

The thing about *thing*:
Use of *vague language*
in L1 and L2 speaker employment interviews in Australia

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Abstract

This study investigates the use of the item *thing* in L1 and L2 speaker discourse in the context of Australian employment interviews. Two main aspects are explored, the relationship of *thing* with the notion of vagueness and its relationship with implicature construction.

Given that most research on *thing* has been conducted in the area of *vague language* (e.g. Channell, 1994; Cheng and Warren, 2001; Drave, 2002; Jucker, Smith, and Lüdge, 2003; Cutting, 2007), the notion of vagueness is first discussed. From a review of recent semantic and pragmatic literature on vagueness a definition and framework is developed. This definition and framework is then used in a comparative analysis of the vagueness of *thing* in L1 and L2 speaker discourse. The relationship of *thing* with vagueness is, therefore, explored in two speaker groups.

Since the analysis only finds few instances of vagueness when *thing* is used, *thing* is also discussed with respect to the cultural context of Australia and the speech event of employment interviews. In particular, the study explores the effects that speakers can generate by using *thing* in discourse, and, thus, its relationship with implicatures is discussed. Based on previous research in the framework of Relevance Theory (e.g. Sperber and Wilson, 1986/ 1995; Escandell-Vidal, 1998; Jary, 1998a, 1998b), a model is developed in order to discuss the construction of implicatures in the context where the use of *thing* was observed. From the analysis, it is proposed that the L1 and L2 speakers of English differ in the effects that their use of *thing* generates in the employment interviews recorded.

Possible reasons for differences in the L1 and L2 speaker use of *thing* with respect to the notion of vagueness and regarding implicature construction are explored, and implications of the different uses identified are discussed.

Statement of Candidate

I certify that the work in this thesis entitled “The thing about *thing*: Use of *vague language* in L1 and L2 speaker employment interviews in Australia” has not previously been submitted as part of requirements for a degree to any other university or institution other than Macquarie University. Since this thesis has been written under a cotutelle agreement, a slightly modified version will, however, be submitted at another university at a later stage.

I also certify that the thesis is an original piece of research and has been written by me. Any help and assistance that I have received in my research work and the preparation of the thesis itself have been acknowledged, and all information sources and literature used are indicated in the thesis.

The research presented in this thesis was approved by the Macquarie University Ethics Review Committee, reference number HE24OCT2008-D06147.

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