

Povolná, Renata

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RENATA POVOLNÁ

## SOME NOTES ON INTERACTIVE DISCOURSE ITEMS IN SPOKEN ENGLISH

### 1 Social interaction

When we communicate with other people we do it not only to convey some new information but above all to exchange ideas, attitudes, opinions, i.e. to create some space for social interaction. What is understood under social interaction? It is the cooperation between two or more partners in a communicative situation. Participants take their turns, i.e. at any particular moment one of them is the current speaker and the others are the current hearers. In the following paper some items that enable social interaction, especially the shift of the speaker are under examination. On the one hand, such items can be labelled as discourse items because they appear in spoken discourse. On the other hand, they can be labelled as interactive items because they help the smooth flow of interaction. Accordingly, they are labelled as interactive discourse items in the present analysis.

### 2 Proper turns vs backchannel signals

Not all utterances produced by the speakers in social interaction can be considered proper turns. Proper turns must be distinguished from backchannels or backchannel signals, which do not involve the shift of the speaker and are just hearers' signals that they are still listening. At the same time they indicate to the current speaker to go on speaking. For this paper some interactive discourse items have been chosen, namely questions tags and two clausal forms *you know* and *you see*, both often considered comment clauses (CCs) by some authors (see e.g. Quirk and Greenbaum 1973, Quirk et al. 1985, Leech and Svartvik 1994).

In connection with the cultural specificity of the English language Urbanová (2002: 17) states that when talking to their partners in a typical dialogue English speakers are all the time seeking confirmation of what they are saying. In her opinion, there are three ways the current speaker can appeal to the current hearer to produce some kind of reaction:

- 1) declarative questions
- 2) question tags
- 3) comment clauses

Two of the above-mentioned ways to prompt some reaction from the current hearer, namely question tags and the comment clauses *you know* and *you see*, are here under investigation.

When talking about features typical of spoken English, Urbanová (2002: 25) mentions discourse markers and pragmatic expressions, such as *well, I mean, you see, you know, all right, I see, m, hm, yeah*. These words that exist only in the spoken variety of English are well-nigh meaningless and function above all as intimacy signals. However, they are of vital importance for the smooth flow of communication because participants in a communicative situation are expected to signal in some way (either verbal or paralinguistic) that they follow and understand what the current speaker is saying. Even backchannelling, for example, in the form of *m, mm, mhm, hm, yeah*, is an important part of social interaction.

According to Biber et al. (1999: 1091) backchannels are very frequent and their role is to signal “feedback to the speaker that the message is being understood and accepted. Given the interactive nature of conversation, backchannels are important in indicating that speaker and hearer are keeping in touch with one another, and that the communication is still in progress”.

The distinction between a proper turn and a backchannel signal is also important for the present study because all the three interactive discourse items, namely question tags, the clausal forms *you know* and *you see*, are studied with regard to what they prompt from the current hearer. The can prompt:

- 1) a verbal response, i.e. the shift of the speaker;
- 2) a backchannel signal, which does not imply any shift of the speaker;
- 3) no verbal reaction at all.

Unfortunately, it has been impossible to conclude from the transcribed texts how often they prompt some silent feedback, for example, in the form of head-nods and facial gestures. That is the reason why the current hearer’s non-verbal reactions are treated together with no reaction at all.

### 3 Material under investigation

The material for the present investigation into interactive discourse items consists of six texts taken from the London-Lund Corpus, namely three texts with private face-to-face conversations (S.1.1, S.1.6 and S.1.8) and three public radio discussions (S.5.1, S.5.2 and S.5.7). The two genres have been chosen because they have both similar and different characteristics. On the one hand, both of them represent spoken face-to-face interaction and have the form of a dialogue

(or multilogue if more than two speakers are involved). On the other hand, they differ in the lack versus presence of planning (at least partial planning in the case of radio discussions), surreptitious versus non-surreptitious recording, and private versus public speaking. The speakers in the texts analysed are all native speakers of British English, mostly educated to university level.

#### 4 Interactive discourse items

As for questions tags, sometimes labelled as tag questions (see e.g. Quirk et al. 1985, Leech and Svartvik 1994), there are basically two types, both included in the present study: 1/ tags with a rising tone which invite “verification, expecting the hearer to decide the truth of the proposition in the statement”, and 2/ those with a falling tone which invite “confirmation of the statement” and have “the force of an exclamation rather than a genuine question” (for more information, see Quirk et al. 1985: 810–813). Urbanová (2001: 53) considers question tags as “a semi-direct way of asking, combining a declarative sentence structure with a tag”. According to Biber et al. (1999: 1080–1089), who use the label question tags and include them among response elicitors, they have an interactive function of eliciting the hearer’s agreement or confirmation, which is the main reason why they have been included in the present analysis.

As for the clausal forms *you know* and *you see*, they are mostly listed as type (1) CCs (for more information, see Povolná 2003) used to claim the hearer’s attention or agreement, expressing at the same time the speaker’s informality and warmth towards the hearer. However, owing to their different functions from the other type (1) CCs, which are mostly used to express the speaker’s tentativeness (e.g. *I think*), certainty (e.g. *I’m sure*), or emotional attitude (e.g. *I’m afraid*), it can be stated that both *you know* and *you see* represent a borderline category within type (1) CCs. Moreover, they are used when the speaker wants to establish some kind of contact with the hearer, i.e. to create some space for social interaction, which is the main reason why these two clausal forms in particular, and not any others, have been included in the present study.

The label interactive discourse items is used in accordance with Leech and Svartvik (1994: 10–19), who, when discussing the grammar in spoken and written English, list several words and expressions typical of spoken discourse like *mhm*, *yeah*, *I see*, *I mean*, *you know*, *you see*, *well*, *anyway*, *of course*. The authors put these discourse items, also called fillers, under three headings, indicating a scale from “purely interactive” to “also interactive” functions. They place the clausal forms *you know* and *you see* somewhere in the middle on the scale and consider them to be “mainly interactive” discourse items, thus emphasizing their importance in social interaction. Such tokens occur in Example 1, where they represent what is according to my classification called the function of empathizer (for more details on the individual discourse functions of *you know* and *you see*, see below):

**Example 1**

- >A ^\_and [em]# --- ^I don't think the 'doctor had ex!p\ected# that I '^w\ould do 'barrier 'nursing \*you s/ee#\*
- C \*^[m]#\*
- >A <<I think>> she said 'something a'bout [i? a:] she ^wished that :everybody would 'take . [e:] the 'thing '':s\eriously# you ^kn/ow# when they were ^t\old {as ^\I did#}# cos she ^came in and the !whole c\orridor# . was '^^\ined# .
- C \*^[m]#\*
- >A \*with\* ^various f\orms of# . ^w\ashing . and s/o on#  
(S.1.8.1017–1028)

Note: The transcription of all the examples in the present paper is based on the prosodic system in Crystal (1969).

According to Biber et al. (1999: 1086) the interactive uses of the finite verb formulae *I mean*, *you know* and *you see* are closely related to discourse markers, which tend to “combine two roles: (a) to signal a transition in the evolving process of the conversation, and (b) to signal an interactive relationship between speaker, hearer, and message”. And it is above all the latter role of *you know* and *you see* that is at the core of the investigation.

For the present study of interactive discourse items (question tags, *you know* and *you see*) and their role as response elicitors (a verbal response, a backchannel signal, no verbal reaction at all), my classification of possible discourse functions of *you know* and *you see* has been applied (for more details, see Povolná 2004a). The reason for this is above all my hypothesis that the clausal forms *you know* and *you see* can have different elicitive force in spoken English depending on their particular function in a given communicative situation. As for my classification, it is based on some of the conversational strategies presented in Stenström (1994). After the application of several different criteria including the entire situational context, it is possible to distinguish four discourse functions: appealer, inform marker, empathizer, and monitor (for their exemplification, see Povolná 2004ab). Accordingly, these four functions of *you know* and *you see* are related to their roles as response elicitors in the present analysis.

**5 Analysis and results**

It becomes clear from Table 1 that there are striking differences between the two genres of spoken English. The number of interactive discourse items (D-items) is considerably higher in private face-to-face conversations, amounting to as many as 205 occurrences, in comparison with their number in public radio discussions, which amounts to 30 occurrences only. These results must be viewed with regard to the fact that the length of the texts under investigation taken from the two genres is identical (15,000 words of each text type). Based on my results, it can now be concluded that speakers in private face-to-face conversations tend to use much more frequently than participants in public ra-

dio discussions some kind of interactive D-items (for the term D-items, see e.g. Stenström 1984).

**Table 1** Interactive discourse items in spoken English

<b>Text types</b>	<b>Private face-to-face conversations</b>		<b>Public radio discussions</b>	
<b>Discourse item</b>	No.	%	No.	%
<i>you know</i>	102	49.8	14	46.7
<i>you see</i>	49	23.9	9	30.0
Question tags	54	26.3	7	23.3
<b>Total (No.)</b>	<b>205</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>30</b>	<b>100.0</b>

Although it is not evident from the overall results presented in Table 1, there are also some differences between individual texts within the same text type (for more details, see Povolná 2005). Such differences are connected with the participants in the texts analysed, their relative social status, their attitudes towards each other, the amount of shared knowledge, and the topics they discuss in a given communicative situation. Moreover, the whole flow of conversation in public radio discussions is supervised by one main speaker, i.e. the radio reporter, who chooses who will speak next. Participants in such discussions are frequently asked to express their opinions on and attitudes to current political and economic issues, and that is the reason why rather than using *you know* and *you see* they often use some other type (1) comment clauses, such as *I think, I believe, I'm sure* etc. to indicate that what they are saying is just their own opinion or feeling (for more information on CCs used in public radio discussions, see Povolná 2004a). Speakers seldom address the other participants, which accounts for the much lower frequency of occurrence of what can be called *you-oriented* CCs including *you know* and *you see* (for the distinction between *I-oriented* and *you-oriented* CCs, see Povolná 2003). This result is in contrast with that from private face-to-face conversations, in which speakers often appeal to their hearers to provide some kind of response, at least in the form of backchannelling, as is the case of the speaker C in Example 1 above. Thus it is not surprising that the clausal forms *you know* and *you see* amount to about 74 per cent (151 cases) of all D-items found in the conversational data.

Since the number of all D-items in public radio discussions is rather low (30 occurrences only), there is no point discussing here any detailed results apart from those that are shown in Table 5b below. By contrast, the number of D-items in private face-to-face conversation is very high (205 cases), which calls for the presentation of detailed results concerning the individual D-items. Moreover, in the case of the clausal forms *you know* and *you see* the results are presented with regard to the four possible discourse functions mentioned above.

**Table 2a** Reactions to *you know*

Reaction Function (No. 102)	Response 27			Backchannel 30			No verbal reaction 45		
	Without any pause	After a pause	After stressed <i>you</i>	Without any pause	After a pause	After stressed <i>you</i>	Without any pause	After a pause	After stressed <i>you</i>
Appealer	6 (1)	1	1	1	0	0	0	0	0
Inform marker	9 (2)	3	2	11 (3)	2	3	28 (2)	5 (1)	3
Empathizer	2	3	0	8	5	0	5	4	0
Monitor	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Total	17	7	3	20	7	3	33	9	3

Note: The numbers listed in brackets in columns “Without any pause” or “After a pause” concern the cases in which D-items occur after the stressed pronoun *you*. In order to avoid their double occurrence in the tables, they are counted in the column “After stressed *you*” but also listed in brackets to show whether such cases occur without or after a pause.

**Table 3a** Reactions to *you see*

Reaction Function (No. 49)	Response 8			Backchannel 8			No verbal reaction 33		
	Without any pause	After a pause	After stressed <i>you</i>	Without any pause	After a pause	After stressed <i>you</i>	Without any pause	After a pause	After stressed <i>you</i>
Appealer	3	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Inform marker	1	2	0	2	2	0	18	8	0
Empathizer	1	1	0	4	0	0	2	4	0
Monitor	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0
Total	5	3	0	6	2	0	21	12	0

The results presented in Tables 2a and 3a, showing the current hearer’s reactions to the clausal forms *you know* and *you see*, provide evidence that in the majority of cases there is some kind of verbal reaction to the occurrence of *you know* in spoken English (57 occurrences). In 27 cases there is a verbal response with the shift of the current speaker and in 30 cases a backchannel signal, i.e. without any shift of the speaker. No verbal reaction at all appears in 45 cases. However, it must be stated again that it has been impossible to take into consideration cases in which D-items prompt some silent feedback, for example, in the form of head-nods and facial gestures. As for pauses, it seems that the presence or absence of a pause after *you know* does not have any influence on the kind of reaction it prompts. Moreover, it can be stated that cases without any pause after all D-items (question tags, *you know* and *you see*) are more common within all types of reaction under investigation (see Tables 2a and 3a above and Table 4a below).

The results concerning the use of *you see* as a response prompter are slightly different: in the majority of cases there is no verbal reaction at all (33 occur-

rences) and the remaining 16 occurrences are evenly distributed between a verbal response with the shift of the current speaker and a backchannel signal without any shift. It can be concluded from the results presented above that the presence or absence of a pause after *you see* does not have any influence on the way in which the current hearer reacts.

Let me now make a short remark on the term prompter. In the present study it is used in agreement with Urbanová (2001: 53), who mentions the prompters *you know* and *you see* when talking about indirectness as a characteristic feature of conversational language and who considers their use after a declarative sentence structure to be a more acceptable way of asking than an interrogative sentence structure. Moreover, in her opinion, “eliciting confirmation is the most frequent discourse tactic creating an atmosphere of understanding and agreement in a spontaneous, reciprocal exchange of views” (Urbanová 2003: 29).

**Table 4a** Reactions to question tags

Reaction	Response 38		Backchannel 10		No verbal reaction 6	
	Without any pause	After a pause	Without any pause	After a pause	Without any pause	After a pause
Total No. 54						
Question tags	23	15	7	3	1	5

As for question tags (54 occurrences), Table 4a makes it evident that these represent a typical response prompter. The overwhelming majority of the 48 question tags prompt some kind of verbal reaction, mostly in the form of a verbal response (38 cases), which implies the shift of the current speaker, as in Example 3, and less frequently in the form of a backchannel signal (10 cases), as in Example 6 below. Only in 6 cases is there no verbal reaction at all, as illustrated in Example 5 below. As already stated, however, it has been impossible to distinguish the cases in which D-items prompt some silent feedback from the current hearer from those in which there is no reaction at all.

Since there are some marked differences not only between the frequency of occurrence of the individual discourse functions of *you know* and *you see* (for more details, see Povolná 2005) but also between the type of reaction they elicit (see Tables 2a and 3a), let me now comment briefly on the results connected with the individual discourse functions of *you know* and *you see*.

As mentioned above, it is possible to distinguish four different functions: appealer, inform marker, empathizer, and monitor. Based on my results, it can be stated that, when functioning as appealers (12 cases), the clausal forms *you know* (9 cases) and *you see* (3 cases) are explicit signals to the hearer that some kind of feedback would be appropriate. Such cases mostly occur in turn-final position with a rising tone, as illustrated in Examples 2 and 3, in which *you know* and *you see* are successful means of getting some feedback from the hearer, namely in

the form of a verbal response, which implies the shift of the current speaker. This function has also been recognized by Östman (1981), who claims that *you know* in turn-final position, especially if accompanied by an interrogative contour, has a questioning effect from which can be inferred “are you attending”, “do you agree”, or “do you see what I mean”. The same applies to *you see* when used as an appeler, as in Example 3:

### Example 2

- B +I sup^p\ose it 'is#+ but ^they're !too !b\ig you kn/ow#  
 A ^y/es# of ^c\ourse they 'are#
- (S.1.8.232–235)

### Example 3

- A \*<<it's ^just 'one !qu\estion that they have to start to do /isn't it#>>  
 B ^well there were [e] !\one# or ^tw\o we've \*got on th/ere#\* ^you s/ee#  
 A \*^yes !I s\ee# . ^y\_es# . ^y\_es# – [e:m] . ^one \other thing S/am#
- (S.1.1.57–64)

As can be seen from Tables 2a and 3a above, all the occurrences of *you see* and the overwhelming majority of *you know* tokens prompt the current hearer's reaction in the form of a verbal response. Only in one case is there a backchannel signal as a reaction to the occurrence of *you know*. Thus it can be concluded that both *you know* and *you see*, when functioning as appellers, prompt some kind of verbal response from the current hearer, which mostly implies also the shift of the current speaker.

As for the function of inform marker, this is by far the most frequent function of all in the data, amounting to 66 occurrences of *you know* and 33 of *you see*. It can be concluded from my results presented in Tables 2a and 3a above that D-items when used as inform markers do not frequently prompt any verbal reaction at all (62 occurrences). According to Stenström (1984: 90), *you know* and *you see* serve in this function differently. “*You see* is typically used when A assumes that the information is new to B”, whereas *you know* can be used in the same way but is “more often used when B is either assumed to be somewhat familiar with the subject matter already or when A wants to create the impression that A and B share a common ground”, which explains why there is no verbal reaction at all in more than half of the cases (36 with *you know* and 26 with *you see*). Moreover, it seems more natural to acknowledge the receipt of new information rather than old information, even if this is just pretended. If there is some verbal reaction, then it tends to be evenly distributed between a verbal response and a backchannel signal (30 cases with *you know* and 7 with *you see*). The second token of *you see* in Example 4 illustrates *you see* as a backchannel prompter, whereas the first one is yet another instance of an appeller and at the same time a successful verbal response prompter:

**Example 4**

- A** and I ^wondered . whether . [i] . gra:phology p/aper# . is in ^fact . [e:m] . ^whether it !tends to be a com:p/varative gra\_phology paper# ^or – a his!t\vorical gra\_phology \_paper# – <<^whether it's>> \*like\*
- B** \*<<^well you>>\*
- >**A** !Old and Middle :English gra/phology# <<or ^something \*like !th\at# ^you s/ee#>>\*
- B** \*^well ^you give\* them the :!ot {^you see#}# \* . \* ^that's the \*\*p/oint#\*\* <<and>> ^make sure that there's :s\omething# [e:] ^fairly :c\losely rel/ated#
- >**A** \*^[\_m]##\* \*\*^[\_m]##\*\*
- >**B** <<to ^what they've st\udied#>>

(S.1.1.42–56)

Note: It is important to state here that single or double asterisks used in the examples presented in the paper indicate simultaneous speech.

In the above example the second occurrence of *you see* produced by the speaker B immediately prompts a backchannel signal in the form of *m* from the hearer A.

Example 5 below presents another instance of a backchannel prompter, this time expressed by *you know* with the stressed pronoun *you*. In agreement with Stenström (1984: 90) I maintain that *you know* as an inform marker is often used to hint at some underlying message, which is usually indicated by a somewhat unexpected intonation contour: *you* carries the tone and not *know*, or both of them carry the nuclear tone, as in Example 5. As can be seen from Tables 2a and 3a above, the instances with the stressed *you* occur almost exclusively when *you know* functions as an inform marker. Moreover, not a single occurrence of a stressed *you* has been found with *you see*.

**Example 5**

- >**A** of 'course# cos she ^said when she c/^ame# – that ^when the :children <<are>> \old e'nough# she would ^get a !<<dr'iving 'job>># .
- B** ^y\es# – – I ^think 'people just !have to# ^d\on't they# – ^Mrs 'Hoggs's 'got [em] – a :rented !fl\at 'now# from the ^c\ouncil# ^y\ou kn/ow# ^just \_needs \_more !m\oney# ^that's /all# ^w\ell# – ^<<lot of 'people>> 'have to
- A** \*^y\es#\* +[e:m]##+
- >**B** \*<<:h\ave them>>\* and of ^course – –

(S.1.8.295–312)

As for *you know* and *you see* used as empathizers, both illustrated by Example 1 above, they represent the second most common function in my corpus, amounting to 27 occurrences of *you know* and 12 of *you see* in the conversational data. Their tone is mostly rising and it can be stated that they are close to what Quirk

et al. (1985) mark as asking for the hearer's understanding. This function has also been stressed by Östman (1981: 17), when talking about "the striving on the part of the speaker to get the addressee to co-operate, or accept the propositional content of his utterance". The fact that empathizers often prompt some feedback from the hearer (altogether 24 cases), either in the form of backchannelling (17 cases), as in Example 1 above, or some stronger verbal reaction implying the shift of the current speaker (7 cases), clearly reflects their important function in social interaction. By using them, the current speaker invites the current hearer to take an active part in the communication (see Example 1 above).

In spite of the fact that *you know* and *you see* when used as empathizers sometimes do not prompt any immediate verbal reaction (15 cases in the conversational data), they have an important social function. It seems that the insertion of an empathizer on its own tends to be sufficient from the speaker's point of view. So the current speaker does not wait for any kind of verbal reaction from the current hearer and goes on talking, as is the case of *you know* in Example 6 below. The example also includes an instance of a question tag, namely *wouldn't he*, this time prompting a backchannel signal. As for the occurrence of *you see* used as an inform marker, it introduces a shift of topic, thus making it impossible to consider it as a verbal reaction prompter.

### Example 6

- A I ^m/ean# . to ^have a 'student 'come to you and [s] – <<oh>> ^I !read a b\ook# and it's '^ ^moved me so 'much I can't t\alk a'bout it# ^[?]you kn/ow# . '^ ^{I} should im':\mediately \_say# '^ ^ph\oney# be^cause <<if it [h]>> . ^it 'had !moved him :s\o 'much# in ^one w/ay# ^by \*hims/el\f#\* ^all qu/iet# . <<and>> \*\* ^not\*\* \_come <<and !m\ade# his>> dra'' ^m\atic \_statement like \_this# .
- B \* ^[\m]#\* – – \*\* ^[\m]#\*\* – – ^[\m]#
- A ^w\ouldn't 'he#
- B ^[\m]# – \* ^[\m]#\* –
- A but ^n\o# ^you s\ee '[e:m]# . [e] ^n\o# ^this is ^this is the :l\vine# to ^<<s\ell>># ^\obviously# \*-\*

(S.1.6.358–381)

Stenström (1984: 226) suggests that the use of *you know* and *you see* should be related not only to the linguistic situation but also to the relation between A and B in terms of status, claiming that age and authority permits "the speaker to take a superior attitude", which is "reflected in the use of *you see*" rather than *you know*. Since there are several marked age differences between the speakers in all the three conversations analysed, it has been possible to test Stenström's claim and, based on my results, it can now be acknowledged that age differences influence the use of *you see*. Of the total 49 occurrences of *you see* found in the conversational data, 34 tokens have been used by a speaker who is much older than his/her hearer.

As for the last discourse function of D-items, namely that of monitor, it has been impossible to draw any results in the present study because only one token of *you see* in this function has been found in the material. Moreover, the function of monitor is not typical of *you-oriented* CCs, among which both *you know* and *you see* can be included (for more information on *I-oriented* CCs such as *I mean*, see Povolná 2003).

## 6 Comparison of private face-to-face conversation and public radio discussions

**Table 5a** Reactions to interactive discourse items in private face-to-face conversations

Reaction	Response 73			Backchannel 48			No verbal reaction 84		
	Without any pause	After a pause	After stressed <i>you</i>	Without any pause	After a pause	After stressed <i>you</i>	Without any pause	After a pause	After stressed <i>you</i>
<i>You know</i> 102	17	7	3	20	7	3	33	9	3
<i>You see</i> 49	5	3	0	6	2	0	21	12	0
Question tags	23	15	0	7	3	0	1	5	0
<b>Total</b>	<b>45</b>	<b>25</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>33</b>	<b>12</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>55</b>	<b>26</b>	<b>3</b>

**Table 5b** Reactions to interactive discourse items in public radio discussions

Reaction	Response 6			Backchannel 3			No verbal reaction 21		
	Without any pause	After a pause	After stressed <i>you</i>	Without any pause	After a pause	After stressed <i>you</i>	Without any pause	After a pause	After stressed <i>you</i>
<i>You know</i> 14	2	0	0	0	0	0	10	2	0
<b>You see 9</b>	1	0	0	1	0	0	5	2	0
Question tags	2	1	0	2	0	0	1	1	0
<b>Total</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>16</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>0</b>

Tables 5a and 5b offer my overall results from the two genres of spoken English under investigation. It is clear that the number of D-items in public radio discussions is very low, the reasons being explicated above. Nevertheless, if some interactive D-items do occur, which happens in 30 cases, then they are not usually followed by any verbal reaction at all (21 cases), which can be explained by the specificity of the communicative situation, in which there is only one main speaker, i.e. the radio reporter, who decides who will speak next (for more details, see above).

By contrast, the results drawn from private face-to-face conversations indicate that in the overwhelming majority of the cases examined interactive D-items

(205 cases) prompt some kind of verbal reaction, more frequently in the form of a verbal response (73 cases) than in the form of a backchannel signal (48 cases). However, the number of the cases in which no verbal reaction at all occurs is also relatively high, amounting to 84 occurrences.

### Conclusion

It can now be stated that, on the one hand, speakers frequently use some interactive D-items to enhance the smooth flow of interaction, to create space for the exchange of ideas, attitudes, opinions, etc. with the other participants in a given communicative situation in spite of some differences between the individual D-items and reactions they prompt from the current hearer. On the other hand, the use of non-verbal reactions on their own, such as head-nods and facial gestures, on the part of the current hearer can often represent sufficient support for the current speaker to go on talking, owing above all to the face-to-face contact between all participants.

For further research it may be interesting to consider the use of some other types of interactive D-items and to extend research to another genre of spoken English, for instance, telephone conversation, in which there is no face-to-face contact between speakers.

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