

Pragmatics, Corpora and Irish English: Discourse-Pragmatic Markers in *First Dates*

Ireland

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Abstract

This contribution uses a corpus of interaction from the Irish version of the reality television show, *First Dates* (*First Dates Ireland*; FDIrE), and explores how the interaction in FDIrE can be analysed as a site of contemporary Irish English, with a particular focus on its pragmatic features. The type of interaction, a first date, also makes FDIrE a rich site for pragmatic analysis in terms of how participants negotiate the complexities of this initial encounter in the broader context of what can be conceptualised as *intimate discourse*, interaction between couples, families and close friends. Hence, it is primarily a study not only of pragmatic aspects of Irish English as a variety, but that variety in a specific context and a context with very specific constraints. As the data is taken from a reality TV show, we are dealing with mediated versions of first dates and interaction that is subject to editing, indeed editorialising, for pace and drama. However, contemporary research in Irish English has shown itself to be open to and very much cognisant of the potential of different data sources, and we argue for the value of the *First Dates Ireland* as yielding interactional data on what we call *nascent intimacy*. We focus on items that have been termed, inter alia, discourse-pragmatic markers (DPMs), and focus on their use in context. This paper is positioned at the intersection of scholarship on pragmatics and research that is predicated on the use of corpora and corpus tools for linguistic analysis, or corpus pragmatics. Findings show that those DPMs that have been shown to characterise Irish English more generally certainly occur, but also that the use of specific DPMs have a particular resonance in this context, e.g. the DPM *(be) like* and its potential relationship with the disclosure of personal information.

Keywords: Irish English; corpus pragmatics; small corpora; discourse-pragmatic markers

1. Introduction

This paper takes as its point of departure the pragmatic turn in the study of Irish English, which we can pinpoint as occurring roughly around the beginning of the new millennium (Barron, 2024: 400). We focus on this in the context of its interactions with those large-scale corpora of Irish English that emerged around the same time (Vaughan & Clancy, 2011; Vaughan, 2024); but also the contribution of smaller, domain-specific corpora to pragmatic research (Vaughan & Clancy, 2013). Both large and small corpora have led to a heightened awareness of the nuanced role of ‘small words,’ amongst other features, and in the context of Irish English research, heterogeneous discourse-pragmatic features in the construction of an overall picture of a variety’s pragmatic profile (Amador-Moreno *et al.*, 2015; see also Amador-Moreno, 2024).

In reviewing the papers that make up what became one of the first special issues on Irish English (O Baoill, 1985), itself collated from issues of *Teanga*, the snapshot that emerges is a drawing together of diverse though complementary traditions in conceptualising the English language in Ireland. Two contributions by Kallen (1985a, b) bookend the issue and in the first he identifies three primary approaches to Irish English: historical-descriptive (a critical presentation of the scope of scholarly research on Irish English), bilingual (more interested in Irish-based elements in contemporary Irish English) and theoretical, and the extent to which the English language in Ireland had been (or not) subject to linguistic theorization. He also notes that many studies to that point either concerned themselves with the influence of Irish on English in Ireland and/or a trend towards (historical) descriptions of highly localised features –preoccupations, incidentally, that appear to persist in the public imaginary. By way of epilogue, he points the project of research on the variety forward to the consideration of Irish English in a global perspective, though he notes the work of Barry (1983) in this regard and takes a nuanced view of

the term ‘global’. What is also interesting to reflect on with relation to this 1985 special issue is the nature of the data sources the papers use, primarily sociolinguistic surveys, attested examples and selected literary sources, in contrast with the cornucopia of data sources for Irish English now, evident in even the most cursory review of recently published work. We advocate for the value of innovation in the sourcing of data for Irish English in advancing our understanding of Irish English as a variety (see also Vaughan, 2024) and perspectivise on how DPMs can act as indicators of contextual and sociopragmatic constraints on interaction. We present discourse-pragmatic markers (DPMs) that characterise the context of the mediated ‘first date’ by comparing it to established intimate discourse such as that represented in the sub-corpus of the Limerick Corpus of Irish English (LCIE; Barker & O’Keeffe, 1999), and specifically the Limerick Intimate Corpus, LINT, a 565,809-word sample of the discourse of family and friends (Clancy, 2016).

First Dates is a reality TV show, which features people on blind dates set up by the show’s production team. Since first being broadcast in the UK, the format has since been franchised internationally and is produced in Ireland by Coco Content (<https://cococontent.ie/>). This contribution uses a corpus of interaction from the Irish version of the show, First Dates Ireland (FDIrE), and explores how the interaction in FDIrE can be analysed as a site of intimate discourse. At the time of writing, the Irish version of the show has run for eleven series’ over nearly a decade and is recruiting participants for its twelfth in 2026; it is a highly successful product. The type of interaction, a first date, can be construed as an ‘initial encounter’ (see Haugh & Sinkeviciute, 2021), albeit a high-stakes one and this is further amplified by the setting and the situation, making FDIrE a rich site for the analysis of how participants negotiate complexities of this initial encounter in their use of language (Clancy, 2017). While it should be acknowledged that the interaction takes place in a context where participants are being filmed (there are at least twenty cameras in the *First*

Dates restaurant) and are aware of this, the interaction between the potential couples is unscripted and the cameras positioned discreetly. The previous research on interaction (also recorded) in intimate settings usually features participants who have previously established relationships, while the origins of intimacy are often the stuff of anecdote. Reality TV shows, such as *FDIrE*, provide us with access to interaction pertaining to the beginnings of intimacy, what we term *nascent intimacy*, in a romantic context. The vast majority of previous research on romantic dating and first dates has taken place outside of linguistic disciplines, and especially within disciplines such as sociology and psychology, using survey methods such as interviews and questionnaires, or staged conversations (Stokoe, 2010). There has been, however, an enduring and increasing interest (cf. Flint *et al.*, 2019) in initial encounters between strangers (Pillet-Shore, 2011, 2018) and how these interactions unfold, such as sequences of self-presentation (Svennevig, 1999, 2014); the role of humour in getting acquainted (Haugh, 2011) and of teasing (Haugh & Pillet-Shore, 2018); as well as the interactional mechanisms by which disclosures of personal information are broached, including between speakers of different varieties of English (Haugh & Carbaugh, 2015). The interactions at the centre of this work are taken from everyday, non-romantic interactions. Where romantic interactions are concerned, there is considerably less work on interaction, though the potential of an internationally franchised media product, especially one whose interaction represents a goldmine for the analysis of intimate discourse, and comparative work on varieties of e.g. English had been mooted (Clancy, 2017) and is beginning to bear fruit. An early very notable exception is Stokoe (2010), who uses a conversation analytic approach to speed dating interaction amongst 35-40-year-olds and examines how participants navigate discussing previous relationships, specifically when in the date, and how, the topic is initiated. In discussing the previous literature on dating (certainly at that point) being so disproportionately concentrated across

disciplines in psychology, she notes the curious comparative neglect of dater interaction specifically, and points out that:

Researchers collect pre- and or post-[x] measures, where [x] may be an interaction, an intervention, an experimental manipulation, a survey, a test of some kind, leaving [x] itself unexamined – despite being the thing that presumably accounts for the difference between pre- and post-[x] measures

(Stokoe, 2010, p. 262)

Stokoe uses a conversation analytic approach to explore the design of questions used to elicit relationship histories, and notes a general acceptance of relationship ‘baggage’, surprisingly few compliments (though see Korobov, 2024), flattery or flirting – perhaps because romance is programmatically on the agenda and does not need to be keyed by flirting.

We take a corpus pragmatic approach to FDIrE (see section 3) exploring the pragmatic features that characterise the context, bringing these into relief by comparing them to naturally occurring, established intimate discourse represented in the Limerick Corpus of Intimate Talk (LINT; Clancy, 2016). The findings discussed below indicate the frequency of specific items with the potential to act as pragmatic markers such as *like*, typical of Irish English north and south (e.g. Corrigan, 2015; Schweinberger, 2012), certainly occur in the First Dates Ireland corpus. In contrast, other pragmatic markers that characterise intimate discourse in the family, for example, *shur* (Amador-Moreno & McCafferty, 2015) and *now* (Clancy & Vaughan, 2012, 2024), are conspicuous by their lack of frequency or absence. The argument is put forward that the markers which occur are those that facilitate the establishment, rather than exclusively the maintenance, of intimacy.

2. (Discourse-)Pragmatic Markers and Irish English

To say that the literature on the heterogeneous, contested and ever-expanding class of items encompassed within terms such as *discourse markers* (e.g. Schiffrin, 1987), *pragmatic markers* (e.g. Brinton, 1996), or *discourse particles* (e.g. Fischer, 2000, 2006) is vast is an understatement – a “jungle of publications” nearly twenty years ago according to Fisher (2006, p. 1).¹ This remains the case as is discussion around issues such as definition, characteristics and categorial scope (see, for example, Brinton, 1996, 2017; Fischer, 2006; or Aijmer & Simon-Vandenberg, 2011, amongst many others). For the purpose of the present paper, the term adopted is *discourse-pragmatic marker* (DPM). As Amador-Moreno (2024, p. 426) points out, this acts as an arguably more “neutral, broad, and conceptually flexible label” which can contain the breadth and scope of their distribution as well as their inherent multifunctionality. In terms of DPMs emblematic of Irish English, Amador-Moreno who has long been one of the most active and innovative researchers in the field, presents the “old” - items such as *sure*, often represented as *shur(e)* and the use of *like* in final position. The “new” are represented by the use of *like* as an opener or in medial position in the utterance, as well as quotative *like* (see section 4. of this paper also), *grand* and *now* (see Amador-Moreno, 2024 for a comprehensive account of DPMs and Irish English).

No matter what variety, the reason for the sustained interest in tracking DPMs across time, variety, context, inter alia, is captured succinctly by Östman (2022, p. xxiv):

...they are the markers that let us see what goes on ‘between the lines’ of what we say, the verbalised connections to the implicit communication we engage in whenever we speak: our connection to the background society and culture we take for granted, to the

¹ For a historical overview, see work by Brinton (1996), which includes a useful summary of terminology; for a critical review of approaches to the study of these items, see Fisher (ed., 2006).

system of politeness and turn-taking we utilise, to the involvement, affect and emotions we might not want to verbalise directly.

3. Data and Methodology

We have already described this study as corpus pragmatic in the sense that it identifies interactional features that have been shown in previous research to have significant pragmatic import and explores their use via corpus analysis tools – in Aijmer and Rühlemann’s (2015) terms our approach after identification involves vertical (quantitative) as well as horizontal (qualitative) perspectives. In 3. below we present selected outputs from word and n-gram frequency, concordance lines generated using tools such as these within our exploration of dates.

The corpus used for this study is a 57,800-word corpus of 35 individual dates taken from First Dates Ireland (FDIrE). The dates were selected at random from episodes over four series of the show. Each episode of First Dates Ireland is comprised of three to five dates interwoven with one another. The audience sees the individual daters entering the restaurant, being greeted by the Maître D’, Matteo Saina, being escorted to the bar to wait for their blind date to arrive, meeting their date at the bar and moving to their table for dinner and meeting an interviewer together at the conclusion of the date to decide whether or not they will see each other again. Each episode intersperses the three to five individual dates, as well as cutaways which feature the daters talking about themselves, their romantic aspirations and sometimes alone being asked to speculate on how the date is going. Our method was to track and transcribe individual dates from the initial meeting at the bar through to the end of the date when the daters decide whether or not they would like to meet one another again, including any cutaways featuring these daters. Of the 35 dates which make up the FDIrE corpus, 29 feature heterosexual couples and six same sex couples. The same sex dates are three male-male and three female-female. Of the 35 dates, 19 are successful, after Stokoe

(2010) this is judged based on whether or not they would like to meet one another again; 16 of the 35 dates are unsuccessful in these terms. Of note, given Barron's (2025) focus on offers using YouTube clips from the UK version of *First Dates*, 23 of the dates in FDIrE feature payment episodes and 12 do not. This may, of course, be related to decisions made by production companies that acquire the franchise and where it is broadcast: Frobenius and Gerhardt (2023) noted that payment episodes are nearly always shown in *First Dates* Germany, for example. The negotiation of payment may well influence the success or not of a first dates and the negotiation of payment is often discussed in relation to its reflection (or challenge) of perceived gender norms (Lever *et al.*, 2015). The dates in the FDIrE corpus feature a wide range of age groups; the youngest dater is 19 years-of age (female) and the oldest 71 (male). There is also a wide geographical spread represented with daters from both the Republic of Ireland and Northern Ireland. The comparative corpus we use, LINT, is a 565,809-word corpus of the discourse of family and friends engaged in everyday conversation (Clancy, 2016). There are two reasons for selecting this corpus for comparative purposes: firstly, it comprises interaction from contexts of established intimacy; and secondly these interactions are between speakers of Irish English and so represent a 'baseline' from which similarities and differences can be extrapolated.

4. Results and Discussion

4.1. Word Frequency

As the designers, compilers and transcribers of the FDIrE corpus, we are the first to concede that it is small; however, as has been argued elsewhere (Vaughan & Clancy, 2013), small corpora lend themselves to pragmatic research, if for no other reason that even a basic measure such as a word or n-gram frequency count can flag up entry points for more in-depth analysis. There are multiple

concordancers available; for this paper, we have used Sketch Engine (Kilgarriff *et al.*, 2014). Table 1 represents raw frequency counts in rank order only. However, it does point toward a number of linguistic items with potential pragmatic import that may be characteristic of our chosen site.

TABLE 1

Top 20 most frequent word comparison between FDI corpus and LINT (raw frequency)

N	FDIrE corpus	Frequency	LINT	Frequency
1	<i>I</i>	3,643	<i>I</i>	19,255
2	<i>you</i>	2,261	<i>the</i>	16,495
3	<i>to</i>	1,478	<i>you</i>	15,947
4	<i>a</i>	1,445	<i>it</i>	15,234
5	<i>like</i>	1,276	<i>and</i>	11,831
6	<i>and</i>	1,228	<i>to</i>	10,058
7	<i>it</i>	1,211	<i>yeah</i>	9,556
8	<i>the</i>	1,147	<i>a</i>	9,330
9	<i>yeah</i>	1,084	<i>that</i>	9,233
10	<i>that</i>	1,028	<i>n't</i>	8,151
11	<i>do</i>	732	<i>was</i>	7,144
12	<i>of</i>	729	<i>he</i>	6,925
13	<i>was</i>	693	<i>like</i>	6,915
14	<i>so</i>	608	<i>in</i>	6,847
15	<i>n't</i>	595	<i>do</i>	6,481
16	<i>my</i>	581	<i>is</i>	6,255
17	<i>in</i>	564	<i>of</i>	5,882
18	<i>me</i>	513	<i>she</i>	5,470
19	<i>just</i>	450	<i>know</i>	5,254
20	<i>know</i>	447	<i>they</i>	5,050

We can offer a couple of observations based on the FDIrE raw frequency list: firstly, it is worth noting that it features only first-person singular pronouns, with *I* in position 1 (*my* is ranked 16th and *me* 18th) and *you* in position 2. *I* is also the most frequently used item in LINT and *you* is in position 3. While this is expected of dyadic or multiparty conversation in everyday contexts, it is interesting that third person pronouns both singular *he* (position 12), *she* (position 18) and plural

they (position 20) are also present in LINT. Clancy (2016) argues that what is distinct amongst intimates in LINT is that, in addition to the ubiquitous *I* and *you*, there are primary stakeholders in the conversation, represented by third person pronouns, who are not present but are nonetheless continually evoked. This is not the case in FDIrE, given that the participants have just met one other for the first time and have not yet established the shared knowledge necessary to include others known to them in their conversation.

Of direct relevance to this paper are items with the potential to function as DPMs in Table 1. Some of these items occur with high frequency in both corpora: *like* is in position 5 in the FDIrE corpus and position 13 in LINT; whereas *know*, frequently used to form the DPM *you know*, is ranked 20th in FDI and 19th in LINT. Furthermore, the FDIrE corpus frequency list is characterised by *so* (position 14) and *just* (position 19), neither of which occur in the top 20 most frequent items in LINT. In order to explore these frequency differences in more detail, the raw frequency counts for *like*, *so* and *just* have been normalised per 100,000 words for both FDIrE and LINT in Table 2.

TABLE 2

Frequency counts for potential DPMs in FDIrE corpus and LINT (normalised per 100,000 words)

	FDIrE	LINT
<i>like</i>	2208	1222
<i>so</i>	1052	524
<i>just</i>	779	446

Interestingly, the frequency difference is very similar for all three markers, in the range of 1.75-2 times as frequent in FDIrE than in LINT. Of course, previous research has shown that *like* appears

regularly in the topmost reaches of spoken corpus frequency lists in many varieties of English. Given the breadth of research into the item in Irish English, it might perhaps be more surprising if it was absent in the results from both FDIrE and LINT. In terms of the behaviour of *like* in the subcontexts of intimate discourse in LINT, Clancy (2016) has shown that *like* is 45% more frequent in friendship groups than in the family, likely due to factors such as age (younger speakers are more likely users) and the potential stigmatisation of the marker by older family members (see D’Arcy, 2017). Its increased presence in FDIrE does not necessarily reflect its increased use by younger speakers given that the corpus features ‘older’ speakers, however, it could reflect opportunities for the increased use of lexical, non-pragmatic *like* when talking, for example, about likes and dislikes given the context is a first date.

In terms of the pragmatic characteristics of the site of the first date, the single items *just* and *so* may be of more relevance. Aijmer (2002, p.153) argues that *just* is ‘strongly favoured in speech where it is orientated to the involvement of the discourse participants’ where she equated it with a ‘reassuring overtone’ (ibid., p.179). In conversation between family and friends represented in CANSOC, a subcorpus of CANCODE, *just* was found to be commonly used with directive acts (O’Keeffe *et al.*, 2007). *Just* was shown to occur in predominantly initial position in the utterance, followed by the directive. Similarly, in LINT, directive acts have been associated with *now* and *there*, with these items functioning to either downtone or boost the impact of the directive (see Clancy & Vaughan, 2012, Clancy *et al.*, 2023). It has been suggested that the use of directive acts, often the most propositionally efficient, though not polite, way of performing speech acts such as requests, are common in intimate discourse for a number of reasons, primary among them is that much of the intimate discourse represented in LINT is multi-party and so the conversational floor can be hotly contested. Therefore, conversational efficiency in the form of

both speech acts and mitigators is often employed. This gives established intimate discourse a particular pragmatic flavour and is acceptable due to the very fact that the relationships are established. In contrast, FDI represents two-party discourse where the participants are relative strangers. This means that the interaction is necessarily pragmatically realised in a different way.

In Schneider's (2008) study of small talk in England, Ireland the USA, he demonstrated how speakers of IrE show a clear preference for the use of *so* as a pragmalinguistic marker (see also Binchy, 2005). He analysed a corpus of DCTs which asked participants to create a conversation between strangers of the same sex who meet at a party. He found that while *so* is used in the initial stages of the interactions, it is more likely to be used in interactions that occur in the later stages where 'further details about the interactants are mutually disclosed' (ibid., p.126). Most exchanges of this type start with a *so*-prefaced requests for information as illustrated by these extracts from the FDIrE corpus (1)-(4) below.

1. So tell me something about you?
2. So where are you from?
3. So what do you do?
4. So how do you prepare for a date then?

Schneider (2008) argues that IrE speakers tend to take a stronger personal interest in the lives of their conversational partners than either AmE speakers or EngE speakers. Therefore, *so* is important in the first dates context as it is used by IrE speakers to show strong personal interest – this is congruent with research on the link between *so*-prefaced questions and getting acquainted discussed by Sincaviciute and Rodriguez (2021), also in a reality TV context. The next stage of initial exploration of the corpus involves generating different frequency-based perspectives.

4.2. N-grams and *First Dates* (Ireland)

Table 1 demonstrated the presence of *know*, indicative of the DPM *you know*. In order to further nature of these items to the context of the first date, 2-word n-grams were generated using Sketch Engine. The top 10 most frequent 2-word n-grams are again compared to the most frequent n-grams in LINT in Table 3.²

TABLE 3

10 most frequent 2-word n-grams in FDI corpus and LINT

N	FDI	Frequency	LINT	Frequency
1	<i>I was</i>	320	<i>do n't</i>	2,520
2	<i>do n't</i>	264	<i>I do</i>	1,820
3	<i>you know</i>	242	<i>in the</i>	1,717
4	<i>I do</i>	228	<i>you know</i>	1,714
5	<i>and I</i>	169	<i>I was</i>	1,376
6	<i>to be</i>	151	<i>n't know</i>	1,281
7	<i>I think</i>	148	<i>do you</i>	1,209
8	<i>kind of</i>	146	<i>it was</i>	1,075
9	<i>are you</i>	137	<i>did n't</i>	1,047
10	<i>going to</i>	121	<i>going to</i>	977

² The n-gram results from Sketch Engine are tokenised. For example, *n't* is treated as a token and this results in 2-word n-grams such as *do n't*.

One of the first observations that might be made from Table 3 is that there are five 2-word n-grams shared between FDI and LINT, including three of the top four – *I was*, *do n't*, *you know* and *I do*. The 2-word n-gram *going to* is also shared in position 10 in both corpora. With the exception of *you know*, ubiquitous across varieties of English, the remaining n-grams in LINT are fragmented in that they do not constitute pragmatically complete units. O’Keeffe *et al.* (2007) associate these fragments or frames with the notion of ‘pragmatic integrity’ (ibid., p.70) whereby they demonstrate pragmatic specialization and clear, common pragmatic functions. Many of these n-grams are frames for referential meaning (see O’Keeffe *et al.*, 2020), for example, *n't know* is most likely a frame for *I don't know* which has a clear pragmatic function. In contrast, the top ten 2-word n-grams FDI features both *I think* (position 7) and *kind of* (position 8). Both of these n-grams are pragmatically specialised units: *I think* and *kind of* function to modify utterances pragmatically in that they can be connected to politeness in the form of mitigation, allowing speakers to express an opinion that is less open to challenge or rebuttal. A particularly pragmatically challenging episode in the date is when the participants come together in front of the camera at the end of the date and have to reveal whether or not they would like to meet one another again. In Extract (1), line (6), we see Rory (M, 48) and Tim (M, 54) deal with their date being unsuccessful, that is they choose not to meet again.

EXTRACT 1. Rory (M, 48) and Tim (M, 54)

1. <Producer> Would you two like to see each other romantically again?
2. <Rory> Am I I'll go first am I would like to see Tim again but **I don't think** s= ah romantically **I I think** we'd be actually very good friends **I think** we **I think** the it's more of the friendship chord with us two.

3. <Producer> Tim?
4. <Tim> I have to agree.
5. <Rory> So now.
6. <Tim> And I hope it's the start of a wonderful friendship I really mean that now I genuinely mean that.
7. <Rory> Feck this let's get married.

Clancy (2011a, b) has shown that in Irish English family discourse, *I think* occurs relatively infrequently, with families showing a clear preference for other mitigation strategies such as vocatives. Many of the mitigation strategies found in intimate discourse have been shown to be clause or utterance final in Irish and British English (Vaughan *et al.*, 2017), as opposed to primarily utterance or clause initial *I think*. We suggest that *I think* and *kind of* build on our argument that DPMs in the context of first dates reflect that in nascent intimacy, speakers have to employ clearly realised and recognisable pragmatic strategies throughout the turn in order to project themselves in as positive a light as possible/make a good first impression. Indeed, *like*, *(you) know*, *kind (of)* and *just* have been shown to be key, or statistically significant, to a corpus of the conversation of close friends when a corpus of family discourse is used as the reference corpus (Clancy, 2016).

Our final step in the exploration of what DPMs are present in First Dates Ireland is to generate a list of 3-word n-grams: these are presented in Table 4, again contrasted with LINT.

TABLE 4***10 most frequent 3-word n-grams in FDI corpus and LINT***

N	FDI	Frequency	LINT	Frequency
1	<i>I do n't</i>	161	<i>I do n't</i>	1,648
2	<i>to meet you</i>	56	<i>do n't know</i>	1,078
3	<i>I was like</i>	56	<i>I did n't</i>	378
4	<i>do n't know</i>	52	<i>is n't it</i>	352
5	<i>a lot of</i>	44	<i>I would n't</i>	242
6	<i>how are you</i>	36	<i>I ca n't</i>	240
7	<i>I ca n't</i>	34	<i>do n't think</i>	217
8	<i>like to see</i>	34	<i>know what I</i>	173
9	<i>you know what</i>	34	<i>you know what</i>	166
10	<i>I have a</i>	33	<i>you do n't</i>	165

Table 4 yields some fruitful results with echoes of the results produced in Table 3. There are four shared n-grams in the top 10 – *I do n't* is in first position in both corpora. Both corpora also feature *do n't know*, *I ca n't* and *you know what*. In addition, the n-grams featured in the LINT list are again predominantly frames upon which DPMs may conceivably be constructed, for example *you know what* could be a frame for *you know what I mean*. Of note also is that the results for 3-word n-grams for the first dates data yield complete, pragmatically specialised units in the form of a potential quotative DPM *I was like* (position 3) and *a lot of* (position 5). Unsurprisingly, given that First Dates features the initial meeting between the daters, n-grams associated with the speech act

of greeting such as *how are you* (position 6) and the frame *to meet you* (position 2) are also present. *I was like* appears in FDI at a rate of 97 occurrences per 100,000 words in contrast to its occurrence in LINT at a rate of 19 instances per 100,000 words, which suggests that a focus for further attention. Canonically, *be like* is used to introduce quoted thought which can take the form of words or expressive or mimetic content (Buchstaller & D'Arcy, 2009). These canonical uses are evident in Figure 1.

FIGURE 1

20 concordance lines for I was like (unsorted)

1	<input type="checkbox"/>	① doc#0	I semester yet.</s><s>Yeah sure yeah <U> I'm sure if you ask me next week I'll be in tears like.</s><s>Yeah I was like that as well with mine as well.</s><s>What do you do?</s><s>I did grap
2	<input type="checkbox"/>	① doc#0	>Oh wow Japanese.</s><s>Yeah.</s><s>Oh I've always wanted to go to Tokyo.</s><s>When I was sixteen I was like obsessed with Anime and stuff Really <U> so I was like the only reason I
3	<input type="checkbox"/>	① doc#0	rs wanted to go to Tokyo.</s><s>When I was sixteen I was like obsessed with Anime and stuff Really <U> so I was like the only reason I ended up doing law like strangely enough was I was like
4	<input type="checkbox"/>	① doc#0	with Anime and stuff Really <U> so I was like the only reason I ended up doing law like strangely enough was I was like looking for Japanese courses and I could either do Japanese and busines
5	<input type="checkbox"/>	① doc#0	</s><s>Yeah am I have to be honest with you I am a bit of a serial dater when I first like broke up with my ex I was like 'ok what happens now like what do I do' you know that kind of way.</s><s>
6	<input type="checkbox"/>	① doc#0	g I <OJ> know <OJ> </s><s>Yeah <O> like I heard law law was the first thing that you said to me and then I was like 'ok she I got to be super serious <O>'.</s><s>I <O> must be serious yea
7	<input type="checkbox"/>	① doc#4	was train to get my first belt mm because I'm kinda our sensei said listen Mark you're a bit of a kinda oddball I was like 'really?</s><s>A bit of a what?</s><s>Oddball.</s><s>I thought you said
8	<input type="checkbox"/>	① doc#4	</s><s>It's not+ No stop it please.</s><s>I She was getting real serious about like goin halves on the bill and I was like goin you know 'let a man just be a man like and just pay the bill'.</s><s>I
9	<input type="checkbox"/>	① doc#5	g amazing as well like yeah.</s><s>That's such a sweet thing to say.</s><s>Thanks.</s><s>When I say you I was like 'damn girl'.</s><s>Is she for me?</s><s>Ah my.</s><s>Thanks.</s><s>
10	<input type="checkbox"/>	① doc#6	as well.</s><s>Yeah. <?> a couple of years ago 'Rebecca why are you rapping when you sing?</s><s>and I was like 'well I'm just a bit shy like I don't have instruments behind me at the mome
11	<input type="checkbox"/>	① doc#7	arted to feel sad and he was there 'listen pet' he said 'I just think you're destined to be like me unlucky in love' I was like 'get me out of this car don't you ever say that to me again I'm not like you'
12	<input type="checkbox"/>	① doc#8	me for a month.</s><s>I was just going through dramas and all the like being bullied in school like you know I was like a bit different and I just went to the barber 'cut me hair'.</s><s>Would you
13	<input type="checkbox"/>	① doc#9	eah there's nothin wrong with that yeah vary it yeah.</s><s>Yeah and what about yourself?</s><s>Originally I was like PR and marketing but I'm actually am working now for a garage down in L
14	<input type="checkbox"/>	① doc#9	used to say to the girls cos some of my friends would be like 'Lynsey you treat cancer like it's the flu like' and I was like <makes a face>.</s><s>Well I think if you put your mind down to things y
15	<input type="checkbox"/>	① doc#12	k the train up.</s><s>Did you?</s><s>Yeah.</s><s>My dad works on the trains.</s><s>Ah shur so.</s><s> I was like 'ah yeah would you be able to like sort me out with a ticket' he was like 'nd
16	<input type="checkbox"/>	① doc#12	rat's that?</s><s>and 'is that a fanny on your arm?</s><s><splutters and puts down his glass?</s><s>And I was like 'no' and then he said 'oh you're the girl with two fannies'.</s><s>He said 'I
17	<input type="checkbox"/>	① doc#12	'fanny arm'.</s><s>Fanny arm.</s><s>Yeah.</s><s>So Fanny Arm took herself back to her tattoo artist and I was like 'listen no disrespect I love it but we're going to have to do something abou
18	<input type="checkbox"/>	① doc#12	g shur I did the whole thing.</s><s>Yeah.</s><s>You were committed.</s><s>And then I went up to him and I was like 'hey I moustachio you a question' I'm not going lie that's the kind of thing
19	<input type="checkbox"/>	① doc#12	estion' I'm not going lie that's the kind of thing I like.</s><s>Right?</s><s>I would have laughed.</s><s>And I was like 'listen have you ever kissed somebody with a moustache before?</s><s>
20	<input type="checkbox"/>	① doc#12	I.</s><s>I went to credit union this morning cos I wasn't going to leave myself super broke from the weekend I was like 'no I'm taking out my life savings I'm securing this meal tonight'.</s><s>I

We can see that 13 of the 20 examples of *I was like* in Figure 1 are associated either with reported speech or thought. In addition, *I was like* co-occurs with the quotative *go* in line 12 and in line 13,

the *I was like* prefaces the mimetic <makes a face>. Furthermore, we can see the characteristic tendency of DPMs to co-occur; for example, ...*so I was like*... (line 3) and ...*I was like a bit different and I just went*... (line 12). Overall in the corpus, 49 of the 56 total occurrences are accompanied by reported speech or thought. In addition, 28 of the 41 instances of the associated, present tense *I'm like* co-occur with reported speech or thought.

4.3. Drilling down: The DPM *I was like* and self-disclosure

As previously mentioned, in our corpus pragmatic approach to exploring the language of first dates, we take direction from previously published research but primarily our cues for further exploration frequently originate in the frequency outputs of single-words and n-grams. In reading the concordance lines, line 14 stood out for its additional use of *would + be like* but more so in relation to its topic: *Some of my friends would be like 'Lynsey you treat cancer like it's the flu' and I was like <makes a face>*. Tal-Or and Herschman-Shitrit (2015) suggest that in initial encounters between strangers, only superficial and positive self-disclosures are expected. During the course of the interaction on *First Dates* Ireland, daters obviously share personal information, such as names, where they live, their occupations, likes and dislikes etc., but also as Stokoe (2010) has shown, relationship histories: in other words, personal information which would in an initial encounter *other* than a first date potentially be considered 'over-sharing'. Moving between the concordance lines for *be like* and its expanded context suggested a potential relationship between *be like* and the direct (and indirect) disclosure of personal information. Extract 2 presents the disclosure of personal information in a date between Leona and Rob.

EXTRACT 2. Leona (F, 32) and Rob (M, 30)

1. <Leona> I don't have a breast there.
2. <Rob> Okay.
3. <Leona> I've had a full mastectomy.
4. <Rob> Wow.
5. <Leona> And em I've had em talks about getting reconstructive surgery I'm on a waiting list but **I was like** literally honest to God before I even had my breast removed **I was like** 'okay lads when's it going to be back on' since I got it removed **I was like** 'nah there's more important things in the world like'. I'm not going to say no to it.
6. <Rob> Yeah.
7. <Leona> But I wouldn't say yes to it either right now. I lost my eyebrows and eyelashes. You do not realise how weird someone looks until you have no eyebrows and eyelashes.
8. <Rob> What a tough thing to go through at such a young age.

Self-disclosure, a construct from social psychology, has been defined as "...any information exchange that refers to the self, including personal states, dispositions, events in the past, plans for the future" (Derlega *et al.*, 1987, p. 173) and plays a major role in the creation and maintenance of intimacy. However, as Svennevig points out "'self-disclosure' might be a useful theoretical construct for describing the establishment of social relations, but it does not seem to correspond to any recognizable conversational activity" (1999, p. 4). We might add that there is also a distinction between levels of self-disclosure: talking about likes and dislikes on a date is rather different from discussing a mastectomy.

Extract (3) features the use of *I was like* to report on speech rather than thought by Emily (F, 27). However, it is used in the context of a humorous anecdote with a skilled play on words, which is appreciated by Cory (M, 26).

EXTRACT 3. Emily (F, 27) and Cory (M, 26)

1. <Cory> Did you do the Zorro thing <mimes throwing cape over face>?
2. <Emily> Right I did everything shur I did the whole thing.
3. <Cory> Yeah. You were committed.
4. <Emily> And then I went up to him and **I was like** 'hey I moustachio you a question'.
5. <Cory> I'm not going to lie that's the kind of thing I like.
6. <Emily> Right?
7. <Cory> I would have laughed.

Again, it is not simply the deployment of *be like* in the recounting of the anecdote – Emily’s failed attempt at flirting with a stranger through wordplay – but that it is helping her to communicate what type of person she is (playful, funny), which we see Cory respond to quite directly in lines 5 and 7: that would have worked with him. He appreciates a woman who is playful and funny. We should note at this stage that we are not suggesting that *be like* used to report speech or thought is *ipso facto* self-disclosure, but rather that focusing on DPMs and drilling down into their occurrence in context enhances our understanding of their broader contextual functions.

5. Conclusion

What the focus on the DPM quotative *be like* intends to highlight is how starting with the established research on DPMs and their interpersonal functions alongside their potential to facilitate interaction in high-stakes initial encounters such as first dates can yield some unexpected insights into other significant features of the interaction. The frequency of the n-gram *I was like* directed us to what we might consider a discursive characteristic of nascent intimacy, whether romantic or non-romantic, self-disclosure. This is a concept which is more often associated with research in social psychology but which is also, critically, situated in the interaction itself and in

terms of being designed to be “disclosive” (Antaki et al., 2005). In Extract 1, using *I was like* to communicate her thoughts during this traumatic time in her life, Leona not only shares the information (*I had cancer and subsequently had a mastectomy*) but also shares who she is, how she deals with extreme adversity and what her values are: ***I was like*** *‘nah there’s more important things in the world like’*. This is the aspect of how quotative *be like* is deployed that is particularly interesting in this context and that will reward deeper theorising and practical operationalising around the concept of self-disclosure in this context, the types of topics that act as conduits to more intimate self-disclosures and, crucially, how the self-disclosures are handled in interaction in terms of the DPMs that cluster around these episodes. According to Tal-Or and Herschman-Shitrit (2015), reality show participants “dramatically violate the norms of self-disclosure that apply in real-life interpersonal relationships” through, for example, very intimate self-disclosure in the form of monologue (in settings such as the ‘Diary Room’ in *Big Brother*, for example). Therefore, the question as to whether or not *be like* is indicative of the context of an Irish first date or a feature of the broader context of reality TV dating shows should also be posed.

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