to two descriptions which are part of the co-text (bolded in excerpt).

15A#8c; L1 speaker

- Int: Is there anything that the group could have done better?
- 15A: Ah, .. we could've raised more money we could have rested at a higher share price, .. but specifically to me, .. I think we probably **could have used a slightly different form of document, .. there were two forms of documents available, .. there was a long form and a short form, .. and we were the first to go out with the long form document, .. but a lot of our contemporaries ended up going with the short form, .. and if we'd chosen the short form document there would have been more risk for the board, .. but at the same time we would have get it out quicker so we might have raised more cash, .. so that was one *thing* we probably, .. well if () raised again a second time, .. I'd probably do it with the short form document second time round, .. so *this could have been one thing* that could have improved.**

In the first of these uses (*that was one thing*) *thing* refers to the choice of one type of document over another in order to improve the performance in a team task that this interviewee was asked to describe previously. In the second use (*this could have been one thing*), interviewee 15A uses *thing* to refer to the choice of a shorter document than the one the group used in the particular task he describes. In both uses, *thing* can be saturated endophorically as the saturation items are provided anaphorically and, thus, vagueness^P should not be generated.

These examples illustrate how the L1 and L2 speakers of this data set saturated *thing* with referents that occur in its linguistic co-text. In the data, some endophorics were saturated cataphorically while others received anaphoric saturation by either particular lexemes or descriptions of events. Since saturation seemed easily accessible in endophoric uses it appeared that these uses did not generate vagueness^P in either corpus. Below I will provide examples of how the L1 and L2 speakers seemed to use *thing* successfully when the saturation required was partly exophoric.

6.4 Partial exophorics: Endophoric – exophoric uses

General extenders such as *and things like that* are typical uses of *thing* that receive saturation in part endophorically and in part exophorically. Such partial exophorics are more frequent in the L1 data although the difference in frequency between the L1 and L2 speaker use is not high (L1: 20 %; L2: 13 %). Regarding partial exophoric uses, it can, however, be concluded from the Mann-Whitney U test, that there is a significant difference between L1 and L2 speakers on average in terms of partial exophoric use of *thing* per 1000 words (U= 142.5, p-value = 0.025). From the test, it can also be concluded that the L1 speakers use *thing* as a partial exophoric significantly more often than the L2 speakers.

In partial exophoric uses, some referents of *thing* are provided in the linguistic co-text by the speakers and were, thus, available endophorically to the hearer. Some are, however, exophoric and have to be inferred from the con-text. L2 speaker 27, for example, uses *thing* as part of a general extender (*and things like that*) in response 27#8b. The endophoric referents of *thing* are bolded. The use of the general extender, however, suggests that there are further exophoric referents that saturate *thing*.

27#8b; L2 speaker

Int: Can you tell me about a time when you worked in a team? What was the group task? How many people were involved? What was your role?

27: Ah ... well the people were more or less more than five people, .. so we have to ... all of we have to ... take care of our accounts or our positions, .. so we have to interact to each other, .. because .. ah .. we need a help of the other people to finish each task, .. in order to start my .. **for example (start my) analysis, .. or start my, .. ah .. follow the next steps to close the month, .. ah .. and *things* like that.**

L2 speaker 27 describes a team task at a previous position and lists different requirements that had to be fulfilled to complete the particular task at hand. He discusses the importance of good communication skills he needed in order to finish an external analysis or a monthly analysis at his accounting position. The use of the phrase *and things like that*, however, indicates that there were more tasks that belong to the referent set of which the items *external analysis* and *monthly close* are examples. As these two referents saturate *thing* to some extent, vagueness^P is not generated. Since the speaker and hearer in this speech event know the work environment under discussion, it should be relatively straightforward for the interviewer to infer additional items from this referent set should she wish to do so.

L1 speaker 2A does not use *thing* as part of a general extender but chooses the plural form *things* in conjunction with the item *like* instead which, however, functions similarly to general extenders. She discusses useful aspects (i.e. *things*) of working as part of a team and provides some endophoric referents (*ideas, feedback*) that partially saturate the item *thing*. By collocating *thing* with *like* she indicates, however, that there are further referents that saturate *thing*. These can be inferred as they are part of the referent set to which the two referents *ideas* and *feedback*, that are provided endophorically in the co-text, also belong (bolded in the text).

2A#8a; L1 speaker

Int: Do you like working in a team?

2A: Yes yes, .. ahm .. and it depends on the team members @@ ahm .. I like I like being in a team where I have more control over my areas? .. but still being able to ahm get feedback, .. of other team members? .. and of my manager?.. my immediate manager?.. and being able to bounce ideas back and forth and, .. ahm being able to approach .. um .. my team members, .. ahm .. any time I needed help, .. or .. or being able to rely rely on them for that purpose, .. but I still like to be able to have my own responsibilities, .. and my own tasks, .. and be able to do them myself? .. ahm without so much needing the, .. ahm needing others to .. to come and .. do it for me first? .. before I .. before I could attempt it? .. so I like .. I like that I like that control and that confidence, .. that I have in doing my own work, .. but at the same time I still like to be able to ah rely on my other team members for other **things** like .. like **ideas** and **feedback**.

No vagueness^P seems to have been generated by this use of *thing* since the hearer can achieve partial saturation by the endophoric referents *ideas* and *feedback*. Also, further referents should be easily accessible to the hearer as she is the interviewer and, thus, certainly has experience working in a team environment.

It seems that the saturation processes coded as endophoric and partial exophoric uses of *thing* were not problematic in the data since saturation appeared possible for the hearer in these uses. Neither endophoric nor partial exophoric uses of *thing*, thus, seemed to generate vagueness^P in the L1 and L2 corpus. In section 6.5, the three fully exophoric uses of *thing* (general exophoric, non-unique definite exophoric and restricted exophoric) will be discussed using data from both speaker groups.

6.5 Exophoric uses

Exophoric saturation items have to be inferred from the con-text as hearers cannot saturate *thing* with items or descriptions from the linguistic co-text. This type of saturation is, therefore, only successful if the required referent is mutually manifest to the speaker and the hearer. As shown in Table 6.1, a similar percentage of exophoric uses was found in the initial analysis of the L1 and L2 speaker data (L1: 58 %; L2: 49 %). The qualitative analysis of these uses in the two speaker groups,

however, suggests that some of them introduce vagueness^P into the discourse, as it seems impossible for the interviewer to saturate *thing* in the contexts where it occurs. These uses are, therefore, unsuccessful exophorics and have to be categorised separately from uses of *thing* that introduce vagueness^P, as I will discuss in more detail below.

First, some examples of exophoric uses of *thing* from the L1 and L2 data will be provided that seem to achieve successful saturation. In sections 6.7 and 6.8, examples of exophoric uses that, however, are at great risk of introducing vagueness^P will be discussed. This analysis allows to determine whether or not the hearer was able to saturate *thing* in the particular contexts where these uses of *thing* occurred.

6.6 Unproblematic exophorics in L1 and L2

As discussed above, when *thing* is used as a general exophoric, a referent set is sufficient for its saturation. This referent set should be easily accessible to the hearer, and its use is, thus, not expected to generate vagueness^P.

L1 speaker 9A discusses facing challenges at a previous position and provides a generic account of such challenges. Although no endophoric saturation item occurs in the co-text of *thing*, the job interview setting makes it clear that *thing* refers to the referent set 'workplace tasks' which an interviewer, given his/ her role, should be familiar with. Since the referent set seems easily accessible and does not require unique identification of its members, vagueness^P should not be introduced.

9A#4; L1 speaker

Int: Ok what are the main challenges for you at this job?
 9A: Ahm .. probably trying to make sure that everything is done in sort of in time, .. you are juggling a lot of balls in the air, .. so you have to sort of be on top of everything that's due? .. there is so many different areas that we work on that sometimes it's hard to sort of keep track? .. ahm .. I suppose also motivating the team members? .. ahm .. and trying to encourage them to do the work, .. you know to the required deadlines and **things** can be difficult, .. so that's probably the most challenging aspect of it actually, .. working with different personalities.

In the second example, L2 participant 16 uses *thing* (*things*) as a general exophoric while describing his attitude to team work. Like the L1 speaker 9B (see response above), he provides a generic discussion of reasons for his positive attitude towards team work.

16#8a; L2 speaker

Int: Do you like working in a team?

16: Yeah of course, .. without team we cannot survive and if we want to get something done, .. we should be in team and, .. get **things** done.

Uses of *thing* as general exophorics, do not introduce a uniqueness requirement since *thing* occurs without determiners such as *the* that can require saturation by a unique referent. Saturation by a broad referent set which should be accessible to the hearer is sufficient and vagueness^P is avoided.

Like the examples provided here, the general exophorics and non-unique definite exophorics did not appear problematic in the L1 and L2 corpus. It is, thus, unlikely that vagueness^P was generated due to those uses of *thing*.

6.7 Potentially problematic exophoric uses in L1

As will be discussed below, while some L1 uses of *thing* that have a great potential to introduce vagueness^P could be identified, they did not appear problematic. In other words, their potential to generate vagueness^P did not seem to have been realised in the contexts where they occurred. Examples of such uses will now be provided and the reasons why vagueness^P was not generated in these uses will be discussed.

6.7.1 Certain/ specific *things*

Uses of *thing* that either collocate with the item *certain* or *specific* may be problematic because these determiners should introduce a uniqueness requirement. Their use may, thus, call for a potentially difficult saturation process of *thing* by a unique referent which might not be manifest to the hearer. The analysis, however, showed that when *certain* and *specific* collocate with the plural form of *thing*, they do not seem to require saturation by unique referents, but are saturated by referent sets similarly to saturation of *some things*. The uses of *certain/ specific + things* identified in the data are, therefore, not restricted

exophorics as they do not introduce a uniqueness requirement. They are general exophorics and, as a result, unproblematic. As the discussion of an example in section 6.8.3 will show, when *certain/ specific* are used with the singular form of *thing* there is, however, a higher risk of vagueness^P, in particular if *thing* refers to a specific past event.

L1 speaker 2A uses the items *certain things* while describing a recurring situation at a previous position that required good communication skills. She, therefore, does not describe a particular incident but provides a generic description of the situation that she has been asked to elaborate on.

2A#6b; L1 speaker

- Int: Ok, can you tell me about a situation when you had to demonstrate good communication skills
- 2A: Um ... ah .. probably in that, .. in that instance .. um .. again when we put together numbers for .. um .. ah statutory reporting so half year and yearly reporting, .. um .. so you'd you'd have to follow accounting standards, .. um .. you have to name accounts and *certain things* .. um ..the business unit doesn't understand, .. they they think oh why is it like this, .. or what's this .. what's fair value, .. and .. um .. or why is this or where is this number I thought I could see it here and why is it over here,

In this response, saturation by a referent set that can be summarised as 'work tasks' seems sufficient. The item *certain* does not introduce a uniqueness requirement in this context and, hence, no vagueness^P appears to be generated.

L1 speaker 5A also uses the form *certain things* as he describes a particular situation at a previous role he held which involved people in different offices working together and communicating over the phone. This use of *certain things* occurs as he describes a particular incident and not as part of a generic answer. Nevertheless, there does not seem to be a risk of vagueness^P since *thing* is used in a conventionalised phrase (*certain things done a certain way*). It appears that its use as part of such a phrase cancels the uniqueness requirement that a use of *certain things* may introduce in some contexts.

5A#6b; L1 speaker

Int: Ok great could you tell me about a situation where you had to demonstrate good communication skills?

5A: Um ... dealing with .. in the last role we had three offices, .. our head office was in Sydney the head office we had Brisbane and Melbourne .. um .. explaining *things* over the phone to .. to ah .. non-accounting staff how *things* are done, .. that was pretty hard, .. it'd be nice to actually .. to actually .. ah .. be with them, .. sit next to them, .. but ah .. to actually explain *things* over the phone, .. and actually having never met these people, .. it was also very, .. it was a little bit difficult for them to ... ah .. open up to me as well, .. to be accepting of ... of ah .. you know that we wanted *certain things* done a certain way.....

In the data, further uses of *thing* as definite noun phrase, which could potentially introduce a uniqueness requirement, were found. However, as in this example, they do not seem to be at risk of generating vagueness^P, because they occur in conventionalised phrases which seems to cancel the uniqueness requirement.

6.7.2 Non-unique definite exophorics

Similarly to the uses of *thing* discussed in section 6.7.1 above, in response 4A#8c and 14A#15, *thing* occurs in a definite noun phrase in two conventionalised phrases. Such uses have been termed non-unique definite exophorics in Chapter Five, as they do not introduce a uniqueness requirement even though *thing* is used in definite noun phrases. As L1 speaker 4A recounts a particular incident of project work in his team, he uses *thing* in an idiomatic clause (*a little bit doing their own thing*). Speaker 14A does not describe one particular incident but provides a generic answer to a question on a potential starting date for the position advertised and uses the phrase to *tie up my things* in his response. In this context, the hearer (i.e. the interviewer) is not required to identify unique referents for *my things* as a referent set is sufficient. These referents can be summarised as 'workplace tasks' and seem to be accessible to the hearer (i.e. the interviewer). Saturation of *thing* is, thus, expected to be successful.

4A#8c; L1 speaker

- Int: Ok is there anything that the group in that project could have done better
- 4A: Oh ... (3.0) so that was, .. that was actually one of the best places I have ever worked, .. ah and the people were very intelligent and very hard working, .. ah ... it's possible that the communication between the group could have been a little bit stronger, .. but but I think the management style of our . of our manager sort of worked quite well ... with *everyone a little bit doing their own thing?*

14A#15; L1 speaker

- Int: When could you start working for us?
- 14A: Um ... well *I'd have to tie up my things* here but as soon .. as soon as you'd need me.

Most uses of *thing* as part of conventionalised phrases are found in generic answers. The reply in 4A#8c, however, describes a particular incident which could generate a requirement for saturation by a unique referent. Nevertheless, the use of *thing* still does not seem to introduce a uniqueness requirement, possibly because it occurs in, what seems to be, a conventionalised phrase. It, thus, appears that, irrespective of whether a particular event or a generic description is provided, *thing* as a definite noun phrase in a conventionalised phrase does not introduce a uniqueness requirement and should rarely generate vagueness^P.

Quirk et al. (1985: 266) also refer to uses of *thing* in definite noun phrases:

“In some cases the assumption of shared knowledge is palpable fiction. Notices such as *Mind the step* and *Beware of the dog*, for example, generally do not assume that the reader was previously aware of the hazards in question.”

In Quirk's examples, there is no previously known unique dog or unique step that the reader/ hearer is expected to identify due to shared background knowledge. Similarly, in the responses discussed above, there is no unique item that *thing* refers to and needs to be saturated by. The L1 speakers who used *thing* in this way did, thus, not seem to generate vagueness^P.

6.7.3 Restricted exophorics

Of all uses, restricted exophorics are most likely to generate vagueness^P as they introduce a uniqueness requirement when there is no referent in the easily accessible linguistic co-text that can saturate *thing*. Restricted exophorics show varying degrees of restriction. They can, for example, be restricted by the type of modification they receive from the co-text. Those that co-occur with a modifier (e.g. *the thing that I do*) may be more accessible than those that are not modified (e.g. *the thing*). They can also be restricted due to the level of universality of the referents required for saturation. Some restricted exophorics require, for example, almost universal information to saturate *thing*. Others need to be saturated by information that is only available to a small group of people and which is, thus, not accessible to all hearers. The restricted exophorics that are at the highest risk of introducing vagueness^P are those that occur without modifiers and which require saturation by information that is only available to a very limited number of people.

In response 1A#6a the two restricted exophorics that interviewee 1A uses are modified to a different degree. He modifies the first restricted exophoric (*the fantasy thing*) by a noun. This use of *thing* occurs as a side comment (*we are trying to keep the fantasy thing here*) which refers to the present context, i.e. the simulated nature of the role play (see the use of *here*), and not to the discussion of the generic past event that interviewee 1A otherwise recounts. The interviewer can saturate *thing* as both interactants are aware of the job interview set up, and the restricted information required is, thus, mutually manifest. However, *the fantasy thing* introduces vagueness^P for a hearer who does not know that the interview is a simulation. This use, thus, shows *thing* as part of a restricted exophoric that could introduce vagueness^P but is unproblematic for the hearer (i.e. the interviewer) in this particular context.

1A#6a; L1 speaker

Int: Have you had much experience dealing with customers then?
 1A: Oh I suppose yeah, .. I would say that's probably half my job at the moment, .. I mean .. I mean ... oops @@ ... the last job, .. we are trying to keep **the fantasy thing** here, .. but yeah, .. so people were coming in with problems with their computer, .. or like .. um .. we are talking about academics and other staff or students having problems with the *things* downstairs in the labs,

The clause *downstairs in the labs* modifies the second exophoric and allows for saturation of *thing* since the referents (e.g. computers) should be easily available due to the nature of the relationship between the interlocutors. The use of *thing* by L1 speaker 1A in this response does, therefore, not seem to generate vagueness^P.

6.7.4 Conclusion: L1 uses of *thing* and vagueness^P

As the analysis of L1 uses of *thing* has shown, the L1 speaker group mainly used this item exophorically although endophoric uses were also found. The rather frequent exophorics do, however, not seem problematic as no case of vagueness^P could be identified. The few restricted exophorics that the L1 speakers of Australian English use, and which introduce a uniqueness requirement, also do not appear to lead to vagueness^P as the required saturation items are expected to be mutually manifest to the interactants. The next section will now focus on the L2 corpus and discuss potentially problematic exophoric uses of *thing* in this speaker group.

6.8 Potentially problematic exophorics in L2

The analysis of L2 uses of *thing* which are at a high risk of introducing vagueness^P, i.e. restricted exophorics, suggests that some speakers indeed do not make saturation possible for the hearer and this can generate vagueness^P. These uses are, however, not common and may be due to L2 speaker errors in article use for which hearers may well make allowances. Therefore, vagueness^P may not actually have been introduced into the discourse (see Chapter Nine for further discussion). Due to the non native-like nature of the discourse, it is also unclear whether these uses constitute failed endophorics, that is, uses of *thing* where a speaker has failed to provide a referent for this noun in the co-text, or failed exophorics, where the speaker has misjudged the mutual manifestness of saturation information.

6.8.1 Non-unique definite exophorics

As in the L1 data, non-unique definite exophorics seem to be unproblematic in the L2 corpus, because they are used as part of conventionalised phrases, and this either cancels or does not introduce a uniqueness requirement in the first place.

L2 speaker 31, for example, uses *thing* as part of the conventionalised phrase: *put the most important thing first*.

31#7b; L2 speaker

- Int: Could you describe a situation where you were under a lot of pressure and how you dealt with it
- 31: Um .. actually I just arrange it, .. and to see what is the priority, .. and .. um .. I *put the most important thing* in my list in the **first** one, .. and then what is the second priority, .. and then I just done them one by one, .. and ah .. try to use my other partly (small) time, .. and I (combine) the small time to a big period of time, .. so I could do it.

He describes his coping strategies when he is faced with difficult situations in this response. No uniqueness requirement seems to have been introduced, and saturation by easily accessible referent sets appears sufficient. Speaker 31 does, therefore, not seem to generate vagueness^P by his use of *thing* in this answer.

6.8.2 Restricted exophorics

In contrast to non-unique definite exophorics, restricted exophorics introduce a requirement of uniqueness which makes them a risky choice with respect to vagueness^P. L2 speaker 21, for example, uses *thing* twice as a restricted exophoric, each time with a modifier that guides the hearer to a referent set which should allow for saturation. As in the L1 data, such uses do not seem to introduce vagueness^P in the L2 corpus, because the required referent sets are expected to be available to the particular hearer (the interviewer) in this speech event.

21#12; L2 speaker

- Int: What do you think your weaknesses and strengths are?
- 21: Um .. my strengths are that I am a very quick .. um .. learning person, .. I am a responsible person, .. um .. and I am very committed with my work, ... a::nd .. mmh my weakness maybe ... (1.0) that .. sometimes I made mistakes in ... in easy *things*, @@ **the difficult things** I do it very well but **the things** .. ah .. *that are easy*, .. maybe I .. I .. miss something @@

The interviewer should be able to infer what is referred to as *difficult* and *easy* aspects of the particular workplace because of the interviewer's role in this speech event. The pre- (*difficult*) and postmodifier (*that are easy*) help the hearer access

the referent set of exophoric referents, and, thus, saturation of this restricted exophoric should be unproblematic.

6.8.3 Problematic uses in L2

While there do not seem to be problematic uses of *thing* in the L1 data, in the L2 corpus 13 % of all uses of *thing* seem at a high risk of generating vagueness^P. In these uses *thing* occurs as a restricted exophoric as part of a definite noun phrase (e.g. *the thing*), does not receive endophoric saturation and introduces a uniqueness requirement. Because the necessary information cannot be manifest to the hearers in those uses, saturation of *thing* seems impossible. As noted above, these uses may be the result of L2 errors. It is possible that hearers recognise them as such which may cancel the uniqueness requirement. That is, hearers may understand that the uniqueness requirement has been introduced accidentally and is recognised as not relevant. Also, given that the employment interview is a simulation, a hearer may be more tolerant with respect to the introduction of vagueness^P. Similarly, since the employment interview is a high stake event, the speaker's use of language may have been impacted and vagueness^P might have been generated as a result of the multiple challenges inherent in this speech event (see Chapter Nine for a detailed discussion of reasons for the differences observed). Below, some examples of problematic uses in the L2 corpus are now discussed.

L2 speaker 17, for example, uses a restricted exophoric (*a specific thing*) to refer to an aspect or a task that he learnt at a previous position. However, it is impossible for the hearer to know what the *specific thing* is that the speaker had learnt previously since this information has neither been provided endophorically to the interviewer nor can she be privy to it otherwise (by reading the resume of the interviewee for example). Accessing the saturation item of *thing* exophorically seems, therefore, impossible, and the hearer cannot saturate it successfully.

17#5f; L2 speaker

Int: What do you think you have done particularly well in your job?

17: What really well in my last job, .. mmh .. I think I had learn ***a specific thing*** in my cur-my last job, .. and I would like to learn more opportunities, .. and .. um .. more responsible to build up my career.

As defined in Chapter Five, uses of *thing* that cannot receive saturation because the required information is not manifest to the hearer, generate vagueness^P except if hearers make allowances for non-native speakers.

L2 speaker 21 also uses *thing* as part of a definite noun phrase which seems to introduce a uniqueness requirement. However, since the speaker and hearer had only just met, it could not have been manifest to the hearer what the particular *things* were that the speaker refers to, given that the hearer was not present at the past event described. Therefore, this use can generate vagueness^P

21#9f; L2 speaker

- Int: Have you ever had a disagreement with one of your co-workers/superior?
What did you do in such a situation?
- 21: First I try to fix it with she or he, .. I .. I the first *thing* I do it's, .. it will be to speak to that person, .. to try to:: talk to that person,.. and well and I will try to tell he or she what I don't .. ah .. agree with and if **the things** don't seem to be working better, .. I will speak with my boss.

The L2 speaker may have overused the determiner *the* in error in this response and may not have had a particular referent in mind that he wanted the interviewer to infer. Since the hearer was aware that this interviewee was an L2 speaker, she may have assumed that the uniqueness requirement had been introduced accidentally. She may, thus, simply cancel it and treat this use as a general exophoric (i.e. *things* instead of *the things*). Therefore, even though this use of *thing* generates vagueness^P according to the definition provided in Chapter Six, its use in this response may not generate it if vagueness^P is identified as an L2 error and disregarded.

Several uses of *thing* as a restricted exophoric (i.e. *the+thing*) generate vagueness^P in the L2 data unless the hearer makes allowances for such uses by categorising them as L2 mistakes and canceling the uniqueness requirement. Interviewee 26, for example, discusses his opinion of team work and uses *thing* as part of a definite noun phrase (*the things*) which can introduce a uniqueness requirement. In this answer, it is not possible for the hearer to know what the particular *things* are that interviewee 26 enjoys about team work. This use of *thing* can, therefore, generate vagueness^P.

26#8a; L2 speaker

Int: Do you like team work?

26: Yes of course, .. um .. working ..um .. in a team is an excellent *thing*, .. and ... you can support each other, .. and .. um .. have and .. um ..you can .. um .. enjoy ***the things*** and discuss the problems, .. and also .. um .. also way .. um .. we have have a happy dis -.. um .. have a happy conversation in our spare time.

Similarly, interviewee 25 also uses the definite noun phrase *the things* while discussing his strategies when faced with disagreements, and this introduces a uniqueness requirement. Since the interactants had only just met, the particular referents that saturate *thing* cannot be manifest to the hearer.

25#9; L2 speaker

Int: Have you ever had a disagreement with one of your co-workers or your superior?

25: Disagreement .. ah ... certainly ... ah ..sometimes we argue for ***the things***, .. yes but .. ah .. finally we can .. ah.. we can agree each other.

As in response 21#9f, the uses of *thing* in 26#8a and 25#9 could be rendered unproblematic if the speaker had simply dropped the article *the* and used it as a general exophoric (*things*) instead. It could also have been rendered unproblematic if saturation items had been provided endophorically. An overview of the results on the saturation of *thing* in both speaker groups is summarised in section 6.9 below.

6.9 Conclusion

While the L1 speakers of English do not seem to generate vagueness^P by using *thing*, 13 % of all L2 uses of *thing* generate this phenomenon unless hearers make allowances and recognise them as L2 errors in which case the strong implicatures (e.g. confusion, outgroup marking) that vagueness^P can generate are avoided. This qualitative analysis, thus, changes the initial results of exophoric uses in the two speaker groups to 58 % in the L1 data and 36 % in the L2 data. The statistical analysis shows that regarding these exophoric uses, there is a highly significant difference on average exophoric uses of *thing* between the two groups (U=52.0, p-value = 0.000). The test confirmed that the L1 speakers are likely to use *thing* more often exophorically than the L2 speakers (P-value = 0.000). Regarding vague uses, the difference between L1 and L2 is also statistically significant

(U=153, p-value =.009) since the test suggests that the L2 speakers used a significantly higher number of vague uses than the L1 speakers.

The qualitative analysis shows that the problematic uses of *thing* identified in the L2 corpus occur only in definite noun phrases (e.g. *the thing*). In such uses, no endophoric referent that would allow for easily accessible saturation (i.e. restricted exophorics) is provided, and the contexts where they appear make it impossible for the hearers to access the required saturation items. The results, thus, suggest that allowing for successful saturation of *thing* is challenging for L2 speakers.

Table 6.2 provides an overview of the results of this saturation analysis of *thing* in both corpora. As discussed, with the exception of the results on endophoric uses, the differences observed between the L1 and L2 speaker uses of *thing* are statistically significant. While there are differences in the two speaker groups regarding uses that generate vagueness^P (unless hearers make allowances for them), this does not prove that *thing* is a vague item as the percentage of such uses is very low. Rather, those instances of vagueness^P show that confirming mutual manifestness is not always possible in context.

Table 6.2: Saturation of *thing* in L1 and L2, end results

<i>Saturation Process</i>	<i>L1 speaker group</i>	<i>L2 speaker group</i>
<i>Endophoric</i>	22 %	38 %
<i>Partly exophoric</i>	20 %	13 %
<i>Exophoric</i>	58 %	36 %
<i>No saturation: Vagueness^P</i>	0%	13 %

As can also be seen from this table, there is a great difference between endophoric and exophoric uses of *thing* by the two speaker groups. It may be that this difference is culturally related. In an interesting study, Hasan (1996), for example, compares implicit and explicit ways of speaking of English speakers and speakers of Urdu. She claims that the “predominant style for the educated middle-class English speaker is the explicit one” (Hasan, 1996: 213) while the dominant style in Urdu is the implicit, i.e. exophoric, speaking style. Given that the L2 speakers of this data set are of

different cultural backgrounds than the L1 speakers, it may, thus, be that culture was one variable that influenced their use of endophoric and exophoric reference (see Chapter Nine for a detailed discussion of possible reasons for the differences observed).

As discussed in Chapter Five, exophoric uses require information to be shared extralinguistically since the saturation item or set is not part of the immediate linguistic co-text. The effects of such uses, therefore, differ from those of endophoric uses. The latter only require mutual manifestness of information that is easily accessible from the co-text and this requires little effort for processing. The former may require more effort from hearers as access to saturation items is more restricted. As I will argue in more detail in Chapter Seven, exophoric uses have a stronger potential to build rapport than endophoric uses, precisely because they require hearers to access saturation items that are not accessible to all hearers, and this identifies those that can saturate *thing* as insiders. Dense social networks are, thus, contexts where exophoric reference occurs often which means that the use of exophoricity is “indexical of a qualitatively different [compared to endophoric] social relationship” (Hasan, 1996: 215).

To conclude, this analysis of uses of *thing* in a corpus of L1 speakers of Australian English and a corpus of L2 speakers of English finds that both speakers of English rarely generate vagueness^P through its use. The VL item *thing*, therefore, does not seem to have a close relationship with this phenomenon, i.e. it is not vague^P. Because of its low semantic specificity its use can, however, have strong interpersonal effects such as marking in-group membership. It is to these and other effects that the discussion now turns.

Chapter Seven: Effects of using *thing*

7.1 Introduction

The vagueness^P analysis of *thing* in Chapter Six showed that the use of *thing* by the L1 and L2 speakers of English rarely generated the effect of vagueness^P in the employment interview data recorded for this study. In most cases, it seemed possible for hearers to saturate *thing* with items from the co-text (endophoric) or the con-text (exophoric). Therefore, it appears that the two speaker groups used *thing* to generate different effects than vagueness^P in discourse. In this chapter, examples of other effects that a use of *thing* can introduce into discourse will be discussed, drawing on the literature on *thing* and the job interview corpus collected.

While the analysis in Chapter Six suggests that *thing* does not have a close relationship with pragmatic vagueness (i.e. vagueness^P), the inherent saturation requirement of *thing* makes it necessary for information to be mutually manifest to the interactants involved in the exchange to avoid communication problems such as vagueness^P and the strong implicatures (e.g. confusion, distance) that can arise as a result. If saturation is successful, then an effect of in-group membership can be generated between interlocutors. This effect is particularly strong in exophoric uses where the information required for saturation is more restricted than where *thing* is used endophorically as in the latter use saturation items are easily accessible to all hearers who overhear the conversation. Therefore, in endophoric uses no insider knowledge is required since the information required for reference assignment is available to everybody.

Marking in-group membership is only one of a wide range of effects that speakers can generate by using *thing*. Further effects that its use can introduce into the discourse are discussed below as either being focused on interpersonal goals or conversation management. Since, as the discussion in this chapter will show, a use of *thing* can generate multiple effects simultaneously it is often difficult to

identify which effect is primary in an instance of use. This makes it impossible to assign uses of *thing* to specific effects and, hence, does not allow for a quantitative analysis of *thing* with respect to its effects in Chapter Eight. This study, thus, follows other major scholars investigating VL items who have similarly refrained from discussing their results of functional analyses of such items quantitatively (e.g. Channell, 1994; Overstreet, 1999; Cheng and Warren, 2001; Aijmer, 2004; Overstreet, 2005). Rather, the argument as to which effect is primary in an instance of use is based upon further linguistic evidence in the data, in this case, on the investigation of the co-text of *thing* (see also Koester, 1996, 1997 and Nikula, 1996, 1997 who use this approach when discussing vague language and hedges). Hence, items that can generate multiple effects simultaneously are commonly analysed qualitatively. In the particular examples discussed in this chapter, other effects, in addition to the one under discussion, may, therefore, be identifiable as well.

7.2 *Thing*, doing conversation management

The item *thing* can either be used to avoid communication breakdown or can help speakers organise and structure their discourse. Therefore, its use can generate effects related to conversation management. As Table 7.1 shows (next page), five main effects that focus on conversation management will be discussed in this section. These are placeholder/ floorholding, approximation, efficiency, focusing and framing.

Table 7.1: *Thing*, doing conversation management

<i>Effect</i>	<i>Description</i>
Placeholder/ Floorholding > Breakdown avoidance	<i>Thing</i> used when the speaker encounters a memory lapse or lexical gap, thus, allowing the speaker to hold the floor.
Approximation > Breakdown avoidance	<i>Thing</i> used as part of the compound noun 'noun+ <i>thing</i> '. The use of <i>thing</i> as the second noun of the compound can generate an effect of approximation on the first noun.
Efficiency > Discourse organisation	Control of the specificity level that is required in a particular context.
Focusing > Discourse organisation	Indicates to the hearer that the speaker is about to introduce important information into the discourse.
Framing > Discourse organisation	To open or close a conversation or indicate a topic change.

(Also discussed by, for example, Fronek, 1982; Channell, 1994; Biber et al., 1999; Overstreet, 1999; Drave, 2002; Jucker, Smith, and Lüdge, 2003; Mahlberg, 2003)

Thing can be used as a *placeholder* (Channell, 1994, 157-165) in contexts where speakers either cannot remember particular lexemes due to a memory lapse, or do not know other lexical items that they would have preferred to use instead, as they are faced with a lexical gap. In such contexts, speakers can use *thing* to gain thinking time which helps them avoid losing the floor. Used as part of a compound noun, *thing* can also generate the effect of approximation as speakers can use it to describe foreign cultural objects that do not exist in the English context for which no English lexeme exists (e.g. tuk-tuk = motorbike *thing*). Speakers can, therefore, generate a wide range of effects with respect to discourse management when they use *thing* to compensate for lexical challenges and to avoid communication breakdown.

From an organisational discourse management perspective, a use of *thing* can introduce focusing (e.g. *the thing is*) and signal to the hearer that what follows is of the utmost importance. Speakers can also use *thing* to open or close a

conversation and to introduce a topic change (i.e. *The thing about, and things like that*). In addition, *thing* can be chosen for reasons of efficiency in a context where a lengthy and more detailed explanation is not required as this could make communication inefficient. Providing more detail may introduce special (and potentially unwanted) effects because greater effort for processing is required from the hearer. Examples of these different discourse management effects are discussed below.

7.2.1 Placeholder/ Floorholding

As a *placeholder* (Channell, 1994), *thing* allows speakers to avoid communication breakdown in a memory lapse or a lexical gap. In this use, *thing* might be followed by a self-repair if speakers remember the lexeme that they had failed to access initially (Drave, 2002: 186, 199). *Thing* can, however, also occur without self-repair, in which case hearers are forced to rely on information that is expected to be mutually manifest.

Interviewee 12A seems to use *thing* as a placeholder in a memory lapse situation. She then immediately self-repairs by providing the item *two* which she may not have been able to access initially. Her self-repair attempt is also indicated by the prosody used. In particular, her speech suddenly becomes fast-paced as she replaces *the thing* by *the two*.

12A#4; L1 speaker

Int: What were the main challenges for you?

12A: Um ... understanding the system?.. the system is more than 40 years old, .. it's a () system, .. it's really black and green screen, .. it is from .. yeah .. and it has been around for that long so it isn't in a language that a lot of people know? .. and ah:: ... also understanding the business side of this .. the ah:: .. system? so understanding what the bus- the users need, .. and how that .. relating **the thing the two** together essentially.

While a self-repaired placeholder use, as in this response, is unproblematic since the saturation item of *thing* is supplied almost instantly, placeholder uses without self-repair are only successful if the information required for saturation is accessible to the hearer.

7.2.2 Approximation

As part of a compound noun, *thing* can approximate the noun that it combines with. In this use, it is reminiscent of phrasal expressions such as *something like* or *some kind of* and uses of *or things like that* which Overstreet also claims to “mark the content of an assertion as possibly inaccurate, **or approximate**” (Overstreet, 1999: 147, my emphasis). Fronek (1982: 647) and Drave (2002: 173) similarly refer to this use of *thing*. Fronek describes it as a strategy to denote “classes of objects which may not have a specialized label in the vocabulary” such as foreign objects and refers to them as “ad hoc compound names” (Fronek 1982: 639). Drave (2002: 173) discusses such uses as “circumlocution” and “compensation” and also suggests that speakers may use *thing* in this way to refer to foreign objects (e.g. *a prawn thing* = prawn dumpling).

In the response below, speaker 1A seems to use *thing* to generate an effect of approximation as it occurs as part of the compound noun *fantasy thing* (see also Chapter Six). This compound refers to the simulated job interview event that he is part of at that particular moment. A simulated job interview is not real and, therefore, similar to a fantasy. However, even though the job interview was simulated, it still does not qualify as a true fantasy either because some kind of job interview was indeed taking place. Speaker 1A seems to use *thing* in this response in order to indicate to the hearer that the noun *fantasy* only approximates the meaning he wants to convey.

1A#6a; L1 speaker

Int: Have you had much experience dealing with customers then?
 1A: Oh I suppose yeah, .. I would say that’s probably half my job at the moment, .. I mean .. I mean ... oops @@ ... the last job, .. we are trying to keep **the fantasy thing** here, .. but yeah, .. so people were coming in with problems with their computer, .. or like .. um .. we are talking about academics and other staff or students having problems with the *things* downstairs in the labs,

The speaker could have used different lexemes to describe the simulated set up of the interview. However, a choice of other linguistic devices (e.g. *I am trying to use language in accordance with the fact that this interview is a simulation*) might require more effort from the hearer and introduce cognitive effects that he may have wished to avoid (i.e. introduce formality). Since he only uses the phrase *the*

fantasy thing to make a side comment and because the concept that is approximated by *thing* is salient to the hearer, a lengthier description does not seem relevant.

7.2.3 Efficiency

Speakers can choose to use *thing* exophorically (e.g. *and things like that, things*) rather than list nouns of a higher semantic specificity (e.g. *apple, pear, mango*) in order to communicate efficiently. This effect is, however, only generated provided that the required saturation information is accessible to the interactants.

Speaker 9A seems to use *thing* for reasons of efficiency in the response below. The question asked requires the interviewee to describe a disagreement with a superior. While she identifies the issue clearly as being the work style used by the managers, she does not provide a description of the particular task where the disagreement occurred but uses *things* instead.

9A#9; L1 speaker

- Int: Have you ever had a disagreement with one of your co-workers/superior?
- 9A: Um .. sometimes I've worked with managers where I don't agree with their work style or their work ethic? .. but you just have to find a way to get along with them, .. so you just try to find .. you know .. sort of common **things** you can meet on, .. and if they are a very disorganized manager, . then you still have to be as organized as you can and try to sort of make up for that? .. um .. so .. so that was probably my most recent situation? .. I just didn't agree with their work ethic, .. and I found them very ..um .. prone to sort of last minute .. you know .. discussion of issues, .. and I really like to like () **things** earlier,.. but .. um .. but I just really tried to sort of .. go with their style of work and still meet the deadlines, .. yeah.

It appears that the two uses of *things* were not substituted by more specific nouns and did not have endophoric referents for reasons of efficiency. This is particularly obvious in the first use of *thing* since the interviewee establishes by the use of *you know* as well as by the adjective *common*, that the hearer certainly knows the referent of *thing*. Hence, it is not necessary to invest more effort and make this information available endophorically or to use more specific nouns instead of *thing*.

While such uses of *thing* may be evaluated positively, they can also generate negative effects. A speaker can, for example, be perceived as lacking commitment (see also Overstreet, 1999: 147) or motivation, which might generate detrimental implicatures in an employment interview.

7.2.4 Focusing

Speakers can also use *thing* as part of a phrase which focuses the attention on information that follows *thing*. Phrasal uses such as *the thing is* or *the thing about* typically generate this effect. Speaker 23 below appears to use the phrase *the thing was* for such discourse management purposes. In response to a question on making mistakes, she describes an incident where she invested too much time in completing a task at her workplace. After setting the stage by introducing the context, she seems to use the phrase *the thing was* to indicate to the hearer that the focus of the text is about to shift to a description of the mistake itself. The frequent use of pauses in line one to three shows that it is difficult for the interviewee to remember a situation to discuss. Her use of *AHA* then indicates that she has remembered a situation which she describes first generally before introducing a focus on the mistake itself by using *the thing was*.

23#10; L2 speaker

- Int: Tell me about a time when you made a mistake at work and how you reacted to it
- 23: Ok .. let me .. um ok, when I was, .. let me remember, ... yeah .. when I was in a group, ... when I was an assistant, .. AHA .. I remember that we required an IT ... the IT of ... the IT help for extracting some data but ***the thing was*** that I require something that wasn't .. not good and useful for my work, that was the problem, ... so when the person in the ...um .. IT department give me the information, of course he give me what I need, but something additional, that made me confuse, .. so I took time .. for .. um .. processing that additional information, so it was so, ..um.. I took more time that I supposed to take no? .. so I was on a delay ... on my ... in my task, so it was it caused my seniors .. well () was upset no? .. for that because I was on a on a delay so,

Overstreet similarly proposes that a use of expressions such as *and things like that* can introduce focusing as they “highlight a previous part of an assertion or question” (Overstreet, 1999: 146). The focusing effect can, therefore, be generated when a topic is introduced (e.g. *the thing is that*) but also when a topic

is concluded, that is, when these expressions occur utterance initially but also when they are found in utterance final position (e.g. *and things like that*).

7.2.5 Framing

Phrases containing *thing* can also help a speaker to frame discourse. Their use can, thus, have effects with respect to topic organisation as they can indicate that a topic is concluded or a new topic is introduced. Biber et al. (1999: 1073, 1075) term such uses an *overture* since they have “a special function of beginning a turn or an utterance” (Mahlberg, 2003: 104). Mahlberg (2003: 104) refers to this use as a “support function” of general nouns and attributes organisational aspects of floor-management in discourse to it (see also Fronek, 1982: 647; Drave, 2002: 182). Introductory framing uses of *thing* share similarities with the focusing effect discussed above since a speaker can introduce a topic and, simultaneously, also place a special focus on the information that is provided. However, focusing can also occur when different aspects with relation to one topic are discussed and not only when a topic is introduced in the first place.

In the next response, speaker 1A is asked to describe a disagreement at work and this also requires him to discuss how he handled the situation. He seems to have used the phrase *the thing is* to introduce the main argument of his answer, which is that he did not encounter disagreements frequently at his workplace or cannot remember such a situation (see italics in excerpt).

1A#9r; L1 speaker

- Int: Have you ever had a disagreement with one of your co-workers or a superior? How did you cope with the situation?
- 1A: Well the *thing*, .. I guess **the thing is**.. *there might have been a lot of disagreements but I just didn't notice*, .. because the way we deal with it was just like, .. talk it through, .. does this make sense? .. is it logical? .. um .. yeah that sort of attitude, .. it's not really, .. mmh .. I mean there is not really too much emotion behind it, .. or like, .. you know .. this was the right way of doing *things*, .. um .. I mean .. um .. suppose being in information technology, .. ah:: you know there there is not really much, ... well if .. if you're a person that is reasonable, .. then you can come up with reasonable solutions, ... so it's not .. it's not really rooted in politics or beliefs, .. it's more it's more scientific, ... so .. you know .. instead of *things* being based on opinions *things* are more based in numbers, ... so if something doesn't get a certain performance then we know that's bad, ... and I mean if a certain set up, .. you know or a certain algorithm doesn't do what it's supposed to do, .. then ah::... it's bad and you should probably come up with a better one?

By using the phrase *the thing is*, the speaker directs the hearer to the most relevant information of his answer which foregrounds this information and backgrounds unimportant information.

Jucker, Smith and Lüdge (2003) similarly refer to the concepts of foregrounding and backgrounding in their discussion of VL. They suggest that by using VL, a speaker indicates to the hearers that they can allocate processing efforts elsewhere. The information that *thing* refers to is, thus, backgrounded. They discuss backgrounding and foregrounding with respect to processing efforts that are required to identify the referent of *thing*. While it seems that an effect of backgrounding can indeed be introduced by using VL, its use can also foreground the information it refers to such as in uses of *I want to do the thing again*, where the referent of *thing* seems to be foregrounded while the referents of *thing* in a use of, for example, *and things like that* might be backgrounded. In the latter case, the referents of *thing* are not processed in great detail by the hearer. It, thus, appears that a use of VL can have a foregrounding and a backgrounding effect on the information that it refers to and can also be used to guide a hearer's focus onto information that is introduced following phrases such as *the thing is*.

The item *thing* can not only generate a framing effect when a topic is introduced, but can also be used to close a topic and, thus, suggest a topic change (see also Fronek, 1982: 647). In response 6A#8a, the interviewee seems to use *thing* (*it's a positive thing it's a good thing*) to show that he would like to conclude his speech and offer to return the floor to the interviewer who is in charge of the turn-taking system and topic changes. Prosodic features such as the short pause before these two uses of *thing* as well as the falling intonation right after they were uttered also suggest that interviewee 6A uses *it's a positive thing it's a good thing* to conclude his speech.

6A#8a; L1 speaker

Int: Do you like working in a team?

6A: Yes definitely, .. um ... (3.0) I suppose as .. um ... (2.0) yeah I don't know what to say to that, .. yeah I do ...um .. look you you can pick up different *things* from different people, .. you can pick up a lot from your peers, .. you can pick up a lot from being getting, .. you know (nuances) and sound advice from the people who are, .. I suppose a few years ahead of you and have those few years of more experience, .. and then there is the subject matter experts in the team where you can pick up a lot of IT like content knowledge, ... and as you progress as well there is also that opportunity to improve you own people management skills, ... um ... you know ... um .. new graduates in the organization and working with them and providing feedback, .. um .. and advice and .. um, .. so yeah it's definitely that sort of dynamic relationship with everyone, .. *it's a positive thing it's a good thing*.

The interviewee could have replaced the use of *it's a positive thing, it's a good thing* by the phrase *that sort of dynamic relationship with everyone is very positive and good*. However, the use of 'it's a + adjective + *thing*' gives the utterance a more final stress and closes the topic. The particular use of *thing* that this interviewee chooses is also shorter and characterised by a more repetitive syntax which demands less processing effort from the hearer. Fronek (1982: 649) proposes further reasons for a use of *thing* as part of such phrases. He claims that including *thing* in framing expressions such as *it's a positive thing* renders an utterance less ambiguous than simply stating *it's positive* instead. He also suggests syntactic reasons for such a use, in particular, the possibility that it can receive straightforward modification by a postmodifier (Fronek, 1982: 649). Hence, the framing expression discussed here, can generate multiple further effects.

Interviewee 4A also seems to use *thing* to close a topic, an effect which expressions such as *this/ that sort of thing* and *general extenders* like *and things like that* can generate in discourse. These phrasals appear to generate a closing effect since they signal to hearers that more could be said, but that the *more* does not need to be made explicit because the referent set that is required for saturation is salient to the hearers (see also Drave 2002: 168 who suggests similarities between these expressions).

4A#3; L2 speaker

Int: What were your main responsibilities in your last job?

4A: My main responsibilities in my last job were, ... um... building maintaining a:: website for .. um .. for researchers to to:: to:: to basically to plan workshops? ... um .. plan research workshops, ...and have people submit abstracts and register for events *and things like that*.

While interviewee 4A lists some of his responsibilities, the use of *and things like that* indicates to the hearer that the speaker was responsible for further tasks and could elaborate on those if required. However, the falling intonation of *and things like that* indicates that he wishes to conclude the list of responsibilities provided endophorically. In order for such a use to be successful the referent(s) of *thing* needs to be accessible to both interactants otherwise vagueness^P arises.

7.2.6 Conclusion: *Thing*, doing conversation management

With respect to conversation management, speakers can either use *thing* to generate effects that are focused on avoiding communication breakdown or oriented towards organisational aspects of the discourse flow. Effects such as placeholder/ floorholding or approximation are useful for speakers who want to avoid communication breakdown or silence when they are faced with a memory lapse or a lexical gap. Effects such as focusing and framing can also help the speaker structure the discourse flow and allow hearers to invest little effort into processing.

While *thing* has a wide range of effects on a discourse management level, speakers can also use it to introduce interpersonal effects such as in-group marking. Examples of such interpersonal effects will now be discussed.

7.3 *Thing*, generating interpersonal effects

The uses of *thing* discussed below show how this noun can generate effects that influence the relationship between speakers and their hearers. That is, they are uses of *thing* that do *relational work* (e.g. Locher and Watts, 2005; Locher, 2006). The range of interpersonal effects identified in the data and the literature on *thing* are listed in Table 7.2. Like conversation management effects, these effects can occur simultaneously.

Table 7.2: *Thing*, generating interpersonal effects

<i>Effects</i>	<i>Description</i>
Avoiding commitment	(General) exophoric use of <i>thing</i> (e.g. <i>things</i>) to avoid providing information that could disadvantage the speaker later on.
Attitudinal marking	Expression of positive and negative speaker attitude: Effect due to the choice of <i>thing</i> over a more specific item such as <i>job</i> or <i>task</i> . Prosody seems to be particularly crucial for this effect since a phrase such as <i>that poor thing</i> can be perceived as showing affection but can also express irony or sarcasm.
In-group marking/ Out-group marking	(Restricted) exophoric use of <i>thing</i> : Since the referent(s) that saturate <i>thing</i> have to be accessible to both interactants a successful use leads to in-group marking whereas an unsuccessful use marks hearers as outsiders.
Hedge (mitigation)	Weakens implicatures which arise when assumptions are contradicted such as when a speaker provides a dispreferred response.
Informality; downplaying power differences (mitigation ^P)	Since <i>thing</i> is characteristic of informal discourse its (frequent) use downplays the power difference between interactants, i.e. suggests a low power difference.

(Also discussed by, for example, Halliday and Hasan, 1976; Fronek, 1982; Quirk et al., 1985; Channell, 1994; Overstreet, 1999; Drave, 2002)

As discussed above with respect to the saturation analysis of *thing*, speakers can use *thing* to generate interpersonal effects such as in-group membership and conversely identify hearers as outsiders. Its use can, furthermore, help speakers avoid commitment which protects them from being proven wrong or contradicted at a later stage. Another of its interpersonal effects is to express positive or

negative speaker attitude, an effect that may be influenced by the prosodic contour chosen in an instance of use. A speaker can also use *thing* to generate the effect of mitigation when it occurs as part of an expression such as *the thing about* or when it is used often. The latter effect of mitigation is due to the implicature of informality that a frequent use of this item can generate as this can downplay power differences.

7.3.1 Avoiding commitment

Sometimes a speaker may use *thing* in ways which helps him/ her avoid commitment to the assumption expressed. This effect can be achieved if *thing* is used exophorically (in particular in its use as a general exophoric such as *some things*) since little information is revealed explicitly. Using *thing* in this manner safeguards speakers from being proven wrong or contradicted at a later stage (see also Channell, 1994). This, thus, seems to be a particularly useful strategy in contexts which are sensitive to contradictions of assumptions such as responses to challenging questions in high stake contexts. In job interviews and political discussions, speakers might, thus, choose an exophoric speaking style to avoid commitment, as any information that is stated endophorically could be used against them.

In response 13A#11, the interviewee is asked to discuss his attitude towards working long hours. A response to this question requires a strategic use of language since it is rare for employees to be enthusiastic about overtime work, however, their answers in employment interviews should nevertheless express willingness to work them.

13A#11; L1 speaker

Int: How do you feel about working long hours?

13A: Ahh:: ... yeah I don't mind doing them occasionally?..ah:: .. but I don't like doing them all the time, .. um .. I'd like to think that I've a work outside of *life*, .. and personally to me it has a lot of bigger and better **things** out there than necessarily work all the time, .. um .. so to me it's very important to have a work life balance, .. but at the same time if work has to be done , ah:: .. then I ll do it,.. but .. ah::... yeah .. I am not, .. ah:: .. ah::... working long hours I don't really like all the time yeah.

The interviewee shows in this answer that he is indeed prepared to work long hours but also stresses that he prefers overtime work to be the exception rather than the norm because, as he says, life has *a lot of bigger and better things out there than necessarily work*. He, therefore, seems to try and keep the balance this answer requires. With respect to the use of *thing*, it appears that participant 13A uses it exophorically since making explicit what he considers to be more important than work might generate detrimental implicatures which he may wish to avoid.

7.3.2 Attitudinal marker: Combined effect of determiner + *thing* + prosody

Speakers can also use *thing* to show a positive or negative attitude towards the item/ items that saturate *thing*. While the attitude expressed may be pejorative, speakers can also convey an affectionate, friendly and, hence, positive attitude towards the item that *thing* replaces. Halliday and Hasan comment on this effect in their discussion of general nouns and claim that:

“The expression of interpersonal meaning, of a particular attitude on the part of the speaker, is an important function of general nouns [such as *thing*]. Essentially the attitude conveyed is one of familiarity, as opposed to distance, in which the speaker assumes the right to represent the thing he is referring to as it impinges on him personally; **hence the specific attitude may be either contemptuous or sympathetic**, the two being closely related as forms of personal involvement (cf. the meaning of diminutives in many languages).”

(Halliday and Hasan, 1976: 276; my emphasis)

The use of *thing* as an attitudinal marker has also been identified by Drave (2002: 160) and termed *pejorative evaluation*, while Fronek's (1982: 646) discussion seems to suggest an expression of an affectionate, i.e. positive, attitude of the speaker towards the item that *thing* refers to (e.g. *the little thing, the poor thing*). Drave (2002: 171) furthermore provides examples of uses of *thing* that generate effects such as irony and sarcasm, which can also be categorised as speaker attitudes. The examples by Drave (2002), Fronek (1982) and Quirk et al. (1984: 785-786), who also refers to this use, show that *thing* collocates with determiners such as *this/ that, the* or *a* when its use expresses speaker attitude. It, therefore, appears that the type of determiner used, might be one crucial aspect in the

expression of speaker attitude. As Fronek (1982: 638) suggests, prosody also seems to play an important role in determining which effects such uses of *thing* generate.

Interviewee 13A is asked to describe why he is the best candidate for the role advertised in the response below. The referents of *things* are clearly positive, as shown by the cataphoric referents of *thing* in the co-text, i.e. the descriptions of desirable qualities (italicised).

13A#14; L1 speaker

Int: Can you tell me why you are the best person for the job, why should we hire you?

13A: Um ... I believe I ... can bring a lot of **things** to this company, .. I am a *great communicator*, .. I have *great attention to detail*, ... um .. I've *worked in this industry before*, .. um .. I have *a lot of industry contacts* that I'd be able to use .. that would be to the benefit of this company, .. um ... and most of all *I'd enjoy it* .. um .. *working in a team like this*, .. I think I'd enjoy the role.

In this response, it is, however, rather the content than the prosody used which generates a positive attitude towards the referents of *thing* since the item *thing* itself is used with a level stress and is, thus, unmarked.

The use of *thing* in response 1A6b, shows a negative attitude of the speaker towards the referent of *thing*. In particular, the L1 speaker expresses his frustration when dealing with requests from clients that were rather minor but which clients were very concerned about. He defines these issues as *stupid* with the item *thing* being used to refer to them.

1A#6b; L1 speaker

Int: Tell me about a situation when you had to demonstrate good communication skills

1A: Ah ... well .. when someone was quite distressed about some stupid **thing** that's quite simple to fix, .. but .. um .. you know for example ... um ... one day Xname, .. um .. one of one of the the astronomers came over and said, .. uh mate .. my junk mail filter is .. um .. all deleting all the emails and, .. um .. I have got an email from a phd student in .. um .. from Cambridge, .. and she wants details about visas and it's critical that I get, .. um .. that I reply to her .. but I have lost that email, .. um .. what's happened is .. um .. the junk mail filter just moved .. um .. those mails automatically to a folder that he couldn't see, .. and we just needed to point them out so, .. it's quite .. yeah .. um .. a lot of a lot of .. um .. waving hands and panic that's not that's not really necessary so, .. I suppose the key is to make people understand that it's not so horribly bad, .. um .. and it's not a horrible situation and we can rectify it etcetera and ..um .. yeah.

While, contrary to the previous answer, *thing* is stressed prosodically, it is again mainly the content that helps determine the negative speaker attitude that interviewee 1A expresses regarding the referents of *thing*.

7.3.3 In-group membership – Out-group marking

As discussed briefly in Chapters Five and Six, a speaker can also generate the effect of in-group membership by using *thing*. This effect is closely linked to the inherent saturation requirement of *thing* which arises in context due to its low semantic specificity (i.e. precision). In order to allow for saturation, the saturation information required needs to be mutually manifest to the interlocutors. This means that interactants assert in-group membership if saturation is successful. If this process is, however, unsuccessful, vagueness^P arises and the effect of out-group rather than in-group is generated. In-group marking is strongest when *thing* is used as part of a restricted exophoric, as in such uses the required saturation items are only available to a limited number of people.

As discussed in Chapter Five, items that saturate *thing* can have different levels of accessibility so that in-group and, conversely, out-group marking may have different strengths. Speakers can introduce strong in-group marking by using *thing* exophorically since the saturation items are not easily accessible to all members of

the community. Endophoric uses can be saturated by all hearers of a conversation and, thus, such uses only contribute to weak in-group marking. In-group membership has similarly been discussed by Overstreet (1999) in her analysis of exophorics such as *and things like that*. In particular she claims that a use of these items expresses “solidarity” (Overstreet, 1999: 146).

Speaker 1A below discusses his responsibilities at an IT laboratory at his present workplace. He describes that his tasks include looking after *things downstairs in the labs* but provides no endophoric saturation items for *things* in its co-text. A hearer who wants to access the information that the speaker refers to, needs to know that interviewee 1A works as an IT professional at a university in Australia. Furthermore, the hearer needs to have some knowledge of the tasks that an IT professional might be responsible for in laboratories at universities since such information has not been provided exophorically. If this information is accessible to both, speaker and hearer, then the effect of in-group can be generated.

1A#6a; L1 speaker

Int: Have you had much experience dealing with customers then?
 1A: Oh I suppose yeah, .. I would say that’s probably half my job at the moment, .. I mean .. I mean ... oops @@ ... the last job, .. we are trying to keep *the fantasy thing* here, .. but yeah, .. so people were coming in with problems with their computer, .. or like .. um .. we are talking about academics and other staff or students having problems with **the things** downstairs in the labs,

A hearer cannot saturate *thing* if the exophoric saturation information is not shared. As a consequence, s/he reveals her-/ himself as an outsider and vagueness^P is generated which creates an effect of distance. Interviewee 1A in this answer appears to assume that the interviewer can saturate *thing* and may, thus, have chosen an exophoric use to build rapport.

7.3.4 Hedging: Introducing dispreferred responses

Speakers can also use *thing* to hedge a dispreferred response and, thus, weaken implicatures that such answers may generate. This effect is reminiscent of the effect that parenthetical verbs like *I think* and modifiers like *sort of* can generate. In the job interviews collected for this study, hedging is mainly introduced by phrasal uses of *thing* (e.g. *the thing about, the thing is*).

Interviewee 1A, for example, appears to weaken detrimental implicatures by using *thing* in a dispreferred response that he provides on the subject of teamwork. His answer suggests that he does not particularly enjoy team work. Since an affirmative answer would be expected which is, thus, unmarked, expressing a lack of interest in working as part of a team generates implicatures which may disadvantage him. Interviewee 1A seems to be aware of this imminent risk of strong (and potentially detrimental) implicatures that can be generated as a result and appears to use *thing* (*the thing about*) to mitigate such potential implicatures.

1A#8a; L1 speaker

Int: Do you like working in a team?

1A: Ah yeah, .. I suppose it's always good to have people helping you out with a few *things*, .. **the thing about** me is though, .. um ...mmh .. I tend to like to lead @@ so ... well I can follow directions, .. um .. but like I would like some sort of reasoning behind, .. um .. the direction so that might take quite a while, .. I just don't follow instructions blindly, .. um.. I yeah I prefer to work better in a team when I am the one leading the team, .. so .. um .. and also the people .. the people in the team do what I ask them to do, .. and I like to see the big picture and, .. um .. yeah .. you know see it work come around come together, .. and be happy, ..um .. mmh .. but I would rather be a team leader than a team member.

Prosodic features such as the frequent pauses in lines one to three, fillers such as *um* and *mmh* as well as the (nervous) laughter in line three suggest that interviewee 1A is aware of the detrimental implicatures his response may generate. His use of *the thing about*, therefore, warns hearers that a marked comment is about to follow, and this mitigates the strength of the implicatures that can arise.

7.3.5 Informality: Downplaying power differences (mitigation^P)

The use of *thing* can help generate an informal atmosphere because of its association with conversations between interlocutors where there is little or no power difference. By using *thing* in a context that is, however, characterised by a high power difference, speakers can downplay this difference (mitigation^P) (see Chapter Three). In contexts where altering the relationship between interactants in this manner is politic, positive effects such as solidarity are introduced and detrimental implicatures, which might have been generated due to the content

expressed, can be weakened. If downplaying the power relationship is, however, not politic then negative effects are generated and a speaker might be perceived as ignorant, rude or careless as a result of the informal speaking style chosen.

Frequency appears to be an important variable in determining the strength of this effect. The power relationship is downplayed strongly if speakers use *thing* frequently and if it occurs alongside other items that are also commonly found in informal discourse. In answer 2A#5, there are eight instances of *thing* while it is only found once in response 34#5. In the first answer, interviewee 2A states that she excels at providing explanations using simple language, a strategy that she also seems to use in this response. Since the question asked introduces a requirement for open self-promotion, a strategic use of language is required in the Australian context in order to avoid claiming specialness as this linguistic behaviour would be marked, i.e. not politic (see Chapter Three). This interviewee, thus, seems to use *thing* as it can mitigate her self praise.

2A#5; L1 speaker

Int: What do you feel you have done particularly well in your job?
 2A: Um .. I think it's .. um .. it's putting the information together changing the information, .. analyzing it in ways to to help to make them understand? .. um .. so really .. ah .. taking a step back from from how you see **things** or I see **things** in my current role, .. and trying to see **things** from their point of view, .. and .. and by seeing **things** from a different point of view you may also learn other **things**? .. and pick up different **things** that you may not necessarily have seen, .. when you just look at it in a typical way? .. um .. so that that was one **thing** .. I thought we did part-I did particularly well, ..um .. just to help them to understand the numbers better? .. um .. by just analyzing **things** differently, .. putting more commentary in just and, .. making and speaking in a language that they would understand? .. um .. so not in accounting speak but more, .. um .. simplified @@ language yeah so, @@

The interviewee's repeated laughter in the last two lines, while describing the language she uses with non accounting people as *simplified*, also suggests that she is trying to avoid generating an effect of superiority and rather attempts to downtone her position. It, thus, appears that the item *thing* is used to generate an interpersonal effect of mitigation in this response.

Speaker 34 answers the same question as interviewee 2A above but, contrary to interviewee 34, he uses nouns that have a high semantic specificity. In particular, the nouns in his speech are characteristic of workplace discourse (e.g. *operation site*, *project site*, *roll out*, *network*, *sites*, *tasks*, *needs*, *contractual needs*, *maintenance site*, *service level agreements*, *outage*, *escalation point*) and the item *thing* only occurs once. By using more specific workplace nouns frequently, he seems to highlight his professional competence rather than downplay power differences. His single use of *thing* contrasts with the response of speaker 2A who uses *thing* eight times. As a result, speaker 34 does not appear to generate the same type of closeness (i.e. the closeness of equal encounters) as speaker 2A (i.e. professional in-group marking).

34#5; L2 speaker

Int: What do you feel you have done particularly well in your job?

34: In my previous *job* I think, .. um .. in the past three *years* I was there I worked in two different *teams*, .. one of them was *manager* which is the *operation site* and one of them was the the *project site* which was the mainly for the *roll out* of new *parts* of the *network*, ... I believe, .. um.. I was ah I was successful in both *sites*, .. ah mainly because almost all the *tasks* which were assigned to me whether it was the, .. um .. based on the the *needs* of the, .. I mean *contractual needs* of the *maintenance site*, .. we have some *service level agreements* to be followed, .. so as an *example* when there is an *outage*? .. I was the second *escalation point*, .. so when it , .. um .. acknowledged by the .. monitoring *engineers* it was escalated to me, .. and I had a defined *time frame* to follow and rectify the *problem*, .. so in .. I can say in almost all the *cases*, .. regarding to my *field of expertise* I could handle them well, .. and also from the (*roll out*) *point* as well? .. and the *elements* which I was responsible, .. and also the *tasks* which was assigned to me, .. I could handle .. um .. properly, .. and do all these *procedures* I just mentioned, .. the *installation* and all the phases perfectly, .. so generally I believe I did well from the ***things*** that was assigned to me by the *company* and the *management team*.

While interviewee 34 shows professional competence by using formal items instead of *thing*, he fails to mitigate detrimental implicatures that a description of skills and achievements can introduce in the Australian cultural context. The frequent use of *thing* by interviewee 2A, however, generates such an effect of mitigation as she presents her achievements in a politic manner.

The use of *thing* as part of a compound noun (e.g. noun + *thing*) seems to have a particularly close relationship with informality and, thus, may downtone power

differences even if it is used infrequently. At the same time, this use of *thing* may also be associated with a fashionable speaking style for some speakers (e.g. teenagers and young adults). A brief internet search reveals that there are several webpages that use this compound noun:

- Blow it's a hair *thing*: <http://blowitsahairthing.com.au/>
- It's a girl *thing*: <http://itsagirlthinginc.com/>
- It's a dance *thing*: <http://www.itsadancething.com/>
- It's a wing *thing*: <http://www.itsawingthing.com/>
- It's a cake *thing*: <http://itsacakething.webs.com/>

It appears that by using noun + *thing*, these speakers convey an effect of informality but also show that they are fashionable. Hence, their use implies that their shops are also fashionable. Moreover, to express the same meaning a speaker would need to use a lengthy expression requiring more effort from the hearer for processing than the shorter noun + *thing* compound (e.g. *it's a girl thing* versus *it is something that a girl needs or does*). Such more elaborate uses can, thus, introduce effects that a speaker may wish to avoid.

7.3.6 Conclusion: Interpersonal effects of *thing*

The discussion of the literature on *thing* and the examples discussed in this section suggest that a speaker can generate a wide range of interpersonal effects by using *thing*. A speaker can, for example, avoid commitment, mark speaker attitude, introduce the effect of in-group membership and mitigate the strength of implicatures by hedging dispreferred responses or by generating an effect of informality which downplays power differences.

7.4 Conclusion

In this chapter, examples of the multiple effects that a speaker can generate by using *thing* have been described. With respect to discourse management, *thing* can help avoid communication breakdown and support organisational aspects of discourse management such as framing and focusing. A speaker can also use *thing* to generate interpersonal effects. Such interpersonal effects include avoiding commitment, expressing positive or negative speaker attitude, showing in-group

and, conversely, out-group membership, weakening implicatures by hedging dispreferred responses or introducing an aspect of informality into discourse.

In Chapter Eight, results of quantitative and qualitative analyses on *thing* and other items of VL such as *stuff*, *sort of* and *I think* are discussed. These different types of analyses were used to investigate the effects that the Australian L1 speakers of English and L2 speakers of English seemed to generate primarily through their use of *thing*. It will be argued that the L1 speakers used *thing* to generate an effect of in-group membership and for mitigation purposes as these effects can establish closeness with the interviewer in an employment interview.

Chapter Eight: The multi-purpose noun *thing* as an in-group marker and mitigator?

8.1 Introduction

As discussed in Chapter Seven, speakers can generate a wide range of interpersonal and conversation management effects by using *thing*. Since *thing* rarely introduced vagueness^P in the L1 and L2 corpus (see Chapter Six), the main effects that its use by the L1 and L2 speakers seemed to generate in the employment interviews recorded, are investigated in this chapter. In particular, it is proposed that *thing* was primarily used by the L1 speakers of Australian English to generate two of the interpersonal effects described in Chapter Seven: in-group marking and mitigation.

In this chapter, findings of quantitative and qualitative analyses will be used to investigate the main effects of *thing* that the L1 and L2 speakers generated in the employment interview data of this study. While the results shown in Tables 8.1 to 8.3 and those in Figures 8.2 to 8.4 are presented using descriptive statistics, the results in Figure 8.1 were tested for their statistical significance. For the qualitative analyses, the context (culture, speech event and linguistic background of the participant) as well as prosodic features are considered. With respect to prosody, the approach taken follows studies on *I think* (Kärkkäinen, 2003; Kaltenböck, 2008; Mullan, 2010), a parenthetical verb that shares many similarities with the item *thing*, and which has also been investigated by recent VL studies.

8.2 In-group marking: Saturation of *thing*

The effect of *thing* to mark in-group membership has already been touched on in Chapter Six. This is because a prerequisite for in-group marking, as it has been defined in this thesis, is successful saturation of *thing* which the analysis in Chapter Six explored. As discussed in Chapter Five, because *thing* is a noun that has a low inherent semantic specificity it requires saturation so that hearers can identify the particular item(s) that it refers to in context. If a hearer can saturate

thing, the effect of closeness, i.e. in-group membership, is generated since successful saturation confirms that mutual manifestness exists between interactants. Uses of *thing* that hearers cannot saturate successfully, however, generate an effect of distance since unsuccessful saturation shows that the cognitive environments of a speaker and a hearer do not intersect. Hence, the mutual manifestness required for saturation could not be confirmed.

The effect of in-group membership can have different strengths. Strong in-group marking is achieved when exophoric saturation processes are successful, while successful endophoric saturation processes generate weak in-group marking. This difference in strength relates to the accessibility of saturation items. In exophoric uses, saturation items are more restricted than in endophoric uses, since in the former saturation has to be achieved by referents from the con-text which are not manifest to all hearers, while in the latter case the saturation items are part of the immediately accessible linguistic co-text, and this is available to all hearers. Those hearers who can saturate exophoric uses successfully are identified as insiders. Unsuccessful exophoric saturation, however, generates a strong effect of out-group marking.

As discussed in Chapter Six, the use of *thing* in the L1 speaker group did not generate vagueness^P since the required saturation items seemed accessible to the hearer (the interviewer). In the L2 group 13 % of all uses of *thing* (see Table 6.2 on next page; reproduced from Chapter Six) were, however, categorised as problematic since they introduce vagueness^P into the discourse, according to the definition provided in Chapter Five. As the hearer was not in a position to identify the referent of *thing*, mutual manifestness could not be confirmed and vagueness^P was generated.

Table 6.2: Saturating *thing* in L1 and L2 (reproduced from Chapter Six)

<i>Saturation Process</i>	<i>L1 speaker group</i>	<i>L2 speaker group</i>
<i>Endophoric</i>	22 %	38 %
<i>Partly exophoric</i>	20 %	13 %
<i>Exophoric</i>	58 %	36 %
<i>No saturation: Vagueness^P</i>	0%	13 %

As can also be seen from this table, there are not only differences with respect to vagueness^P, but also regarding the type of saturation process that was used most often in the two speaker groups. Including partial exophorics, almost 79 % of all uses of *thing* required saturation by exophoric referents/ referent sets in the L1 data while only 49 % of all uses of *thing* required exophoric saturation in the L2 corpus. Since exophoric saturation processes figure more prominently in the L1 corpus, the use of *thing* by this speaker group appeared to generate a stronger effect of in-group marking than uses of *thing* by the L2 speakers of English. The instances of vagueness^P which occurred in the L2 but not the L1 corpus may, however, have generated an effect of distance in the L2 data.

The analysis shows that with respect to the saturation requirement of *thing* and the effect of in-group membership, the L1 and L2 speakers seemed to use *thing* differently in the employment interviews analysed. In particular, the effect of closeness appeared stronger in the L1 than the L2 corpus due to the more frequent exophoric saturation requirement of *thing* and the absence of vagueness^P. An effect of closeness can, however, also be introduced into the discourse when speakers engage in mitigation and weaken detrimental implicatures that arise when linguistic behaviour is not politic. As discussed in Chapter Seven, one effect of *thing* is to generate mitigation and, hence, different types of analyses were used to investigate whether *thing* introduced mitigation in the L1 and L2 corpus.

8.3 *Thing*: Mitigation and politic linguistic behaviour

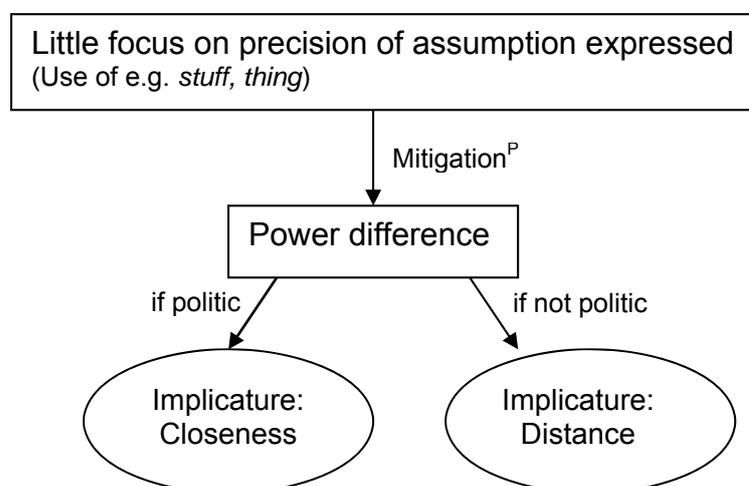
Job interviews are challenging events since a speaker should avoid or mitigate strong detrimental implicatures which can easily be generated due to the type of questions asked in this context. Responses to two types of questions may particularly require mitigation in this context: those that ask interviewees to describe their weaknesses and those that explicitly encourage them to present their strengths. The former require mitigation because strong implicatures such as incompetence may be generated in responses and these implicatures can be detrimental to the presentation of an interviewee as an able candidate in an employment interview. The latter type of questions require mitigation because a description of strengths can generate implicatures such as boastfulness in the Australian cultural context which may also influence the chance of success in an employment interview negatively (See Chapter Three for a discussion of the Australian cultural context).

Two types of mitigation were discussed in Chapters Three and Seven with respect to the item *thing*: mitigation and mitigation^P. Speakers can weaken their commitment to the assumption they express by using items such as *I think* and *sort of* as a use of these items mitigates implicatures that may arise. They can also use informal items such as *thing* and *stuff* for mitigation purposes (mitigation^P) since such items are common of conversations where no power differences exist. If used in unequal encounters, the power difference can be downplayed.

8.4 Mitigation^P: Informality and power differences

As discussed (Chapter Three), upholding a fiction of egalitarianism is important in the Australian cultural context, and the overt stressing of hierarchical relationships often avoided. One way of introducing an effect of closeness into discourse is to use lexemes such as *thing* as their use does not show overtly that a speaker has knowledge and status. As can be seen from Figure 3.5 (reproduced from Chapter Three) on page 159, an implicature of closeness can arise when power differences are downplayed, provided that it is politic to do so in a cultural context and speech event. Implicatures such as the perception of a speaker as being rude might, however, be generated if it is not politic to imply equality, that is, egalitarianism, but is politic to strengthen hierarchical relationships.

Figure 3.5: Mitigation^P, downplaying power differences (Reproduced from Chapter Three)



As discussed in Chapter Seven, the frequency of informal items used seems to influence the strength of this type of mitigation. In order to investigate whether *thing* was indeed used by the two speaker groups as part of an informal speaking style that generates mitigation^P, the overall frequency of *thing* and its density in responses to the different types of questions asked is compared between the two speaker groups.

As can be seen from Table 8.1 (next page), *thing* occurred on average 5.9 times per person per 1000 words in the L1 corpus but only 2.5 times per person per 1000 words in the L2 corpus. Also, while *thing* was found in all L1 interviews, this noun did not occur at all in six L2 employment interviews (Participants 9, 12, 13, 18, 19, 24).

Table 8.1: Frequency of *thing* in L1 and L2

<i>Uses</i>	<i>L1 speakers</i>	<i>L2 speakers</i>
Total uses of <i>thing</i>	236	87
Average use per person	13.1	3.5
Average use per person per 1000 words	5.9	2.5

Because L1 speakers of a language should have a wider range of lexical resources at their disposal than L2 speakers, it seems unlikely that the L1 speakers of Australian English used *thing* to compensate for lexical shortcomings. They may, however, have used it to generate interpersonal effects in this speech event and cultural context. It is this aspect which is now explored in detail.

As discussed above, the employment interview is a speech event that is characterised by a high power difference. The Australian cultural context, however, seems to place great emphasis on egalitarianism (see Chapter Three). Because of the tension between what seems to be expected linguistic behaviour in the job interview (show respect of power difference) and what appears expected by the cultural context (respect egalitarianism), the L1 speakers of Australian English may have used *thing* to generate an effect of mitigation^P. They may, thus, have taken advantage of the informality of *thing* and other items that are similar to *thing* to downplay power differences. By generating this effect, potentially detrimental implicatures that may have been generated, are weakened. Since *thing* is used less than half as often in the L2 compared to the L1 group, the effect of mitigation^P seems less strong in the L2 interviews.

8.4.1 Density of *thing* across answers

There is not only an overall difference in frequency between the L1 and L2 speaker use of *thing* but also a difference in its effects in responses to the different

types of questions asked. I will first discuss the density of *thing* in L1 answers, that is, I will explore the percentage of uses of *thing* in responses to each job interview question asked.

As can be seen from Table 8.2, *thing* constitutes 1% or less of the total of words used in most L1 responses (75 of the total 122 *thing* answers). There are, however, some responses (46) where the L1 speakers used *thing* with a percentage between 2% and 6%, i.e. with a higher frequency. Responses which show a high percentage (> 2%) of uses of *thing* as a result of this noun occurring more than once in these answers are referred to as density answers.

Table 8.2: Percentages of L1 uses of *thing* according to questions

Question	<1 %	2 %	3 %	4 %	5 %	6 %	Total Thing answers	Density Answers
#1								
#2								
#3	2	1	1				4	0
#4	9	1	1				11	2
#5	4	2		2	2		10	6
#6a	1	1					2	1
#6b	7	1					8	1
#6c								
#7a	3	2	4				9	5
#7b	5	1					6	1
#7c								
#8a	4	1	1				5	2
#8b	3	1	1				5	1
#8d								
#8c	6	2					8	1
#9	6	4					10	4
#10	4	2		1			7	2
#11	6	2					8	1
#12	8	1	1			1	11	1
#13	1	2					3	0
#14	5	3	2				10	3
#15			1			1	2	0
#16	1				1		2	1
Total	75	27	12	3	3	2	122	32

A clustering of density answers can be observed in L1 responses to certain types of questions while others lead to no or only infrequent uses of *thing*. According to

Table 8.2, density answers are frequent in responses to four questions in the L1 corpus (bolded in Table 8.2). These are:

Question #5: What have you done particularly well at your previous job?

(six uses)

Question #7a: How do you cope with deadlines? (five uses)

Question #9: Could you tell me about a disagreement at work? (four uses)

Question #14: Why are you the best person for the job? (three uses)

Question #5 and #14 ask interviewees explicitly to promote their professional competence, that is, their specialness. Since self-praise does not seem politic linguistic behaviour in an Australian context, speakers may need to mitigate the presentation of their skills in answers to these types of questions. While question #7a does not explicitly ask for self-promotion, speakers are still required to show that they have skills because of the competitive nature of this speech event. The kind of self-promotion in answers to question #7a may, thus, also require mitigation. Question #9 does not explicitly ask speakers to promote their skills but asks them to recount a disagreement at their workplace. This is also challenging since harmony seems to be highly valued in the Australian cultural context (see for example Mullan, 2010: 59), hence, a description of disagreements should be downtoned.

The discussion of the four questions in response to which the L1 speakers of Australian English used *thing* frequently suggests that mitigation is crucial since potentially detrimental implicatures can arise, and these should be weakened. By using *thing* frequently, it seems that the L1 speakers of Australian English generated an effect of mitigation^P in a bid to use language in a politic manner. The analysis of density *thing* answers in the L2 data, however, suggests that the use of *thing* did not generate a strong effect of mitigation in responses to some questions. As in the L1 analysis, in the L2 corpus the percentage of *thing* in all answers where it occurred was calculated in order to identify density answers and determine whether such answers cluster. The results show that there is no clustering of density answers in the L2 corpus as such answers occurred in response to a wide range of questions without showing a particular pattern (Table 8.3, next page).

Table 8.3: Percentages of L2 uses of *thing* according to questions

Question	<1 %	2 %	3 %	4 %	5 %	6 %	7 %	8 %	Total Thing answers	Density answers
#1										
#2										
#3	4								4	0
#4	2			1	1				4	1
#5	2	1	2		1				6	1
#6a	1								1	0
#6b	4	1	1						6	1
#6c										
#7a		2							2	1
#7b	3								3	0
#7c										
#8a	1			2					3	1
#8b	1	1							2	0
#8d										
#8c	2	1	3		1				7	0
#9	2	4	1			2			9	1
#10	2	1							3	0
#11	1	1		1				1	4	0
#12	4	2		1	1				8	2
#13	2								2	0
#14	1	2							3	1
#15		1							1	0
#16			1						1	0
Total	32	17	8	5	4	2	0	1	69	10

As can be seen from Table 8.3, *thing* was found in 69 L2 answers while it occurred in 122 L1 answers (see Table 8.2). Of the 69 answers, 10 (14%) were categorised as density answers while in the L1 data 32 of the 122 answers (26%) were identified as density answers. Therefore, both the number of answers that led to a use of *thing* and the density of *thing* in responses to the different questions asked is higher in the L1 than the L2 corpus.

Following this discussion of the use of *thing* on a macro level, examples of individual uses of this noun in the two data sets will now be provided. These serve to further illustrate whether and how an effect of mitigation was generated in the L1 and L2 speaker interviews when *thing* was used. The use of *thing* will, however, not be discussed on its own as reference will also be made to items in its

co-text which are functionally similar to *thing*. The analysis of the co-text of *thing*, thus, assists the investigation.

8.5 Instances of *thing*: Politic linguistic behaviour

The responses below exemplify how the use of *thing* generated an effect of mitigation in the employment interviews when it occurred in expressions such as general extenders (e.g. *and things like that*), compound nouns (*girl thing*) and in phrases like *the thing is*.

In the two responses below, the L1 participants 1A and 11A appear to use *thing* to avoid an explicit discussion of taboo topics and to avoid revealing information that might be considered too personal in this context. Discussing taboo topics as well as providing personal information can generate detrimental implicatures and interviewees may, therefore, wish to engage in mitigation to weaken them as this can increase their chances of success. Interviewee 1A uses the expression *and things like that* in response to a question on salary expectations. This seems to be a rather delicate topic to discuss in the Australian context:

“Wages, salary, income, should only be referred to with badly constructed... you know... lots of punctuation marks... sort of... obliquely... and how can one put it...”

(Treborlang, 1999: 33; on Australian English)

In answer 1A#13, *thing* is preceded by the noun *expenses*, “the exemplar” (Overstreet, 1999), which guides hearers to a list of further referents in the set that *expenses* also belongs to. Since *expenses* is an umbrella term, its use, however, already summarises all items that *thing* could possibly refer to. This suggests that *and things like that* does not have a simple list-completion function as there is no list to complete, because a summary (i.e. *expenses*) has already been provided endophorically. The phrase *and things like that*, thus, seems referentially redundant. Furthermore, the interviewee’s laughter in the first part of the answer, immediately after he mentions a potential salary figure, suggests that he feels rather uncomfortable discussing this matter. His discomfort is also obvious from the accelerated pace in the phrase *I am not a money sort of person I am happy if I can get along*.

1A#13; L1 speaker

- Int: What salary are you looking for? .. What would be a minimum salary that you'd work for?
- 1A: A:hm, (ss), well, ... *it's not really about salary* for me, but ahm *I suppose* there are still practical considerations, .. so 60 000 Dollars? @@
- Int: Mmh, ok
- 1A: Well, .. yeah but *I am not a money sort of person I am happy if I can get along*,.. but you know people do have expenses **and things like that**, ... so,

Instead of simply introducing a list-completion requirement, the partial exophoricity of *and things like that*, i.e. its “obliqueness” to refer to Treborlang’s comment above, also seems to suggest that while both the speaker and hearer know the appeal of a good salary, they are also aware that a taboo is attached to explicit discussions of financial matters. By using *thing* exophorically, interviewee 1A confirms that he knows what constitutes politic behaviour in the Australian cultural context. An effect of closeness can be established since the interviewee’s linguistic behaviour reveals (cultural) insider knowledge and strong implicatures that a non-politic use of language can generate are weakened. Interviewee 1A also uses other items and expressions that can create an effect of mitigation (italicised). These are expressions such as *I suppose* and clauses like *I am not a money sort of person*. It, therefore, appears that *and things like that* is used as part of a speaking style that focuses on downtoning the pragmatic impact of the assumptions expressed.

Interviewee 11A below also seems to use *thing* to generate an effect of mitigation. He answers a question on overtime which is an aspect of work that is generally not particularly appealing to most employees. Nevertheless, interviewees are expected to express willingness to work long hours but they are not required to show enthusiasm about working late or on weekends. Interviewee 11A tries to assert his willingness for overtime as he assures the interviewer that he does not have significant other commitments. By using *or things like that*, he avoids providing additional information about his personal life as this might be considered too personal, i.e. not politic, for a job interview context as two interlocutors meet for the first time in a high power speech event.

11A#11; L1 speaker

Int: How do you feel about working overtime?

11A: Ah I .. I really don't have an issue with working long hours, um .. you know within reason, um .. I think going back to what I was saying before with external pressures? that's when it's difficult when I have other deliverables externally, but .. generally speaking you know I don't have a lot um responsibilities apart from my own studies? so I don't have children ***or things like that***, so therefore I don't have a problem with it, it's .. um .. it's not a big issue for me.

By stating that he does not have children, interviewee 11A indicates flexibility and implies that he is able to work overtime. The exophoric component of the general extender (*or things like that*) leaves further details about his personal life implicit since it might not be politic to reveal detailed personal information (i.e. whether he is divorced, married or has sick parents to care for) in this speech event. The interviewee might also have believed that revealing details about not having children was not politic in the first place and use *and things like that* to mitigate detrimental implicatures that can arise if his comment was indeed not politic. This analysis is supported by prosodic features such as the accelerated pace of *or things like that* which suggests that the interviewee believes to have generated implicatures that he may not have wished to generate and, thus, tries to quickly change the topic.

In response 4A#10, the interviewer asks interviewee 4A to discuss an incident where he made a mistake at work. This question challenges the high professional competence that interviewee 4A, an engineer, may wish to portray. The interviewee's response can, thus, influence the chance of success in the interview negatively. In his answer, interviewee 4A describes that one of his mistakes was to make certain aspects of his tasks too complex when there might be more straightforward solutions. He uses *thing* as part of the compound noun *engineering thing*, thereby categorising his mistake as typical of engineers in general. By doing so, he mitigates the severity of his mistake since he implies that other engineers (i.e. other applicants for the same position) are susceptible to the same mistake that he admits to having committed.

4A#10; L1 speaker

- Int: Tell me about a time when you made a mistake and how you reacted to it. A mistake at work.
- 4A: Ok .. um ... (3.0) um ... (2.0)
- Int: You don't make mistakes?
- 4A: No that's not it @@ I just I can't think of it, so ...um ... (1.0) so there I suppose there were times where I've made um .. decisions, going back to the time of making **things** more complex occasionally than they needed to be, *I don't know whether it's just an engineering thing or not*, but I like to make **things** that are *elegant not not crude and prone to breaking*, um .. so there there .. have been times, a few couple of occasions, probably in the last last year?, where .. where I have had a *relatively simple* task, um .. and working on this *simple* task, I have noticed that there were other **things** that I *probably* should patch up, because there was a *small* chance that they could come back and cause problems later, and then have committed much too much time to trying to patch up these **things** that weren't actually solving the problem, um .. and .. um and therefore .. um come very close to missing deadlines were the main **thing**. um and ... so what was? Sorry?

Since refusing to answer questions is rarely an option in job interviews, mitigation is crucial when interviewees are required to elaborate on negative professional qualities. The challenging nature of this question can also be seen by the faster pace of the phrase *I don't know whether it's just an engineering thing* which occurs immediately after the interviewee describes the mistake he made. While avoiding detrimental implicatures completely is difficult because of the nature of the question asked, interviewee 4A mitigates the negative implicatures by his categorisation of the mistake as an *engineering thing*, that is, as typical of engineers. He also uses further items and expressions (italicised) that generate an effect of mitigation in this response such as, for example, the adverb *probably* or the clause *I like to make **things** that are elegant not not crude and prone to breaking*, the latter being a downtoned self-promoting statement. *Thing* is therefore used in this answer as part of a speaking style that seems to value mitigation.

Interviewee 6A below also uses *thing* in a compound noun (*maturity thing*) when he is asked to discuss an incident at work where he made a mistake. Like interviewee 4A above, he also shows discomfort with this question as indicated by (suppressed) laughter immediately after he justifies the mistake he made. The mistake of interviewee 6A was to include negative comments about a client in an

email to a work colleague that he then accidentally forwarded to the client as well. Since describing mistakes can generate strong implicatures that might be detrimental (e.g. incompetence), the phrase *it was a maturity thing* seems to be used to mitigate them.

6A#10; L1 speaker

- Int: Tell me about a time when you made a mistake at work and how you reacted to it
- 6A:Yeah it was, put it this way *it's very easy*, as I discovered, *it's a very easy thing to do* it's a and there is a lot of, *I suppose* lessons in it, the first **thing** is .. *you know* if you have, .. it's () **thing**, if you don't have something positive to say don't say it, but if you, .. *you know*, if you gonna never ever put comments that, any personal comments in an email particularly when you are dealing with clients .. um .. and *I suppose* it's about acting professionally in the work that you do, and *that was a maturity thing @@ and a great learning experience* in terms of the way I reacted to that, the first **thing** I did was raise it with my manager, .. um .. let them know that I made a mistake, that this has happened, .. show them the email, so I shared it with him, and I asked their advice in terms of how I should respond to it, so we agreed, I actually called up the client and apologized about it, so *I was very open and honest about it*, and um ... look *it's a learning experience*, .. it's .. *I think it's a mistake that can be easily made*, and I happen to make it and um .. (you know) it's not gonna happen, it's not, it hasn't happened since and it's not gonna ever happen in the future.

The use of the noun *maturity* suggests that the interviewer will not commit this mistake again because he can reflect on it and is, thus, more mature now. His use of *thing* as part of a compound noun also generates an effect of informality and, thus, downtones power differences. The effect introduced may weaken detrimental implicatures that could have been generated in this context. Furthermore, in addition to *thing*, interviewee 6A also uses other items and expressions (italicised) that seem to weaken the severity of the mistake he committed such as *it's a very easy thing to do*, *it's a learning experience* or *it's a mistake that can be easily made*. The item *thing*, therefore, occurs again as part of speaking style that focuses on downtoning the pragmatic impact.

L1 interviewee 1A also seems to use *thing* in *the thing about* to generate interpersonal effects in his response on stress management. The expected, i.e. politic, answer would be to express capability when dealing with stressful situations as such linguistic behaviour would assert professional competence.

Interviewee 1A seems to have little experience working under pressure and it is, thus, unclear whether he is competent and can complete tasks according to strict deadlines. The accelerated pace of *so the thing about working at universities is there are often no deadlines* and the pause that immediately follows this phrase suggests that he is aware that his answer may be dispreferred. The pace is also faster in the phrase *it's not too much of a high pressure thing* which appears as a side comment, thus, ascribing the dispreferred response less importance.

1A#7a; L1 speaker

Int: How about meeting deadlines? Do you cope well with pressure?

1A: Ah deadlines, so ***the thing about*** working at universities is there are often no deadlines, ... well in my group anyway, we have only just instituted the concept of projects, so you actually do have deadlines, and ***things*** tend to finish, but those are quite generous .. um in this environment, so it's not a high,.. it's not too much of a *high pressure thing*,.. although I suppose .. um .. the merger of the two faculties, I mean, the division ICS and the ELS, .. um .. , the workload has gone up a little bit, .. um .. , but it's still not as bad as you would have in the real world,

The phrasal use of *thing* is found utterance initially immediately before the interviewee reveals that he only has limited experience dealing with deadlines. This may be contrary to expectations since the response does not assert professional competence but rather suggests that the interviewee may not be competent. The phrase *the thing about* seems to weaken detrimental implicatures such as incompetence that might be generated. The use of *high pressure thing* can also contribute to mitigation as it generates an effect of informality, i.e. closeness. Apart from uses of *thing*, further mitigation efforts occur in this response. Interviewee 1A stresses, for example, that while he cannot claim extensive experience in dealing with deadlines he does have some. He then immediately mitigates this self-promoting statement by describing those deadlines as not particularly rigid and, thus, seems to try and show politic linguistic behaviour in the Australian context. The general discourse of downtoning *thing* is embedded in, thus, suggests that *thing* itself was also used for mitigation purposes.

While in the L1 speaker data several examples of *thing*, like the ones discussed above, that seem to generate an effect of mitigation could be identified, in the L2

corpus, such uses of *thing* (e.g. *and things like that, the thing is*) were not found. Moreover, the general speaking style of the L2 speakers of English is different to the style of the L1 speakers of Australian English as will be discussed in detail in section 8.6 below. Before exploring items in the co-text of *thing* in both speaker groups, individual uses of *thing* from the L2 interviews are now discussed to illustrate that arguing for a use of *thing* for mitigation purposes in the L2 corpus is difficult.

In response 23#10, L2 interviewee 23 is asked to describe an incident at work where she made a mistake. Since, as discussed, a response to this question can generate strong detrimental implicatures (e.g. incompetence) interviewee 23 should mitigate the mistake she made. The item *thing* is used as part of the phrase *the thing was* immediately before interviewee 23 introduces the main reason (underlined) which made her commit a mistake, that she took too long to complete a task.

23#10; L2 speaker

- Int: Tell me about a time when you made a mistake at work and how you reacted to it
- 23: Ok .. let me .. um ok, when I was, .. let me remember, ... yeah .. when I was in a group, ... when I was an assistant, .. aha .. I remember that we required an IT ... the IT of ... the IT help for extracting some data but **the thing was** that I require something that wasn't .. not good and useful for my work, that was the problem, .. so when the person in the ...um .. IT department give me the information, of course he give me what I need, but something additional, that made me confuse, .. so I took time .. for .. um .. processing that additional information, so it was so, ..um.. I took more time that I supposed to take no? .. so I was on a delay ... on my ... in my task, so it was it caused my seniors .. well () was upset no? .. for that because I was on a on a delay so,

Apart from one use of the item *thing* which can generate such an effect, no other items that have a mitigation potential occur in this response. It, thus, appears that *thing* was mainly used to generate an effect of focusing rather than to mitigate the mistake the interviewee describes in this response.

In response 21#3, the L2 interviewee does not seem to use *thing* either because its use can mitigate implicatures. The question asks interviewee 21 to describe her responsibilities at a previous position. The phrasal use of *thing* (*and things like*

that) occurs utterance finally. Its use suggests that interviewee 21 was responsible for further tasks and also concludes a list of items (*fixed incomes* and *bonds*) that she describes as her main responsibilities at a previous position.

21#3; L2 speaker

- Int: What were your main responsibilities in your last job?
 21: Ah .. well I have to:: develop systems for accounting area, I have to do the analysis, the (), and develop the:: .. the programs for the system, .. ah .. I also attend to the:: .. ah .. back office of mutual funds, and also to the tax area, ah .. I have to to develop all the:: system they need, .. um .. I also did some reports for ah .. for the accounting area, but about ah:: .. fixed incomes bonds () **and things like that.**

Since no other items that can generate an effect of mitigation occur in this response, it is unclear whether interviewee 21 wanted to generate an effect of mitigation by using *thing*. It, rather, appears that *and things like that* was used as a concluding framing device, that is, it seems to have been used for organisational discourse management purposes.

In response 27#13, the L2 interviewee answers a question on salary expectations which, as discussed above, seems rather challenging in the Australian cultural context. The item *thing* occurs as part of a phrase (*and things like that*) and appears to conclude a list of tasks (*taxation, accounting law*) that interviewee 27 was responsible for. Apart from *thing*, no other items that can generate an effect of mitigation can be found and this makes a use of *thing* for mitigation purposes unlikely.

27#13; L2 speaker

- Int: What salary are you looking for? What would be a minimum salary that you'd work for?
 27: Ah ... meanwhile I am looking for ... an average salary, because I need to understand more about the Australian accounting system, .. so I am looking for jobs in entry level positions, .. who can help me to understand, .. much more about the Australian courses, .. as an example ... currently I undertake a course in TAFE, ... in accounting which can help me to understand more about, ah .. for example the taxation, .. accounting law, **and things like that.**

An L1 response to the same question was discussed above (Response 1A#13).

In contrast to the L2 response, the L1 use of *thing* in response 1A#13 did, however, not seem to have a list-completion function since the exemplar *expenses* already summarised further items that *thing* could refer to. The phrase *and things like that*, thus, seemed referentially redundant in the L1 answer, and it was argued that an effect of mitigation was generated since the co-text also showed a focus on downtoning the pragmatic impact. Because no further items that can generate an effect of mitigation occur in the L2 response and since *and things like* may indeed have a list-completion function, it is unclear whether it was used to generate an effect of mitigation in response 27#13. The falling intonation which follows the general extender rather suggests that it was used as a concluding framing device.

The use of noun + *thing* was also discussed above as generating an effect of mitigation in the L1 corpus. In the L2 data this use is not common as it is only found three times in reply to two different answers by one and the same interviewee. Interviewee 14 who uses such a compound noun construction is asked to describe the tasks he was responsible for at a previous position.

14#3; L2 speaker

Int: What were your main responsibilities at your last job?

14: Ok .. ah .. my last job is running sales agent in my home country, ah .. sales agent of a leading global software company, and ah .. I was responsible to: .. ah .. just develop plan, () let's say business plan first of all, and let's .. and then provide the sales and marketing plan in order to enter the market, and (let's) I did some market research at that time, to see if the product would go into the market, .. and would fits into the market, .. and is a need for the industries of the companies or not, .. and after I did that I just started to do marketing things and sales things, .. conducting meetings with different companies, ... IT managers, .. managers, .. and CEOs of the companies .. big companies, .. in many industries such as oil and gas mining, ah .. and let's say .. construction .. media broadcasting, because the device we were presenting, ah .. was a let's say .. a must for .. ah.. the companies who worked in bad areas with no telecommunication, .. you see .. I was responsible for that kind of stuff.

The use of noun + *thing* in this answer is interesting because *thing* is referentially redundant in the compounds *marketing things* and *sales things*. Since it is perfectly acceptable to simply refer to *marketing* and *sales*, *thing* does not seem to have been used for discourse management effects such as placeholder or approximating, effects that this compound noun can also generate. Rather, it

appears that *thing* occurs as a semantically empty suffix as this L2 interviewee tries to adopt an Australian speaking style. It is, therefore, possible that interviewee 14 uses noun + *thing* in a bid to build cultural in-group membership, but it is unclear whether he also relies on it for mitigation purposes.

Analysing the speaking style of interviewee 14 in more detail it becomes clear that his speech in general does not show a frequent use of items that can generate an effect of mitigation. His speech is characterised by an infrequent use of items such as *sort of* and *I think* or markers of informality like *guys* which could influence the pragmatic impact in a downtoning manner and weaken implicatures. In the particular answer discussed above, he does not use such items either. On the contrary, his speaking style is characterised by workplace nouns such as *CEO*, *sales agent*, *global software company* and *marketing plan* which are commonly found in formal discourse. Since the use of noun + *thing* is characteristic of informal speech, his use of this compound is stylistically rather peculiar as his style does not focus on informality otherwise. It is, therefore, unlikely that he used *thing* to generate an effect of mitigation by downtoning power differences (mitigation^P).

8.6 Co-text of *thing*: Mitigation^P and mitigation

The comparison of the use of *thing* in the two speaker groups outlined so far suggests that the L1 speakers of Australian English used this item to generate an effect of mitigation. The same could, however, not be observed in the L2 data. In order to strengthen the analysis of *thing*, the frequency of items that are functionally similar to *thing* which occur in the co-text has also been compared between the two speaker groups. It will be argued that if *thing* co-occurs with other items that can generate an effect of mitigation then this increases the likelihood that *thing* itself has been used for the same purpose (see also Koester 2006: 95 who argues in a similar vein in her discussion of VL and hedges).

By analysing the co-text of *thing*, further VL items which, due to the scope of this thesis, could not be investigated in the same detail as *thing*, are also discussed to some extent (see Appendix H for a frequency analysis of all items coded initially). The VL items analysed in this section include nouns such as *stuff* (categories 4.2, 4.3 in Appendix H), discussed as part of the more general category 'informality markers', modifiers like *sort of* (category 5 in Appendix H) and parenthetical verbs

like *I think* (category 7 in Appendix H). These further types of VL items are similar to *thing* as they can also generate an effect of mitigation due to their common link to vagueness¹² and the informality of some of them (e.g. *stuff*, *I guess*). A quantitative analysis of these items will be provided in both speaker groups and examples of markers of informality, modifiers and parenthetical verbs as used by the L1 and L2 speakers of English will also be discussed qualitatively.

8.6.1 Mitigation^P: Markers of informality

With respect to mitigation^P, the use of other markers of informality has been analysed since this type of mitigation is generated due to the informality of *thing*. As discussed above, some items that will be analysed in the category of markers of informality haven also been investigated by previous VL studies. Such items are, for example, the nouns *stuff* and *guys* (Jucker, Smith, and Lüdge, 2003; Andersen, 2010) and general extenders such as *and stuff like that* (e.g. Overstreet, 2005; Terraschke, 2010). Since informality is an inherent property of a wide range of VL items (see, for example, the list of informal items discussed by Crystal and Davy's study, 1975), the analysis of markers of informality, thus, broadens the scope of this VL study on *thing*.

A type-token analysis of language that is commonly found in informal discourse identified four main categories of markers of informality that can generate an effect of mitigation in the L1 job interview data (see Crystal and Davy, 1975 for an overview of features of casual conversations). These categories are strong positive or negative *attitudinal expressions* (e.g. swearing; Wierzbicka, 2002; Stapleton, 2010), *colloquialisms* (i.e. Australian colloquialisms; Baker, 1959; Baker, 1978; Delbridge, 1999), *quotatives* (see e.g. Winter, 2002 for quotative use in Australia) and *shortenings* i.e. *abbreviations* (see Appendices F and G for L1 and L2 lists of informal items identified). Markers of informality from these four categories occur in all L1 speaker interviews with some speakers of Australian English using them particularly often. Most items have been categorised as *colloquialisms* and include nouns such as *guys* or more elaborate expressions like *we nutted it out*. Positive and negative attitudinal expressions (positive: *I get a kick*

¹² The type of vagueness the different categories introduce may, however, differ since a use of *thing* can, for example, generate referential vagueness while items such as *I think* may generate epistemic vagueness.

out of or negative: *the idiot*) and informal quotatives (e.g. *they just simply said no this is not right*) are also found.

The discourse marker *you know*, which has been identified as a common feature of informal discourse (Holmes, 1986), is also found often in the interviews analysed. Its use influences the relationship between speaker and hearer as by its use the speaker implies that mutual manifestness exists between the interlocutors (Holmes, 1986). Similarly to using *thing*, by using *you know* “the speaker divides responsibility for what he or she is stating” (Schneider, 2010: 263). Speakers can, however, also choose this expression when they assume that the hearer does not know what the speaker refers to and it “may serve as a rhetorical device aimed at pre-empting possible objections by the interlocutor (cf. Huebner, 1983: 148; Bazzanella, 1995: 253, 154).” (Schneider, 2010: 263). The expression *you know* can, therefore, have a hedging function and also alters power differences as it seems to be a characteristic item of informal discourse.

Whereas in the L1 corpus markers of informality occurred quite frequently, few uses of such language were found in the L2 data. Nevertheless, in both speaker groups most informal lexemes and expressions that occurred were categorised as *colloquialisms*. However, a considerably greater frequency and wider range of items occurred in the L1 interviews (see Table 8.4 next page). Eight of the 25 L2 speakers used colloquialisms while they were only found in 16 of the 18 L1 speaker interviews (see participant IDs in parenthesis).

Table 8.4: Colloquialisms in L1 and L2

L1 speakers	L2 speakers
The <i>nitty-gritty</i> (2A)	I had very very <i>tough</i> very hard deadlines (2)
Put their foot down (3A)	That kind of <i>stuff</i> (14)
Hiccups and hurdles (4A)	<i>tough</i> (16)
Iron out (4A)	<i>stuff</i> (16)
A bunch of (4A)	They were <i>like</i> they want to/ it's <i>like</i> / I <i>like</i> forget (17)
Get on top of that (5A)	<i>they are stuck</i> waiting for the information (21)
Shoestring budget (5A)	<i>guys</i> (21)
Just roll with it (5A)	<i>teammates</i> (21)
It became messy (5A)	I had to <i>quit</i> that job (22)
Guy (5A)	It's <i>like</i> (29)
Nutted it out (5A)	Some team <i>mates</i> (3x) (33)
I've picked up along the way (5A)	all those <i>stuff</i> (33)
Twiddling your thumbs (6A)	
You guys (6A)	
Teething problems (7A)	
Stuff (7A)	
Bounce ideas of them (7A)	
Stuff (7A)	
Such a big figure, you know, going beserk (8A)	
You guys (2x) (8A)	
Pick up his work (9A)	
Two heads are better than one (12A)	
To do your bit (12A)	
Bossing everyone around (14A)	
On the spot (14A)	
For <i>like</i> the last year (14A)	
Guys (15A)	
Taking a battering (15A)	
Learning to hold my tongue (16A)	
I get a kick out of (16A)	
Jump over to another bit (16A)	
Jump on and help (16A)	
my mates (16A)	
Put my foot down (17A)	
Usually <i>like</i> we work individually (18A)	
Just get on with work (18A)	

The list of *colloquialisms* in Table 8.4 also shows that the L1 speakers use colloquial expressions (e.g. *put my foot down*) frequently while these are mostly absent from the L2 speech.

The comparison of items from the category *attitudinal expressions* similarly finds a difference between L1 and L2 speaker use. While the L1 speakers express positive (e.g. *love*) and negative attitude (e.g. *hate*), only items that show a positive speaker attitude occur in the L2 data.

Table 8.5: Expressions of speaker attitude in L1 and L2

L1 speakers	L2 speakers
<i>Stupid thing</i> (1A)	I <i>love</i> being updated in everything (14)
What I really <i>hate</i> is calculus (1A)	It's almost I mean <i>fun</i> and exciting to do my job (32)
Wasn't a lot of <i>fun</i> (4A)	have some some <i>fun</i> (32)
An absolute <i>idiot</i> (4A)	I really <i>love</i> the challenges (34)
<i>This guy</i> (4A)	
<i>Let's attack</i> this framework (8A)	
Is quite <i>fun</i> (12A)	
Some pretty <i>horrible</i> people (15A)	
A bit of <i>fun</i> (15A)	

In order to exemplify this type of mitigation in L1 and L2 by items other than *thing*, some uses of markers of informality are now discussed qualitatively.

Other markers of informality which have standardly been included in VL research are general extenders such as *and stuff like this*. Participant 7a below chooses such expressions as well as other markers of informality in the two responses shown below (italicised). In response 7A#5, she uses *and all that sort of stuff* in addition to a wide range of other markers of informality (e.g. *things*, *sort of*, *you know*).

7A#5; L1 speaker

Int: What do you think you have done particularly well in your job?

7A: I'd say picking up technical knowledge would actually be my forte at the moment? .. yeah .. I find it quite easy to *sort of* dive into *those sort of things*, and just learn as I go, so those *things* are, .. those *things* are the easier ones, .. it's always the time, .. *you know*, .. organisation ***and all that sort of stuff*** which I am finding hard but, .. yeah,

Prosodic features such as the accelerated pace in the phrase *organisation and all that sort of stuff* and the pauses which are introduced when interviewee 7A describes her weaknesses (interestingly without having prompted to do so) suggest that she may feel uncomfortable answering this question. Her discomfort may be related to the detrimental implicatures that her answer can generate. It appears that in order to weaken such potential implicatures, the interviewee uses the informality of VL to generate an effect of mitigation^P.

In response 7A#6b, a general extender (*and stuff like this*) is again used in conjunction with a high frequency of other markers of informality such as *you know, like, and things like that*.

7A#6b; L1 speaker

Int: Tell me about a situation when you had to demonstrate good communication skills

7A: *well .. it was actually in one of the client meetings, .. um .. the::... coz we had gone to a previous client meeting where the client, .. he wasn't completely sure of what he wanted .. from us? we'd sort of presented all this different, .. ah .. you know opportunities for him, .. but he wasn't sure himself what he wanted? .. so we'd held another meeting in which I was present again? ..um .. where we went through, .. and I think in terms of communication he was just, .. sort of, .. you know, .. trying to put into words what he wanted, .. and I sort of brought forth the idea of just using, .. like the, .. whiteboard, .. and like, .. I started writing down his ideas **and stuff like this**, .. and he could actually immediately see what and we could like form connections *and things like that*,.. so I think that helped in the communication, .. sometimes you find that, .. you know, .. people communicate in different ways?.. so some people are very visual, .. some people are very vocal, .. and so sometimes it helps to use a different? .. sort of?.. communication?.. I think, .. I am sort of versatile that way?*

Participant 7A describes in this answer how she helped solve a difficult situation. Instead of boasting about her achievement, she downtones it and, thus, avoids detrimental implicatures. Prosodic features in this answer also suggest that this question is rather difficult for the interviewee. In particular, the accelerated pace in the phrase *I started writing down ideas and stuff like that*, followed by a change from a first person singular pronoun description to a first person plural (inclusive we) description suggests that the interviewee feels uncomfortable praising her skills.

While the two responses above show the use of general extenders, the following two answers exemplify the use of *guys*, another item of VL, in the L1 interviews. Interviewee 8A below, uses the expression *you guys* twice when addressing the interviewer and the company the interviewer represents. The use of *guys* occurs in the last two questions of the interview. It first occurs when interviewee 8A is asked to promote his suitability for the position advertised (8A#14) and is then used again in response to the immediately following question (8A#15) which asks him to indicate a potential start date at his new workplace, should he be offered the position.

8A#14; L1 speaker

Int: Can you tell me why you are the best person for the job, why should we hire you?

8A: @@ as I said, .. there is a lot of things that I've got to say, .. but, .. um, .. basically I think I've got the right expertise for this particular job, .. um .. **you guys** are looking for, .. you know, .. a person who can communicate well, .. a person who can act work well in a team, .. um .. a person who can meet deadlines, a person who's ...who's adaptable to change, a person who's got great technical knowledge in a particular area, .. in IT, ..um.. a person that's, .. that's committed a person who's willing to work in a diverse environment,.. I think I've got all those skills to meet, .. and I think I'd be a great asset to your particular team.

8A#15; L1 speaker

Int: When could you start working for us?

8A: Um, .. as soon as possible, .. whenever **you guys** are ready, I am .. basically open to:,... to negotiations as to my start date.

Prosodic features such as the nervous laughter as interviewee 8A answers question #14, as well as the pauses in the second answer indicate the challenging nature of the questions. It, thus, appears that in both responses the use of *you guys* builds rapport with the interviewer by introducing mitigation^P, that is, its use downplays the power difference between interviewer and interviewee by engaging in a discourse of mateship.

Markers of informality such as *guys* and *stuff* have typically been discussed as VL items. Further informal items are also analysed below due to their close relationship with informality, a feature which they share with the informal VL nouns

discussed so far. In response 16A#10, an L1 Interviewee is asked to describe a situation where he made a mistake at work. As discussed previously, a response to this question can generate detrimental implicatures as an interviewee may, for example, be perceived as incompetent. It seems that interviewee 16A uses colloquial expressions (bolded in the response), such as, *to muck around the issue* and *it's a huge stuff up* in order to generate an effect of informality and, thus, invoke a discourse of mateship. In the Australian context, engaging in such a speaking style weakens detrimental implicatures which could arise when interviewees describe mistakes in job interviews.

16A#10; L1 speaker

- Int: Tell me about a time when you made a mistake at work and how you reacted to it
- 16A: Yeah one of the biggest mistakes I've made at work was actually that, ... we we work with some,..um.. suppliers and we we send them some data that basically lets them know how much they need to invoice us for, .. and one of two of the suppliers .. um .. have the same name, .. and so I actually sent pricing information to one supplier that I obviously should not have, .. the recourse for that was that, .. basically that, .. I went directly to the supplier, .. and and ***rather than sort of trying to muck around the issue*** I said, .. this mistake has been made, ..um.. I met with that supplier met with the other supplier whose information I had sent to them and, .. um... and tried, .. and tried to appease all parties, ..um.. obviously it's ***it's a huge stuff up***, .. because it's very sensitive information? .. um.. but .. um ... but I thought going directly to people and saying, .. ***this is what's happened let's deal with it?*** was the best way to do it rather than trying to make sure it went away ().

By using markers of informality, the high power difference that characterises this speech event seems downplayed and effects such as closeness and friendliness may be generated. In such an atmosphere, potentially detrimental implicatures, the speaker's answer may introduce into the discourse, are weakened.

Interviewee 7A also uses markers of informality often in the response below. This interviewee was previously asked to describe a team task that she contributed to and now evaluates the group's performance and suggests improvements to the performance of the team.

7A#8c; L1 speaker

- Int: Is there anything that the group could do better? How could the performance be improved? [Part of a question on team work]
- 7A: Oh yeah, .. no there could be a lot of improvements I think @@ ahm .. yeah I think with,.. there is always a bit of division between ahm the people doing the work and the people who () managing the work? .. there's, .. because with us we're the graduates we're *sort of* doing the, .. **you know** .. the baseline work, .. whereas there is always the manager who *sort of* expects us to have reached certain deadlines and he, he's not quite aware of how long it takes? .. so that's been our main problem at the moment trying to convey to him, **you know**, .. how long it's really *gonna* take, you know, .. he expects it at the end of the week we are telling him no it actually takes like a month .. **you know** yeah .. so he is not quite aware of how long it really takes to do certain *things* so, .. I think ... I guess it really just comes round to communication then, where you try to tell, .. **you know**, .. this is *gonna* take this long we really can't,.. **you know**, .. *push it*, .. make it just happen in one week so yeah that's been our major . . pro-problem and it could be improved by just improving our communication yeah.

L1 interviewee 7A uses the expression *you know* five times in her answer, in addition to other items that are also characteristic of informal discourse (italicised). It appears that her use of these markers of informality downplays the power difference between interviewee and interviewer and this may generate positive effects such as rapport. Due to this effect, allowances may be made with respect to potentially detrimental implicatures that this response could have generated.

While the qualitative discussion of L1 uses of markers of informality suggests that these items are indeed used for mitigation purposes, the L2 speaker analyses cannot clearly identify a use of such items for mitigation purposes. As in the L1 data, informal items which have previously been categorised as VL are discussed first in the qualitative L2 analysis which follows. In 16#8b, an L2 speaker describes a team task. In his reponse, he uses the VL noun *stuff* once when concluding his speech. Other than *stuff*, no further items that can generate mitigation, however, occur. Moreover, the falling intonation at the end of the clause as part of which *stuff* occurs suggests that it is used as a concluding device rather than to generate mitigation.

16#8b; L2 speaker

Int: Tell me about a time when you worked in a team, how many people were in the group, what was the task, what was your role?

16: Oh .. in our project there were 13 Nepalese, .. and .. um .. four foreigners, ... one is from America one is from Canada one is from Australia and one is from, ..um .. Switzerland, .. and (13) are Nepalese we 17 worked together, .. and we did lot .. to change government bank into private bank, ... and that is really challenge and that is the evidence we work in the team, .. and we could ... reduce the:: .. non-performing assets, .. non-performing assets means bad assets in the bank we normally we reduce, .. we reduce non performing assets from 76 to 26, .. or 25 or 26, .. that's the great **stuff** we did in the team.

This interviewee uses mitigation devices very infrequently in all answers. In fact, the single modifier that he uses is *sort of* that occurs only once while only one parenthetical verb (*I think*) is found, which he uses eight times. The low frequency of items that can generate mitigation, thus, suggests that he does not understand the importance of mitigation in the Australian context.

In response 33#8b, L2 interviewee 33 uses an informal general extender (*all those stuff*). While this general extender is non-native like (*and stuff like this* would have been the correct expression), it still introduces an aspect of informality into discourse. This interviewee chooses a semi-formal style, using mainly general words and markers of informality but also some formal language (e.g. *infrastructure, assemble*).

33#8b; L2 speaker

L2: Can you tell me about a time when you worked in a group, what was the group task, how many people were involved and what was your role?

33: Yes we ... my team .. back in university,.. we had to:: ...(1.0) to .. structure to make all the structure for our new IT laboratory,... so we were in a team with five .. or six, .. five or six teammates to complete the tasks we had only one week to finish all the work, ..um.. I was the leader of the part of the infrastructure part,..um... I had to::... teach all those *guys* how to assemble cables,.. network cables and how we would pass the cables through the walls,.. and how we would ... um .. create the network architecture?.. and about the installation of software and operational systems, .. we were a team and we all knew what to do and how to do,.. so we divide the work .. um .. equally,.. I think each one took around 5 or 6 computers to:: .. to install all the software, .. and operational systems we had to use .. um .. both linux and windows, ... yeah, .. I think that was really *tough* one week just to do **all those stuff**,

The speaking style of interviewee 33 generates an effect of informality and, as a result, mitigation^P does occur. However, such responses are not common in the L2 corpus.

Apart from these VL markers of informality, further informal items that occur in the L2 data are now discussed. L2 speaker 17, for example, uses the marker of informality *like* (*it's like*) several times in her interview as shown in the response below.

17#8a; L2 speaker

Int: Do you like working in a team?

17: Yes I like it,.. ***it's like*** .. because we can learn, .. a lot from each other? .. and then we can done the team quicker.

Apart from this feature, which is common of informal discourse, no other markers of informality can be found in the speech of interviewee 17. Moreover, in contrast to the L1 excerpts discussed above, this L2 answer does not show further items that could generate an effect of mitigation (e.g. *I think*) and the frequency of informality markers is very low.

L2 participants 2 and 16 both use the marker of informality *tough* once. Interestingly both uses of this item occur in response to question 7# which asks interviewees to describe how they cope with deadlines. Interviewee 2 uses *tough* but immediately replaces it by the less informal adjective *hard*. It, thus, appears that he does not consider *tough* to be a good word to use in this response. This is also indicated by the short pause which follows *tough* and the accelerated pace by which *hard deadlines* is introduced into the discourse.

2#7a; L2 speaker

- Int: How about meeting deadlines, do you cope well with pressure?
2: Ah .. sometimes .. sometimes yes .. um .. sometimes I had very very **tough** .. *hard* deadlines, .. and very .. ah .. short time to do ...um ... to eliminate some problem .. ah .. it's because ah ... our mobile network ah ... is large network, .. we we have a lot of ah .. customers, .. a lot of subscribers, .. and .. ah .. even when .. ah .. some of our service system, .. doesn't work within maybe half of hour, .. ah .. we we lost a lot of money, .. so I .. I always ... maybe not always, .. in 95 percents of .. cases I meet all deadlines.

Apart from the word *tough*, no other markers of informality are used in this answer. Furthermore, no hedges such as *sort of* or *I think* occur. Therefore, mitigation does not seem to have been generated in this answer.

Interviewee 16 also uses the adjective *tough* in response to the question on meeting deadlines. However, unlike interviewee 2, he does not replace *tough* by a less informal item. It appears that he does not feel that using this informal word is not politic.

16#7a; L2 speaker

- Int: How about meeting deadlines, do you cope well with pressure?
16: Oh that's the (good) pressure and, ... normally we do have one meeting in a week, .. with my boss and directors, .. and they give lot of jobs, ... before I go to the meeting, ... I have to prepare all the *things*, .. prepare balances sheets, .. prepare profit and loss all financial statements, .. plus .. get all reports regarding customers .. service .. () service, .. all those *things* definitely it is **tough**, .. and to get a report from my (subordinate), .. and to submit my .. s-supervisor (report) and I have to be on time.

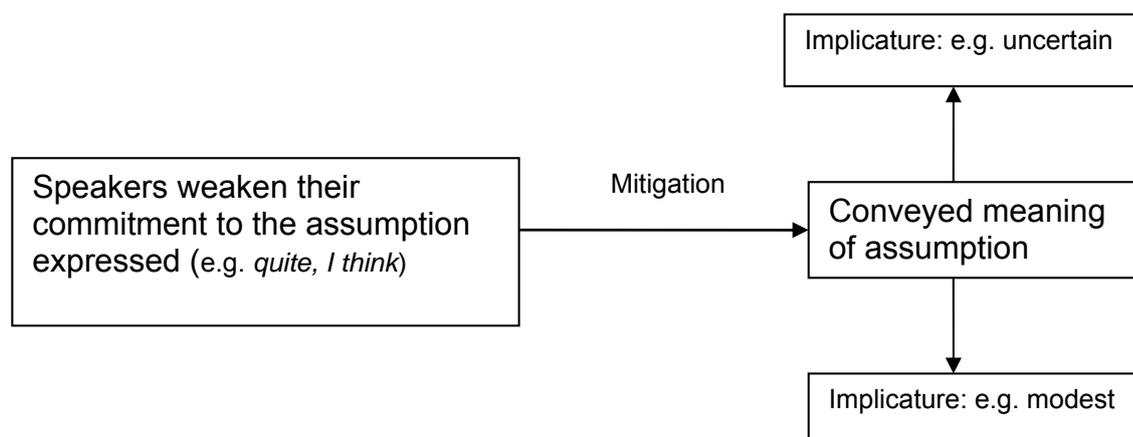
In addition to *tough*, interviewee 16 also uses *things* twice which does not occur at all in the answer by interviewee 2. Therefore, a weak effect of mitigation^P in generated in this answer. This trend continues throughout the interview as the total frequency of *thing* is higher in the speech of interviewee 16, suggesting a more informal speaking style.

The comparison of markers of informality in the L1 and the L2 data finds an overall fewer use and narrower range of items that can downplay power differences (mitigation^P) in the L2 corpus. The analyses of these items, therefore, mirrors the findings on *thing* in the two speaker groups since both, markers of informality and *thing*, occur less often in the L2 than the L1 data. Frequency being the main variable that influences the strength of mitigation^P, it appears that the L2 speakers in general did not take advantage of this effect of mitigation as strongly as the L1 speakers of Australian English. With respect to the qualitative analysis of markers of informality, the findings of the quantitative discussion could be confirmed with respect to the L1 data as markers of informality were embedded in a speaking style which relied on further such items. In the L2 data, the qualitative results were mixed. As expected by the quantitative findings, L2 answers generally showed few uses of markers of informality. Some L2 speakers, however, managed to skillfully use a semi-formal speaking style by incorporating markers of informality as well as more formal language in their responses. Therefore, these speakers also generated mitigation^P. However, this effect was less strong in the L2 group overall.

8.6.2 Hedges, mitigation in the co-text of *thing*

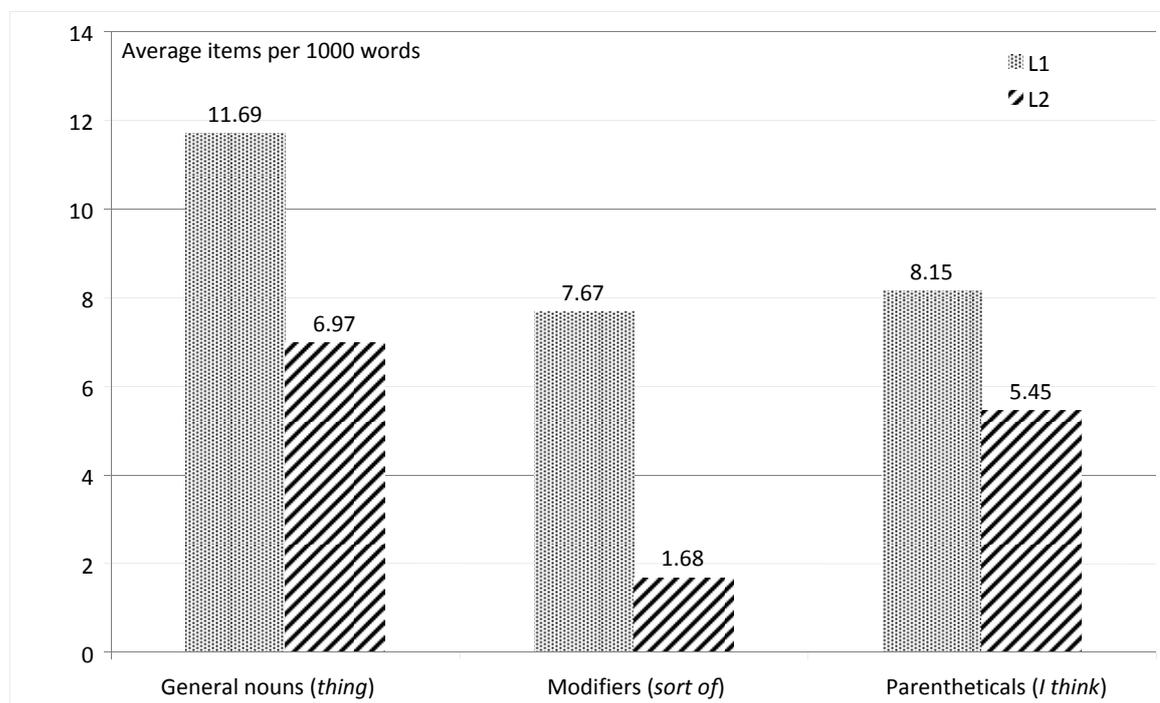
Hedges such as *I think* and *sort of* were also analysed quantitatively in the L1 and L2 interviews. These items have been included in some VL studies (e.g. Jucker, Smith, and Lüdge, 2003; Zhang, 2011) while others have chosen to refrain from their analysis (e.g. Cheng and Warren, 2001; Drave, 2001). Given that hedges can also generate vagueness, that is epistemic vagueness (see Sauerland and Stateva, 2007 for a description of this type of vagueness), this study chose to include them in a taxonomy of VL (See Table 2.1 for the VL taxonomy used in this study). Moreover, similarly to uses of *thing*, speakers can choose parentheticals such as *I think* and modifiers like *sort of* to mitigate their commitment to the assumption expressed. Therefore, these items share their relationship with vagueness and their potential to generate an effect of mitigation with the item *thing*. The mitigation effect of hedges was discussed initially in Figure 3.4 (Chapter Three), reproduced on the next page.

Figure 3.4: Hedging (reproduced from Chapter Three)



As discussed in Chapter Three, the mitigation effect of modifiers such as *quite* and parentheticals like *I think* can portray a speaker as uncertain or modest. Figure 8.1 (next page) shows that, in addition to general nouns such as *thing* which occur 11.7 times per 1000 words in the L1 data but only 7 times per 1000 words in the L2 data, the L1 speakers of English used *sort of* and *I think* more often than the L2 speakers. Modifiers like *sort of* occurred 7.7 times per 1000 words in the L1 corpus whereas they only constitute 1.7 of 1000 words in the L2 corpus. Parentheticals such as *I think* are found 8.2 times per 1000 words in the L1 corpus but only occurred 5.5 times per 1000 words in the L2 corpus.

Figure 8.1: General nouns, modifiers and parenthetical verbs in L1 and L2



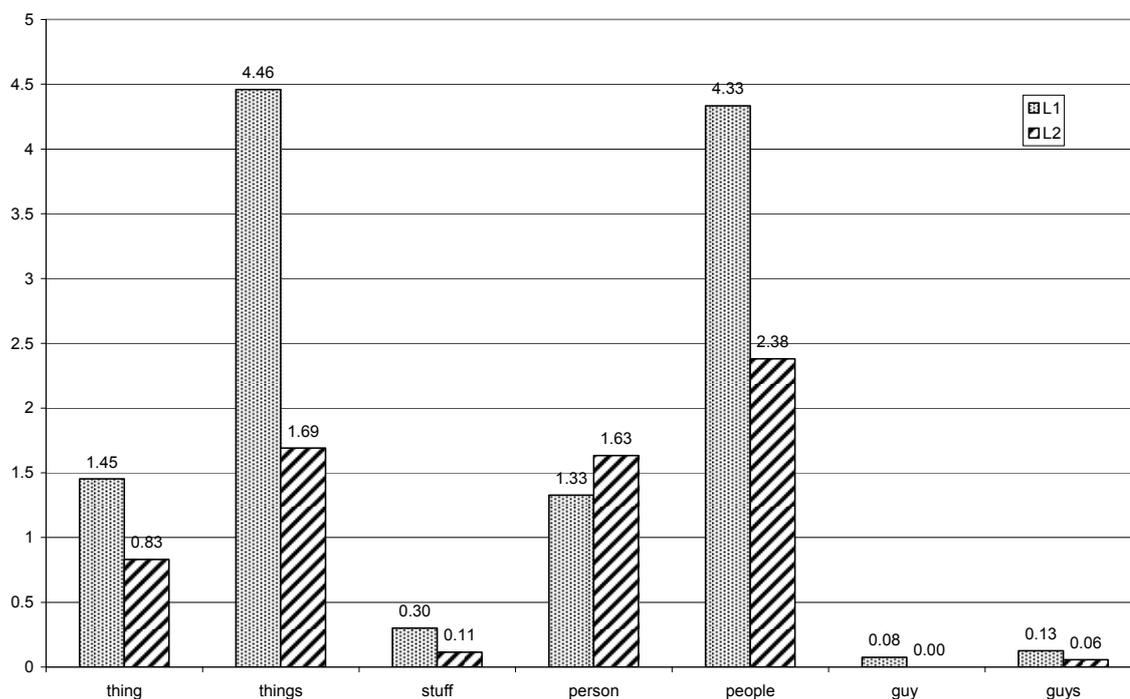
The overall use of modifiers and parentheticals, therefore, parallels the use of general nouns such as *thing* in the two speaker groups as they were also used less often by the L2 speakers. Therefore, several categories of VL items which have a potential to generate an effect of mitigation are more prominent in the L1 than the L2 corpus.

Statistical tests were conducted to test the statistical significance of the results presented in Figure 8.1. It can be concluded that there is a statistically significant difference on the average use of general nouns such as *thing* per 1000 words between the L1 and L2 speaker group (L2) (Mann-Whitney U statistic = 71.0 with p-value = .000). It can also be concluded that L1 speakers are more likely to use general nouns such as *thing* than L2 speakers (p-value = 0.000, mean rank = 30.56 for L1 against 15.8 for L2). The Mann-Whitney U test also suggests that there is a significant difference regarding the use of modifiers (per 1000) between L1 and L2 speakers (U = 59.0, p-value = 0.000). It also confirmed that the L1 speakers used such words significantly more than the L2 speakers

(p-value=0.000, mean rank =31.22 for L1 against 15.36 for L2). Regarding parentheticals, there is a significant difference on the average uses of parentheticals (per 100 words) between L1 and L2 speakers (t-statistics = 2.507, p-value = 0.017 < 0.05, equal variances not assumed) according to Two-sample t-test. The results also suggest to conclude that the L1 speakers are significantly more frequent users of parentheticals compared to the L2 speakers (p-value =0.017). On average L1 speakers used parentheticals 2.803 per 1000 words more than the L2 speakers (standard error (SE)=1.118). Therefore, the differences between L1 and L2 speaker use of general nouns, modifiers and parentheticals are all statistically significant.

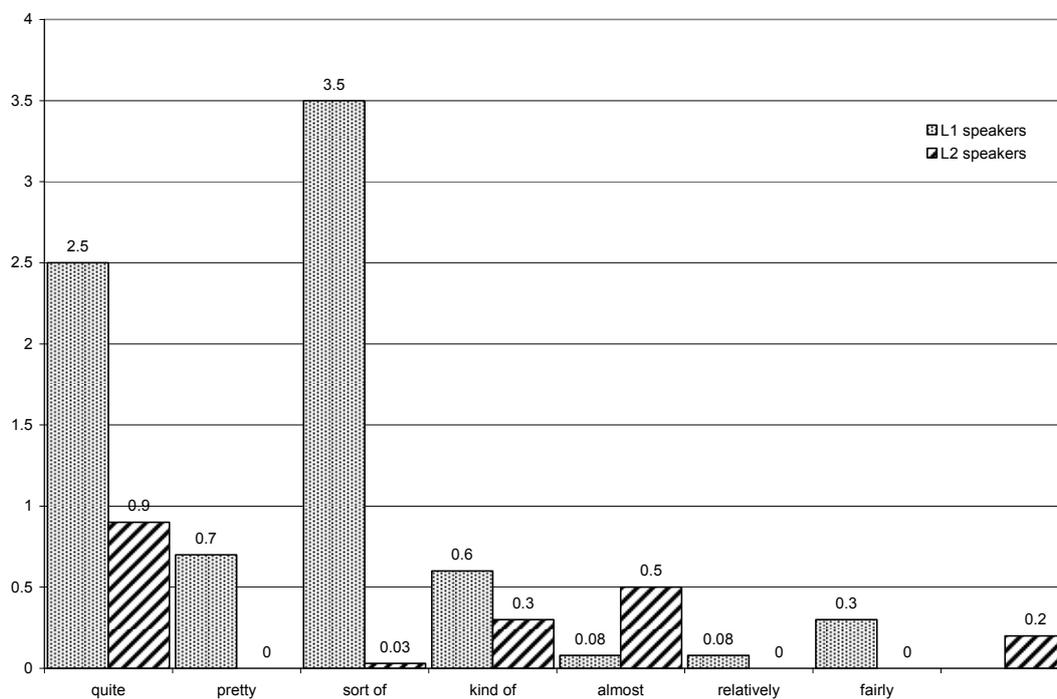
In addition to the overall difference in frequency between L1 and L2 speaker use of items from these three categories, there are also differences regarding the types of general nouns, modifiers and parentheticals used. With respect to the range of general nouns (see Figure 8.2 on next page), the most frequently used item in the L1 data is *things* (4.5 times per 1000 words) whereas the general noun that the L2 speakers used most often is *people* (2.4 times per 1000 words), which is the second most common noun in the L1 corpus (4.3 times per 1000 words). Other general nouns that were used quite often are *thing* (1.5 times per 1000 words in L1; 0.8 times per 1000 words in L2) and *person* (1.3 times per 1000 words in L1; 1.6 times per 1000 words in L2).

Figure 8.2: General nouns in L1 and L2



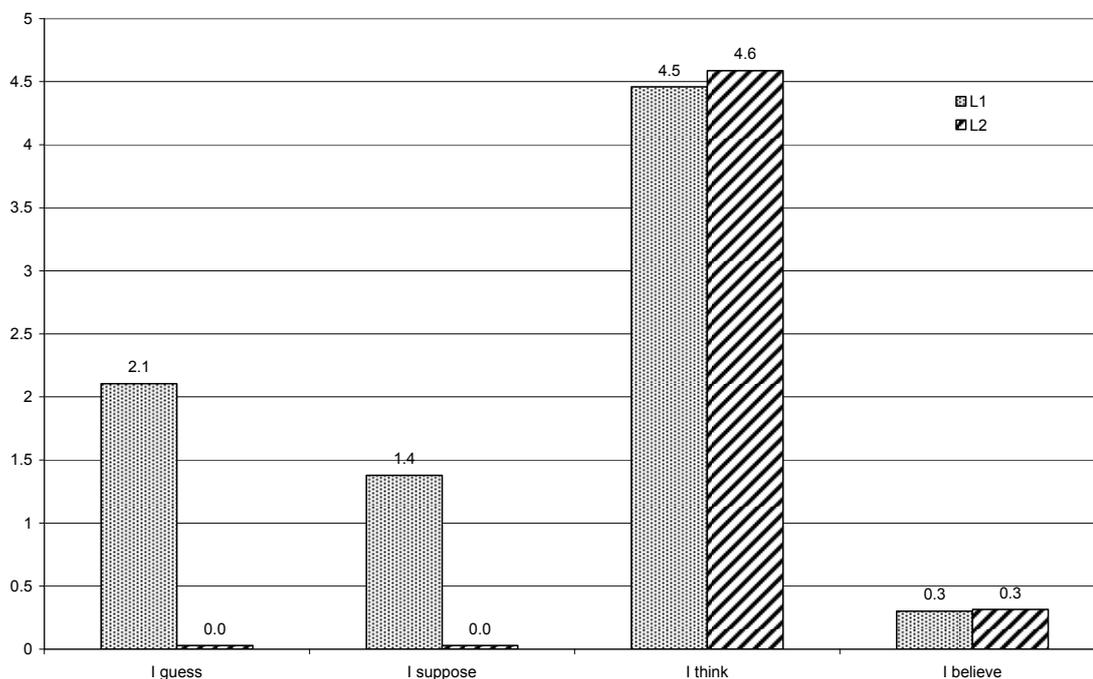
Regarding modifiers, there are also differences (see Figure 8.3 on next page). The modifiers that were used most often by the L2 speakers are *quite* and *pretty* with *quite* being the second most used item in the L1 speaker data as well. The L1 speakers, however, used *sort of* very frequently while this item rarely occurred in the L2 corpus. Instead, the latter preferred the modifier *kind of* which is a synonym of *sort of*. *Kind of* was, however, used very rarely by the L1 speakers.

Figure 8.3: Modifiers in L1 and L2



There are also differences regarding the range of parenthetical verbs in the two speaker groups (see Figure 8.4 on next page). Although both, the L1 and the L2 speakers, used the parentheticals *I think* and *I believe* with almost the same frequency, only the L1 speakers also used *I guess* and *I suppose*.

Figure 8.4: Parenthetical verbs in L1 and L2



Examples from both speaker groups that exemplify the different uses of these VL items are now discussed.

In the response below, interviewee 6A is prompted to engage in self-praise as question #14 asks him to describe why he is the best candidate for the position advertised. As in previously discussed answers to this question, interviewee 6A also seems to feel that this question is challenging, as indicated by prosodic features such as laughter and accelerated pace (*Because I am the best person on the job and you should hire me*). Furthermore, a wide range of hedges occur which seem to generate a strong effect of mitigation. While interviewee 6A initially assures the interviewer that he has *a lot to offer*, he precedes this by the parenthetical verb *I think* and follows it up with another parenthetical (*I suppose*) which both mitigate the interviewee's self-promoting statement.

6A#14; L1 speaker

Int: Can you tell me why you are the best person for the job, why should we hire you?

6A: @@ .. Because I am the best person on the job and you should hire me, .. um ... look **I think** I've got a lot to offer, ... in terms of ... **I suppose** the approach to the way I do **things**, .. um .. I am **fairly** honest with myself in terms of where I can improve, ..um .. and I can adapt to situations and, .. you know .. pick **things** up **fairly** quickly, .. so the end result of that means that, .. you know .. I have learnt how to do **things** at Xname with my current role, .. in a new role I'd see myself as being able to pick up .. new processes and new approaches and new **things** **fairly** quickly, .. as well as receive feedback openly, . you know and work well with your team, .. um .. um .. you know senior team and clients and so forth.

In the remainder of the answer, he also uses other hedges that can introduce mitigation (e.g. *I think*, *I suppose*, *fairly*). The adverb *fairly*, for example, occurs three times and mitigates the description of positive personal characteristics. In addition, the frequent use of *you know* by this interviewee similarly establishes closeness and downplays power differences. The speaking style of interviewee 6A is, thus, focused on mitigation. Since a description of skills requires mitigation in the Australian cultural context, this type of linguistic behaviour suggests closeness as language is used in a politic manner.

In response 7A#7a below, another L1 interviewee uses hedges often. In this case, there is a frequent use of modifiers such as *quite*, *sort of* and *a bit of*. It appears that this interviewee uses modifiers to downtone the description of her work load. In particular, she uses *a bit of* and *quite* to mitigate the number of tasks that she was required to complete in order to meet a deadline. In addition, she uses the modifier *sort of* twice which seems to contribute to a tone of informality, similarly to the use of *you know* that also occurs in this answer.

7A#7a; L1 speaker

- Int: How about meeting deadlines, do you cope well with pressure?
 7A: Yeah .. um .. recently we had **a bit of** ah:: .. um .. one where .. *you know* .. it was due on a Monday, .. and we had **quite a bit of things** to do so:: .. it involved us working on the weekend, .. so I mean you just **sort of** learn, .. I learnt that you have, .. especially with this job, .. that you have to .. um .. try not to keep too many priorities (of), .. like as in external priorities? .. so you have to be able to manage them as *things* come across?.. so:: say if I had *things* on that weekend, . I had to learn to just manage them in some other way so that I could actually work on the weekend, .. um .. yeah that's how, .. that that's **sort of** happened (),

These L1 responses show that the L1 speakers of English rely on hedges often and use a wide range of such items. Therefore, a strong effect of mitigation, i.e. hedging, is generated in these responses.

In the L2 data, fewer hedges are used. The analysis also reveals that there are quite considerable individual differences with respect to the use of such items and this leads to hedging being of very variable strengths in the L2 corpus. In response 24#4, for example, L2 speaker 24 uses the modifiers *rather* and *quite* to downtone the description of challenges at a previous work place and to describe the experience he gained from this situation.

24#4; L2 speaker

- Int: What were the main challenges for you?
 24: The main challenges? ... ah ... my main challenges was ah:: .. to organise all work all documentation papers issued orders, .. ah:: .. that is why it was **rather** difficult but I receive **quite** a lot of experience.

While this response shows some uses of hedges, the immediately following answer (24#5) only includes the use of *I think*. Furthermore, the prosody of *I think* (even stress on both *I* and *think*) suggests that the speaker does not use it to generate an effect of mitigation, but rather to express that he is indeed thinking about a response that answers the question asked. The remainder of his answer then focuses on a description of his positive qualities which are not downtoned. On the contrary, interviewee 24 boosts the description of his skills (e.g. *I can even boast that our office as always in the top 10*).

24#5; L2 speaker

- Int: Ok, what do you feel you have done particularly well in your job?
24: Ahm ... um .. **I think** .. um ... (1.0) I provide .. um .. very well consultancy to our client, .. and I always .. um .. try the best that my sales was up to the mark, .. and because we have a strict demand,.. according ... um ... according ... um ... sales standards, .. according to the use of our office dress code, .. and I even *I can even boast that our office was always in the top 10 out 135 offices all over the Russia*, ... um .. we usually have four .. casual clients, .. who came to our office as a clients, .. and ah ... just check our standard sales, .. the (view) of our office and write a report about our, .. about our .. um .. about our service .. quality service.

These two questions in response to which hedges occur, contrast strongly.

Question #4 requires a description of difficulties whereas question #5 asks for a description of skills. Hence, it may be expected that hedges occur less frequently in response #5. However, in the Australian cultural context, a description of skills (question #5) requires mitigation which is lacking from the L2 answer discussed above. Since this L2 speaker has knowledge of hedges, as indicated by his response to question #4, the absence of these items in response to question #5 suggests that there may be a mismatch with respect to what constitutes politic linguistic behaviour in this particular context.

Interviewee 23 is also asked to describe her achievements in response 23#5. Like L2 speaker 24, she neither uses hedges such as *I think* nor markers of informality like *guys*. It also appears that *thing* has not been used to generate an effect of mitigation but rather shows placeholder uses.

23#5; L2 speaker

- Int: What do you think you have done particularly well in your job?
23: Particularly well .. ok, .. all my the job that my old reviewer gave me was reviewed by her, .. so whatever I do .. I did sorry, .. I need to do it very good or well because .. ah:: .. she reviews and make me comment, ... the less the comment the better, .. because if I have many comment I (invest) time, .. in doing the **thing** again, .. and my other task could be .. ah .. (on) delay, .. so I need to do the **things** the well as I could.

Thus, no effect of mitigation can be observed in this response.

As exemplified by the examples discussed in this section, the qualitative analysis of modifiers (e.g. *sort of*) and parentheticals (*I think*) also suggests that the L1 speakers generate an effect of mitigation more strongly than the L2 speakers of English since the latter use these items less frequently and do not use them in contexts (e.g. question #5) where their use is required due to Australian cultural norms. The comparison of mitigation and mitigation^P with respect to the use of other VL items investigated in the corpus, thus, shows that these items were generally used less frequently by the L2 speakers. As a result, an overall weaker effect of mitigation can be attributed to the use of a range of VL by this speaker group.

8.7 Conclusion: Effects of *thing* in L1 and L2 job interviews

In addition to the overall frequency of *thing*, the comparison of the in-group (saturation) and mitigation analyses also suggests that the L1 and L2 speakers who participated in the job interviews conducted used *thing* to generate different effects. In the L1 corpus, *thing* mainly required exophoric saturation which can introduce stronger in-group marking than endophoric processes. The L2 speakers did not use *thing* exophorically as frequently as the L1 speakers, and this means that in-group membership was asserted less strongly in this speaker group by their use of *thing*. Furthermore, some uses of *thing* in the L2 data seemed impossible to saturate since the referents required for successful saturation were not manifest to the hearer. Thus, these uses may have generated strong implicatures such as distance rather than closeness.

With respect to mitigation and mitigation^P, the L1 speakers used *thing* as well as other items (e.g. *sort of*, *I think*) that can generate these two types of mitigation more often than the L2 speakers, and these results were statistically significant. The qualitative analysis of *thing* also suggests that it was used for mitigation purposes by the L1 speakers while it is unclear whether generating an effect of mitigation was also a priority in the L2 data. A clustering of high density *thing* answers in responses to some questions but not others in the L1 but not the L2 corpus also shows that there are differences regarding the use of *thing* by the two speaker groups. The questions that lead to frequent high density *thing* answers in L1 mainly asked interviewees explicitly to promote their skills. A politic way to engage in self-praise in Australian English seems to require mitigation and it

appears that the L1 speakers created such an effect by using *thing* and other items that are similar to *thing* frequently in these responses. In addition, the analysis of individual uses of *thing* such as the phrase *the thing is, and things like that* or *thing* as part of a *compound noun* (e.g. *girl thing*) suggests that *thing* generates the interpersonal effect of mitigation in the L1 responses whereas the same could not be observed in the L2 corpus.

To conclude, it appears that by using *thing* strong detrimental implicatures were weakened in the L1 corpus in a bid to show politic linguistic behaviour in this speech event and cultural context. An effect of in-group membership also seemed to be generated since *thing* was often used exophorically. The L2 speakers, however, did not appear to use *thing* because of its potential for mitigation, as also suggested by the lower frequency of items that are functionally similar to *thing* in this corpus. Some uses of *thing* in the L2 corpus may even have generated strong and possibly detrimental implicatures (e.g. distance), as saturation did not always appear possible for the hearer. With respect to in-group marking, the L2 speakers used *thing* less often exophorically than the L1 speakers and, thus, this effect is less strong in the L2 corpus. In Chapter Nine these findings will now be discussed, practical implications will be given and future research possibilities will be outlined.

Chapter Nine: Discussion of results, practical implications and future research possibilities

9.1 Introduction

In this chapter the research questions presented initially in Chapter Four on the vagueness and effects of *thing* in L1 and L2 employment interviews in Australia are discussed. The questions addressed by this study are:

1. How can the notion of vagueness be defined with respect to *thing*?
2. Does using *thing* introduce vagueness^P in the L1 and L2 corpus?
3. What are the main effects that the L1 speakers of Australian English and the L2 speakers of English generate by using *thing* in employment interviews in Australia?

Section 9.2 will first address research question (1) and refer to theoretical aspects of vagueness from discussions in Chapter Two and Five. In addressing question (2), the results of the vagueness analysis of *thing* (Chapter Six) in the L1 and L2 speaker interviews recorded will be discussed, and possible reasons for the differences observed between the two speaker groups will be proposed. In section 9.3, the range of effects that speakers can generate by using *thing*, and its relationship with implicature construction in the context of Australian job interviews and regarding L1 and L2 speaker use will be addressed (Question 3).

9.2 Vagueness and *thing*

Research question (1):

How can the notion of vagueness be defined with respect to *thing*?

Since most studies on *thing* have been conducted in the research tradition of *vague language* (Channell, 1994), research question (1) focuses on the vagueness of *thing*. As discussed in Chapter Two, although *thing* has been categorised as *vague* by VL studies, few of them have provided a concise

definition of the notion of vagueness. It appears that the term *vague* has been used to refer to items of a low semantic specificity (i.e. imprecision) as well as to describe the use of such items in context. VL studies, therefore, seem to have used the term *vague* to refer to semantic features but also to discuss pragmatic phenomena.

In order to address research question (1), a different approach was taken in this study since using the same term to refer to semantic features and pragmatic phenomena may be confusing. Compared to other VL research, this study places a strong emphasis on the definition and theoretical discussion of vagueness. Vagueness was first defined as a context-dependent phenomenon and, thus, the term *vague* was only used to refer to one pragmatic phenomenon. From a review of recent semantic and pragmatic literature on vagueness in Chapter Two, the Underdeterminacy Thesis (Carston, 2002, 2009) was identified as central for the definition of vagueness as a pragmatic phenomenon as it proposes that language in use is inherently underdetermined i.e. vague. This means that a process of inferencing is crucial in all contexts and with respect to all uses of language (see also Levinson, 2000). It is, therefore, not limited to items that have been referred to as *vague* by previous VL studies but applies to all lexemes in context.

The discussion of *vagueness* suggests that an analysis of this phenomenon requires careful definition of the particular phenomenon investigated because the term vagueness seems to have been applied to refer to different phenomena. This has been done in this study for one common lexeme of VL, *thing*, since a detailed framework was developed for one phenomenon of vagueness. Vagueness (i.e. vagueness^P) was defined as a problem in reference assignment which occurs when a hearer cannot saturate *thing* because the saturation information that is required to be manifest to the hearer for this type of explicature construction to be successful, is only manifest to the speaker. Hence, in contexts where mutual manifestness cannot be confirmed between the interactants, vagueness^P is generated as explicature construction fails. The phenomenon of vagueness^P is, therefore, closely related to explicature construction which has not been discussed in detail by previous VL research.

The notion of *uniqueness* (informational uniqueness; Roberts, 2003) was identified as important for vagueness^P since uses of language that introduce a uniqueness requirement seem most prone to vagueness^P, particularly if the saturation referent is not provided endophorically in the easily accessible immediate linguistic co-text. Furthermore, as this brief discussion of uniqueness shows, the notions of *saturation*, *mutual manifestness* and *accessibility* of saturation items are also central for an analysis of vagueness^P. Since vagueness^P is generated when one type of explicature construction fails, the framework chosen for its analysis needs to allow for an investigation of this inferential process. Relevance Theory was selected as the main framework for this study because it discusses explicature construction while the Gricean maxims, which have often been used by previous studies on VL, do not.

In the following section, research question (2) will be addressed and the results of the analysis of vagueness^P in the L1 and L2 speaker employment interviews are discussed. Reference will also be made to previous studies that seem to comment on this phenomenon.

9.2.1 Vagueness^P, *thing*, L1 and L2 speaker discourse

Research question (2):

Does using *thing* introduce vagueness^P in the L1 and L2 corpus?

While vagueness^P can occur in all uses of language since the mutual manifestness required to avoid vagueness^P is never guaranteed (Sperber and Wilson, 1986/ 1995: 38-46), the analysis of vagueness^P in Chapter Six only found problematic uses of this item in the L2 data. The few cases identified occurred when the L2 speakers of English used *thing* as a restricted exophoric (e.g. *the thing*), introducing a uniqueness requirement that the hearer could not fulfill. In total 13 % of all L2 uses of *thing* had the potential to introduce vagueness^P according to the definition developed in Chapter Five and, thus, most L2 uses of *thing* and all L1 uses of *thing* seemed to achieve successful saturation.

Since uses that generated vagueness^P, however, occurred in L2 speech, the hearer might have made allowances for them, that is, followed the “let it pass”

(e.g. Firth, 1996: 243-245; House, 2003: 558-559) principle. The hearer may, thus, have disregarded the uniqueness requirement introduced by the use of the determiner *the* and categorised L2 uses of *thing* that generate vagueness^P as committed in error. This means that no effect of vagueness may have been introduced into the discourse. Regardless of whether the hearer made allowances for uses that generated vagueness^P according to its definition, the analysis shows that *thing* does not have a close relationship with vagueness^P. Hence, in most contexts, *thing* is not pragmatically, i.e. referentially, vague.

While VL research has not defined the notion of vagueness (i.e. vagueness^P) as proposed by this study, it appears that some VL studies have nevertheless discussed instances of vagueness^P. Cutting (2002: 74), whose study investigated lexemes such as *thing* in L1 discourse, found that some uses of these items generated *referential hitches* in discourse which she describes as a “temporary halt in the flow of communication“. She found, however, that saturating items such as *thing* was not problematic in general for the L1 speakers who participated in her study. Nevertheless, she identified some uses of language such as “metonymical proper nouns” (e.g. Did you get the *Chomsky?*; *Chomsky* referring to a book rather than the person) and “limited range nouns” (definite noun phrases that introduce a uniqueness requirement) that appeared more challenging since they led to referential hitches most often (Cutting, 2002: 74). Overall this “lexis of the in-group” (i.e. items that are similar to *thing*), however, rarely caused problems of understanding in her L1 corpus (Cutting, 2002: 75).

Drave (2002) also briefly refers to uses of VL that, it seems, could be categorised as instances of vagueness^P according to the definition provided in Chapter Five. Like Cutting’s (e.g. 2000; 2002) data, his corpus consists of naturally occurring casual conversations. However, unlike Cutting who investigates L1 discourse, Drave compares VL use in intercultural conversations between L1 and L2 speakers of English. Drave (2002: 194) uses the term *pragmalinguistic errors* which, like Cutting’s (2002) term *referential hitches*, appears to refer to a use of language that is “referentially unproductive” (Drave 2002: 201) and, thus, generates vagueness^P according to this study. Drave (2002), who mentions pragmalinguistic errors only in passing in his comparative study and provides no examples, found such errors exclusively in his L2 data. Provided that his term

pragmalinguistic errors indeed refers to instances of vagueness^P, his L1 speakers of English did not seem to generate this phenomenon when using VL.

The findings from the data collected for the present study, therefore, mirror the results of Cutting's (2002) and Drave's (2002) research. Like Cutting (2002) and Drave (2002), this study also finds that *thing* rarely introduced vagueness^P as most uses appeared to allow for successful saturation. Furthermore, like Drave's (2002) comparative research, this study also concludes that it is the L2 speakers who found it challenging to ensure saturation of a VL item (*thing*), whereas the L1 speaker use of *thing* seemed to allow for saturation in all instances. Since Cutting (2002), however, also reports difficulties in reference assignment, i.e. saturation, of VL in her L1 data, vagueness^P cannot simply be categorised as an L2 mistake because L1 speakers of a language also generate it. Nevertheless, the results of both comparative studies (this study and Drave, 2002) suggest that L2 speakers struggle more often to allow for successful saturation of VL.

It appears that the problematic uses of *thing* (vagueness^P cases) discussed in Chapter Six occurred because the L2 speakers of English had accidentally introduced a uniqueness requirement by using determiners such as *the*, but this requirement could not be fulfilled by the hearer in the particular context because the required unique saturation items were not accessible to her. Research on article use is, therefore, closely related to the phenomenon of vagueness^P. L2 literature on the acquisition of articles has identified this aspect as a notoriously difficult area to master for learners of a second language so that errors like misuses or omission of articles occur frequently (e.g. Huebner, 1983; Thomas, 1989; Robertson, 2000; Ionin, Ko, and Wexler, 2004; Ionin, Zubizarreta, and Maldonado, 2008). In particular, previous research found that L2 speakers overuse the determiner *the* in contexts where it should have been avoided as no requirement for uniqueness applied and an indefinite reading (i.e. a referent set) was sufficient.

Huebner discusses overgeneralisations of the article *the* by learners in contexts where an indefinite article would have been required and refers to this phenomenon as "the-flooding" (Huebner, 1983: 48). Thomas (1989) similarly found an overuse of *the* by L2 speakers and compared this to research on child

L1 article acquisition as L1 children also seem to overuse *the* initially. In a more recent study, Ionin et al. (2008) discuss three sources for L2 speaker issues in acquiring English articles: L1-transfer, L2-input and Universal Grammar (UG). They found that Spanish L2 speakers of English transferred their knowledge of the Spanish article system when using English (L1 transfer) while Russian L2 speakers of English, due to the absence of an article system in their L1, accessed semantic universals such as definiteness and specificity between which they fluctuated. Therefore, depending on whether or not the L1 language of L2 speakers of English has an article system, their likelihood of generating vagueness^P might differ.

Some L2 speakers of the present study are L1 speakers of languages that are article-less and some are not. Vagueness^P, which may have occurred as a result of definite article overuse, was generated by speakers of both types of L1 languages, although it was found more often in the speech of those L2 speakers whose L1 has an article system (e.g. Spanish). This is not surprising given that previous research shows that L2 speakers whose L1 is article-less tend to omit articles in English (e.g. Thomas, 1989: 349; see also Ionin et al., 2008, for a more complex and detailed description of this issue) and, as a result, fewer of their uses of *thing* should generate vagueness^P. The discussion, thus, suggests that the cases of vagueness^P identified in the L2 corpus may be attributed to L1 transfer issues of article use.

To conclude, the results of this study on the use of *thing* in L1 and L2 speaker discourse and its relationship to vagueness^P seem to confirm previous VL research as well as L2 research on article use. It appears that L2 speakers, and in particular those whose L1 has an article system, are prone to generate vagueness^P because of L1 transfer issues. The L2 speakers of this data set whose use of *thing* generated vagueness^P seemed to have used *the* or other determiners accidentally, thereby, introducing a uniqueness requirement for saturation of *thing* that the hearer could not fulfill because the unique saturation items required were not manifest to her. Vagueness^P was, thus, introduced into the discourse unless the hearer made allowances for such uses.

9.2.2 Conclusion: Vagueness, *thing*, the L1 and L2 speaker

In response to research questions (1) and (2), vagueness was defined as pragmatic in this study and, regarding *thing*, referential. Since in 100 % of the L1 and in 87 % of the L2 uses of *thing* vagueness^P did not seem to occur, the results of the vagueness^P analysis suggest that *thing* is not vague^P. Nevertheless, there were differences with respect to L1 and L2 speaker use of *thing* and vagueness^P as only in the latter corpus, some uses of *thing* may have generated vagueness^P. With respect to VL research, the results show that VL nouns such as *thing* which have a low semantic specificity are used successfully in context most of the time. Semantic vagueness, i.e. low semantic specificity, is rarely problematic because hearers can rely on inferencing to reach a fully propositional form as also proposed by, for example, Carston (2009) and Levinson (2000) regarding the use of inferencing in context. The results of this analysis, thus, suggest that while VL nouns such as *thing* may be semantically vague, pragmatically, i.e. with respect to reference assignment, they rarely lead to vagueness. Hence, while *thing* may be referred to as a semantically vague item, the results of this study suggest that the categorisation of *thing* as *vague* when used in context is misleading. The analysis of its effects in discourse, which will be discussed below, suggests that it may be more appropriate to refer to VL nouns such as *thing* by the term *multi-purpose nouns*.

In section 9.3, the range of effects that speakers can generate by using *thing* in context are summarised and the differences identified regarding the effects generated by the two speaker groups are discussed. In addition, its relationship with implicatures in the Australian employment interview will be explored using the RT model developed in Chapter Three. Reference will also be made to previous research on the use of items such as pragmatic markers that can generate multiple effects and are, thus, similar to *thing*.

9.3 *Thing*: Effects in discourse

Since the results of the saturation analysis in Chapter Six show that *thing* did not generate vagueness^P often, other effects that the L1 and L2 speakers of English of this study can generate by using this noun were explored. Research question (3), thus, focuses on the effects of *thing* that are introduced by the two speaker groups in employment interviews:

What are the main effects that the L1 speakers of Australian English and the L2 speakers of English generate by using *thing* in employment interviews in Australia?

Before investigating *thing* qualitatively in both corpora, the effects that speakers can generate by using this noun were identified and discussed in Chapter Seven. The examples from the employment interview recordings of this study showed that *thing* can, for example, be used as a placeholder or an approximator when a speaker tries to avoid communication breakdown. By using *thing*, speakers can also generate effects such as focusing and framing which are helpful for organisational discourse management purposes and allow for ease of processing for the hearer. Apart from conversation management effects, speakers can use *thing* to generate interpersonal effects such as avoiding commitment, showing speaker attitude, marking in-group and, conversely, out-group membership and mitigating implicatures. As discussed above, its use can furthermore introduce vagueness^P into the discourse and, as a result, strong implicatures such as distance (outgroup marking) may be generated because the referent(s) of *thing* cannot be accessed, making it difficult for hearers to participate in a conversation.

9.3.1 *Thing*: Effects in L1 and L2 speaker employment interviews

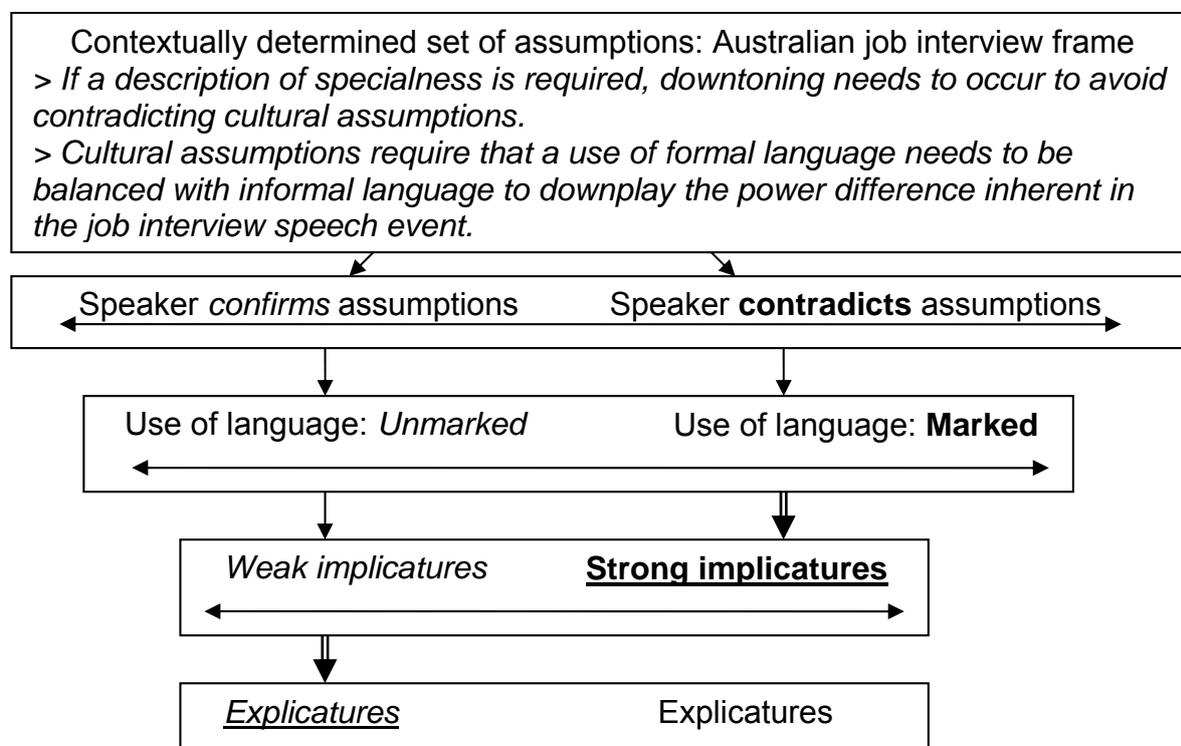
The L1 speakers of Australian English used *thing* more than twice as often as the L2 speakers of English in the employment interviews conducted for this study. Hence, unlike research that focuses on its use as a compensatory item (e.g. Dörnyei and Scott, 1997), *thing* cannot be categorised as “foreigner talk” (Cheng and Warren, 2001: 93) in this corpus, as it occurs more often in the speech of L1 speakers of English than the foreign L2 speakers. The more frequent use of *thing* by the speakers of Australian English from this study rather defines it as insider talk. The analysis of Chapter Eight suggests that, as also argued by Cutting (2002), *thing* was mainly used by the L1 speakers to generate positive interpersonal effects such as in-group marking.

The analysis in Chapter Eight proposed that the use of *thing* by the L1 speakers of Australian English seemed to generate the effect of in-group membership and mitigate strong and potentially detrimental implicatures such as incompetence. In-

group membership was asserted strongly by the L1 speakers of Australian English through the frequent requirement for exophoric saturation of *thing* which can only be successful if the hearer shares the required restricted saturation information with the speaker. As discussed in Chapter Six, the required saturation items of *thing* seemed to be accessible to the hearer in the L1 corpus and the effect of in-group membership should, thus, have been strong in this group. This effect was less evident in the L2 interviews since they did not use *thing* as often exophorically and also because some of their uses seemed to introduce vagueness^P in which case strong implicatures such as distance rather than closeness may have been generated. The results on *thing* were supported by an investigation of items such as *I think* and *guys* which are similar to *thing*. Since these lexemes also occurred less often in the L2 corpus, it appears that the L1 speakers used *thing* as part of a speaking style that values informality and mitigation whereas the same could not be observed in the L2 speaker group.

In order to explore the relationship of *thing* with implicature construction in the context of Australian job interviews, an RT model was developed (see Figure 3.3 on next page, reproduced from Chapter Three). This model allows for a discussion of whether the effects, i.e. implicatures, generated by a use of *thing* in the two corpora were weak or strong. As claimed in Chapter Three, weak implicatures arise when linguistic behaviour is politic, that is, unmarked (italicised in figure). Strong implicatures are, however, generated when linguistic behaviour is not politic and it is these implicatures that hold the main relevance (bolded and underlined in figure) and become strongly noticed.

Figure 3.3: Confirming and contradicting assumptions in Australian job interviews (reproduced from Chapter Three)



In the Australian job interview frame (see figure above), identified from a review on Australian English and the context of employment interviews, the importance for speakers to downtone a description of their achievements and to downplay the power difference inherent in this speech event were highlighted (e.g. Wierzbicka, 1986; Béal, 1992; Wierzbicka, 2002; Peeters, 2004; Goddard, 2006, 2009).

Speakers who mitigate their skills, therefore, only generate weak implicatures because such linguistic behaviour is expected (unmarked, politic) in this cultural context. Speakers who, however, neither mitigate the presentation of their achievements nor downplay power differences but, on the contrary, strengthen or boost these aspects, generate strong implicatures.

With respect to the relationship of *thing* with implicatures in Australian employment interviews, it is proposed that a use of *thing* should mainly generate weak implicatures in this context since the effects (e.g. informality, mitigation) that it can generate are politic. Nevertheless, speakers can also generate strong

implicatures by using *thing* in Australian employment interviews. Such strong implicatures are introduced if hearers cannot saturate *thing* as unsuccessful saturation shows that mutual manifestness cannot be confirmed. Strong implicatures might also be generated if speakers do not balance a use of informal items such as *thing* with formal vocabulary such as *task* or *issue* in Australian employment interviews (see assumptions in figure above). This is because a semi formal style seems politic in this context as such a speaking style neither contradicts cultural nor job interview assumptions to a great extent. It appears, however, that more than its use, an absence of *thing* and other items that are functionally similar (e.g. *I think*, *sort of*) generates strong (detrimental) implicatures, since mitigation and marking in-group membership, which are effects that all of these items can generate, seem crucial in this context. In the Australian employment interview, a use of *thing* can, therefore, mitigate but also generate weak and strong implicatures.

With respect to the results of the analysis on *thing* in the two speaker groups, its use in the L1 speaker group mainly seemed to generate weak implicatures since using the item *thing* frequently seems politic in this context. However, *thing* also seemed to weaken strong implicatures such as incompetence that were generated due to the questions asked or the answers given by the interviewees. The effect of mitigation and the weak implicatures seemed to contribute to a general positive atmosphere of closeness in the L1 interviews. The L2 speaker use of *thing* in the job interview corpus analysed, however, generated weak implicatures such as in-group membership or egalitarianism less often than the L1 speakers of Australian English. The atmosphere created by the use of *thing* and items that are similar to *thing*, thus, seemed different in the L2 interviews. The item *thing* also did not appear to be used by the L2 speakers in order to mitigate strong implicatures such as incompetence or boastfulness. On the contrary, some of the L2 uses even appeared to generate strong implicatures such as distance due to saturation issues of *thing*. *Thing* was, thus, used differently for implicature management in the L1 and L2 speaker employment interviews.

Consequences of different implicature management may be wide-ranging as they can influence the success of interviewees in employment interviews. With respect to implicature construction in uses of *thing* by the L1 speakers of Australian

English, it appears that its use contributed to rapport-building, that is in-group membership, an aspect which has been identified as crucial in employment interviews (e.g. Kerekes, 2006, 2007). The L2 speaker use of *thing*, however, did not appear to generate such positive implicatures as often, and they may also have generated strong detrimental implicatures. It is, therefore, possible that rapport-building was not as strong in the L2 interviews. With respect to the success of interviewees in securing the position at stake, this difference in implicature construction may disadvantage L2 speakers.

Regarding the discussion of implicature construction in previous studies on VL, this study concludes that the construction of implicatures by a use of VL items and expressions can only be discussed with respect to the particular cultural context and speech event where it is observed. It is, thus, not possible to make general claims about the relationship between VL and implicatures. The RT model developed for the discussion of implicatures in this study has proven to be useful as it allowed for an investigation of language in relation to its socio-cultural context. Despite the perception of RT as a cognitive framework only, this study has shown that RT is well suited for a discussion of social aspects of language in use such as analyses of politic and non-politic linguistic behaviour. The RT model developed, or Relevance Theory in general, may, thus, also be applied by other research with an interest in socio-cultural issues of language use such as studies on cross-cultural communication or interlanguage pragmatic research.

9.3.2 Findings of previous L1 and L2 studies on implicature construction

In line with this study, previous L1 studies on VL use also found that by using items and expressions such as *thing*, L1 speakers generated effects on an interpersonal level of discourse (e.g. Drave, 2002; Jucker, Smith, and Lüdge, 2003; Koester, 2006). Koester (2006, 2007), for example, explains the high frequency of VL in workplaces genres that require downtoning, with the mitigating effect that the L1 speakers can generate by using these items. The L1 speakers of her study seemed to use VL items as the effects in discourse were expected to be positive. Drave (2003) also attributed the L1 use of the VL item *thing* to interpersonal effects that such uses of language can generate. In particular he claims that this speaker group used *thing* to show pejorative evaluation and because more specificity was not required. Jucker, Smith and Lüdge (2003)

similarly claim that the L1 speakers of English of their study used VL as strategic items to communicate efficiently, to express speaker attitude and to mitigate criticism rather than simply in order to compensate for lexical difficulties.

With respect to the language of formal speech events in the Australian culture and the effect of informality that a use of *thing* generates, previous research also found that speakers of Australian and New Zealand English use informal language such as *thing* to downplay power differences in unequal encounters (e.g. Yates, 2000, 2005; Marra, Vine, and Holmes, 2008; Yates, 2010). These studies discuss the use of features that are characteristic of an informal speaking style in contexts such as classrooms and in workplace meetings which, like employment interviews, are characterised by a power imbalance. Research on Australian English in general has similarly underlined the importance of engaging in mitigation when achievements are described, an effect that informality can generate in unequal encounters. The L1 results of this study, therefore, parallel previous findings on L1 use of VL and other markers of informality in conversations that are characterised by a power imbalance in Australasia.

As discussed, the L2 results differ from the L1 results, and this has also been observed by the scarce comparative literature on L1 and L2 speaker use of VL. Drave (2002: 200), who analysed *thing* in detail, claims that the L1 speakers of his data set used it mainly to convey *pejorative evaluation* or relied on it in situations where more specificity was not required. In the L2 corpus he, however, only found one use of *thing* that seemed to show pejorative evaluation but several uses that he claims occurred as speakers encountered a memory lapse or a lexical gap. That is, these latter uses were focused on discourse management. Fernandez and Yuldashev (2011: 2616-2617) similarly claim that the L1 speakers of their corpus used VL expressions such as *and things like that* (general extenders) more often in their “societal” use in order to express cultural in-group membership (*he’s going to have a huge turkey, gravy **and stuff***). This use was less common in the L2 group. In her study on general extenders, Terraschke (2010) also observed that the L2 speakers used VL items to generate different effects from the L1 speakers. However, interestingly it is the L2 speakers who appeared to try and generate interpersonal effects by using the general extender *or so*, whereas in her L1 corpus this general extender was primarily used for numerical approximation.

Previous research on items that are functionally similar to *thing* such as modifiers like *sort of*, parentheticals such as *I think* (often referred to as pragmatic markers; Aijmer, 2004) and discourse markers like *well* and *you know*, has also discussed differences in the use of these items by L1 and L2 speakers of English (e.g. Nikula, 1996; Aijmer, 2004; Müller, 2004; Fung and Carter, 2007; Aijmer, 2011). Like this study on *thing* and Drave's (2002) work, previous research found that, overall, pragmatic markers are less frequent in L2 speech although there are individual differences as studies found that some of these items were used as frequently or even more often by the L2 group (see for example Müller, 2004 and Aijmer 2011 who report an overuse of 'well' by L2 speakers). Their results also show that L2 speakers generated a smaller range or different effects when using these items. The results of this study on *thing*, thus, parallel findings of previous research on VL and items that are functionally similar to *thing*.

9.3.3 Differences in L2 use: Possible reasons

There are several reasons that could explain the different use of *thing* by the L2 speakers of English in the employment interviews conducted. Since *thing* is an item that every speaker of English should know, the differences may relate to sociopragmatic or pragmalinguistic issues. It is, for example, possible that the L2 speakers did not consider it politic to use *thing* often in this speech event and, hence, their different use may be related to sociopragmatics. In particular, the L2 speakers of English who participated in this data collection might not have used *thing* often because they expected such language to generate strong detrimental implicatures in formal contexts. Given that items like *thing* may be perceived as "bad language" (see Chapter One, section 1.1), the lower frequency might be attributed to different perceptions of the L2 speakers on what constitutes politic linguistic behaviour in the Australian employment interview. The L2 speakers may, thus, have used *thing* mainly as a *compensatory* tool (Drave, 2002) or as Zhang (2011) terms it because they *had to* and might have used other items instead of *thing* (e.g. formal nouns) to generate positive interpersonal effects such as in-group membership.

Drave (2002: 200) attributes the infrequent use of *thing* to convey an effect of pejorative evaluation in his L2 corpus to transfer issues. That is, he explains an

absence of pejorative evaluation when *thing* occurred in the L2 group, with a lack of this effect of *thing* in Cantonese. The different use of *thing* in his L2 group can, thus, be categorised as a pragmalinguistic issue. L1 transfer issues have also been proposed by other comparative studies (e.g. Terraschke, 2010 ; Parvaresh et al., 2012 on general extenders) as a possible reason for the different use of VL items and expressions by L2 speakers of English. As also briefly discussed above, Terraschke (2010), for example, found that the general extender *or so* was used by German L2 speakers of English to generate interpersonal effects and, as this would not be acceptable in English but is acceptable in German, attributes the difference in use that she observes to L1 transfer.

While pragmalinguistic issues may result in a different use of items such as *thing* by L2 speakers of English, previous research on employment interviews has mainly referred to frame mismatches, that is, studies have discussed differences in what speakers from different cultural backgrounds consider politic linguistic behaviour in this context. In particular, they have described differences with respect to the presentation of self and the level of downtoning or, conversely, boosting that an interviewee is expected to engage in and this can manifest itself in different uses of pragmatic fine-tuning devices by L1 and L2 speakers of a language (e.g. Roberts and Sayers, 1987; Gumperz, 1992; Roberts and Campbell, 2006; Campbell and Roberts, 2007). They claim that the L2 speakers might be disadvantaged in employment interviews as a result of differences in their use of downtoning and boosting.

While L2 speakers may consciously choose to follow a frame that is different to the L1 frame, their speech might also only appear to be guided by another frame while in reality their lexical resources do not allow for a consistent use of language according to a normative set of assumptions. Previous research on pragmatic markers that found differences between L1 and L2 use has often argued that L2 speakers may not have acquired pragmatic fine-tuning devices or may not know how to influence the pragmatic impact in a particular context. Consequently, it is likely that they accidentally used a different frame. Differences in the use of VL by the two speaker groups may, therefore, be a result of little exposure to these items in L2 classrooms. Crystal and Davy (1975: 2), for example, refer to a lack of

discussion of informal language (e.g. VL, parentheticals, modifiers) in English language textbooks:

“People in textbooks, it seems, are not allowed to tell long and unfunny jokes, to get irritable or to lose their temper, to gossip (especially about other people), to speak with their mouths full, to talk nonsense, or swear (even mildly). They do not get all mixed up while they are speaking, forget what they wanted to say, hesitate, make grammatical mistakes, argue erratically or illogically, use words vaguely, get interrupted, talk at the same time, switch speech styles, manipulate the rules of language to suit themselves, or fail to understand. In a word, they are not *real*. Real people, as everybody knows, do all these things, and it is this which is part of the essence of informal conversation.”

(Crystal and Davy, 1975: 3)

In a similar vein, Holmes (1988) analysed the discussion of epistemic modality (e.g. modal verbs, adverbs, modifiers, parentheticals) in four ESL textbooks and found that the quantity and quality of their discussion differed greatly. Some textbooks covered the topic of modality quite thoroughly while others discussed uses of language that might not be found in L1 speaker speech (See also Thomas, 1984 ; Hellermann and Vergun, 2007) or did not include items which seemed frequent in L1 speech. Since textbook language often does not seem to be representative of naturally occurring informal conversations, acquiring such items might be difficult for L2 speakers. Exposure to these items may, thus, be either limited, lacking or not provide native-like examples (see also Romero Trillo, 2002; Müller, 2004; Fung and Carter, 2007, for the same claim).

While a different use of pragmatic markers might occur as a result of little or only inaccurate description of these items in textbooks, it may also be that the classroom setting *per se* is not conducive for their acquisition. Hellermann and Vergun (2007: 176-177), for example, suggest that the power relationship between teachers and students might not allow for a use of items such as *like*, *well* and *you know* that can generate interpersonal effects and this can hinder L2 acquisition. Nikula (1997: 197), who finds an almost complete absence of items such as *sort of* and *kind of* in her L2 speaker data but a frequent use of them in

L1, similarly attributes this difference to those items being “very much part of informal, face-to-face register which has not been the focus of formal language teaching at schools and which the speakers, consequently, have had little access to” (Nikula, 1997: 197). Coincidentally, it is often research that investigates L2 speaker use of language in a study abroad context which focuses on these items (e.g. Barron, 2003; Terraschke, 2010).

Nikula (1997: 197) also suggests that differences between L1 and L2 speaker use of modifiers such as *sort of* and parentheticals like *I think* might be linked to the notion of formality. In particular, she notes that the less frequent use of such language by L2 speakers makes their speech appear more formal than the L1 speech “despite the fact that the setting, the topic, and the relationship between the participants were about the same in all conversations”. She suggests that because of their infrequent use:

“the non-native speakers’ turns were very densely packed with information as almost every word seemed to be more preoccupied with the content of their messages than with their interpersonal effect” (Nikula, 1997: 197).

Yates (2000: 287 – 288), who found a more limited range of vagueness expressions (e.g. *or something, whatever, that sort of thing*) and vernacular language in L2 compared to L1 speech, similarly concludes that as a result of this difference, the L2 speakers appeared more formal. While differences in formality levels are described as the effect of different uses of modifiers, parentheticals and VL they could also be the cause. Therefore, it may be that L2 speakers struggle to judge the level of formality that is politic in context accurately and this leads to a different use of language, as Yates (2000) also suggests regarding the L2 speaker use of language in her data.

It appears that choosing the level of formality that is politic in a context can be difficult for all users of language and, therefore, also poses challenges for L1 speakers of a language:

“We all think that our use of language should be placed at the right stylistic level, but no one knows what is right. Some things in language are taboo: for instance, religious and sexual cursing. But most things considered ‘bad’ in language follow the ‘right level’ rule. A little bit of slang may be charming, but there should not be too much of it. To use *sort of* a couple of times is only natural, but it should not become an obsession. And so on. The problem is that what is the right level for one person is too much for another and too little for a third. Perfect linguistic behaviour becomes impossible – at least, if you want to please everyone all the time.” (Andersson and Trudgill, 1990: 193)

Since identifying appropriate levels of formality appears to be inherently difficult, it is not surprising that this is an aspect that L2 speakers might also struggle with.

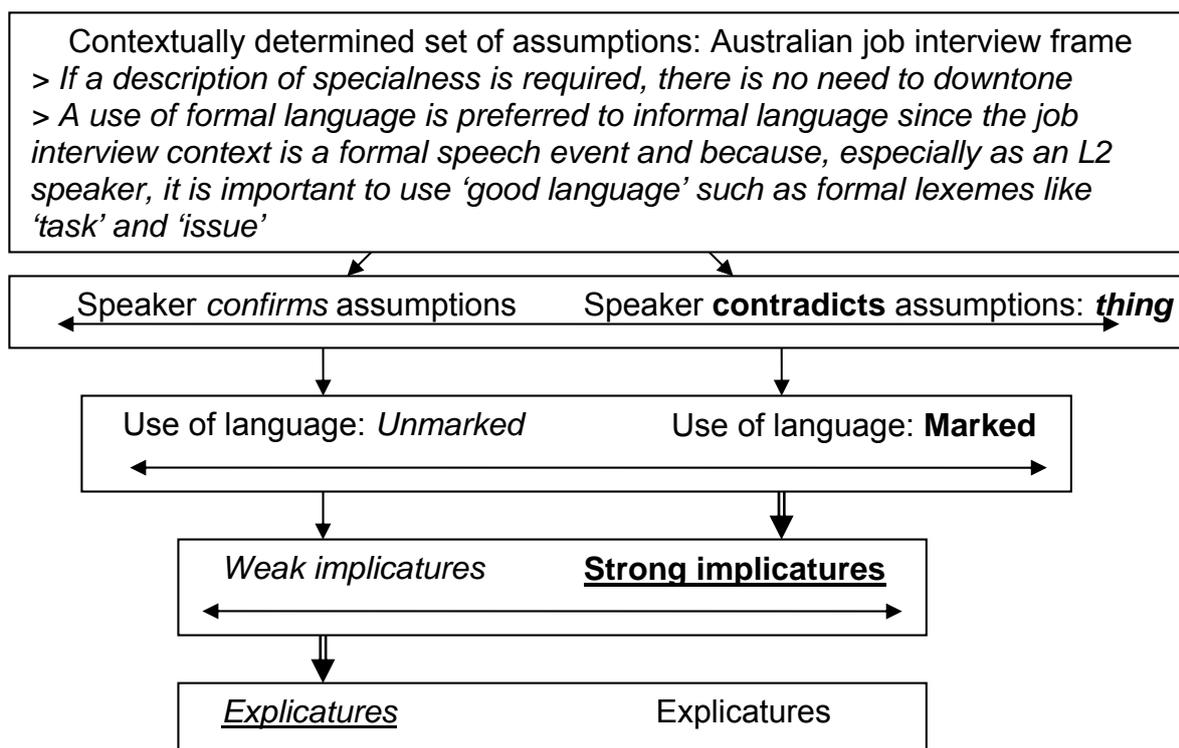
While an absence or less frequent use of certain types of items such as modifiers could be explained by gaps in the English vocabulary of the L2 speakers, this argument cannot be put forward with respect to *thing*. Every L2 speaker certainly knows the noun *thing* which makes it a particularly interesting lexical item to compare between L1 and L2 speaker groups. Even though the item *thing* should be known to all L2 speakers, the L2 use of *thing* in the employment interviews analysed still differs from the L1 use in terms of its frequency and the effects that are generated. It, thus, appears that the L2 speakers of this study have not acquired the sociopragmatic and/ or the pragmalinguistic competence that would result in a use of *thing* which is comparable with the L1 use in the speech event investigated. The L2 speakers may, for example, have been unaware of the effect of mitigation and in-group marking that a use of *thing* can generate. The difference in use could, therefore, also be categorised as a pragmalinguistic issue.

With respect to sociopragmatics, the L2 speakers of this study might have believed that using an informal speaking style that includes items such as *thing* is not considered professional behaviour in employment interviews and/ or does not show linguistic competence:

“We often think that some synonyms are more respectable than others. However, it is simply that synonyms can have quite different effects in different social settings.” (Andersson and Trudgill, 1990: 193)

The frequent use of *thing* by the L1 speakers of Australian English, however, suggests that its use in this variety of English and the job interview speech event should not be perceived negatively. Nevertheless, it seems that the L2 speakers of this corpus may believe that a use of *thing* is not politic in a competitive job interview context and, thus, avoid it as they expect its use to generate detrimental implicatures. They may, for example, follow an assumption that prescribes that there is no need to engage in mitigation when specialness is described (see Figure 9.1, first assumption). In addition, they may follow an assumption that prescribes the use of formal instead of informal language (see Figure 9.1, second assumption) and this would also lead to an infrequent use of *thing* since its use would be marked. These potential L2 assumptions have been incorporated in the RT model (see next page) to show the effect on the construction of implicatures by a use of *thing* should these assumptions indeed apply.

Figure 9.1: Assumptions in Australian job interviews; potential L2 perspective



If the L2 speakers of this data collection indeed followed a frame like the one described in this figure, a frequent use of *thing* would be perceived as marked as it contradicts the assumptions that are politic in this context. Even if L2 speakers were aware of the multiple effects that a use of *thing* can generate, they may, therefore, not have used it because they expected a high frequency of *thing* to be detrimental to their success in employment interviews.

9.3.4 Conclusion: *Thing*, effects, L1 and L2 speaker use

The results of this study suggest that the L1 and L2 speakers of English managed implicatures differently with respect to *thing* in the employment interviews recorded. The different use by the L2 speakers may be due to a lack of pragmalinguistic knowledge regarding positive interpersonal effects that a use of *thing* can generate. The L2 speakers may also not have understood the sociopragmatic importance of informality and mitigation in this cultural context and speech event. Regardless of the reasons, the different construction of implicatures in the two speaker groups may have influenced the effect of rapport between interviewer and interviewee. In a real life situation, rapport-building is one aspect

that can influence the success of interviewees as failure to establish closeness may disadvantage speakers.

9.4 Practical applications and implications

Since, previous research on job interviews claims that the chance of success of interviewees is decreased if interviewees use different conversational styles from that of their interviewers (e.g. Gumperz, 1992; Roberts and Campbell, 2006; Kerekes, 2007), the findings of these studies have important practical applications with respect to L2 speakers and the teaching of employability skills. It seems, for example, important that teaching material is developed for L2 speakers in Australia who are in the process of looking for employment in order to raise pragmatic awareness as to what constitutes politic linguistic behaviour in the context of employment interviews (See also Rose and Kasper, 2001 ; Barron, 2005; Overstreet, Tran, and Zietze, 2006; Louw, Derwing, and Abbott, 2010 who underline the value of pragmatic instruction). This material could be made available to language centres where migrants are enrolled in courses to prepare for employment interviews, and teachers could benefit from training on how to discuss pragmatic issues in language use.

There are also more wide-ranging implications of the results obtained from this study. First, it seems crucial that L2 speakers in general are made aware that a use of items such as *thing* can generate multiple effects in discourse. Their pragmalinguistic competence could, thus, be increased and sociopragmatic issues could also be discussed with respect to these items. In order to raise pragmatic awareness, it is important that English language textbooks focus on teaching the use of language in contexts, and this may also be discussed as an important aspect in teacher training courses. It is, therefore, suggested that language use for strategic purposes such as to cope with conversation management but also in order to generate interpersonal effects in discourse should receive more focus in teacher training and, hence, teaching. Lastly, the saturation analysis of *thing* shows that learners may need further instruction on how to allow for saturation of items such as *thing* so that they can avoid introducing vagueness^P and the effect of distance that it generates. L2 speakers may, thus, need more instruction on correct article usage and the topic of reference in general in the English language.

9.5 Limitations and further research possibilities

The description of the Australian job interview frame used in this analysis was obtained from an analysis of simulated employment interviews. Consequently, the nature of the data collection technique might have influenced the language the interviewees used in the interviews recorded. Nevertheless, previous research on Australian English has identified similar conversation styles (e.g. Béal, 1992; Yates, 2000; Wierzbicka, 2002; Goddard, 2006) and has also suggested that L2 speakers who are in the process of seeking employment and who act out a role they can identify with should perform similarly in naturally and simulated conversations (e.g. Roberts and Sayers, 1987; Kasper and Dahl, 1991). Although this study does not claim that the corpus of employment interviews collected is identical to natural data, the differences between the simulated interviews analysed and naturally occurring employment interviews may not be considerable.

While great differences between naturally and simulated interviews are not expected, analysing VL use in naturally occurring Australian job interviews is, nevertheless, an interesting future research possibility. In particular, the use of fine-tuning devices could be investigated, and a discussion of the notion of formality would also be beneficial as these aspects could be compared with the results of this study on *thing*. Such analyses could also address the issue of success in interviews by investigating whether a native-like use of language leads to more positive outcomes for interviewees in naturally occurring interviews than language use that differs quite significantly from the native speaker norm. It would, furthermore, be interesting to replicate this study by simulating employment interviews in different English speaking countries using the same interview questions and compare the results with respect to mitigation and mitigation^P, thus, making a contribution to variational pragmatics research. Moreover, there is scope for further studies on the use of *thing* by L1 and L2 speakers of English in other formal speech events.

With respect to the notion of vagueness, a vagueness analysis of other VL items from Channell's (1994) taxonomy could be conducted in L1 and L2 speaker discourse. Hence, the relationship of vagueness to further categories of VL items could be investigated and definitions for, possibly, different types of vagueness may be developed. With respect to vagueness^P, studies can, for example,

compare whether differences can be observed regarding this phenomenon when items such as *house*, which have not been categorised as vague, and VL are used by L1 and L2 speakers of English.

While this study focused on *thing* and mainly discussed the notion of mitigation in Australian job interviews, studies that investigate the use of boosting in the same context would also be valuable. Although boosting was not discussed in this study, the analysis of the Australian job interviews collected suggests that the L1 speakers not only downtone the presentation of their achievements. Rather there seems to be a use of informal (introducing mitigation^P) as well as formal items and the latter may generate boosting^P. Moreover, a comparison of boosting modifiers such as *very* with downtoners like *sort of* in the two corpora, which was not included in this thesis, suggests that boosting also occurs in the L1 interviews recorded although overall mitigation is stronger than boosting. Since this aspect has not been analysed in detail or discussed in this study it could be investigated further in order to lead to a more complete Australian job interview frame than the one proposed in Chapter Three.

To conclude, while a detailed analysis of *thing* has been provided in this study, there is scope for a range of interesting future research on different aspects in relation to the use of VL, vagueness in language, employment interviews and L1 and L2 speaker use of language in relation to these aspects.

9.6 Conclusion

The vagueness analysis of *thing* and the analysis of its effects in the Australian job interview speech event suggest that the L1 and L2 speakers of English differed in their use of *thing*. While the L1 speakers did not seem to face problems allowing for saturation of *thing*, the L2 speakers found saturation more challenging. With respect to the main effects generated, it appeared that the L1 speakers of Australian English had a positive attitude towards the item *thing* as they did not hesitate to use it often and, thus, seemed to expect its use to generate positive interpersonal effects in this context. The L2 speakers, however, appeared to be wary about using *thing* as indicated by its lower frequency in this corpus. Rather than taking advantage of the positive interpersonal effects such as

closeness that its use can generate, they seemed to avoid using *thing* and mainly relied on it if other items failed them.

In contrast to most previous VL research, this study used RT to investigate the item *thing*. Based on RT, a framework for vagueness and a model to discuss implicature construction were developed and used successfully for the analysis of *thing*. The framework of RT may, therefore, be recommended for future research on VL items and expressions. Regarding previous criticism on RT, the results of this study suggest that even though this framework has chiefly been regarded as valuable for cognitive research it can also be used to investigate language with respect to its socio-cultural context. The discussion of *thing* in Australian employment interviews, thus, shows that the RT framework is not asocial.

To conclude, the analyses and discussions in this study have shown that an item such as *thing* which seems rather unimportant and is often perceived as bad language can be used to express politic linguistic behaviour. The L1 speakers of Australian English generated positive interpersonal effects by using *thing* and this may be favorable for success in employment interviews. The L2 speakers used *thing* differently, thus, generating such positive effects less strongly. This difference in use by the L2 speakers of English may be due to a lack of pragmalinguistic or sociopragmatic competence or both. The results of this study, therefore, suggest that the L1 speakers of Australian English of this data collection seemed to have a 'thing for *thing*' whereas the L2 speakers did not share the same attitude towards this item and struggled using it. This study furthermore concludes that *thing* is not vague^P but is defined as a multi-purpose noun.

Appendix A: Transcription conventions
(Du Bois et al., 1992; Jefferson, 1994)

[] overlapping speech

= latching speech

LOUD increased volume

.. break in rhythm (0.2 seconds or less)

... short untimed pause (0.3 to 0.9 seconds)

... (1.0) time intervals over 0.9 seconds

..... extraneous data / quotation omitted

. final intonation contour

, continuing intonation contour

? appeal intonation contour

the::n lengthened sound or syllable

(hello) Transcriber's best guess at an unclear utterance

() Unintelligible utterance

@@ laughter

JOB INTERVIEW PRACTICE AT MACQUARIE UNIVERSITY

Research title: The language used by non-native and native speakers of English in job interviews

Would you like to take part in a study in applied linguistics and get some job interview practice?

I am doing research on the language used in job interviews by non-native and native speakers of English and I am looking for participants.

For this research I am going to set up mock job interviews with interested participants. The interview, in which you would be playing the part of the interviewee, should take about 20 minutes. You will also be asked to provide some demographic data such as your age and gender. However, the data will be anonymous and your name will not appear anywhere.

What's in it for you?

- You will get practice dealing with difficult questions in a job interview setting
- You will also receive the transcript of everything that you say in the interview which should help you prepare for real job interviews.

Are you:

- a speaker of Australian English?
- between 20 and 40 years old?
- working/ trained in IT or accounting with some work experience?

Then please contact me on 0402 563 321 or at denise.gassner@students.mq.edu.au.

I LOOK FORWARD TO MEETING YOU!

JOB INTERVIEW PRACTICE AT AMES

Would you like to get some job interview practice?

I am doing research on the language used in job interviews by non-native and native speakers of English and I am looking for participants. For this research I am going to set up mock job interviews (role plays) at AMES.

What's in it for you?

- You get practice going to job interviews and dealing with difficult questions.
- You will receive the transcript of everything you say in the interview which should help you prepare for real job interviews.
- You will receive a report about the findings of the project.

If you are interested and have about 20 minutes to spare before or after an AMES class, please write your name on the line below and return this flyer to your teacher. Please also provide your phone number so that I can contact you to arrange a time for the interview.

I LOOK FORWARD TO MEETING YOU!

Name: _____

Phone number: _____

Suggested day and time:

Appendix D: Self-assessment grid, Common European Framework of Reference for Languages

	A1	A2	B1	B2	C1	C2
Listening	I can recognise familiar words and very basic phrases concerning myself, my family and immediate concrete surroundings when people speak slowly and clearly.	I can understand phrases and the highest frequency vocabulary related to areas of most immediate personal relevance (e.g. very basic personal and family information, shopping, local area, employment). I can catch the main point in short, clear, simple messages and announcements.	I can understand the main points of clear standard speech on familiar matters regularly encountered in work, school, leisure, etc. I can understand the main point of many radio or TV programmes on current affairs or topics of personal or professional interest when the delivery is relatively slow and clear.	I can understand extended speech and lectures and follow even complex lines of argument provided the topic is reasonably familiar. I can understand most TV news and current affairs programmes. I can understand the majority of films in standard dialect.	I can understand extended speech even when it is not clearly structured and when relationships are only implied and not signalled explicitly. I can understand television programmes and films without too much effort.	I have no difficulty in understanding any kind of spoken language, whether live or broadcast, even when delivered at fast native speed, provided. I have some time to get familiar with the accent.
Reading	I can understand familiar names, words and very simple sentences, for example on notices and posters or in catalogues.	I can read very short, simple texts. I can find specific, predictable information in simple everyday material such as advertisements, prospectuses, menus and timetables and I can understand short simple personal letters.	I can understand texts that consist mainly of high frequency everyday or job-related language. I can understand the description of events, feelings and wishes in personal letters.	I can read articles and reports concerned with contemporary problems in which the writers adopt particular attitudes or viewpoints. I can understand contemporary literary prose.	I can understand long and complex factual and literary texts, appreciating distinctions of style. I can understand specialised articles and longer technical instructions, even when they do not relate to my field.	I can read with ease virtually all forms of the written language, including abstract, structurally or linguistically complex texts such as manuals, specialised articles and literary works.
Spoken Interaction	I can interact in a simple way provided the other person is prepared to repeat or rephrase things at a slower rate of speech and help me formulate what I'm trying to say. I can ask and answer simple questions in areas of immediate need or on very familiar topics.	I can communicate in simple and routine tasks requiring a simple and direct exchange of information on familiar topics and activities. I can handle very short social exchanges, even though I can't usually understand enough to keep the conversation going myself.	I can deal with most situations likely to arise whilst travelling in an area where the language is spoken. I can enter unprepared into conversation on topics that are familiar, of personal interest or pertinent to everyday life (e.g. family, hobbies, work, travel and current events).	I can interact with a degree of fluency and spontaneity that makes regular interaction with native speakers quite possible. I can take an active part in discussion in familiar contexts, accounting for and sustaining my views.	I can express myself fluently and spontaneously without much obvious searching for expressions. I can use language flexibly and effectively for social and professional purposes. I can discuss ideas and opinions with precision and relate my contribution skilfully to those of other speakers.	I can take part effortlessly in any conversation or discussion and have a good familiarity with idiomatic expressions and colloquialisms. I can express myself fluently and convey finer shades of meaning precisely. If I do have a problem I can backtrack and restructure around the difficulty so smoothly that other people are hardly aware of it.
Spoken Production	I can use simple phrases and sentences to describe where I live and people I know.	I can use a series of phrases and sentences to describe in simple terms my family and other people, living conditions, my educational background and my present or most recent job.	I can connect phrases in a simple way in order to describe experiences and events, my dreams, hopes and ambitions. I can briefly give reasons and explanations for opinions and plans. I can narrate a story or relate the plot of a book or film and describe my reactions.	I can present clear, detailed descriptions on a wide range of subjects related to my field of interest. I can explain a viewpoint on a topical issue giving the advantages and disadvantages of various options.	I can present clear, detailed descriptions of complex subjects integrating sub-themes, developing particular points and rounding off with an appropriate conclusion.	I can present a clear, smoothly-flowing description or argument in a style appropriate to the context and with an effective logical structure which helps the recipient to notice and remember significant points.
Writing	I can write a short, simple postcard, for example sending holiday greetings. I can fill in forms with personal details, for example entering my name, nationality and address on a hotel registration form.	I can write short, simple notes and messages relating to matters of immediate needs. I can write a very simple personal letter, for example thanking someone for something.	I can write simple connected text on topics which are familiar or of personal interest. I can write personal letters describing experiences and impressions.	I can write clear, detailed text on a wide range of subjects related to my interests. I can write an essay or report, passing on information or giving reasons in support of or against a particular point of view. I can write letters highlighting the personal significance of events and experiences.	I can express myself in clear, well-structured text, expressing points of view at some length. I can write about complex subjects in a letter, an essay or a report, underlining what I consider to be the salient issues. I can select style appropriate to the reader in mind.	I can write clear, smoothly-flowing text in an appropriate style. I can write complex letters, reports or articles which present a case with an effective logical structure which helps the recipient to notice and remember significant points. I can write summaries and reviews of professional or literary works.
U N D E R S T A N D I N G						
S P E A K I N G						
W R I T I N G						

Appendix E: Coding system saturation of *thing*

'Location' of referent:

Level 1.1	Endophoric - anaphoric
Level 1.2	Endophoric - cataphoric
Level 2.1	Endophoric - exophoric anaphoric
Level 2.2	Endophoric - exophoric cataphoric
Level 3	exophoric

Type of referent:

A	Superordinate noun and names e.g. Macquarie University Computing Society (endophoric)
B	Circumlocution (endophoric)
C	Not in linguistic co-text but classified by situation where discourse takes place; e.g. 'work' <i>thing</i> (exophoric)
D	Not in linguistic co-text but classified by situation where discourse takes place; not 'work' <i>things</i> but, for example, 'leisure' <i>things</i> (exophoric)
E	Unclear (exophoric)

Type of cohesive device:

cd1	<i>thing</i>
cd2	A (one) <i>thing</i>
cd3	Some <i>thing</i>
cd4	The <i>thing</i>
cd5	This <i>thing</i>
cd6	That <i>thing</i>
cd7	<i>Things</i>
cd8	Some <i>things</i>
cd9	The <i>things</i>
cd10	These <i>things</i>
cd11	Those <i>things</i>
cd12	And <i>things</i> like that
cd13	Certain/ specific <i>things</i>
cd14	Your/ his/ my <i>thing</i>

Appendix F: Markers of informality in L1

Strong speaker attitude (positive and negative)

<i>Participant IDs</i>	
1A	Stupid <i>thing</i>
1A	so trying to get it to work before the start of teaching was pretty pretty horrible well not horrible
1A	What I really hate is calculus
4A	Wasn't a lot of fun
4A	An absolute idiot
4A	This guy
8A	Love working in a team
8A	Let's attack this framework
12A	Is quite fun
13A	I love working in a team
15A	Some pretty horrible people
15A	A bit of fun
15A	it's a good fun way to work

Colloquialisms

<i>Participant IDs</i>	
1A	screwed up solutions
1A	there was also the big deal
2A	Bounce ideas back and forth
2A	The nitty-gritty
3A	You' are on top of your task
3A	Dragging on
3A	Put their foot down
3A	it got tricky
3A	teammates
4A	A bunch of (3x)
4A	Hiccups and hurdles
4A	Iron out
4A	to squeeze more out of you
5A	Get on top of that
5A	knock on effect
5A	Shoestring budget
5A	that was pretty tough
5A	Just roll with it
5A	It became messy
5A	Guy
5A	Nutted it out
5A	I've picked up along the way
6A	which really irked me quite a bit
6A	Twiddling your thumbs
6A	You guys
7A	Teething problems

7A	Bounce ideas of them
8A	Such a big figure, you know, going berserk
8A	You guys (2x)
9A	I stepped up
9A	Pick up his work
12A	Two heads are better than one
12A	To do their bit (2x)
14A	Bossing everyone around
14A	On the spot
15A	Taking a battering
16A	Learning to hold my tongue
16A	I get a kick out of
16A	Jump over to another bit
16A	to jump on other people's ship
16A	Jump on and help
16A	muck around the issue
16A	my mates
16A	it's a huge stuff up
17A	Put my foot down
17A	be on top of each report
17A	know the ins and outs of it
18A	Just get on with work
19A	You gotta do what you gotta do

Shortenings (examples)

<i>Participant IDs</i>	
1A	Software wasn't up to spec
1A	a demo

Quotatives

<i>Participant IDs</i>	
2A	So not just to say ok this is what everyone in accounting does so just do it
3A	and said no it needs to be done finally by this time
11A	they just simply said no this is not right go back this is not right go back this is not right go back
13A	and said yeah look this doesn't happen and I am fixing it now and you'll see in your numbers within about two hours time when the ledger rolls over again
15A	I went straight back to him and said Xname I stuffed up I am sorry mate I have used the wrong calculation here is the right one

Appendix G: Markers of informality in L2

Strong speaker attitude (positive and negative)

<i>Participant IDs</i>	
14	I <i>love</i> being updated in <i>everything</i>
32	It's almost I mean <i>fun</i> and exciting to do my job Have some some fun
34	I really <i>love</i> the challenges

Colloquialisms

<i>Participant IDs</i>	
2	I had very very <i>tough</i> very hard deadlines
14	That kind of <i>stuff</i>
16	<i>tough</i> <i>stuff</i>
17	They were <i>like</i> they want to/ it's <i>like</i> / I <i>like</i> forget
21	<i>they are stuck</i> waiting for the information <i>guys</i> <i>teammates</i>
22	I had <i>to quit</i> that job
29	It's <i>like</i>
33	Some team <i>mates</i> (3x) all those <i>stuff</i>

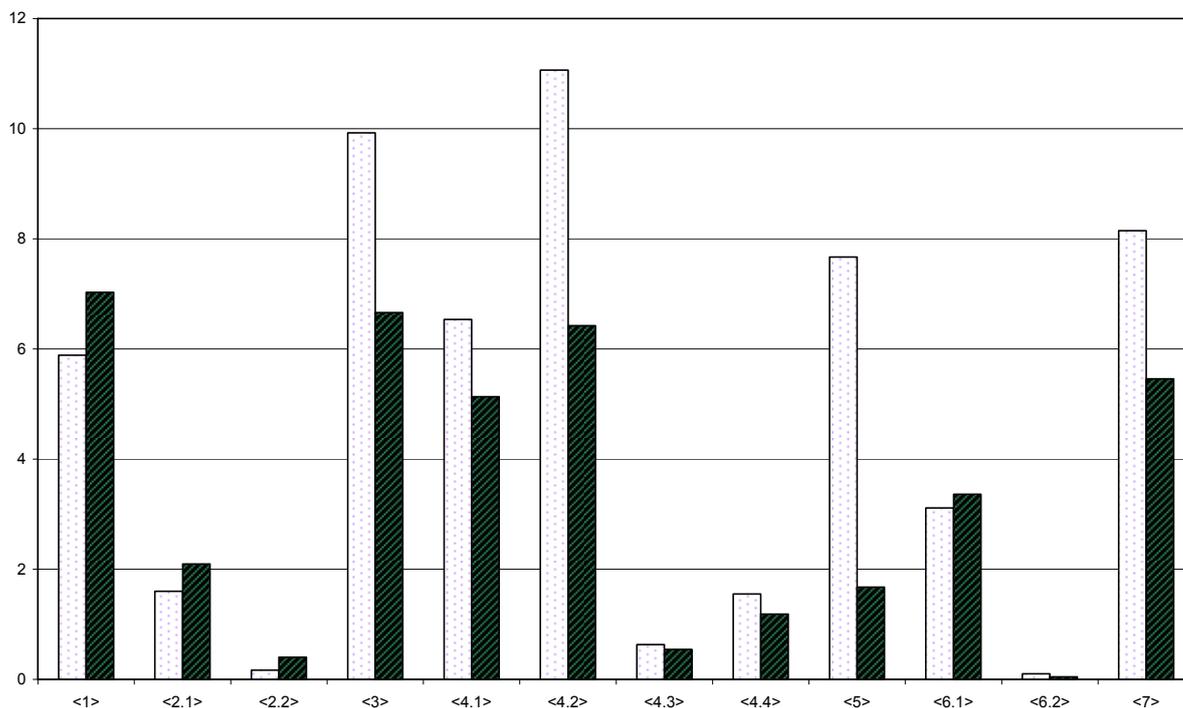
Shortenings

Several participants	Uses of <i>lots, cos, wanna</i>
----------------------	---------------------------------

Quotatives

<i>Participant IDs</i>	
23	he said to my assistant ' <i>get to your senior and that your senior ask me for information not you</i> '

Appendix H: Results of initial frequency counts of all *vague language* items coded



Category 1: Temporal expressions

Adverbs of frequency: *sometimes, often, recently, any time, usually, normally, generally*

Categories 2.1 and 2.2: Numeric quantification

Number approximators (2.1): *about, N or m, maybe n, N to m, probably n, around, N more or less, N or so, between n & m*

Partial numeric specifiers (more & less) (2.2): *more than, over, at least, N or so, a minimum of ; nearly, almost, less than, a maximum of, up to not more than, under*

Category 3: Non-numeric quantification

Indeterminate non-numerical quantifiers: *a lot of, many, a bit of, a few, lots of, a little, a couple, several, a number of, loads of, some, most*

Categories 4.1, 4.2 and 4.3: Generic expressions

General non-numerical specifiers (4.1): *everything, everywhere, everyone, everybody, anything, anywhere, anyone, anybody, somebody, someone, all*

General nouns (4.2): *thing, stuff, guys, people*

General extenders (4.3): *or something (like that), or whatever, and things (like that), and all (and that), or anything, and so on*

Category 5: Modifying expressions

kind of, sort of, quite, pretty, almost

Categories 6.1 and 6.2: Probability expressions

Modal adverbs (6.1): *probably, possibly, maybe*

Modal adjectives (6.2): *It is probable that, It is possible that*

Category 7: Parenthetical verbs

I believe, I think, I suppose, I reckon, I guess



14 November 2008

Ms Denise Gassner
B 817/444 Harris Street
Ultimo
NSW 2007

Reference: HE24OCT2008-D06147

Dear Ms Gassner

FINAL APPROVAL

Title of project: "The language used by non-native and native speakers of English in job interviews"

Thank you for your recent correspondence. Your response has addressed the issues raised by the Ethics Review Committee (Human Research) and you may commence your research. This approval is subject to the following condition:

1. Please forward a copy of the list of survey questions after analysis of the role playing exercises has been completed.

Please note the following standard requirements of approval:

1. Approval will be for a period of twelve (12) months. At the end of this period, if the project has been completed, abandoned, discontinued or not commenced for any reason, you are required to submit a Final Report on the project. If you complete the work earlier than you had planned you must submit a Final Report as soon as the work is completed. The Final Report is available at: http://www.research.mq.edu.au/researchers/ethics/human_ethics/forms
2. However, at the end of the 12 month period if the project is still current you should instead submit an application for renewal of the approval if the project has run for less than five (5) years. This form is available at http://www.research.mq.edu.au/researchers/ethics/human_ethics/forms If the project has run for more than five (5) years you cannot renew approval for the project. You will need to complete and submit a Final Report (see Point 1 above) and submit a new application for the project. (The five year limit on renewal of approvals allows the Committee to fully re-review research in an environment where legislation, guidelines and requirements are continually changing, for example, new child protection and privacy laws).
3. Please remember the Committee must be notified of any alteration to the project.
4. You must notify the Committee immediately in the event of any adverse effects on participants or of any unforeseen events that might affect continued ethical acceptability of the project.
5. At all times you are responsible for the ethical conduct of your research in accordance with the guidelines established by the University http://www.research.mq.edu.au/researchers/ethics/human_ethics/policy

If you will be applying for or have applied for internal or external funding for the above project **it is your responsibility** to provide Macquarie University's Research Grants Officer with a copy of this letter as soon as possible. The Research Grants Officer will not inform external funding agencies that you have final approval for your project and funds will not be released until the Research Grants Officer has received a copy of this final approval letter.

ETHICS REVIEW COMMITTEE (HUMAN RESEARCH)
LEVEL 3, RESEARCH HUB, BUILDING C5C
MACQUARIE UNIVERSITY
NSW, 2109 AUSTRALIA

Ethics Secretariat: Ph: (02) 9850 6848 Fax: (02) 9850 4465 E-mail: ethics.secretariat@vc.mq.edu.au
http://www.research.mq.edu.au/researchers/ethics/human_ethics

Yours sincerely



2 **Dr Margaret Stuart**
Director of Research Ethics
Chair, Ethics Review Committee (Human Research)

Cc: Professor Anne Burns, Department of Linguistics

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