School of Education

The Elastic Use of 'Some': A Comparative Study between L1 and L2 Speakers in Educational Settings

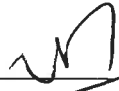**LE Nhu Nguyet**

December 2015

Declaration

To the best of my knowledge and belief this thesis contains no material previously published by any other person except where due acknowledgment has been made.

This thesis contains no material which has been accepted for the award of any other degree or diploma in any university.

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Date: 2nd December 2015

Abstract

This study is one of the first comprehensive and pragmatic studies of *some*. Through the lens of *some* in educational settings, this study goes into uncharted territory and explores *some* from an elasticity perspective. It highlights the elastic nature of *some*, which underpins the ways in which it is able to perform a wide range of pragmatic functions.

This study was based on three sets of naturally-occurring classroom data: L1 speakers of American English, Chinese-speaking learners of English, and Vietnamese-speaking learners of English. The data analysis adopted a mixed methods approach, combining both quantitative and qualitative strategies. It found that the two L2 groups had similar frequency distribution patterns in the use of *some* which were opposite to its use by the L1 group. L2 speakers used more *some* than L1 speakers: the Chinese and Vietnamese speakers are vaguer than the American speakers. However, the heavier use of *some* by the L2 groups does not necessarily mean that they overuse or under use it; all this shows is that the L1 and L2 groups have different preferences in using *some*. L1 and L2 speakers do not use *some* differently all the time; while they differ in overall frequency distribution, they are similar in using some types of *some* clusters.

The use of *some* is explained effectively by Elasticity Theory (Zhang, 2011, 2015), consisting of three principles: fluidity, stretchability, and strategy. *Some* is fluid and stretchable between being a quantifier or a qualifier, having positive or negative meanings, and having local and global interpretations. There is also overlap among the pragmatic functions of *some* in order to meet different and complex needs of communication.

The meaning of *some* is elastic in the sense that it is context dependant and is interpreted according to the speakers' intended meaning. The meaning of *some* is like a rubber band, stretching along a conventional linear meaning continuum ('none → at least one → *some* but not all → *some* possibly all'), and a pragmatic nonlinear meaning set consisting of a smaller number than expected, approximation, uncertainty, politeness, evasion, and the like.

The functions of *some* is multi-directional, consisting of four major functions (right amount of information, mitigation, withholding information, and structure), and 10 sub-functions (approximation, generalization, uncertainty; politeness, downtoning; self-protection, evasion; hesitation, searching for words, repairing). *Some* can be stretched in different directions depending upon the need or context. These functions are overlapping and not categorical. Correlation between the pragmatic meanings, types, and the functions of *some* emerged in the data.

This study found evidence of the influence of speakers' language ability and cultural backgrounds on the use of *some*. L2 speakers differ from L1s in that the former use *some* clusters less consistently than the latter, due to their lower language ability. In particular, their limited vocabulary makes it difficult for them to use more complex structures. The limitation of language skills was also found when L2 speakers were having difficulty in searching words to express their opinions, when *some* came to their aid. It appears that under the influence of Confucian heritage cultures the Chinese and Vietnamese groups have a tendency to use *some* for the purpose of politeness, face-saving, indirectness, and the like. This indirect cultural style may contribute to the fact that L2 groups appear less straightforward than the L1 group by using more vague words like *some* in their communication.

This study focused on *some*, its findings have important implications for language use in general. Language does have vague and elastic characteristics, which demands a rethinking of our approaches to language study and more attention to its elasticity. The findings are useful for language education, providing some ideas for teachers and learners to add the elastic features of language into their curriculum to make language learning more realistic and robust. The study calls for attention to be paid to the teaching of elastic language to improve the language competence of L2 learners. This study can be a resource for teachers' curriculum and a reference for students.

Further research could expand the scope of this data, including more cultures and settings: for example the use of *some* in written language or investigate *some* from the perspective of prosody. These provide a more complete picture of *some*, and add more insights and new empirical evidence to the existing literature.

Acknowledgements

Dedication

This thesis is dedicated to my spiritual grandfather – Tran Van Gia

With my respect and gratitude

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Transcription conventions

SU: unknown speaker without gender identified

SU-f, SU-m: unknown speaker with gender identified

SS: two or more speakers

[ ]: marking the start and end of an overlapping utterance, comments on non-verbal activity, etc.

[xx]: indecipherable

List of abbreviations

CA: Conversation Analysis

CP: Cooperative Principle

CSLE: Chinese-speaking learners of English

EFL: English as a Foreign Language

ELFA: English as a Corpus of Lingua Franca in Academic Setting

L1SE: L1 Speaker of English

L2: L2 Speaker of English

MICASE: Michigan Corpus of Academic Spoken English

NS: Native speaker

NNS: Non-native speaker

NSE: Native speaker of English

NSC: Native speaker of Cantonese

PSLE: Persian-speaking learner of English

RT: Relevance Theory

VL: Vague Language

VSLE: Vietnamese-speaking learner of English

Chapter 1 Introduction

Some is a vague, versatile and complex word the study of which, together with its clusters, opens up an intriguing window to show how and why vague language (VL) is underpinned by its essential elasticity. While *some* has been widely studied, especially from formal sematic perspectives, little attention has been paid to the vagueness of *some* from a pragmatic perspective, which is the focus of this study. This study explored the vagueness of *some* with special attention to its elasticity that shows that it plays an indispensable role in communication: this is perhaps the first such comprehensive study of *some*.

This study examined how *some* was used elastically for strategic purposes, to shed some theoretical insights on the patterns of *some*. It was based on empirical evidence from a comparative study between American English native speakers (L1 speakers of English) and two L2 speaking groups (L2 speakers of English) of Chinese-speaking learners of English (CSLE) and Vietnamese-speaking learners of English (VSLE) in academic settings. The combination of L1 and L2 data is new and rare, contributing to refreshing and important insights. This in-depth study of vague language, through the lens of pragmatic meanings of *some,* provides new perspectives and resources. It has significant implications in terms of highlighting the elasticity of *some* in strategic communication.

1.1 Definitions

Some is an indefinite pronoun (Becker, 1999; Carter & McCarthy, 2006), with a scalar implicature of "some and possibly all" or "some but not all" (Grice, 1975; Bott & Noveck, 2004; Huang & Snedeker, 2009). *Some* is also a general stretcher, a part of elastic language (Zhang 2011; 2015). *Some* is a vague quantifier and as part of vague language (VL) (Channell, 1994), it has vague meaning conveying far more than mere numerical denotation, "setting up a reference point" for a listener in the case that he/she doesn't know what to expect (Moxey & Sanford, 1997, p. 211). A vague expression, according to Jucker, Smith and Ludge (2003), may convey a

meaning that is more relevant than a precise expression. This is supported by Stubbs (1986) who states that

> When we speak or write, we are rarely very clear, precise, or explicit about what we mean – and perhaps could not be – but are, on the contrary, vague, indirect, and unclear about just what we are committed to. This often appears superficially to be inadequacy of human language: but only for those who hold a rather crude view of what is maximally efficient in communication (p. 1).

Studies of *some* expand to other members of its group, including *someone, somebody, something* and *sometimes. Something* often makes up a component of the vague tag, such as *or something,* or *something like that*. Vague tags have also been investigated as strategic tools in communication by Dubois (1992), Overstreet and Yule (1997a), Overstreet (1999), Ruzaitė (2007b), Terraschke and Holmes (2007), and Zhang (2015).

Table 1.1: Definitions of *some*

Term	Definition
Existential quantifier	Expresses a quantity or number greater than zero (Huddleston & Pullum et al., 2002)
Indefinite pronoun	Expresses a non-specific or non-defined meaning (Carter & McCarthy, 2006)
Vague quantifier	Expresses an approximation or vague quantity (Channell, 1994)
Quantity stretcher	Expresses an underspecified quantity (Zhang, 2011)
Approximate or general stretcher	Expresses an approximation or nonspecific meaning (Zhang, 2015)

As can be seen in Table 1.1, *some* has various definitions with different focuses. For example, from a semantic point of view, *some* is defined as an existential quantifier indicating a quantity or number greater than zero (Huddleston & Pullum et al., 2002).

Some is also considered as an indefinite pronoun to express a non-specific or non-define meaning (Carter & McCarthy, 2006).

With vagueness in focus, Channell (1994) defines *some* as a quantifier conveying approximation and vague meaning. Similarly, in the elasticity framework of Zhang (2011, 2015), *some* is a stretcher, to achieve communicative purposes in different contexts. Zhang describes the elasticity of an utterance to rubber-like fluidity, stretchability and strategy. *Some* as a stretcher may be used for mitigating or evading. Under Zhang's framework, *some* could be a vague quantifier and a qualifier.

Highlighting the pragmatic meaning of *some*, this study adopts the definitions of Channell (1994) and Zhang (2011, 2015): *some* is a vague quantifier and qualifier with underspecified and elastic meaning. This definition is appropriate to the present study, because it promotes the elasticity of *some*, meeting the needs of exploring the behaviours of *some* in stretching elastically to serve communicative purposes in academic settings.

1.2 Purposes of study

This study explored the use of *some* by L1 and L2 speakers in academic settings. This comparative study revealed the elasticity of *some* based on the different cultural features underlying its use by the interlocutors of three different cultures. To achieve this goal, this study addressed the following objectives:

1. To investigate the frequency of *some* used by L1 and L2 speakers in English speaking classes;
2. To analyse the pragmatic functions of *some* to see how differently *some* is used strategically between L1 and L2 speakers;
3. To explore the effects of cultural and linguistic factors on the use of *some*.
4. To uncover the manifestation of the elasticity of *some*.
5. To speculate on the implications of the findings of this study in academic settings and beyond.

The above five objectives are interconnected. The five objectives led to an investigation of how *some* was used as a communicative strategy in classroom settings and unveiled the cultural features which might influence the use of *some* by L1 and L2 speakers. The results of the frequency of *some* informed the functional analyse of how *some* is used differently by L1 and L2 speakers to achieve the goal of communication in classrooms. The frequency of *some* provided an overall picture of the preferences of each group: a quantitative and macro analysis. The pragmatic function of *some* provided contextualized information of how and why *some* was used, using a qualitative, micro analysis. The macro and micro analyses were further strengthened by investigating the underpinning factors of the similarities and differences in its frequency and functions. The first three analyses were necessary in investigating the manifestation of the elasticity of *some*, showing how it was realised in the data. Finally, the findings of all previous four studies led to a consideration of the implications of this study.

To meet the above objectives, the research questions this study aimed to answer were:

1.   How frequently was *some* used by L2 speakers, compared with L1 speakers?
2.   What are the functions of *some*, and do L1 and L2 speakers differ in using *some* in their communication?
3.   What are the cultural and linguistic factors affecting the use of *some*?
4.   What is the manifestation of the elasticity of *some*?
5.   What are the implications of this study?

The five research questions are designed to address the above five objectives of this current study, respectively. Like the objectives, they complement each other.

1.3 Organization of the thesis

This thesis is organized as follows. Chapter 1, the current chapter, is the introductory chapter, giving an overview, definitions and the purposes of this study. Chapter 2 presents the theoretical background of VL in general; and the studies of *some* and *some* groups are reviewed in particular. Additionally, the theoretical frameworks

used in this study are also presented in this chapter. Chapter 3 describes the methodology of this study, including the data collection (participants, procedures) and data limitations. The frequency of *some* clusters and *some* groups revealed in three data sets are presented in Chapter 4. Analysed examples are added to each kind of *some* clusters and *some* groups to clarify the different behaviours of L1 and L2 speakers in their use of *some*. Chapter 5 presents an analysis of the pragmatic functions of *some* between L1 and L2 speakers. Chapter 6 is a general discussion based on the findings of previous two chapters. Chapter 7 consists of conclusion and implications.

Chapter 2 Theoretical Foundations

Some has the distinctive feature of being a vague word, and an overview of previous works on VL will inform the framework under which this present study was carried out. The study of VL was highlighted when Channell (1994) launched her investigation of VL and emphasized that "a complete theory of language must have vagueness as an integral component" (p. 5). More studies since then have increased the attention given to VL stressing its importance in communication, and are represented by those of Hyland (1998), Cutting (2007), Ruzaitė (2007a), Zhang (2011, 2015), Sabet and Zhang (2015). For instances, Zhang (2013, p. 87) considers VL to be "a versatile tool of communication in presenting the world in an imprecise but powerful manner" and Jucker et al. (2003, p. 1737) suggest it might "carry more relevant contextual implications than would a precise expression". Alternatively, VL has often been considered as a negative feature of language and can be traced as far back as Classical Greece (Aristotle, 1946, 1963; Plato, 1914). As such it has been seen as an undesirable phenomenon.

VL studies have been a multifaceted undertaking. Among others, Warren (2007) examined VL and discourse intonation and found that an intonation choice by an interlocutor can serve "to disambiguate VL use or add additional layers of meaning to vague items based on the speaker's perceptions of the context including the perceived shared knowledge between the participants" (p. 194). Vague category markers were examined as "shared social space" by Evison, McCarthy and O'Keeffe (2007, p. 138), who argued that vague categories are expressed in different levels of assumed shared knowledge; for example, it is assumed that some knowledge is shared by all mature adults while other knowledge requires more local understanding and is culture-bound. Some work has focused on comparative studies between native speakers (NSs) and non-native speakers (NNSs) such as the use of non-numerical vague quantifiers between British English NSs and Czech NNSs of English (Tárnyiková, 2010), general extenders between English and Lithuanian speakers (Ruzaitė, 2010), general extenders between New Zealand English NSs and German NSs (Terraschke & Holmes, 2007), general extenders in native Persian and non-native English discourse (Parvaresh, Tavangar, Rasekh & Izadi, 2012), and vague

nouns used between Norwegian NSs and English NSs (Andersen, 2010). These comparative studies searched for the similarities and differences between NSs and NNSs in expressing VL. Other studies looked at VL in different settings e.g. healthcare contexts (Adolphs, Atkins & Harvey, 2007), courtroom (Cotterill, 2007), politics (Fetzer, 2010), business news reporting (De Cock & Goossens, 2013), and education (Myers, 1996; Rowland, 2007; Neary-Sundquist, 2013).

This chapter discusses the development of VL research, how VL is interpreted from a pragmatic approach, and more specifically the study of *some* is also looked at.

2.1 Vague language

Despite its negative connotations in Classical Greece, VL has more recently come to be considered as "a desirable feature of natural languages" (Williamson, 1994, p. 4869) and to be "one of the most important features of the vocabulary of informal conversation" (Crystal & Davy, 1975, p. 111). As a feature of natural languages, VL "plays a huge role in human communication" (van Deemter, 2010, p. 93). Ruzaitė (2007a) stated that VL is "a natural, usually purposeful and multifunctional linguistic phenomenon that involves imprecision and is employed for certain communicative strategies" (p. 28). She also added that VL should not be avoided, as over-precision may lead to a breakdown communication (2004).

2.1.1 Vagueness

Pierce asserted that, "A proposition is vague when there are possible states of things concerning which it is intrinsically uncertain whether, had they been contemplated by the speaker, he would have regarded them as excluded or allowed by the proposition" (1911, p. 748). Following Pierce, Russell (1923) considered vagueness as "a matter of degree, depending upon the extent of the possible differences between different systems represented by the same representation."(p. 90). He is opposed to the idea of supposing that vague expressions must be false and highlights that "a vague belief has a much better chance of being true than a precise one, because there

are more possible facts that would verify it" (p. 91). In accordance with this approach, Van Deemter (2010) argued that "Most of the things around us have the boundaries that are only vaguely defined. […] To regard vaguely defined events as if they were crisply defined 'things' is perhaps best seen as a useful fiction." (p. 69).

According to Coterill (2007, p. 98), the terms used to refer to VL are vague themselves. VL has been described in a number of ways, e.g. "imprecision" or "imprecise language use" (Crystal and Davy, 1975; Dubois, 1987), "loose talk" (Sperber & Wilson, 1991, 1995), "implicature" and "semantic under-determination" (Bach, 1994). Zhang (1998) distinguished the four following concepts: fuzziness, vagueness, ambiguity, and generality. According to her, "An expression is fuzzy if it has a characteristic of referential opacity" (p. 15), *e.g. about 20 students*. Generality refers to unspecification, *e.g. my friend* (it is not clear whether the "friend" is male or female) (p. 16). Ambiguity is defined as a feature of an expression which has "more than one semantically unrelated meaning" (p. 17). So, Zhang defined vagueness as "an expression which has more than one possible interpretation (i.e. is polysemous)" (p. 16) as exemplified by the use of *good* "which has a range of interpretations: *good (fine) weather, good (hard-working) student, good (warm-hearted) people, good (sexy) legs*". (p. 16-17). She observed that the term "fuzziness" tends to be used in the sciences, such as mathematics and logic, and "vagueness" tends to be used in humanities related fields like linguistics and psychology. Zhang's 1998 definition of vagueness has been updated in her recent works (2011), where it refers to an underspecified and elastic expression.

Cheng and Warren (2003) differentiated between indirectness, inexplicitness and vagueness. They suggested that "the notion of indirectness which consists of four paradigm cases: (1) conversational implicatures, (2) illocutionary acts, (3) indirect speech acts and (4) pre-sequences" (p. 386). Inexplictness includes the following paradigm cases, i.e. "(1) ellipsis, (2) substitution, (3) deixis and reference" (p. 392). Vagueness covers "(1) vague additives to numbers, (2) vagueness by choice of vague words, and (3) vagueness by scalar implicature" (p. 395). Cheng (2007), then, argued that "VL consists of a closed set of identifiable items that can be interpreted based on the particular context in which they occur, and that VL signals to the hearer that the utterance, or part of it, is not to be interpreted precisely" (p. 162). The "close set of

identifiable items" aims to make the distinction between VL and language phenomena clearer.

Under the semantic explanation of vagueness, Zhang (1998) saw vagueness as a linguistic unit (word, phrase or sentences) with no clear-cut meaning boundary. For example, 'how tall is *tall*'? Zhang thought "the norm of *tallness* varies, depending on many non-linguistic factors. A tall female may not be tall, compared to a standard for male; in turn, a tall male might not be tall compared to a tall professional male basketball player" (p. 20-21). Hence, the reference of *tallness*, according to Zhang, is not clear-cut. Carter and McCarthy (2006) defined VL as "words or phrases which deliberately refer to people and things in a non-specific, imprecise way" (p. 928), for example, *stuff*, *like*, *or anything*, *or whatever*, and *sort of*.

From a pragmatic point of view, Channell (1994, p. 20) defined VL as a word or expression that can "render the same proposition" with other words or expressions; and more importantly "is purposely and unabashedly" vague. Ruzaitė's (2007a) definition emphasised the strategic nature of VL in communication. She stated that "vague language is a natural, usually purposeful and multi-functional linguistic phenomenon that involves imprecision and is employed for certain communicative strategies" (p. 28). Zhang (2011) confirmed VL "features strategic elasticity, which can be stretched and negotiated to suit the moment-to-moment communicative needs" (p. 573). She also stated that the elasticity refers to the interpretation of VL that is not specified, and is dependent upon context and communicative purpose (2015, p. 18).

In this present study, the working definition of VL was adapted from Channell (1994), Ruzaitė (2007a) and Zhang (2011, 2015): it is unspecified but elastic, contextually dependable but not resolvable. This definition will inform the data analysis and general discussion in this research.

2.1.2 The development of vague language research

Pierce (1911) was one of the early pioneers in the area of vague language research, highlighting the intrinsic uncertainty in language as a reason for vagueness. Wittgenstein (1953), a philosopher, suggested that words are like blurred photographs, "Is it even always an advantage to replace an indistinct picture by a sharp one? Isn't the indistinct one often exactly what we need?" (p. 34). This emphasizes the blurred edges of categories and the way in which they crisscross and overlap. Ullmann (1962) applied the term of "words with blurred edges" to this idea of Wittgenstein (1953) and grouped the sources of vagueness under the idea of natural language. He notes that:

> If one looks more closely at this vagueness one soon discovers that the term is itself rather vague and ambiguous: the condition it refers to is not a uniform feature but has many aspects and may result from a variety of causes. Some of these are inherent in the very nature of language, whereas others come into play only in special circumstances. (p. 118)

Ullmann (1962) provided an explanation about the sources of vagueness in natural language and attributes vagueness to four factors:

(a) the generic character of words;
(b) meaning is never homogeneous (i.e. it is context-bound);
(c) lack of clear-cut boundaries in the non-linguistic world;
(d) lack of familiarity with what the words stand for" (as cited in Channell, 1994, p. 6).

Ullmann elaborated that in factor (a), the words refer not to a single item, but a class of items or events which have some element in common. In (b), the meaning should be linked with the context bound up in interpretation, that is, "Only context will specify which aspect of a person, which phase in his development, which side of his activities we have in mind" (p. 124). In (c), the non-linguistic word is vague by nature, for example *hill* vs. *mountain*, *girl* vs. *woman*; and (d) refers to unfamiliarity with what is being talked about.

The term "fuzzy" was used by Zadeh (1965), which he defined as "a class of objects with a continuum of grades of membership. Such a set is characterized by a membership (characteristic) function which assigns to each object a grade of membership ranging between zero and one." (p. 338). For example, in the category of *tall man*, the height to be a tall man depends on a variety of factors such as the standard of physical measurement in each society (human thinking), communication of information and abstraction. Zadeh's theory focuses on category membership as a matter of degree rather than a clear-cut issue. Crystal (2008, p. 204) confirmed that "fuzzy" was derived from mathematics and refers to indeterminacy in linguistics.

Heider (1971), in the same vein as Zadeh (1965), asserted that category membership is not simply a matter of saying yes-or-no, but rather a matter of degree. She used a hierarchy order of "birdiness" to clarify this point:

Robins

Eagles

Chickens, ducks, geese

Penguins, pelicans

Bats   (Heider, as cited in Lakoff, 1973, p. 459)

The above hierarchy shows that robins are typical of birds; eagles are less typical than robins. Chickens, ducks, and geese are less typical than eagles; penguins, pelicans are less typical than chickens, ducks and geese; finally bats are hardly bird-like at all. Heider also added that the different category-rankings, for example, like the hierarchy order of birdiness, depend on the individual's experience, knowledge, and beliefs. For this reason, the category-rankings might have different orders for different people.

Lakoff (1973) applied Zadeh's (1965) fuzzy set theory to his study of fuzziness. He stressed category membership as a matter of degree rather than a clear-cut issue. Lakoff rejected classical set theory stating "clearly any attempt to limit truth conditions for natural language sentences to true, false and 'nonsense' will distort the natural language concepts by portraying them as having sharply defined rather than fuzzily defined boundaries" (p. 458). He supported the hierarchy order of Heider

(1971), and suggested that sentences of character membership are judged by the speakers via their degree of truth (e.g. *A robin is a bird* is truer than *A penguin is a bird*).

Lakoff (1973) defined *hedges* (e.g. *sort of*, *kind of*) as something "whose meaning implicitly involves fuzziness, words whose job is to make things fuzzier or less fuzzy" (p. 471). This idea is similar to that of Crystal and Davy (1975), who called vagueness an *impression*, and stated that "lack of precision is one of the most important features of the vocabulary of informal conversation" (p. 111). They enumerated four reasons for using VL:

> (1) memory loss – the speaker forgets the correct word;
> (2) the language has no suitable exact word, or the speaker does not know it;
> (3) the subject of the conversation is not such that it requires precision, and an approximation or characterization will do;
> (4) the choice of a vague item is deliberate to maintain the atmosphere (as cited in Channell, 1994, p. 8).

Crystal and Davy (1975) drew attention to the existence of three types of devices for expressing vagueness in spoken language, dummy nouns (e.g. *thingummy*), collective nouns (e.g. *oodles, bags of*), and number approximations (e.g. *about/around thirty*).

The term "implicitness" can be found in studies from the 1960s onwards. Garfinkel (1967) identified implicitness due to "unstated understandings" (p. 3). Grice (1975) claimed implicitness was a conversational implicature in which the speaker violates the maxim of the Cooperative Principle (CP), assuming that the hearer can understand the implied meaning. Grice stated that speakers often break rather than follow one or more maxims. When this happens, specific affects, known as implicatures, are produced for the hearers. Gumperz (1982, p. 131) added that members of social groups use implicitness: "exclusive interaction with individuals of similar background leads to reliance on unverbalized and context-bound presuppositions in communication" in which "without the co-construction between the speaker and the hearer, successful communication fails to be realized" (Zhang,

2015, p. 23). Zhang (2015) pointed out that VL and implicitness "have an intersection: covert and fluid" in which the former "can be a social healer as well as social divider" and "can manifest as surface features of language" while the latter "is seen as a social divider" and "always has underlying meaning" (p. 23). This is very much in line with Cutting (2007) in differentiating between the terms "VL" and "implicitness". Studies of VL, according to Cutting, look at language

> that is inherently and intentionally imprecise, describing lexical and grammatical surface features that may refer either to specific entities or to nothing in particular. Studies of implicitness mention whole bodies of underlying meaning, and language dependent on the context, based on unspoken assumptions and unstated meaning. Implicitness can be expressed with VL and other language features; VL can express implicit meaning but it can be taken at its face value (p. 4).

Hence, according to Cutting, vagueness is different from implicitness.

Channell's (1994) work was a seminal investigation about vague language. She investigated the use of VL by taking a pragmatic view to analyse the forms of VL and their functions. Any use of VL "needs to be considered with reference to contexts and situations when it will be appropriate, or inappropriate" (p. 97), she insisted. Hence, the speakers and writers choose their language based on the situation (when, where, why) and the linguistic context (is it a gossip chat, an interview, a story in a popular newspaper?) (p. 3). In this work, Channell also recalled the concept of "intrinsically uncertain" of Pierce (1911) in her definition of VL. She focused on linguistic expressions that are in Sadock's (1977) formulation "purposely and unabashedly vague" (p. 20).

Biber, Johanson, Leech, Conrad and Finegan (1999) mentioned VL in *The Longman Grammar of Spoken and Written English.* They explained the approximators expressing imprecision, "hedges" indicating imprecision of word choice, and in generic reference the noun "refers to a whole class rather than to an individual person or thing" (p. 265). Writing from a pragmatic perspective Carter and McCarthy included a section on "vague expressions and approximations" in the *Cambridge Grammar of English* (2006). They defined VL as words or a phrase "which

deliberately refer to people and things in a non-specific, imprecise way" (2006, p. 928) such as *stuff*, *like*, *anything* and *sort of*. In addition, approximations are described as vague expressions when used with numbers and quantities helping speakers to give approximations rather than choosing a precise number (*around six*, *five minutes or so*).

VL is recognized as being used more widely in spoken discourse than in written discourse (Channel, 1994, p. 197; Biber et al., 1999, p. 1045). Also, McCarthy (1998) suggested that VL makes an important contribution to the "naturalness and the informal, convergent tenor of everyday talk" (p. 118) in which the interlocutors prefer to convey information which is softened in some way in an informal setting. This is, according to Warren (2007), because "in spoken discourse, the participants are more likely to share a context than in written discourse, and they usually have the possibility of supplementing verbal communication with non-verbal communication" (p. 182). Or, due to the different expectations of precision, the informal spoken language requires less precision than formal written language (Cook, 1989).

While other works have been focused on the nature and function of VL, one of most recent developments is that of Zhang (2011, 2015), who gives a theoretical explanation of VL "through the notion of elasticity, in that fluid utterances are stretched for various pragmatic purposes " (2015, p. 2). See Section 2.3.3 for more discussion on the theoretical framework.

2.1.3 Vague language in different settings

Channel (1994) argues that "vagueness in language is neither all 'bad' nor all 'good'. What matters is that vague language is used appropriately" (p. 3). She also highlights that any use of VL "needs to be considered with reference to contexts and situations, when it will be appropriate, or inappropriate" (p. 197). For this reason, VL plays different functions in different settings (or contexts). Hence, the use of VL had been studied in different settings such as advertising (Leech, 1964; Myers, 1994), academic writing on economics (Channell, 1990), medical settings (Adolphs et al., 2007), forensic situations (Cotterill, 2007), and so on.

Adolphs et al. (2007) examined vague expressions in medical settings in two healthcare contexts: NHS direct phone-ins and hospital-chaplain interaction. According to Adolphs et al, it is "a misconception that medical communication, in terms of it being a scientific discourse, requires precise language" (p. 64) since VL is used in medical settings when delivering medical information to patients. This finding supports Prince, Bosk and Frader's (1982) work, who found that VL originates from a professional, scientific need to express uncertainty with medical subject matter. When VL is used by physicians, it "demonstrates a scholarly orderliness in their representation of knowledge" (Prince et al., 1982, p. 96).

The analysis of the data by Adolphs et al. revealed that the interlocutors included vague words in their utterances for different purposes. For the physicians, VL helped them deliver understandable information to the non-specialist patient in the health-professional-patient consultation. They cited another example showing the need for VL in the medical context, i.e. in the case of conveying medical diagnoses and prognoses e.g. with cancers that are still not wholly understood, there is an inherent level of uncertainly (2007, p. 94).

Using the UK's National Health Service direct phone-ins, Adolphs et al. found that VL allowed nurses to create an interpersonal relationship with the patient when eliciting personal information as well as giving responses, which reduced anxiety for the patient. VL, in this case, became "a softening device to tone down the alarming nature of possible medical diagnoses" (2007, p. 69). Additionally, VL also helped the nurses to maintain a "relaxed atmosphere" (p. 74) and "to establish an interpersonal relationship with the patient, while pursuing the necessarily intrusive institutional requirements of eliciting personal and sensitive responses." (p. 74-75)

From the perspective of hospital-chaplain-patient interaction, due to the face-to-face communication, the chaplain has to build up a relationship with the patient in order to provide spiritual support. VL, in this case, helps to "facilitate the patient's conversational involvement, while mitigating the force of directives to such supply personal information" (Adolphs et al., 2007, p. 74). Moreover, this decreases the social distance between the speaker and the hearer (Holmes, 1984, p. 350), the chaplain "communicates positive feelings towards the hearer which helps to boost

the solidarity of the relationship" (Adolphs et al., 2007, p. 74). The different level of vague expression by nurses and chaplains reveals the elastic features of VL (Zhang, 2011, p. 583).

Noticeably, NHS Direct consultations have a higher level of VL compared with hospital-chaplain-patient interaction. Adolphs et al. (2007) explain that this is because NHS Direct consultations are conducted on the phone, hence the nurse lacks the situational context to see the physical appearance of a particular symptom in a patient which leads to the use of VL.

Cotterill (2007) found that VL is a "widespread phenomenon" in forensic situations and plays a different role from different positions (p. 112). For the barrister acting as an examiner-in-chief, the use of vague expressions "present him or her with an account which lacks precision, detail and therefore potentially, a challenge to their witness's credibility" (p. 112). VL expressions for the cross-examiner, on the other hand, create an opportunity for confrontation since vagueness may be seen to "stem from witness failings in memory, expression or integrity in the eye of the cross-examiner" (p. 112). Witnesses and defendants use markers of vagueness of various kinds, but particularly those which express vagueness in the form of approximators (*some sort of*, *kind of*, *a bit*, *whatever*, *this, that and the other*) and additives or tags (*and everything*, *sort of thing*, *something like that*). Additionally, due to a lack of knowledge or memory loss, the witnesses and defendants use vague words, such as *I am not sure*, *I can't remember* and *I don't know exactly*. Through the investigation of uses and abuses of VL in forensic situations, it again shows that VL is used differently by people in different positions. According to Zhang (2011), the struggle between the lawyer and the defendant illustrates VL working elastically, which allows both parties to the conversation to stretch their utterances strategically (p. 582).

Political discourse is another setting where VL has been investigated. Fetzer's (2010) study examined the form and function of *sort of* and *kind of* in the context of political interviews. This study found that the two hedges "can be assigned the status of a contextualization cue par excellence" (p. 69). *Sort of* and *kind of* appeared in political discourse less frequently than in ordinary talk. In particular, when used in verb-

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phrases they functioned more vaguely in ordinary talks; conversely when used in noun-phrases they functioned more vaguely in political discourse. VL helps the communicators "to keep their communicative intentions diplomatically vague and at the same time signify solidarity and responsiveness" (p. 69). On the contrary, the less-fuzzy-making function provides the clarity to the communicative intentions, for instance, signifying certainty and assertiveness.

Apart from its occurrence in forensic situations, healthcare contexts and political discourse, VL frequently appears in academic settings. VL even appears in mathematics classrooms where language supposedly provides "a means of communication which is powerful, concise and unambiguous" (Department of Education and Science, 1982, p. 1). However, Rowland argued that VL is an "essential ingredient of communicative competence in mathematical interaction" (2007, p. 94). The analysis of Rowland, focusing on investigating the use of hedges in mathematics classrooms, shows that the hedges play an important part "in the formation and articulation of prediction and generalizations" (p. 94). Hedges

> include words such as 'sort of', 'about', and 'approximately' which have the effect of blurring category boundaries or otherwise precise measures, as well as words and phrases such as 'I think', 'maybe' and 'perhaps', which hedge the commitment of the speaker to that which she or he asserts (p. 82).

Rowland examined when and how two particular pairs of hedges are used, i.e. *maybe*, *think* and *about*, *around*. In the school classroom or in the clinical interview, the child is obliged "to conform to the expectations and demands of the teacher/interviewer. VL is one way he or she can redress the power imbalance while observing the social norms that constrain their actions and responses" (p. 94). From a pragmatic perspective, it can be seen that "vagueness is not a deficiency, but an essential ingredient of communicative competence in mathematical interaction" (p. 94).

Zhang (2013) conducted research on the relationship between the sensitivity of the topic and the use of VL, particularly topical sensitivity and the form and function of VL. Based on the semi-controlled spoken data of Australian English comprising two

topics: 'Things you usually do on weekends and any particular reasons for doing them' (T1) and 'Your opinions on asylum seekers' (T2) (p. 94), she investigated the impact of touchy topics on VL use. The findings revealed that VL was used differently on the topics of 'weekend activities' and 'asylum seekers'. VL was applied more in T2 than in T1. This, according to Zhang, might be because interactants felt less secure talking about asylum seekers than about weekend activities. She explains that T1 is factual but T2 is subjective and opinion-based, requiring more thinking and language skills. Another reason for vagueness appearing regularly may be that a high level of subjectivity requires a high level of linguistic manipulation. Zhang asserts that as "the level of topical sensitivity increases, the level of vagueness in talk-in-interactions also increases" (p. 114). Two tendencies appear from the findings: a) the levels of sensitivity and VL frequency are positively related; and b) the levels of sensitivity and vagueness are positively related with certain vague items. The higher the sensitivity, the higher the level of VL frequency and certain types of VL.

Ruzaitė's (2007a) study was an attempt to explore the similarities and differences of VL use between American English (AE) and British English (BE) in spoken academic discourse. Her study focused on discourse type, language variety and culture. The data showed that the spoken academic discourse contained different moves in the two varieties of English. Quantifiers existed more frequently in AE, whereas approximators were more common in BE. VL occurred in both teachers' and students' utterances, because they needed to "shield their claims against possible criticism, avoid categorical claims, observe the politeness principle and save face" (p. 213). Ruzaitė argues that precision is not the most important objective in spoken academic discourse (p. 213).

With regard to the functions of VL, Ruzaitė showed that both approximators and quantifiers perform the same functions in AE and BE. The functions of VL perform depend on the type of VL item so that "paucal quantifiers are mainly used for mitigation, whereas multal ones are emphatic". Ruzaitė states some quantifiers such as *tons* and *loads* "hyperbolise a quantity and thus are emphatic due to their metaphoricity" (2007a, p. 213).

Concerning the linguistic patterns of quantifiers, Ruzaitė observed that "most commonly quantifiers collocate with very basic vocabulary" in which "some quantifiers are more prone to occur in unfavourable contexts than others" (p. 214). Ruzaitė (2007a) emphasizes that VL depends on the different places in which English is used, i.e. culture is an important factor leading to differences in the use of VL.

2.1.4 Vague language and non-native speakers

The continuous development of studies of VL has suggested there is a need to investigate the vague expressions employed by English language learners. Hyland and Milton (1997) compared the differences of using qualification and certainty in the writing of British students and Cantonese speaking school leavers. The results of their study showed that the Hong Kong learners employed simpler syntactical constructions with more limited devices, had greater difficulty in expressing doubt and certainty in English, releasing stronger commitments in their statements and faced greater problems when giving a precise degree of certainty.

Warren (1993, p. 49) believed that different levels of inexplicitness are associated with different discourse types. Cheng and Warren (1999) examined the use of inexplicitness based on ten hours of conversational recordings taken from the Hong Kong Corpus of Conversational English which is made up of native speakers and non-native speakers engaged in English conversations. Inexplicitness, according to Cheng and Warren, in conversation is "achieved through the employment of any one of a number of linguistic forms which requires the hearer to interpret the specific meaning from the particular context in which it is uttered" (p. 293). They state that

> the language of an academic lecture has a lower level of inexplicitness and is thus less context-dependent, whereas the language of natural-occurring conversation is more context-dependent and hence has a higher level of inexplicitness (p. 299).

Their study found that NNSs had a lower level of use of the forms of inexplicitness than NSs. They suggested that this might be due to a lower level of communicative and linguistic competence of the former.

The lower or higher level of inexplicitness by NNSs depends on many factors, according to Cheng and Warren (1999). For example, it may be a strategy for NNSs to "use repetition as a turn-holding device while they work out what they want to say and how they want to say it" (p. 306). Additionally, "speakers may make assumptions about the comprehensibility of their utterances based on different cultural schemata" (p. 306). Moreover, low linguistic competence on the part of speaker may also lead to a low level of inexplicitness in the discourse; or transfer from L1 (Cantonese in this case) to L2 can give rise to language which is too explicit. Hence, according to Cheng and Warren, four factors, i.e. repetition, cultural schemata, linguistic competence and transfer from L1 to L2 influences the lower or higher inexplicitness by NNSs. These researchers recommended that teachers should raise awareness of using inexplicitness by adding more activities including analysis of levels of inexplicitness in classrooms and the widespread use of deixis, ellipsis, reference, and substitution in native speaker discourses.

Researching spoken vague language in intercultural conversations between native speakers of English and native speakers of Cantonese, Drave (2002) found differences in using VL between the two groups, for example, the English participants were vaguer than the Cantonese speakers (p. 38). Also, the former used language more skilfully, resulting in a full use of flexible linguistic resources compared with the latter. These discrepancies are possibly due to the first language of the Cantonese participants interferes with their performance in English, and language education which does not contain sufficient exposure to VL use in English.

Metsä-Ketelä (2006) investigated the use of the vague expression *more or less* by NNSs in academic Lingua Franca English in two corpuses, the corpus of English as Lingua Franca in Academic Settings (ELFA) and the Michigan Corpus of Academic Spoken English (MICASE). Her study's findings showed that *more or less* was most frequently used for vague expressions in the ELFA corpus. Also, *more or less* was used more frequently in monologues such as presentations and lectures than in

dialogues. *More or less* performs three prominent functions for the NNSs: *minimizing, comparing similarities* and *approximating quantities.* The first function, which only occurred in NNS' data is "to indicate that the concept is either small in scale or that it is not adequate" (Metsä-Ketelä, 2006, p. 135). The second function was to compare "the similarities between two or more concepts or entities" (p. 137). The third function of *more or less* was only found in NNS data and was used "to approximate the quantity of things and it denotes generalisation" (p. 139).

Metsä-Ketelä concludes that vague expressions used by NNS do not "cause any confusion in the interaction" even if it "deviates from the standard or native use of the expression" (2006, p. 141). She supports to the view that

> lingua franca speakers can come up with innovative ways of using the language and negotiate new meanings for old words. It also suggests that cooperativeness and the will to understand each other play a crucial role in lingua franca English and therefore the unorthodox use of language does not necessarily result in communication breakdown (p. 141).

Sabet and Zhang (2015), in the line of Metsä-Ketelä's views, suggest that "L1s and L2s can be different in the use of English, as long as both parties manage to communicate successfully" (p. 21).

Metsa-Ketela's 2012 study, with a wider scope than her study in 2006, investigated vague expressions of general extenders, vague classifiers, metadiscourse particles and indefinite prepositional phrases in English spoken as a lingua franca in academic settings. She found general extenders used frequently in situations where the speakers shared similar status at university. On the other hand, metadiscourse particles appeared commonly in doctoral defences, where the roles of the interlocutors were clearly assigned and hierarchical (p. 280).

Gassner (2012) investigated the use of *thing* between L1 and L2 speakers in job interviews in which the former were Australians and the latter had migrated to Australia from places such as South-America, Europe and Asian countries. She found that the L1 speakers used *thing* about 2.5 times more than the L2 speakers.

Gassner described the notion of saturation, which involves "finding the intended content (or value) for a linguistically indicated variable or slot" (Carston, 2009, p. 49). The L1 and L2 speakers preferred different saturation processes which in turn impacted on the ways they used *thing* to achieve certain effects. The two groups used *thing* differently with regards to the saturation requirement of this item. Gassner confirmed that *thing* was used by L2 speakers to achieve vagueness effects. She also found that L1 speakers used *thing* more proactively, especially for rapport-building, than the L2 group, which might influence positively on the success of the L1 group in employment interviews (p. 26).

There have been various studies on VL involving Chinese either as L1 or L2 speakers. Wu, Wang and Cai (2010) examined the use of *I think* by Chinese EFL learners compared to native speakers of English based on London-Lund Corpus of Spoken English and the College Learners' Spoken English Corpus. It was found that *I think* was used significantly more by the Chinese EFL learners compared to the native speakers. Both Chinese EFL learners and native speakers used *I think* for downtoning, marking deliberation, taking or holding the turn, delaying, signalling self-repair, emphasizing, listing, reasoning, illustrating, comparing, contrasting, summarizing, and concluding. They suggested that the reasons for overuse of *I think* by Chinese EFL learners was due to "the need for delay, habit, inadequate language proficiency, pragmatic overgeneralization, and probably situational anxiety" (2010, p. 20).

Lin (2013) examined the different uses of vague expressions in adolescent intercultural conversations between British and Taiwanese adolescents, based on the British and Taiwanese Teenage Intercultural Communication Corpus. The spoken corpus was collected from informal chats between British and Taiwanese participants during an intercultural exchange program. This study narrowed its investigation into three categories of vague expressions: vague categories, approximations, and hedging. The findings showed that the frequency of use of these three categories by British adolescents was always higher than the Taiwanese ones. These three categories do not only "perform a set-marking, hedging, and textual functions, but also serve to express interpersonal relationships between the speakers and their interlocutors, indicating assumed or shared knowledge and marking in-group

membership" (p. 77). Lin added that her results were in line with Anderson and Trudgill's (1990) study which noticed that the wide application and referents of these words and phrases is of key importance in English, and indeed in other languages as well, as they are a crucial part of daily communication.

Lin (2013), then, highlights the importance of the use of VL in English language teaching and intercultural communication. EFL learners use VL to "maintain a good relationship in face-to-face conversation" (p. 78). Hence, the EFL pedagogical materials should include these important spoken patterns and give instructions for learners on how to use VL, as suggested by Lin. Lin's suggestion echoes and reinforces the callings from authors in Cutting's edited book of VL studies.

Cheng and O'Keeffe (2014) examined the sociocultural dimensions of VL through two corpuses, one contained the conversations between Hong Kong Chinese and native speakers of English, the other was of Irish English interactions. Specifically, they investigated the occurrences of approximators (e.g. *about* 20), a type of VL identified in Channell's framework. The findings showed that there was no stark difference of VL forms between Hong Kong Chinese speakers and native Irish English speakers. Cheng and O'Keeffe pressed the importance of the context of reference in the use of VL which is in the line with Cutting (2007), who noted that VL is not always interpreted effectively as the speaker might have a wrong reference when the speaker and listener have different cultural backgrounds. Similarly, O'Keeffe (2004) argued that

> the shared knowledge required in order to construct vague categories has a common core of socio-culturally ratified 'understandings' and that the range of domains of reference of these categories is relative to the depth of shared knowledge of the participants and relative to their social relationship (p. 2).

Sabet and Zhang (2015) compared VL use between L1 and L2 speakers in which the L2 speakers were Chinese-speaking learners of English and Persian-speaking Learners of English in an academic setting. Their study focused on five categories of VL: subjectivisers, possibility indicators, vague quantifiers, vague intensifiers and placeholders. There was a significant difference in the overall frequency of these five

categories between L1 speakers and L2 speakers, in particular the Chinese group had much greater frequency of use compared with L1 speakers and Persian speakers. Especially, it seems that the cultural and linguistic background of the L2 speakers influenced the use of VL in English communication. For instances, in the case of politeness, cultural realisations of VL were found in the way the Persian learners of English used vague expressions as a cultural concept called "taarof", while the Chinese group used indirectness as a cultural norm. In contrast, L1 speakers preferred directness and frankness.

In Vietnam, research on VL is limited. Hedges, "a subset of VL" (Zhang, 2015, p. 22), have drawn the most attention. Pham (2011) found that hedges appeared to express uncertainty, when used by both Vietnamese and American speakers (p. 47). Surprisingly, American narrators still use hedges "when they are certain about what they are telling", seeming to "belong to stylistic variation rather than being a pure hedging device" (p. 47). Similarly, hedges were found to be used as a device to decline invitations as a polite strategy to mitigate face-threating by both Vietnamese and American participants in an office setting (Dang, 2014).

Another study comparing the use Vietnamese and English hedges by Nguyen and Truong (2015) found that both Vietnamese and American speakers applied hedges for the function of "saving the public self-image of the participants" (p. 30). However, Vietnamese speakers mainly used hedges to save "**the listener's** self-image" in order "to retain friendliness and a well-knit relationship" (p. 34, bold in original), whereas in English "it is the speakers' face saving that is highly concerned by the speakers themselves" (p. 37). That is, the Vietnamese speakers were more concerned about the others' face than the American speakers were.

Investigating the differences between Australian native speakers and Vietnamese learners in using the speech act of criticism in English, Nguyen (2008) found that the learners were less direct in criticising than the Australian speakers. Even owning the low level of directness, the learners tended to "resort to quite 'offensive' indirect criticisms" (p. 61), failing to soften face-threatening speech acts. Nguyen pointed out that this seemed to be due to the underuse of internal modifiers, syntactic modifiers, hedges, understaters and downtoners by Vietnamese learners compared to Australian

speakers. Her findings showed that the lack of attention of learners to using modifiers can be due to "their lack of full awareness of the power of modifiers in softening a face-threatening speech acts since modifiers carry only minimal propositional meaning" (p. 63).

Studies of VL used by L2 speakers demonstrate that there are many features leading to the different applications of VL compared with L1 speakers. One of the prominent features which influences the observed discrepancies in the use of vague expressions between L1 and L2 groups is cultural schemata (Cheng & Warren, 2003; Sabet & Zhang, 2015, Zhang & Sabet, in press) since cultural differences dominate how we understand and interpret meaning (Zhang, 2005, p. 77). Cheng (2003) adds that "culture can influence the communicative behaviour and style of an individual either directly, through the socialization of the individual within the culture, or indirectly, as the individual learns the language of the culture" (p. 1).

2.1.5 Pragmatic functions of vague language

Zhang (1998, 2011) states that VL is a part of our normal everyday language, and it is just as important as so-called non-vague language. VL is "viewed much more in terms of the contextualized interpretation of utterances by social actors rather than as part of the propositional content of context-free sentences", as argued by Overstreet (2011, p. 297). Supporting Overstreet's idea, Ruzaitė (2007a) and Zhang (2011, 2015) assert that the interpretation of VL is highly context-dependent. The context comprises all sorts of pragmatic factors such as scale effects, the item being modified, expectation (Moxey & Sanford, 1993) and cultural differences (Zhang, 1998; 2014). In addition, Cheng and O'Keeffe (2014) stress the importance of "the context of reference" in understanding VL in which the notion of "successful reference" (Brown & Yule, 1983) "is dependent on an assumption and expectation by the speaker of a high degree of shared social and cultural background knowledge over and above the immediate physical context of the interaction" (p. 375).

VL, according to Jucker et al. (2003), "is not only an inherent feature of natural language but also – and crucially – it is an interactional strategy" (p. 1739). Vague

expressions are used for strategic reasons to target a number of communicative purposes and "may be more effective than precise ones in conveying the intended meaning of an utterance. That is, they may carry more relevant contextual implications than would a precise expression" (p. 1737). Jucker et al. confirm that the most obvious reason for the use of VL is "uncertainty at the time of speaking. Sometimes speakers lack information about a given quantity, quality or identity. They therefore cannot be more precise even if they want to" (p. 1765). Even when speakers know the precise information, they may still choose to use VL, because vague words "often suffice for the purpose in hand, and too much precision can lead to time wasting and inflexibility". (Williamson, 1994, p. 4869)

Jucker et al.'s (2003) argument is supported by Zhang (2005) who noted that

> If suitable to a particular situation, approximate information could be better than precise information. This is made feasible by our understanding of the existence of fuzziness in communication (p. 79).

Following Moxey and Sanford's (1993) findings, Zhang confirmed pragmatic factors influence the interpretation of a vague expression, these being scale - "the interpretation of a fuzzy expression can be affected by the scale onto which they are mapped"; the item being modified - "the meaning of fuzzy expressions may also depend on the size and nature of the objects being modified and on the spatial situations surrounding the objects"; expectation - "the understanding and interpretation of meaning is associated with language users' expectation corresponding to different situations", and cultural influences (Zhang, 2005, p. 76-77).

Channell (1994) listed some communicative purposes for and situations which use 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

7. Self-protection

8. Power and politeness

9. Informality and atmosphere

10. Women's language (p. 174)

She highlighted that "The widespread use of vagueness for varied purposes and in varied settings demonstrates what an important aspect it is of language users' knowledge of their language" (p. 194).

Channell (1994) also emphasized one of the important social functions of VL, i.e. it can strengthen solidarity among social groups. She stated that "Any social group sharing interests and knowledge employs non-specificity in talking about their shared interest" (p. 193). Vague words are also markers of in-group membership to show solidarity and convergence (Carter & McCarthy, 2006; Cutting 2000, 2001, 2002, 2007) or to engender camaraderie (Jucker et al., 2003). Carter and McCarthy (2006, p. 202) stated that:

> Vague language softens expressions so that they do not appear too direct or unduly authoritative or assertive. It also is a strong indication of an assumed shared knowledge and can mark in-group membership: the referents of vague expressions can be assumed to be known by the listener.

In addition, Cutting (2007) found that "sometimes speakers are tired or in too much of a hurry to find the right word". Hence, "sometimes they do not process words properly or as they could wish" (p. 7).

Zhang (2011, 2015) summarized the pragmatic functions of VL as follows:

1. Giving the right amount of information: Vague words are often used when it is too complicated for the speaker to express their ideas, or something doesn't need to be made precise (Channell, 1994).

2. Strengthening: Vague words help to increase the strength of a claim (Channell, 1994, Ruzaitė, 2007a). For example, *she is a <u>very</u> smart girl*, the purpose of using *very* is to enhance the degree of smartness.

3. Mitigating: Vague words can reduce imposition and attenuate negative discursive moves. Mitigating is "perhaps the most natural and recognized function of VL, because of its nature and capacity" (Zhang, 2015, p. 39).

4. Showing intimacy and solidarity: VL is also considered a tool to create an informal and friendly atmosphere, and marks group membership (Evison et al., 2007). The speakers believe that both parties in a conversation must negotiate expectations about what the other party knows within the social space (Vygotsky, 1978) and common understandings are required for interpreting VL to achieve successful communication.

5. Self-distancing: VL helps the speaker shield from the risks or being wrong by expressing a propositional attitude (Channell, 1994; Jucker et al., 2003; Ruzaitė, 2007a; Trappes-Lomax 2007). Modality words such as *maybe* and *perhaps* "suggest a lower degree of speaker's commitment to the truth of the claim and make the claim less categorical" (Ruzaitė, 2007a, p. 158).

6. Politeness and face: VL "serves for politeness and face-saving, which is important in successful communication" (Zhang, 2015, p. 40). The interlocutors use VL as a strategy for politeness (Channell, 1994; Stubbs, 1996; Zhang, 2015) and as a tool to "prevent face-threatening acts from eventuating, or to reduce their impact" (Zhang, 2015, p. 40).

7. Withholding information: VL can be applied for withholding information (Channell, 1994, p. 4) which is often viewed negatively (Zhang, 2015, p. 43). Zhang finds that VL can serve both cooperatively and competitively, the latter "refers to negative and divergent language moves, and is rarely mentioned in the literature" (2011, p. 577). She added two strategies of VL: confronting with "a non-accommodating tone, acting as a social divider" and evading to deliberately avoid "conveying correct/accurate information to manipulate the situation to the speaker's advantage" (Zhang, 2011, p. 577).

From the above pragmatic functions, Zhang (2011) notes that the characteristic that unite all VL functions is "their typically cooperative tone. Cooperation refers to a joint effort from interlocutors for a common communicative purpose, involving

positive and collaborative linguistic behaviors" (p. 576). However, the competitive functions of VL as mentioned above do exist, and play an important role in communication as well.

2.2 *Some*: a vague word

Some has been investigated through two approaches: semantics and pragmatics. The distinctions here between the two approaches are not all-or-none, rather they are guidelines and mainly used for the convenience of discussion.

2.2.1 The semantic approach

Some has long been treated as an existential quantifier or indefinite quantifier to decode its meaning. As an existential quantifier, Partee, ter Meulen and Wall (1990) stated that *some* is viewed in the sense of "at least one, possibly more" (p. 138). Huddleston, Pullum et al. (2002) add that *some* indicates "quantity or number greater than zero" (p. 358). However, Duffley and Larrivée (2012) have challenged this, suggesting that treating *some* as an existential quantifier fails in evaluating the full range of uses of *some* in terms of "its particular distribution and collocations" and "how its various uses are related to one another" (p. 133).

Some was investigated as an indefinite pronoun by Quirk, Greebaum, Leech and Startvik (1985), Chesterman (1991), Haspelmath (1997), and Carter and McCarthy (2006). Carter and McCarthy listed *some* as an indefinite pronoun defined as "a pronoun that expresses a non-specific or non-definite meaning" (2006, p. 907). Haspelmath's work highlighted the functions of indefinite pronouns in an attempt to solve the limitations of *some* as an existential quantifier by introducing the notion of the cognitive map of indefinite expression (1997). Haspelmath's cognitive map is a bi-dimensional map to illustrate the functions of indefinite pronouns based on context (e.g. indirect negation) and semantic readings (e.g. specific indefinite). However, Dahl (1999) argued that "the map simplifies linguistic reality, in that it leaves out a number of relevant distinctions", such as the speaker's expectations or differences in focus (p. 665). Evaluating Haspelmath's cognitive map, Duffley and

Larrivée stated that a tri-dimensional map is perhaps needed to cover the third dimension of "context + reading", because Haspelmath's cognitive map is "neither sufficiently precise nor sufficiently nuanced to handle the qualitative uses of *some*" (2012, p. 146).

Chesterman (1991, p. 182) introduces a scale of definiteness which put *some* between zero and article *a* as follows:

Most indefinite ———————————— Most definite

zero *some* *a* *the* null
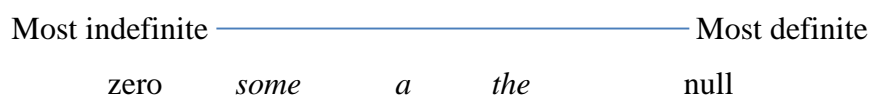
A is less indefinite than *some* or zero, as "a single item is quantitatively 'more definite' than an unspecified quantity" (p. 182): *a pen* is treated in this sense as more definite than *some pens* due to the singular sense of *a pen* compared with the sense of being general and vague in the plural phrase *some pens.*

In addition, *some* presents assertive meaning as an assertive pronoun or an indefinite assertive article. Quirk et al. (1985) stated *some* contains an assertive meaning (positive orientation) when occurring in negative, interrogative, and conditional sentences (p. 390). Regarding *some* as an indefinite assertive article, it is seen to be basically an article with a light quantitative force by Sahlin (1979, p. 15), as in *There must be some water under there.*

Some was investigated using a scale by Israel (1999, 2006) who considered *some* to be a scalar understater or attenuator. According to Israel, a sentence like *Some people enjoy the weather in San Diego* "makes a weaker claim than one would expect – that *most people enjoy the weather in San Diego*" (1999, p. 177). Israel explained that *some* cannot be generic because it is a low-scalar, attenuating positive polarity item drawing a limited indefinite value (p. 373). Duffley and Larrivée (2012) opposed Israel's (1999) statement and argued that this description does not extend to all uses of *some* (p. 136). For instance, the sentence as *He made some thirty-three snowmen that afternoon* "would also have to be treated as an exception in the scalar approach, as the amount of snowmen built is treated as greater, not less, than normal expectations" (Duffley and Larrivée, 2012, p. 137). They added that Israel's (1999)

study "does not provide a satisfactory answer to the question of the distributional behaviour of *some* as compared to that of *any*, … , which have to be treated as separate lexical entries in a scalar approach, i.e. as exceptions" (p. 137).

Duffley and Larrivée (2012) argued that the quantity of *some* is different based on the following nouns. With singular nouns, they state that "what is understood to be non-specified is exclusively the identity of the referent" (p. 143) as exemplified by Farkas (1999)'s example *Mary was depressed for some reason* in which *some* informs the listeners that there is a definite reason which is not specified about Mary's depression. It appears that the speaker ignores "the exact nature of the reason, is withholding this information, or just cannot see what could be troubling her" (Duffley & Larrivée, 2012, p. 143). With plural and mass nouns, the possibility of quantitative variation in the referent is understood to be unspecified, although the identity of the referents is unspecified as well. Duffley and Larrivée stress that "this gives rise to the impression of a reference to a non-specified middlish quantity, and since this quantity is smaller than the whole category, it can be felt to be situated lower on a scale of quantities than a maximum or close-to-maximum amount" (p. 146).

Duffley and Larrivée (2012) highlighted the qualitative uses of *some* without considering scales. There are three uses of qualitative *some* which cannot be explained by Haspelmath's 'cognitive map' concept:

1. Evocation of particular exceptional exemplar which defies precise identification (*That was SOME frittata!*)
2. Evocation of a particular considerable quantity which defies precise quantification (*That was SOME time ago*)
3. Evocation of a particular approximate quantity which defies precise quantification (*There were some fifty people at the party*) (p. 146)

Generally speaking, there are singular and plural uses of *some*. The former vague count in the singular use *some* is more natural than the indefinite article in the situation of expressing annoyance or denigration emotively with the head noun referred to, as in *Some idiot has left the oven on* (Huddleston & Pullum et al., 2002,

p. 380). The head noun *idiot*, according to Huddleston and Pullum et al., serves to express annoyance with the individual concerned rather than to give an objective description. If, *a* (indefinite article) is replaced instead by *some idiot*, then it is being used as an ordinary descriptive noun.

Duffley and Larrivée (2012) compare the following two sentences with *some* expressing pejoration:

1. Apparently *some urban planner* thought that this would be a good place for a mall. (p. 137)
2. Apparently *some urban planners* thought that this would be a good place for a mall. (p. 138)

They state that *some* with a pejorative impression "does come through more clearly with singular nouns" (p. 138). Derogatory and appreciative expressions are also more strongly expressed with a singular *some* than a plural, as the idea denoted by *some* "can be applied both to the number of referents and to their identity with a plural noun, but only to the identity of the referent with a singular" (p. 139).

Some expressing approximation, according to Duffley and Larrivée (2012), must be with a round number, for example, *There were some 50 villages that agreed to the plan.* They emphasize the complexity and flexibility of the interaction of linguistic meaning between *some* and the numeral, the precise-quantity meaning denoted by a cardinal number may convey the notion of quantitative approximation.

Some can convey diminution and augmentation (Israel, 1999). Duffley and Larrivée (2012) note that the quantity "with which *some* is contrasted can be greater than that expressed by *some*" (p. 140). They also emphasize that *some* + plural/mass noun is not necessary to express a large amount but could contain the message of "at least a little bit", for example: *There must be some mercy in that guy's heart. Some* could express "a lesser than possible degree of understanding" (p. 140), for example: *I have some idea of what you mean, but it's still a bit hazy.*

The accent of *some* also plays a crucial role in governing the meaning of *some* in the conversation (Rooth 1992; Huddleston & Pullum et al. 2002; Carter & McCarthy

2006; Duffley and Larrivée, 2012). *Some* with accent indicates a contrastive and emphatic expression. A stressed *some* expresses contrastive meaning only when combined with mass nouns (Duffley & Larrivée, 2012). The contrastive meaning could signal something "between the quantity corresponding to *some* and some larger quantity, which can in certain cases be the whole category denotable by the noun" (p. 144). Regarding an emphatic expression, *some* is applied to emphasize "the significance of the individual (with singular nouns) or quantity (with plural nouns)" referred to by the *some* phrase (p. 144).

2.2.2 The pragmatic approach

Through the lens of semantics, *some* is understood as an existential quantifier or an indefinite pronoun and it tends to be measured on scales. However, *some* has been found to have more complex meanings when considered from a pragmatic approach. Through the lens of pragmatics, *some* involves scalar implicature rather than a scale itself. The ways in which *some* is interpreted creates opposition between the semantic approach and the pragmatic approach. The semantic approach ignores the context in the interpretation of *some*, whereas reference to the context is an important feature in identifying how *some* functions in context when using the pragmatic approach.

Gricean theorists believe that s*ome* can be interpreted at both the semantic level and the pragmatic level (Horn, 1989; Gadzar, 1979). According to Grice (1975), both interpretations of *some* are compatible with *all*. Huang and Snedeker (2009) illustrate *some* and *all* on a scale of conveying stronger information (Horn, 1972, 1989; Gadzar, 1979) as in Figure 2.1 (Huang & Snedeker 2009).
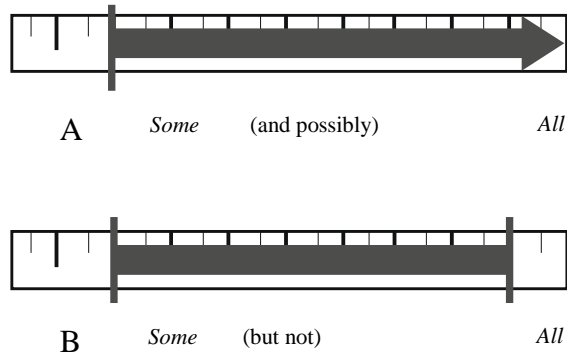
Figure 2.1: Two interpretations of *some*

As seen in Figure 2.1, the semantic meaning of *some* is interpreted in the total set ('some-and-possibly-all') which requires an upper-bound scale. From a pragmatic interpretation *some* excludes *all* (with a lower-bound scale) and the pragmatic meaning is compatible with a proper set ('some-but-not-all') (p. 378).

Channell (1994) mentions that *some* is "semantically neutral for quantity" (p. 114), but it is not a neutral choice in pragmatic meaning, and needs context to clarify its meaning. The scalar implicature contains two interpretations of *some* resulting from two approaches with different focuses: the defaultist approach and a contextualist approach. The former believes that the implicature, which could be cancelled by the context, originated by default; the latter argues that the implicature is produced by the context.

The defaultist approach (Horn, 1972; Levinson, 2000; Chierchia, 2004) believes that *some* implicating *not all* is the default interpretation, which is optional and may be "contextually cancelled" (Grice, 1975, p. 57). The implicatures are derived by default; however it could be cancelled if required by the context. The contextualist approach (Sperber & Wilson, 1986, 1995; Carston, 1998) on the other hand, emphasizes that implicatures are generated by the context.

There have been a number of studies of pragmatic implicature of *some* supporting the contextualist view such as those by Noveck and Posada (2003), Bott and Noveck (2004), Breheny, Katsos and William (2006), Geurts and Pouscoulous (2009), Huang and Snedeker (2009), Larrivée and Duffley (2014). Bott and Noveck (2004) investigated the scalar implicature of *some* in supporting the Relevance Theory

(Sperber & Wilson, 1985/1995) which treats references of *some* based on context and requires a deeper processing of utterances. Their findings showed that *some but not all* is more complex than *some and possibly all* due to the two following reasons. Firstly, a proposition gives rise to "a narrower set of true circumstances; thus determining whether or not a statement is true requires more careful assessments" (p. 454). Secondly, negation is also a reason which adds to the cost of processing (Just & Carpenter, 1971; Clark & Chase, 1972; Lea & Mulligan, 2002). Bott and Noveck's finding is compatible with that of Sandford, Moxey and Paterson (1996) who state that quantifiers interpretation leans on attributions of a speaker's expectations and is context-dependent. Breheny et al. (2006), as did Bott and Noveck (2004), found that all the above findings are consistent with

> the Context-Driven view of language interpretation, where implicatures are processed by a single context-sensitive pragmatic system that cannot be subsumed into the domain of grammar and does not operate on default rules (p. 457).

Inspired by Bultinck (2005), whose analysis supports a contextual perspective of how particular contexts are enriched by an underspecified reading of cardinals, Larrivée and Duffley (2014) examined the sources of scalar implicatures of *some* based on the Bergen Corpus of London Teenage English, and confirmed that implicatures are only generated when prompted by the context (p. 543), which is in line with the work of Breheny et al. (2006).

In supporting the contextualists, Jucker et al. (2003) noted that "the interpretation of what is a high or low number depends on the context" (p. 1754), thus the number of *some* interpreted by undergraduates might be different from the number represented by graduate students. They also emphasized that "the speaker may assume that the listener will use the context to interpret the number in an appropriate way and that an exact number would carry less useful information" (p. 1754).

From the field of vague language, s*ome*, being considered as a vague quantifying expression by Channell (1994), only conveys "information about the proportion of the full set of items which is intended" (p. 99). According to Jucker et al. (2003), a

vague expression may be "more informative than an absolute number would be" by giving information associated to a reference point (p. 1751) and they believe that "in terms of some goals it can convey much relevant information" (p. 1753) as in the following example:

> A: last week e=r,
>
>   let me see,
>
>   I rent *some* movies.
>
> B: yeah me too.
>
> A: yeah [I I didn't go out]
>
> B: [which what movie]?

Speaker B had questioned A about whether she has watched any movies lately. Speaker A's response with *some movies* is vague as she could have given a more precise number. However, Jucker et al. (2003) explain that the use of *some* may be more relevant than a precise number in this context. Firstly, the application of *some* may deliver the message that the precise number of movies is not relevant therefore not the speaker's focus of attention here. This explanation is revealed through following the sequence when speaker B expresses his disinterest in the number of movies, but in the kinds of movies she watched. Secondly, *some* may indicate that the speaker thinks that the number of movies is not particularly high or low. *Some*, then, may imply that the number of rented movies meets the expectation of both the speaker and listener.

Ruzaitė (2007b) pointed out that *some* in the vague sense, was used as a face-saving strategy in teacher-student interactions in British and American spoken academic discourse in her study. The students used *some* to mitigate, as in "… I made *some* also just *some* stupid mistakes which shouldn't have …". Similarly, the teacher employed *some* to prevent face-threatening, as in: "I'm going to bring in *some* illuminated medieval books for you to have a look at …" (p. 167). *Some* was also used to make statements less specific and more flexible. Ruzaitė concluded that *some* performs as a self-distancing device for politeness purposes, not for an estimation of a numeric denotation. In another study of quantifiers, Ruzaitė (2007a) also noted

that *some* as a quantifier had many functions which normally occur in vague language such as using language persuasively, suggesting that precision is impossible, discourse management, saving face and encouraging.

The pragmatic functions of *some* are multiple even when the primary function of *some* is to mitigate (Zhang, 2015, p. 85). Zhang states that *some* modifies both quantity and quality, the meaning of *some* is multi-faceted (p. 85). *Some* could be used as a quantifier, typically denoting an unspecific quantity which can express a greater amount; or as an indefinite pronoun; or a synonym of *about* and *approximately* as in *some 30 people attended his birthday party*. Also, *some* acts as general stretcher to refer to someone or something that is unknown or unspecified. In the case of expressing "remarkable", *some* is not unspecific as in *that was some speech* (p. 85).

The current literature of *some* mostly focuses on the scalar implicature of *some but not all* in supporting the contextualists' view that the scalar implicature is produced only based on the context.

2.2.3 *Some* groups: *someone*, *somebody*, *something* and *sometimes*

Some groups includes *someone, somebody, something* and *sometimes* in which *someone, somebody, something* are placeholders and *sometimes* is a vague adverb of frequency. Placeholders are totally vague words (Crystal & Davy, 1975). Interlocutors use placeholders for two communicative reasons: they don't know or they know but don't want to tell (Channell, 1994, p. 164).

Greenbaum and Quirk (1990) found that *somebody* was rarely used in formal discourse. Similarly, *someone*, *somebody* and *something* occurred infrequently in academic writing (Channell, 1994). However, Hinkel (2003) found that they appeared at median frequency rates in the academic writing of NNS students (Chinese, Japanese, Korean, Indonesia, Vietnamese and Arabic). Comparing the use of *someone* and *somebody* among American native speakers, Chinese speakers and

Persian speakers, Sabet and Zhang (2015) found that L1 speakers and Persian speakers used the two items more frequently than Chinese speakers.

Zhang (2015) noted that *something* refers to "an undetermined entity or notion in a general sense" (p. 92), as in *There is <u>something</u> in the box,* in which *something* is considered as an object unspecified. Zhang divided the understanding of *something* into two kinds: specific indefinite and non-specific indefinite, as in *He plans to buy <u>something</u> for her birthday* vs *He is holding <u>something</u> in his hand.* She explain that *something* is indefinite in both sentences in which the former may not indicate any specific item in mind; on the other hand, the latter reveals something specific in his hand even it is unnamed (p. 92).

Something appears in a number of tags such as *or something,* or *something like that.* These vague phrases have been named differently: set marking tags by Dines (1980), terminal tags by Aijmer (1985), extension particles by Dubois (1992), vague category identifiers by Channell (1994), approximation markers by Erman (1995), general extenders by Overstreet and Yule (1997b) and Overstreet (1999), or general stretchers by Zhang (2015).

The structure of tags, according to Channell (1994), is created by exemplars plus tag: *books* (exemplar) *and something like that* (tag). The exemplar is always situated in front of the tag. Vague tags "are pragmatically as well as semantically defined" (p. 143). Ruzaitė (2010) supported Channell's claim, and highlights that vague tags are "especially context-dependent" and interpreted based largely on "the hearer's framework of knowledge" (p. 34). Importantly, the interpretation of vague tags is by "taking into account their function in the communicative act" (p. 34).

Vague tags are applied in communication to serve different purposes. Dines (1980) stated that they are used to "cue the listener to interpret the preceding element as an illustrative example of some more general case" (p. 22). Ball and Ariel (1978) noted that the function of a tag is "to suggest, without specifying, other conjuncts or disjuncts similar in some relevant respect to the preceding" (p. 36). According to Overstreet and Yule (1997b), one of the major roles of general extenders is "to convey an assumption of shared knowledge and to invite the recipient to provide any

additional information as needed to identify the referenced category" (p. 95). Overstreet (1999) adds that a vague tag also serves as a positive or negative politeness device, in which the former is used "to mark invited solidarity" (p. 104) whereas the latter may hedge face threatening (p. 105). Vague tags are also used "to express a range of affective meanings, including establishing rapport and reducing the degree of face threat of negatively affective discursive moves" (Terraschke & Holmes, 2007, p. 213) or "to mitigate potentially face-threatening acts" (Koester, 2006, p. 93).

The vague tags, according to Zhang (2015), place their "functions in kind more than in number", in which they can be used "to express uncertainty, to mitigate, to do self-protection, and the like" (p. 88). The vague tags are "effective and good enough to serve the discourse needs without requiring too much effort from speaker or hearer" (p. 89), offering "a convenient way out of an otherwise challenging situation" (p. 95).

Sometimes was classified as a vague adverb of frequency by Channell (1994). It is also used in vague expressions due to its ability to cover a wide range of frequency. *Sometimes* serves functions when it only conveys "little information about the frequency itself", for example, the speaker may choose *sometimes* in cases where it does not matter how many times an action may occur or the point is that it may happen (Jucker et al., 2003, p. 1756). *Sometimes* then "may express the speaker's attitude towards the importance of the frequency itself, that the exact frequency is not important in regard to the point being made" (p. 1756). In the other words, *sometimes* does not simply express the frequency but is also used to serve certain purposes of communication.

2.3 Theoretical frameworks

Having reviewed the literature on the topic of VL and *some*, this section discusses three theoretical frameworks which are relevant to this study: Cooperative Principle (CP, Grice, 1975), Relevance Theory (RT, Sperber & Wilson, 1986/1995) and Elasticity Theory (Zhang, 2011, 2015).

2.3.1 Vague language and Cooperative Principle

Grice's (1975, p. 45) cooperative principle (CP) is a principle of conversation in which participants will be expected to: "Make your contribution such as is required, at the stage at which it occurs, by the accepted purpose or direction of the talk exchange in which you are engaged". According to CP, both parties (speakers and listeners) of any particular conversation basically follow four maxims: the Maxim of Quantity (be truthful), the Maxim of Quality (be as informative as required, but not overdo it), the Maxim of Relevance (be relevant) and the Maxim of Manner (be perspicuous) (pp. 45- 46).

Through the four maxims, CP recommends what speakers should do and what they should avoid during conversations. However, when one does not observe the maxims, it indicates some sort of implicature, which is another important part of Grice's theory. For example, in the case of VL use, for some purposes the interlocutors may not give explicit and complete information, hence the speakers flout the Maxim of Quantity.

According to Huang (2007), a speaker can straightforwardly observe the maxims or violate them. Awareness of following maxims can be demonstrated by the use of hedges in conversation: Quality (e.g. *I am not sure if this is true, but…*), Quantity (e.g. *I probably don't need to say this*, *but …*), Relation (e.g. *I'm not sure if this is relevant*, *but …*), Manner (e.g. *I don't know if this makes sense*, *but …*) (p. 26-27).

Grice (1975, 1989) noted that speakers often break rather than follow one or more maxims. When this happens, specific effects, known as implicatures, are produced for the hearers. Davies (2007) argued that "the existence of this pattern of behaviour enables the speaker to make the task of the hearer more difficult; speakers can convey their intentions by a limitless number of utterances and it is up to the hearer to calculate the utterer's intention" (p. 2310). Huang (2007) added that:

> Faced with such a conspicuous flouting by the speaker, the addressee then has two options. One is to think that the co-operative principle has been abandoned as well. But he or she may - and characteristically does - choose a

second option. He or she may assume that despite the speaker's apparent failure of co-operation, he or she is still observing the co-operative principle, and reasons roughly thus. If the speaker is still co-operative, and if he or she is exploiting a maxim in such a way that I should recognize the infringement, then he or she is doing so in order to convey some extra message, which is in keeping with the co-operative principle at some deeper level. (p. 29)

Huang (2007) clarifies his argument with the following example:

Maxim of Relation:

John: Susan can be such a cow sometimes!

Mary: Oh, what a lovely day today! (p. 30)

Looking at Mary's response, it appears that she infringes the Maxim of Relation with an unrelated response to John's. However, according to Huang, if we assume that Mary still stays cooperative, her response could be interpreted "as highly relevant at some non-superficial level" (p. 31); one of the possible ways to explain Mary's interpretation as conversationally implicating is that Mary disapproves of John's bad-mouthing people behind their backs.

According to Channell (1994), the maxims of CP are relevant to VL so far as

vague expressions may be used to enable speakers to follow the maxims … If I am asked what time I expect to be home from work, and if I genuinely do not know, because I cannot anticipate workload or traffic, then my most truthful reply, that for which I have evidence, could be 'about six o'clock'. From this, the hearer would infer that I could not say exactly (p. 33).

The speaker's answer shows an attempt to meet the Maxim of Quality; however, with this unclear answer the speaker cannot give an exact response to the question, leading to the flouting of the Maxim of Manner. This suggests that a speaker may observe one maxim but flout another, he or she may not be able to follow all the maxims. Zhang (2015) noticed that conversational implicature can explain VL in

some extent. However, these two are not the same as Grice's framework may not provide an adequate account of VL (p. 51).

Cutting (2002) objected to Grice's model as "different cultures, countries and communities have their own ways of observing and expressing maxims for particular situations" (p. 41). She gave a number of cross-cultural examples to strengthen her criticism of Grice's CP. For instances, a question "How are you?" in the United States will expect to a response of "Fine". However, in another cultures, "How are you?" might be a request after the state of health and expect a full report from the listener. Or, in the United Stated, instead of saying "Do you find it's getting a bit chilly in here?" which could flout the Maxims of Quantity and Manner, the speakers often go straight to the point by saying "I'm cold. Is it OK if I put the fire on?" This, according to Cutting, relates to "the matter of politeness and cultural conventions" (p. 42).

In the line with Cutting's (2002) criticism of Grice's model, Zhang (2004) also expressed her concern in using Grice's CP to explain a conversation without relating it to culture. Zhang (2004) studied Grice's conversational maxims together with the principle of selectiveness. Based on her discussion, the applicability of Grice's maxims can be understood as matters of degree, i.e. the maxims cannot be taken as absolute rules. This is because language is not "as clear-cut as mathematical formulas" (p. 141); but is an integration of many social and cultural factors. It was shown clearly in Zhang's study that "cultural/pragmatic considerations tend to be a deciding factor for what communicative principles to use in order to achieve a successful outcome" (p. 141). Hence, the participants must follow certain cultural and social conventions during the conversation depending on the particular context of the communication.

Zhang (2004) found that the principle of selectiveness doesn't seem to violate any of Grice's maxims. As shown from her study, inferential meaning with selectiveness is different from Grice's CP as speakers do not always want the hearers to explore anything other than the literal meaning of their utterances. She emphasized the weakness of Grice's maxims in their lack of cultural considerations and highlighted the importance of adding a maxim governing pragmatic cultural considerations.

Cutting (2002) identified another weakness of CP in so far as there is an overlap between the four maxims of CP. She claimed that "It can be difficult to say which one is operating and it would be more precise to say that there are two or more operating at once" (p. 42). For example: A: *What did you have to eat*? B: *Oh, something masquerading as chicken chasseur*. Cutting explains that Speaker B is flouting the Maxim of Quality when indicating his food is *something* which implies that it was not "chicken chasseur". On the other hand, his utterance could be considered as flouting the Maxim of Manner as he does not say exactly what *something* was or what *something* looked like. From this point, Cutting argued that Speaker B also might flout the Maxim of Quantity as he does not give enough information to identify what he ate. The only maxim he does not violate is the Maxim of Relation as his answer is relevant to the question.

Grice's CP is relevant to this study, as CP can explain how and why VL is used: under the framework of CP, using VL such as *something* actually observes all Grice's maxims except the Maxim of Manner ('speak clearly'). When one uses *something* it may be that he or she does not have evidence to make it more accurate (so observing the Maxim of Quality), or does not need to make it more accurate than is required (so observing the Maxim of Quantity), or *something* is the most relevant way to communicate (so observing the Maxim of Relevance). If a situation demands one to be accurate but one still chooses to be vague, then according to CP, some sort of conversational implicature has emerged here.

More specifically, the maxims of CP can explain to a degree, the pragmatic functions of *some*. While the use of *some* fits the maxims of CP, CP alone is not adequate to develop a robust account of vagueness of *some* because of its lack of cultural perspectives (Cutting, 2002). This study compares how *some* is used by L1 and L2 speakers who originate from different cultures (Western and Asian cultures). While CP can provide some theoretical explanation on the use of VL, it is not a specific theory for VL. For a comprehensive account of VL, and *some* in particular, CP needs to be combined with Relevance Theory and Elasticity Theory, as discussed in the next two sections.

2.3.2 Vague language and Relevance Theory

Aiming to streamline Grice's CP, Sperber and Wilson (1986/1995) developed Relevance Theory (RT), the definition of relevance being that the speaker's input (a sight, a sound, an utterance, a memory) connects with background information which the listener has available to produce the conclusion that matters to him or her. The relevance of an input to an individual may be assessed through cognitive effects and processing effort. The relevance of an input to the hearer is clarified as:

a. Other things being equal, the greater the positive cognitive effects achieved by processing an input, the greater the relevance of the input to the individual at that time.

b. Other things being equal, the greater the processing effort expended, the lower the relevance of the input to the individual at that time (Wilson & Sperber, 2002, p. 252).

Sperber and Wilson (1995) proposed two principles of relevance, the Cognitive Principle and the Communicative Principle. The Cognitive Principle states that the "human cognition tends to be geared to the maximisation of relevance" (Wilson & Sperber, 2002, p. 254). From the perspective of the Communicative Principle (or Ostensive-inferential communication), communication has two kinds of information, the information that we want to transfer to the audience and the information that we intend to "inform the audience of one's informative intention" (p. 255). In this principle, every ostensive stimulus conveys a presumption of its own optimal relevance. The ostensive stimulus is optimally relevant to a hearer iff:

a. It is relevant enough to be worth the audience's processing effort;

b. It is the most relevant one compatible with communicator's abilities and preferences (p. 256).

Whilst the CP is based on conversational principles, RT focuses on cognitive principles (Levinson, 1989). Based on Grice's maxims, communicators and audience are expected to know the norms and keep to them during their conversation. However, communicators may violate the norms to achieve their particular purpose;

hence the audience has to approach interpretation of communicative behaviour by using their knowledge of the norms. The principle of relevance, on the contrary, is "a generalisation about ostensive-inferential communication … every act of ostensive communication communicates a presumption of relevance" (Sperber & Wilson, 1995, p. 162).

Sperber and Wilson emphasised that the most important difference between Grice's approach and their RT is the explanation of communication. In Grice's approach, there is no explanation of explicit communication in a conversation which starts from a distinction between what is explicitly said and what is implied. In the explanation of implicatures it is assumed that "the audience must make to preserve the idea that the speaker has obeyed the maxims, or at least the co-operative principle" (p. 162). On the other hand, the principle of relevance is intended to explain as a whole, both explicitly and implicitly. RT "involves human cognition, and its cognitive and communicative principles differ from Grice's socially acquired cooperation principles" (Zhang, 2015, p. 53). Viewed as a part of human cognition, the principle of relevance is "an automatic reflex of the human mental capacity that works without the communicators having any overt knowledge of it" (Huang, 2007, p. 202).

Sperber and Wilson (1986, 1991) treat vagueness, also called looseness or loose talk in their terms, as a natural aspect of language use. Loose talk uses are "non-literal uses" of language (1986, p. 164), "based on resemblance relations among representations". Sperber and Wilson (1986, p. 157) stated that: "Generally speaking, an utterance can be used to represent any representation which it resembles in content, whether a public representation such as another utterance, or a mental representation such as a thought." These two models of representation are differentiated as "representation in virtue of truth-conditions and representation in virtue of resemblance". Sperber and Wilson call "the former *description*, and the latter *interpretation*" (p. 157, italics in the original). Descriptively, an utterance "represents the state of affairs which makes the proposition it expresses true". Interpretively, an utterance "represents a representation which it resembles in content" (p. 157). *Loose talk* involves "interpretive rather than descriptive dimensions of language use" (p. 164).

RT has been applied in VL research. Applying relevance theoretical framework in analysing vagueness, Jucker et al. (2003) concluded that vague expressions "may carry more relevant contextual implications than would a precise expression" (p. 1737). In some cases, the speaker does not have precise information, hence vague words are uttered instead. However, Jucker et al. also found that vague expressions still occurred when the speakers had precise information, so "a vague utterance may be more efficient in the sense that it yields the same contextual assumptions for lower processing costs" (p. 1765). From a RT point of view, vague expressions may "provide a unitary account of the various forms of vague expressions" (p. 1766). These vague words 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 (p. 1766).

Zhang (2005) suggested that the use of VL "can be explained by RT, i.e. it conforms with the optimal relevance in that people using fuzzy language can achieve the greatest positive cognitive effect and the least processing effort" (p. 83). However, she points out that RT emphasises the relevance of an input to an individual, but there might be a difference between individuals. For example, when a speaker utters this sentence: "John has many girl friends"; one hearer might interpret *many* as five girl friends and consider that would be most relevant. However, another hearer might interpret *many* as ten instead of five and insist that his inference is the most relevant one. Hence, she emphases "at the level of individual we may have a situation where everyone is satisfied INDIVIDUALLY" (p. 75, upper case in the original). Alternatively, at the group level, we may be faced with a complicated situation to achieve agreement among individuals and have to find a way to reach unified agreement (p. 75). Therefore, "RT may have to extend its theory from an individual relevance to group relevance to explain fully the interpretation of fuzzy language" (p. 83). Zhang also emphasises that the language form (such as numerical or non-numerical, with or without modifiers, etc.) is not the "deciding factor" to reach optimal relevance; it is "the language users' judgment" which is satisfactory in terms of the relevance principle (p. 83).

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Wilson and Sperber (2012) argued that there is no sharp boundary but a continuum in using vague expressions, while loose use contains a sharp boundary but no continuum. 'Vague use' and 'loose use' are different based on "whether there is a continuum or a sharp conceptual boundary" (Zhang, 2015, p. 52). In the example, "it is very late, I have to run to catch the bus" (Wilson & Sperber, 2012, p. 20), Zhang explains that a continuum does not exist in this example as there is "a sharp discontinuity" between running and walking. The loose use of running is possible to "indicate the activity of going on foot at a speed more typical of running … conceptually, 'running' and 'walking' are not vague, but can be 'loosely' interpreted in context" (Zhang, 2015, p. 52). Zhang gives another example: a daughter calls her mother and says "I'll be home at 8 p.m." instead of informing her that "I'll be home about 8 p.m.". According to Zhang, the use of *at 8 p.m.* is possibly a loose use which shows an interpretation of "a seemingly precise expression" as an approximation and categorised as such. She says that "such loose use, according to Wilson and Sperber, refers to an expression with a precise, strict sense but a loosely interpreted meaning. A vague use, on the other hand, refers to an expression with a vague strict sense and a vaguely interpreted meaning" (p. 52). Zhang argued that loose talk occurs "when our language is 'not good' enough to represent our thought". However, this is not the use of VL as "it can be used deliberately when the speaker could be precise but chooses not to be" (p. 53). Zhang (2005) argued that cultural considerations pose a challenge in RT. She explains that "language is a social action; culture and language are two inseparable things. Cultural considerations may interfere with language rules" (p. 82). This limitation of RT was also mentioned by Cutting (2008) who stated that RT "says nothing about interaction and does not include cultural or social dimensions, such as age, gender, status and nationality". Zhang (2015) noted that "although Relevance Theory can explain certain features of VL and is helpful in considering looseness (and vagueness) in its theoretical framework, it is a cognitive paradigm of language use" in which human cognition is focused more than language behaviour (p. 54).

RT explains VL from a cognitive communication perspective, which is useful for this study in explaining why *some* is used. The use of *some* may follow the principles outlined in RT, which will be discussed in the following analysis. However RT has

some limitations as mentioned previously, thus it is used in combination with two other two theories, CP and Elasticity Theory, in order to explore the use of *some* in a more in-depth and comprehensive way.

2.3.3 Vague language and Elasticity Theory

The concept of elasticity of VL is originated from Zhang's seminal work in 2011 in which she described how VL stretches to meet the needs of communication:

> VL features strategic elasticity, which can be stretched and negotiated to suit the moment-to-moment communicative needs, the elasticity refers to the interpretation of VL that is not specified, and is dependent upon context and communicative purpose. The interlocutors in interaction co-construct the understanding of VL; that is, VL is stretchable and negotiable. (Zhang, 2011, p. 573)

Zhang used the slingshot analogy to describe VL communication: "The unique capacity of VL, like using a slingshot, contributes to the elasticity of language in discursive interaction" (p. 595). Interlocutors approach VL depending on their communicative needs and their communicative goals. Language needs to make continuous adjustment to target an agreeable solution. More importantly, "the elasticity of VL is culturally and socially specified and adapted, because the interpretation of VL is socially and culturally co-constructed" (p. 579). Attempting to develop a theoretical framework for VL which has been lacking in the existing literature, Zhang proposed the notion of elasticity. She explained that she adopted the term 'elastic' because it "highlights the positive, significant and effective role that VL plays in language communication" (p. 596), on the other hand the term 'vague' has a somewhat negative connotation. There is a need "to develop a more realistic, non-idealized account of language use" (p. 596). She stressed that while VL is culturally specific, it does have universality as well in term of its all-around capacity.

Zhang's 2011 work on elasticity of vague language laid a foundation for her further development of "a fully fledged" Elasticity Theory in 2015 (Zhang 2015, p. 2). She

used the term elastic language (EL) to refer to "language that inherently and strategically conveys fluidity and stretchability" (p. 5). According to Zhang, EL and VL seem to have different connotations: the former seems more positive than the latter. They are similar linguistic phenomena, but with different focuses: VL mainly focuses on the uncertainty and under-specification of language, whereas EL pays more attention on fluidity and elasticity of language.

Zhang (2015, p. 57-58) introduced three principles of Elasticity Theory: fluidity, stretchability and strategy, which are interconnected and complementary. Fluidity concerns "a matter of degree" in which "the meanings of utterances are non-discrete, overlapping, context-dependent but context-irresolvable". Stretchability reveals that the interlocutors can stretch their utterances in different ways depending on their communicative purposes, so "appropriate stretching assures effective communication". This strategy confirms that fluid utterances "are employed primarily to serve strategic purpose, performed through their pragmatic functions". She also emphases that fluidity is an essential principle in the existence of the other two principles. Without fluidity in language, the other two principles would not exist, and strategy is the purpose of stretchability: "fluidity is the basis, stretchability is the means, and strategy is the end" (p. 58). There are three characteristics of elasticity: it is co-constructed and is influenced by factors such as social background and speech, both universally and specifically it is cross-linguistic and cross-cultural (p. 58).

The boundaries of elasticity refer to meaning types as EL is a combination of literal, non-literal meaning and hidden meaning, as Zhang confirms, in which the literal meaning is a basic and default meaning; non-literal meaning is related to implicature; and hidden meaning occurs when the speaker does not want the listener to know the meaning. Regarding to the structure of elasticity, there are two levels, global and local. The global level refers to "a collective non-discreteness between utterances, in that the boundaries of meaning overlap" and the local level refers to "individual non-discreteness" (2015, p. 61). There are three constructions with elastic expressions, i.e. preceding stretchers, succeeding stretchers and middle stretchers. EL consists of four lexical categories: approximate stretchers, general stretchers, scalar stretchers, and epistemic stretchers. There are six categories of pragmatic functions: just-right elastic, mitigating elastic, rapport elastic, intensifying elastic, self-protection elastic,

and evasive elastic. These categories "are, paradoxically, non-categorical: an utterance may play more than one role depending on context" (p. 65).

Elasticity is stretchable vertically (upward or downward) or horizontally (left or right) as in the following examples:

> This is <u>very</u> important (upward)
> There are <u>about</u> 20 students in the classroom (left and right or horizontal)
> This is <u>a bit</u> embarrassing (downward)   (Zhang, 2011, p. 573).

Adopting the concept of elasticity of VL, Zhang (2014) examined how *I think* stretches its pragmatic functions in institutional settings, specifically interactions between Australian custom officers and passengers. The speakers used *I think* serving five types of pragmatic functions: emphatic, evaluative, mitigating, tentative and discursive. Zhang (2014) asserted that these pragmatic functions exist elastically in two forms: multi-trajectories and overlapping (p. 251). In particular, the data showed that *I think* elastically stretches from the basis (evaluative) to upward (emphatic), downward (tentative and mitigating), and sideways (discursive). *I think* is fluid at both local and global levels: at the local level an individual pragmatic function of *I think* is itself non-discrete; at the global level the functions interconnect along "the continuum of assertiveness with certainty at one end of the scale and uncertainty at the other" (p. 229).

Zhang and Sabet (in press) investigated the use of *I think* by L1 speakers of American English and L2 speakers of English (Chinese and Persian learners). The findings revealed that the use of *I think* by L1 and L2 speakers is elastic, "manifested through three stretchable, non-discrete and fluid continua: frequency, position and cluster" (p. 17). L1 and L2 speakers stretched *I think* to "variable degrees and stop at variable points" along the three continua (p. 17). It also showed that L1 speakers were "more speaker-oriented and assertive", whereas the Persian English learners were "more listener-oriented and less authoritative", and the Chinese English learners were somewhere in between (p. 17).

Sabet and Zhang (2015) highlighted the elasticity of VL use in another comparative study of L1 (American native speakers) and L2 speakers (Chinese and Persian speakers). Their findings showed that the elasticity manifested through the versatility between VL's linguistic realizations and pragmatic functions in academic setting (Sabet & Zhang, 2015, p. 187). While the category of vague terms tends to serve a particular pragmatic function, an item may express a number of functions based on individual context due to the stretch of VL. For example, placeholders often serve a number of functions such as the right amount of information, mitigation and downtoning.

2.4 Concluding remarks

This chapter discussed 1) previous works on VL with a special focus on *some*, and 2) theoretical frameworks in relation to VL. The concepts considered were used in formulating this current study. There are various definitions of VL in existing literature and this study adapts the definitions of Channell (1994), Ruzaitė (2007a) and Zhang (2011, 2015) with a working definition of VL as language that is unspecific but elastic, contextually depended but not resolvable. This study supports the view that *some* modifies both quantity and quality. While there are insightful works on the subject, there is a lack of studies on how *some* is interpreted elastically and strategically to serve various communicative purposes. This study fills that gap. The previous works on VL showed that VL is actively employed in all sorts of settings, including forensic situations, the healthcare context, political discourse, and especially in education settings. By investigating *some* in classroom settings, this study has explored the similarities and differences of using *some* between L1 and L2 speakers.

This chapter also examined the Cooperative Principle, Relevance Theory and Elasticity Theory, which together provide the theoretical foundations for this study. VL observes most of Grice's maxims, and when the use of VL flouts CP then the explanation may come from conversational implicature. RT explains VL from a cognitive communication perspective, in which the use of VL is justified by the

principle of relevance, because using it may achieve optimal relevance while gaining the most cognitive effect using the least processing effort.

While both theories are relevant to this study in a general sense, Elasticity Theory relates to this study more particularly as the theory has been formulated specifically to account for vagueness and elasticity in language. Elasticity Theory consists of three major principles (fluidity, stretchability, strategy), and provides useful tools for vague/elastic language analysis including four lexical categories and six pragmatic functions. Therefore, this study adopted Elasticity Theory as the main theoretical framework, complemented by CP and RT where appropriate. This combinational approach has provided a robust account of the use of *some*, based on a new and rare mix of resources (L1 speakers of English, Chinese and Vietnamese L2 speakers of English).

Chapter 3 Methodology

This study adopts a mixed methods approach, including both quantitative and qualitative methods. This chapter explains the reasons to use this method, as well as providing information about the data and consider the limitations of the study.

3.1 Research design: mixed methods

Mixed methods, according to Johnson, Onwuegbuzie & Turner (2007), present "a new movement, or discourse, or research paradigm" (p. 113). They are also called the "third methodological movement" (Tashakkori & Teddlie, 2003, p. ix) or the "third wave" (Johnson & Onwuegbuzie, 2004, p. 17) in the evolution of research methodology as they use both quantitative and qualitative approaches to "bridge the schism" between them (Johnson & Onwuegbuzie, 2004, p. 15; Onwuegbuzie & Leech, 2005). When using mixed methods, a researcher "combines elements of qualitative and quantitative research approaches (e.g., use of qualitative and quantitative viewpoints, data collection, analysis, inference techniques) for the broad purposes of breadth and depth of understanding and corroboration" (Johnson et al., 2007, p. 123). Creswell and Plano Clark (2007) state that the central premise of mixed methods is that "the use of quantitative and qualitative approaches in combination provides a better understanding of research problems than either approach alone" (p. 5).

There are advantages of using a mixed methods design. It can "provide the most complete analysis of problems" (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2007, p. 13), bring "a very powerful mix" to the study (Miles & Huberman, 1994, p. 42), help "to understand the important complexities of our social world more completely" (Greene & Caracelli, 1997, p. 7), and "allow for research to develop as comprehensively and completely as possible" (Morse, 2003, p. 195). The mixed methods approach is a tool to "balance flexibility of qualitative exploration with the fixed characteristics of theoretical grounding and hypothesis-testing inherent to many quantitative approaches" (Kroll & Neri, 2009, p. 37). The approach is not intended to replace quantitative or qualitative research, but rather "to draw from the strengths and

minimize the weaknesses of both" (Johnson & Onwuegbuzie, 2004, p. 15). The limitations of using mono-method designs can be reduced by applying mixed methods (Onwuegbuzie & Leech, 2004; Creswell & Plano Clark, 2007; Feilzer, 2010) which can be used "as a means of avoiding biases intrinsic to single-method approaches" (Denscombe, 2008, p. 272).

3.1.1 Quantitative methods

Creswell (2008) defines quantitative research as a methodology in which "the researcher decides what to study; asks specific, narrow questions; collects quantifiable data from participants; analyses these numbers using statistics; and conducts the inquiry in an unbiased, objective manner." (p. 46). Aliaga and Gunderson (2002) state that quantitative research is about "Explaining phenomena by collecting numerical data that are analysed using mathematically based methods (in particular statistics)" (p. 1).

In quantitative research, a researcher can describe a trend or explain a relationship among variables. This method seeks to establish the overall tendency of responses from collated individual measures and to note how this tendency varies among people. Specific, narrow questions are asked to obtain measurable and observable data on variables. The data analysis tends "to involve describing trends, comparing group differences, or relating variables", and interpretation tends "to consist of comparing results with prior predictions and past research" (Creswell, 2008, p. 56). The researcher reports the data analyses based on "standard, fixed structures and evaluative criteria" (p. 58).

In quantitative research, the most important thing is that the researcher has to use procedures to ensure that their own personal biases "do not influence the results" (p. 58). It needs to be shown that the data collected from the chosen instruments is reliable and valid from past uses of the instrument. Quantitative research is more deductive than qualitative since "the investigator employs a close-ended stance by identifying variables and selecting instruments to collect data *before* the study begins. Quantitative research questions and hypotheses do not change during the

study" (p. 139). The investigators in quantitative research lean on the statistical analysis of the data during the procedure (Creswell, 2012, p. 19).

Quantitative analysis was applied in this study in obtaining the frequency of using the vague word *some,* the analysis of which revealed a general picture of *some* patterns between three groups of data; and enabled the testing of the hypothesis that L2 speakers may use *some* in different frequency in comparison with the L1 speakers. For lexical analysis, the frequencies were generated automatically by using WordSmith Tools (Mike Scott 2010, version 6.0, analytical software package). The quantitative research also enabled the measurement of which meanings of *some* appeared the most and least frequently in the language of L1 and L2 speakers.

This study employed Chi-square tests to validate the significant differences of using *some* between L1 and L2 speakers. The statistical calculations were done though an online chi-square calculation (Preacher 2010–2015) in which the significance level is represented by the *p*-value (*p* stands for probability, $p < 0.01$). Any value that is equal or lower than 0.01 indicates that the difference is statistically significant and representative of its population. The frequency in this study was a normalised frequency (per 50,000 words) to make the numbers comparable across all three data sets (see Section 3.2 for details).

3.1.2 Qualitative methods

According to Thomas (2003), qualitative methods involve "an interpretive, naturalistic approach to its subject matter. This means that qualitative researchers study things in their natural settings, attempting to make sense of, or interpret phenomena in terms of the meanings people bring to them" (p. 1). Creswell (2008) defines qualitative research as a procedure

> in which the researcher relies on the views of participants; asks broad, general questions; collects data consisting largely of words (or text) from participants; describes and analyzes these words for themes; and conducts the inquiry in a subjective, biased manner. (p. 46).

A typical qualitative method is Discourse Analysis (DA), which looks at language in a variety of sociocultural contexts (Kirkpatrick & McLellan, 2013, p. 654) and examines "how people make meaning, and make *out* meaning" in which meanings are understood to be "social-cultural constructs of reality" (Widdowson, 2007, p. xv-xvi). DA refers to "socially shared habits of thought, perception, and behavior reflected in numerous texts belonging to different genres" (Scollon & Scollon, 2011, p. 539); and focuses upon "the meaning and structure (whether overt or hidden) of acts of communication in context" (Jupp, 2006, p. 74). DA has:

> an analytic commitment to studying discourse as *texts and talk in social practices.* That is, the focus is not on language as an abstract entity such as a lexicon and set of grammatical rules (in linguistics), a system of differences (in structuralism), or a set of rules for transforming statements (in Foucauldian genealogies). Instead, it is the medium for interaction; analysis of discourse becomes, then, analysis of what people do (Potter, 2004b, p. 203, italics in the original).

The three principles of DA, according to Potter (2004a, p. 6), are that it is action-oriented, situated and constructed. DA is action-oriented as it is concerned with actions and practices in which actions are performed as parts of broader practices. These actions have either generic or specific character and occur in a wide range of both formal and informal settings. Discourse can be situated in three ways. First, discourse is treated as occasioned in the manner of Conversation Analysis (CA). In other words, talk and texts are concerned with sequences of interaction (Hutchby & Wooffitt, 1998). Second, discourse may be situated institutionally, considering the way participants make institutional activities and identities relevant to themselves. Third, discourse can be situated in terms of rhetoric (Antaki, 1994; Billig, 1991, 1996; Potter, 2004a; Potter, Hepburn & Tileaga, 2011) which is designed to counter an actual or potential alternative version (Billig, 1991; Edwards & Potter, 1992; Potter, 2004a). Potter (2004a) noted that while DA and CA both look at sequences of interaction, DA focuses on institutional settings, identities, and rhetorical functions.

In terms of the construction of DA, Potter (2004a) argued that discourse instruction has two levels. The first level is related to "the way discourse is constructed out of words, idioms, rhetorical devices and so on" (p. 610). The second level concerns how "discourse constructs and stabilizes versions of the world" (p. 610). Gee (2014) described seven "building tasks" of language used in analysis of language: significance, activities, identities, relationships, politics, connections, and sign systems and knowledge (p. 95-97).

The data analysis in this current study is based on naturally occurring data which has been considered as a primary data source for conversation analysis (CA) (Sacks, 1973; Heritage 1984, 1985; Pasthas, 1995; Hutchy & Wooffitt, 1998; Seedhouse, 2004; Wooffitt, 2005; Liddicoat, 2007). However, CA is not adopted in this study because CA has different priorities. It seeks to "discover sequential patterns of interaction, and to explicate the web of normative expectations and assumptions which inform and underpin the production of those sequences" (Wooffitt, 2005, p. 79) and to process the analysis of any particular utterance by "examining its placement in the turn-by-turn development of interaction" (Wooffitt, 2005, p. 79). This study's focus is similar to that of DA with a broader range: "the action orientation of language is located at a broader level, and, traditionally, empirical analysis of the organisation of talk (and texts) has focused on the wider interpersonal or social functions served by a passage of talk" (Wooffitt, 2005, p. 80). In particular, this study investigated a wider range of the use of the word *some,* rather than focusing on turn-taking and order speaking, hence DA is more suitable and thus adopted.

In this study, the qualitative analysis helped to reveal how VL was used differently by the three groups of speakers to serve a communicative purpose in an educational setting. Also, the cross-linguistic and cross-cultural impact on the use of *some* between L1 speakers and L2 speakers was explored by examining the habit of using this vague word: how the strategic functions of *some* were performed and how social and speech factors from different cultures impacted differently on the elastic use of *some* among three groups, and more importantly, their implications. The qualitative analysis is at discourse level looked at four pragmatic functions of *some*: the right amount of information, mitigation, withholding information and discourse

management. Even though qualitative analysis is a strong tool to evoke the similarities and differences of the use of *some* between L1 and L2 groups, it still has weaknesses in terms of providing information about general patterns.

To maximise the strengths of quantitative and qualitative methods, this study combined them. This is because "the inclusion of quantitative data can help compensate for the fact that qualitative data typically cannot be generalized. Similarly, the inclusion of qualitative data can help explain relationships discovered by quantitative data" (Onwuegbuzie & Leech, 2005, p. 383). In this study, the quantitative research was used to address Research Question 1 by exploring the frequency of *some* among three groups. The qualitative research responded specifically to Research Questions 2 and 3 through analysing the functions of *some* and any possible impact of socio-cultural and speech factors. Research Questions 4 and 5 were addressed by the mixed methods research to reveal the manifestation of the elasticity of *some* and derive the implications of this study in general.

3.2 Data

The three chosen data sets are from L1 (American English speakers) and L2 (Chinese and Vietnamese learners of English) groups. A comparison of the three culturally diverse groups of data enabled the display of some significant language use behaviours in relation to VL use in the classroom. While it was expected that there may be some differences between L1 and L2 groups given their contrastive linguistic and cultural backgrounds, the expectation on the difference between the two L2 groups was somewhat less clear due to the historical connection between the Chinese and Vietnamese languages and cultures.

Vietnam is geographically located next to China and was dominated by the Chinese for roughly 1,000 years from 111BC to 938AD, which according to Pham and Fry (2002, p. 128) "left an indelible influence on Vietnam, its culture, customs, and language". Vietnamese used Chinese characters, known as the Han script, in the writing system under Chinese rule. In 939, Vietnam became independent from China, but Chinese characters continued to be used. In the 13th century, Vietnamese

scholars created the Vietnamese language based on Chinese characters called *Nom.* Then, in the early 17th Vietnamese, Romanized Vietnamese script named *Quoc Ngu* (national language) was introduced with support from Alexandre de Rhodes, a French missionary (Lo Bianco, 1993; Pham, 1991, 1994; Wright, 2002, p. 226-227). However, *Quoc Ngu* was only used in a limited way in late 18th century due to French colonialism. *Quoc Ngu* was recognised as the national Vietnamese language when Vietnam became independent from France in 1945.

While the Chinese and Vietnamese languages belong to different language families (Sino-Tibetan vs Austro-Asiatic), being ruled by China for such a long historical period, Vietnam "borrowed culturally much from China" (Pham & Fry, 2004, p. 200), especially the Confucian Heritage Culture which is dominant in China (Nguyen, Terlouw & Pilot, 2006, p. 4). China and Vietnam, therefore, "share some common cultural characteristics, being influenced by Confucian thinking in one way or other" (Tsui, 2007, p. 139). In particular, Confucianism stresses "the importance of relationships and the conscious effort required to maintain them" (Walker & Dimmock, 2000, p. 170). This study investigated the use of *some* to see if CSLE and VSLE is having the same shared cultures influenced the use of it.

The English L1 data (52,604 words) were selected from the Michigan Corpus of Academic Spoken English (downloaded from http://micase.elicorpora.info). The corpus is a collection of 1.8 million words of transcribed speech, from a wide variety of speech events (lectures, classroom discussions, lab sections, seminars, and advising sessions), speaking groups (undergraduates and postgraduates), and topics. The transcription of classroom discussions was chosen for this current study as it contains a significant amount of interactions, unlike monologue-style lectures. The five chosen topics were mainly from the social sciences.

The Chinese L2 data (53,741 words) were extracted from the College Learners' Spoken English Corpus, which contains 723,299 words transcribed from the College English Test (Spoken English Test). The speakers were university non-English major students with intermediate-advanced levels of spoken English. The data contains student-student group discussions with one teacher and three or four students, where the teacher acted as a facilitator. The group discussion topics were primarily on

social and everyday issues. The conversations were started by the facilitator and the students began with an introduction of themselves, then they moved to talk about the topics. The Chinese data selected for this study contains 19 conversations of randomly selected social topics.

The Vietnamese L2 data (54,235 words) were collected specifically for this study, from intermediate-advanced speaking English classes in Vietnam. The data consists of naturally recorded interactive conversations on social topics, from two universities and one high school for gifted students in different regions of Vietnam. The classes were observed in these three places to make sure that the English levels were similar. The discussion groups were small, with a teacher as the facilitator. Criteria for selecting a class for recording were: 1) The students were at intermediate-advanced level; 2) There were at least four participants in a discussion group with a facilitator to make sure there was a good level of interaction; 3) Data were taken from different classes and in different regions to have a variety of language use. Before the data collection, in May 2012 in Tuy Hoa City, Phu Yen a recording of a 20-minute conversation was used to test the quality of sound was from both teacher and students, which paved the way for the data collection. The research was approved by Curtin's ethics committee.

This study used recorded data, as they can be re-checked during the procedure of data analysis (Atkinson & Heritage, 1984; Pomerantz &Fehr, 1997). Mondada (2013, p. 56) adds "audio- and video-recordings capture something that cannot be imagined or introspectively recollected - something that can only be observed from adequate recordings through careful and repeated scrutiny, using the technological possibilities of players, rewind functions, slow motion, increasing volume, extraction of pitch and contours". The recorded data are more reliable than note taking, enabling the analyst to "study the same fragment over and over and makes it easier to share interpretations with other researchers" (Jupp, 2006, p. 42).

The three spoken data sets were comparable in terms of word count (approximately 50,000 words), speaker group (students), format (small group with a facilitator), L2 English level (intermediate-advanced), and speaking topics (social issues). It was not appropriate to compare the length of recording time due to the difference in word

length from one language to another (Terraschke, 2008; Sabet & Zhang, 2015), so the word count was used in this study rather than the length of recording time, because it is likely that a L1 speaker speaks faster than a L2 speaker.

As for the limitations of the data in this study, firstly there is some difference among the three data sets in terms of recording settings. While all three data sets were in classroom settings, the Chinese data were in an oral test setting. It is possible that the Chinese students were more stressed than those in the other two groups. However, the Chinese data used in this study show no visible sign of students under considerable pressure which may impact on the way they used *some*. Therefore, there is no reason to discredit the comparability between the three data sets. Secondly, while recordings were of good quality with few indecipherable parts, the data are audio only and therefore non-verbal information is lacking. The remedy for this limitation is to use optimally all available contextual information in the data analysis, which seemed working well in this study. Thirdly, as noticed in many other researches studies (e.g. Cheng & Tsui, 2009; Zhang, 2015) the categorization of pragmatic functions of a vague word is not problem free. It should be viewed as clues and guidelines, rather than laws and rules. While the data here are perhaps imperfect, they were still adequately valid to serve the purpose of this study and there was no evidence to doubt their credibility.

3.3 Concluding remarks

This study adopted a mixed methods approach combining quantitative and qualitative analysis to maximise the strength of both. While this study is, in principle, similar to CA, DA was chosen for this study as it suited better the wide range of areas for exploration.

There were three sets of data used: an L1 set of American English speakers, an L2 set of Chinese speaking learners of English, and an L2 set of Vietnamese speaking learners of English. The data were naturally occurring in classroom settings, with approximately 50,000 words each. The use of *some* was examined at both lexical and discourse levels. The frequency of *some* and its clusters revealed general patterns of

usage, and the pragmatic and strategic functions of *some* were uncovered from detailed information of how and why *some* was used in academic context. The methodology discussed in this chapter serves well the main purpose of this study: exploring the manifestation of elasticity of *some* in real-life data.

Chapter 4 *Some* and *Some* Clusters

The chapter provides a general picture of the linguistic behaviour of *some* in the data. It presents lexical and syntactic analyses of *some* and *some* clusters, including *some* groups viz. *something, sometimes, someone* and *somebody*.

4.1 *Some* clusters: lexical

This section presents data about the three most frequent *some* clusters: *and + some*, *but + some* and *in + some* as in Table 4.1.

Table 4.1: Frequencies of the three most frequent *some* clusters

Group / Item	L1SE		CSLE		VSLE		Total	
	Frequency	Percentage	Frequency	Percentage	Frequency	Percentage	Frequency	Percentage
and + some	0	0	9	37.5	15	62.5	24	100
but + some	0	0	4	28.6	10	71.4	14	100
in + some	10	25	7	17.5	23	57.5	40	100
Total	**10**		**20**		**48**			

Note: The frequency in this table, and all the following frequencies, are normalised for per 50,000 words.

As indicated in Table 4.1, L1SE sounds as though they were not interested in using *and*/*bu*t before *some* in their utterances. However, CSLE and VSLE used these two conjunctions before *some* to manage their conversation. They preferred *and + some* more than *but + some*. Regarding to using *in* before *some,* all three groups used this preposition: VSLE used twice as much as the other two groups. VSLE used all three *some* clusters more than the L1SE and CSLE groups. The L1SE group only preferred *in + some*, the CSLE mostly preferred *and + some*, and VSLE mostly used *in + some*. All three groups preferred *but + some* the least, suggesting that *some* is not usually an indicator of contrast in the flow of conversation.

The difference among the three groups is statistically significant (χ^2 [d.f.2, n = 78] = 29.846, p <0.01). The difference between L1SE and CSLE is not statistically

significant (χ^2 [d.f.1, n = 30] = 3.333, p = 0.06790291), while the difference is verified statistically between L1SE and VSLE (χ^2 [d.f.1, n = 58] = 24.897, $p < 0.01$). The difference between two groups of L2SE was also found to be statistically significant (χ^2 [d.f.1, n = 68] = 11.529, $p < 0.01$). This means that the L1 group and the Chinese are similar in using these three *some* clusters, but not between anyone else.

4.1.1 *And + some*

Table 4.2: Frequencies of *and + some*

Item	*and + some*			
Group	**L1SE**	**CSLE**	**VSLE**	**Total**
Frequency	0	9	15	24
Percentage	0	37.5	62.5	100
Chi-square test	L1SE and L2SE	χ^2 [d.f.2, n = 24] = 14.25, $p <0.01$		
	L1SE and CSLE	χ^2 [d.f.1, n = 9] = 9, $p < 0.01$		
	L1SE and VSLE	χ^2 [d.f.1, n = 15] = 15, $p < 0.01$		
	CSLE and VSLE	χ^2 [d.f.1, n = 24] = 1.5, $p = 0.22067136*$		

Note: * stands for 'not statistically significant'.

As Table 4.2 shows, L1SE did not use *and* before *some* in their interactions, whereas *and + some* is found in both CSLE's and VSLE's utterances, and the L1 and L2 difference is statistically significant. Among the two groups of L2SE, VSLE used *and + some* 1.7 times more than CSLE, but the difference is not statistically significant. This means that L2 learners use *and + some* similarly. The following examples are excerpts from the data, showing how *and + some* were employed by L2SE.

Extract 4. 1 (Chinese)

Context: This is an extract of a female student in a discussion on topic: What change has had the greatest influence on people's life in China since 1980?

Student 3: I think ¡- I think the most important factor to affect to change people's life is the open-door policy er open-door policy and mm people more and more people are accept the fashionable ways of foreign country, they er they moved er always go out and bring some new ideas into China, and er they all er bring er bring new ideas into China, er they will mm more and more people go abroad and accept accept high education, er *some people* go out *some and some people* er understand how to enjoy their lives during the daily life, they er such as go to karaoke or dancing place er and so on. (C:3:30)

In turn 3:30, student 3 asserts that the open door policy helps to change many aspects in Chinese society, for example, more people go overseas for higher education. Especially, people get to know how to enjoy things as going to karaoke. The conjunction *and* is used to connect two sentences with different leisure activities in current China i.e. *some people go out, some and some people er understand how to enjoy their lives during their daily life, they er such as go to karaoke or dancing place er and so on.* However, *people* is mentioned in both sentences showing it belongs to the group of changing their life style in response to modern influences. *Some* indicates 'a small amount' of people who go out and understand how to enjoy their life because of the open door policy. *Some* softens the tone of the speech to express a 'narrowed or restricted' generalization to indicate that a small number of people have adapted to the influences of the open door policy.

Extract 4. 2 (Vietnamese)

Context: Two female participants over two speaking turns. They are discussing about whether they believe the year 2012 is the end of the world or not.

S1: So, I see your point, [a name]. [A name], you tell, told us that you believe in that day, so what you have prepared for that day. (V:30:17)

S4: Ok, I have to prepare for food *and* *some* necessary things such as drink and other things, hmm hmm. That's all. (V:30:18)

Note: In this study, actual names have been replaced by [a name], for privacy protection in Vietnamese data. For English and Chinese data, names are kept as the original data provided.

Knowing that S4 believes that the end of the world does happen in 2012, S1 asks what S4 has prepared for that day in turn 30:17. In turn 30:18, S4 responds by briefly talking about her plan, i.e. preparing for food and *some* necessary things such as drink and other things. S4 might not have a clear plan for what she has to prepare as this is only imagining about a possible future disaster. Hence, the use of *some* helps the speaker to avoid giving the exact information. The nouns after the conjunction *and* represent closeness to the category of food, i.e. drink. Both of them relate to the necessary daily demands of people. However, the conjunction *and* is also used to connect two opposite expressions as follows:

Extract 4.3 (Vietnamese)

Context: Two participants over two speaking turns. They are discussing a reality TV program.

S2: Can you explain something about serious program? (V:21:92)

S1: Serious it means it's real, it give reality feeling and ridiculous it means it brings people *some funny, some jokes* and *some very boring jokes*. (V:21:93)

S1 is trying to explain what a serious program is in turn 21:93 in responding S2's question. According to S1, a serious program can bring *some funny, some jokes* and *some boring jokes* to an audience. The speaker connects two opposite meanings (*funny* vs *boring*) together using the conjunction *and*. In this case *some* simply gives the right information, as it is impossible and there is no need to give an exact number about jokes in this situation.

4.1.2 *But + some*

As opposed to *and + some*, *but + some* tends to signal a contrast in conversation. As shown in Table 4.3, the frequency of this cluster is less than *and + some*, suggesting that *some* occurred more in conjunction than dis-conjunction.

Table 4.3: Frequencies of *but + some*

Item	*but + some*			
Group	**L1SE**	**CSLE**	**VSLE**	**Total**
Frequency	--	4	10	14
Percentage	---	28.6	71.4	100
Chi-square test	L1SE and L2SE	χ^2 [d.f.2, n = 14] = 10.857, *p* < 0.01		
	L1SE and CSLE	χ^2 [d.f.1, n = 4] = 4, *p* = 0.04550026*		
	L1SE and VSLE	χ^2 [d.f.1, n = 10] = 10, *p* < 0.01		
	CSLE and VSLE	χ^2 [d.f.1, n = 14] = 2.571, *p* = 0.1*		

As Table 4.3 shows, L1SE again did not use *but + some* in their speech, while L2SE showed their interest in this cluster. VSLE employed this twice as much as CSLE. From the statistical perspective, the discrepancy between L1SE and L2SE is significant (*p* < 0.01), as is L1SE and VSLE, but not L1SE and CSLE. The difference between CSLE and VSLE is however not statistically meaningful, that is the two L2 groups behave similarly as they do in using *and + some*. The following two excerpts illustrate how the L2 speakers use *but + some* in the data.

Extract 4.4 (Chinese)
Context: Two participants (one male, one female) over two speaking turns. They are discussing the importance of family responsibility.

Teacher:	Ok, very good boss. Ok, Miss, er do you think the sense of responsibility is also important in your family life? (C:18:63)
Student 4:	… … So I, for me, I don't er I don't think I don't show any prejudices on the housewives. As they say, nowadays they encourage women er to go out for work, but for me I think this is just a choice, _some women_ mn are very good at making money. So it's ok. But _some, some kind of women_ er they are just, they want, they are just value their family very much. They want to be housewife. They want to care about their children and their husband. So it's ok also. So I think. Thank you. (C:18:62)

Asked about the importance of family responsibility, Student 4 asserts that the responsibility is important to build up the relationship amongst members in a family. She specifies how women show their responsibility differently in the family. _Some women_ are very good at earning money based on the trend of encouraging women working; but _some, some kind of women_ decide to do housework at home. _Some_ is used to make the generalizations about "opposing phenomena" (Ruzaitė, 2007a, p. 100) between the women who prefer working and the ones who are happy to take care of their family as housewives. Moreover, the hedge _kind of_ is added in Student 4's utterance to "lessen the degree of certainty and assertiveness of utterances" (Handford, 2010, p. 121). The _but_ helps to emphasize the opposite choices of women in the two sentences.

Extract 4.5 (Vietnamese)

Context: Two participants (one male, one female) over two speaking turns. They are discussing about the topic "your plan for future job".

S5: I have a question for you. Because do you, do you think we choose a job, a favourite job relying on our passion or only for money? What do you think about this? (V:16:34)

S1: Yah, I think it is a very relative question. I think it depends on what, what kind hmm of job in a thinking of people. You know sometimes hmm _some people_

> think that money is too important even it's the most important in his or her life hmm _but some people_ think that a good teacher maybe better than a rich people. It depends. (V:16:35)

In responding to the question about choosing a favourite job based on passion or on money, S1 replies that it depends on each individual's choice instead of picking one of the given choices. She uses *but* to connect two sentences to emphasis the opposite selection between two groups, one prefers money and the other focuses on passion. However, it is impossible to clarify how many people there are in each group, hence *some* is used to avoid giving a precise number of people choosing their job for passion or money.

Overall, in this data *and some* is used to express both similar and opposite utterances, whereas *but some* only appears in the opposite expression. There is a significant difference in the frequency of using *and some* and *but some* between L1SE and L2SE, as L1SE never uses the conjunction + *some* in their classroom communication. On the other hand, the Chinese and Vietnamese students do not differ much in their use of the two *some* clusters.

4.1.3 *In + some*

The cluster *in + some* is a combination of a preposition + *some*, rather than a conjunction + *some* (*and*/*but* + *some*) as discussed previously.

Table 4.4: Frequencies of *in + some*

Item	*in + some*			
Group	**L1SE**	**CSLE**	**VSLE**	**Total**
Frequency	10	7	23	40
Percentage	25	17.5	57.5	100
Chi-square test	L1SE and L2SE	χ^2 [d.f.2, n = 40] = 10.85, $p < 0.01$		

	L1SE and CSLE	χ^2 [d.f.1, n = 17] = 0.529, p = 0.46702758*
	L1SE and VSLE	χ^2 [d.f.1, n = 33] = 5.121, p = 0.02363799*
	CSLE and VSLE	χ^2 [d.f.1, n = 30] = 8.533, p <0.01

Table 4.4 reveals that *in + some* is the only cluster that is popular in all three groups, with even the L1 group this time showed interests in using it. VSLE used this cluster three times as often as CSLE, and more than twice as often as L1SE. The differences among the three groups are statistically significant, but not between L1SE and each group of L2SE. Different from the previous two *some* clusters, this time for the first time there is a statistical significance between the two L2 groups: CSLE and VSLE differ in using *in + some*. The following three excerpts demonstrate how this cluster is used in the data.

Extract 4.6 (English)

Context: Two participants (one teacher, one student) over two turn-takings. They are discussing Brenda, senior manager of Hauser Foods being ambitious to boost the sales in the company.

T1: Come up with some creative ideas and we'll reconvene in a few minutes. (L1:1:229)

S25: I think basically, in order to make the company happy Brenda needs to, stimulate sales overall, and, the biggest problem is, that people aren't happy with, compensation, uh regarding their new idea I mean, in order to stimulate sales overall we need to get new idea- ideas, and so, she needs to reallocate, the bonus of the system I think, *in some way* to get, a lot more, bonus on, on not necessarily, being a plan as much as having new ideas to stimulate sales. Because that way, it should just be a downfall. There're n- there should be a, like a waterfall effect. If if everyone understands, the new ideas. (L1:1:230)

In turn 1: 230, S25 suggests that stimulating sales in general could bring happiness to staff in the company. She suggests that Brenda, the senior manager, should reallocate the bonus system *in some way* to receive more bonus. S25 could not give detailed plans of how Brenda should reallocate the bonus system, as S25 might not have the professional knowledge in planning the bonus system. In the other words, S25 might be aware of the risk of giving a wrong opinion about how to reallocate the bonus system. Hence, S25 uses *some* as a shield of self-protection. It is also possible that S25 might not want to enumerate the ways to rearrange the bonus system as according to her, it is not necessary. S25 uses *some* to give the right amount information that suits this situation.

Extract 4.7 (Chinese)

Context: Two participants (both female) over two speaking-turns. They are discussing t the most popular hobby of their classmates.

Teacher: Thank you. Now, [a name]*, er, what's the most popular hobby of your classmates? (C:2:33)

Student 2: My classmate, er, I think I think it should be such as means surfing the internet. Er I think er *in some in some way* it is it is a good hobby, but *sometimes sometimes* we er there are many advantage there are many advantages just as I have said just now. But it also have many disadvantages such as such as er many of my classmates just can't set aside appropriate time for ball study and surfing the net er maybe er our study will be affected affected a lot. Er chatting chatting internet can make a lot of friends, but er after all it isn't very realistic. Er maybe we are er, how to say, er I think I think if we can make good deal of the time may contribute to the to our hobby such as surfing the net. Er that it we can benefit a lot from our hobbies. (C:2:34)

Note: * In the original Chinese data, *** was used. In this thesis, [a name] is used instead of *** for consistency with the Vietnamese data.

The most popular hobby of classmates, according to Student 2, is to surf the internet. In turn 2:34, she confirms that surfing the internet is a good hobby *in some way* and

it *sometimes* has many advantages as she mentioned above (she presented the advantages of the internet in other part of this oral test). Both *in some way* and *sometimes* are used immediately in the sentences after S2 chooses surfing the internet as one of the popular hobbies of her classmates. She might be aware that her choice is controversial as surfing the internet may have many disadvantages, as mentioned by S2 in the latter part of her utterance. Even though S2's English is not perfect (e.g. repeating the same word a lot), she still manages to use suitable vague words and expresses her ideas reasonably.

Extract 4.8 (Vietnamese)

Context: Two female students over two speaking turns. They are discussing whether smokers should receive free treatment for illness caused by smoking.

S2: *In some countries*, I am doing a research and I need more information. Yes, *in some countries* in the world, health service is free, some people think that smokers shouldn't get free treatment for smoking related illnesses because they are slowly harming themselves. What do you think about this? (V:11:3)

S3: Hmm, I think people should get free treatment if the smokers, you know that people smoke when they are in bad mood when there are some, when they are stress and smoking is a way to reduce their stress. Nowadays, with and as you know, nowadays with the development of mass media, every-, everyone know the, know the, know that smoking isn't good for the health but *in some, in some mountainous remote areas* in ethnic group, people smoke a lot and smoking is a custom. Yes. If, if they don't receive the free treatment, they don't have enough money, they and they stay at home and more and more they will, they will smoke more and more and they will become addicted cigarettes and they become tuberculous and they, they effect to people around. (V:11:4)

S2 asks S3's opinion on whether smokers should get free treatment for illnesses caused by smoking even in those countries where health services are free. *In some countries* appears twice in turn 11:3, which could be because S2 might not know the name of the countries with free health services. In turn 11:4, S3 raises another issue

that even though people are aware that smoking is not good for their health, smoking is a traditional custom "*in some, in some mountainous remote areas* in ethnic group". It sounds as though S3 found it difficult to get the correct words to express her idea, so *in some* is repeated twice. *Some* in this turn has a similar function with *some* in turn 11:3, S3 might not know the name of those areas. The cluster *in some* in turn 11: 3 and 11:4 is used as a means to provide the right amount of information, as the speakers may not know the precise information.

4.1.4 Other *some* clusters

In addition to the three *some* clusters previously discussed, there are other less frequently occurring *some* clusters in the data as well. For example, the CSLE used *some group work* (17 times), *some ideas of* (14 times), *some part time job* (11 times), while the other two groups did not use them much at all. Conversely, the L1S used *some kinds of* six times and the VSLE 10 times, but not at all by the CSLE. This shows that there are different trends of *some* cluster use amongst the three groups. The following excerpts illustrate how the above mentioned *some* clusters were used in the data.

Extract 4.9 (Chinese)

Context: One teacher with one speaking turn. This extract is from the discussion of the topic: how to ensure that elderly people live a happy life?

Teacher: Right. Now we all have <u>*some ideas of*</u> the choices that elderly people can make concerning their way of living. I'd like you to discuss this topic further and say something on how to ensure that elderly people live a happy life. During the discussion, you may argue with each other or ask each other questions to clari- make your point clear. You will have about 4 and half minutes for the discussion. Ok. (C:8:22)

The cluster of *some ideas of* only occurred in CSLE data. The teacher used it after students gave their general opinions on the topic, and before they moved to a more

detailed discussion. This cluster, which was only used by the teachers (14 times), was a popular phrase for facilitators to shift the discussion phases.

In Excerpt 4.9, *some* in *some ideas of* strengthens the tone of speech of the teacher to reassure the students that they now have ideas about the elderly people's choices in their living. *Some* appears as an intensifying stretcher (Zhang, 2015) for strengthening purposes. It may also deliver appreciation to the students: the teacher appreciates all the ideas contributed by the students in previous parts of discussion.

Extract 4.10 (Chinese)

Context: Three participants over three speaking turns. This is an introduction part of an oral examination.

Student 2: En my name is [a name], and my major is Tech-communications
Engineering. And I I'd like to meet all of you. (C: 1: 14)
Student 3: My name is [a name], and I am a sophomore. My major is Vehicle and
Transportation Engineer. Now I I like English very much. (C: 1: 15)
Teacher 4: Ok. Now that we know each other, we can do *some group work*. Ok,
first of all, I'd like to ask each of you a question, Ok? Now again
from [a name], yes. Where do you usually get the latest news, from
newspapers, the radio, TV, or the internet, why? (C: 1: 16)

In turn 1:16, after the students' introduction, the teacher instructs them to proceed with the next part of the oral test. By using *some group work*, the teacher avoids enumerating how much group works will be done. The teacher's focus is the type of speaking rather than the quantity; or perhaps the teacher wants to leave some freedom for students to decide how long the group work will be.

Extract 4.11 (Chinese)

Context: Two participants over two speaking turns. They are discussing part-time jobs for students.

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Teacher: Erm, Mr. [a surname] do you think it is useful for students to do part-time jobs? (C: 12: 14)

Student 2: Mm in my opinion, mm a student went out and do *some part-time jobs* is very necessary mm because mm through this part-time job he can get *some informations* mm in the society and accept a lot of new things and he can make them mm make them get *some* mm... improve themselves. And most of us friend to mm out and do *some part-time jobs* when we-we in grade one. (C: 12: 15)

Student 2 says that part-time jobs are useful for students. The use of *some part-time jobs* twice refer to an unspecified quantity. It appears that the speaker is not after a precise quantity here, a vague amount serves quite adequately. This is in line with what Jucker et al., argue: a vague word "may carry more relevant contextual implications than would a precise expression" (2003, p. 1737). Even when the speaker is interested in an exact number, he or she may not be able to specify one, given many kinds of part-time jobs available, and more importantly *some* can be more relevant than a precise number in this situation. The explanation for *some part-time jobs* is also relevant for *some information*. The speaker also uses *some* without associating it with any other word in turn 12:15. This *some* functions as a discourse management device, for self-repair in particular, helping the speaker to find the right words.

Extract 4.12 (Vietnamese)

Context: Three female students over three speaking turns. This is a conversation about the difficulties when starting a new life at university.

S1:   Now is the end of April, in the next two months, we have we have faced the, an important exam and in the September the life of us will changing and we are going go with, going to the new world and the world you haven't met before. So what do you think about the life of the students in the university life? (V:4:1)

S2:	I think it is surely about a complicated life because as far as the time you have to live far from their parents. So you have to learn how to deal with difficulties by yourself because maybe you can highly get any help from other people. (V:4:2)
S3:	Moreover, from now on we can live far from parents so you have private money in order to manage throughout the month we should learn how to use your money effect… effectively. Besides, we can also look for *some part-time jobs*, almost students in the university have part-time job, because it's one way to earn living, part-time job. (V:4:3)

Three students are talking about how their lives are going to change when they enter the university in the next few months. S3 recommends doing part-time jobs to pay for living costs. However, the category of part-time job is not given, because each student might choose different kinds of part-time job based on their interests and skills. Therefore, a precise number of part-time jobs is problematic to estimate. *Some part-time jobs* serves the 'go just-right' maxim for giving the right amount of information to the listener (Zhang, 2011, 2015).

Extract 4.13 (English)

Context: Three participants (one teacher and two students) over four speaking turns. This is a discussion about a bonus system in sales for baby food.

T1:	So therefore, if we find out, that there's an elderly market for baby food, maybe we won't keep it to ourselves because if the whole region increases in sales, we get a bigger bonus other thoughts? What else might you do for the bonus system? Good Jessica? (L1:1:288)
(… …)	
S2:	We're talking for, as far as bonuses instead of each year, your growth, your your sales have to be like ten percent more in order to, to to get a bonus, instead make it, based on, a the average economic growth, in the in_ as a whole I- in the economy and on that you get the bonus not based on like_ so you, you're taking away from like, if you do really well this year, you have

> to do even better next year this way it's more like you're doing well, and each, it it's independent almost. (L1:1:291)
>
> T1: So there's _some kind of_ objective criterion that we're linking, the reward to, right? We're gonna look at general, economic conditions, Adam, wha-? (L1:1:292)
>
> S26: Um, Daniel mentioned when we were talking, about stock options, I thought that was a really good idea, to increase uh, kind of awareness of the company as a whole. (L1:1:293)

In turn 1:291, S2 suggests that the bonus could be based on the average economic growth and be dependent on the consumption every year. In trying to summarize S2's idea before asking another student to contribute, the teacher uses _some_ in _some kind of objective criterion_, indicating tentativeness that may serve the functions such as self-protection (in case S2 does not agree with teacher's generalization) and elicitation (encouraging students to join in the conversation). Noticeably, _kind of_ is vague itself functioning to soften the tone of speech. By using twice the number of vague words _some kind of_, the teacher seems to mitigate his/her tone of speech and suggests that the notion of _objective criterion_ is not a standard one.

Extract 4.14 (Vietnamese)

Context: Two female students over seven speaking turns. They are discussing love.

S4: Which want would you choose a person who love you or a person who you love? (V:10:27)

S3: To be what? (V:10:28)

S4: To be … (V:10:29)

S3: To be the rest of your life. (V:10:30)

S4: Yes. (V:10:31)

S3: It depends on that person if they love me or not. (V:10:32)

S4: Wow, with a person who love you then you have that person's love but you might not love him then it would be _some kinds of_ disaster [S3: but for a

---

> person who you love] I think it's much happier than love the one who doesn't love you. (V:10:33)

In turn 10:33, in a discussion about which person you should choose, the one who loves you or the one you love, S4 gives her support to the idea of being in a relationship with the one you love. She explains that you might not love a person who loves you; therefore being with that person is *some kinds of* disaster. S4 sounds somewhat unsure about the correct words to express what a person feels in this situation. *Some* in *some kinds of disaster* may be used to tone down the degree of severity of a disaster, or a marker of a non-standard notion used here for what is a 'disaster'. Although the notion is not precisely a standard one, the speaker assumes that the listener will understand that the feeling is hurtful similar to the impact of a *disaster*.
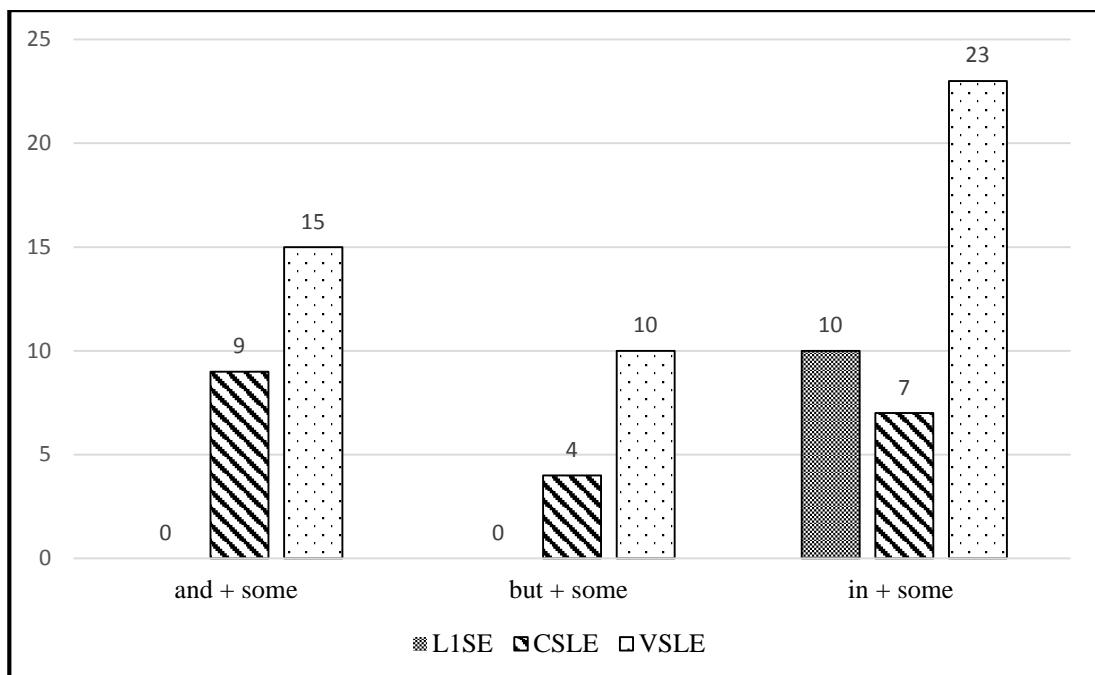
Figure 4.1: Overall frequencies of *some* clusters: at lexical level

Figure 4.1 shows the overall frequency of three most frequently used *some* clusters at the lexical level. L1SE only used *in + some* in their interactions, whereas L2SE used all three *and + some*, *but + some* and *in + some* in their talks. L2SE used more conjunctions before *some* than L1SE, especially the VSLE who use the most in the data.

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4.2 *Some* clusters: syntactic

Some- clusters appears in L1SE's and L2SE's data with four syntactic types, as shown in Table 4.5.

Table 4.5: Frequencies of *some* clusters at syntactic level

Group Item	L1SE		CSLE		VSLE		Total	
	Frequency	Percentage	Frequency	Percentage	Frequency	Percentage	Frequency	Percentage
some + noun	41	12.35	144	43.37	147	44.28	332	100
some + noun phrase	41	18.22	103	45.78	81	36	225	100
verb + *some*	43	14.15	169	55.59	92	30.26	304	100
some of + noun/ noun phrase	18	54.55	8	24.24	7	21.21	33	100
Total	143		424		327			

As can be seen in Table 4.5, CSLE were the most frequent users of *some* clusters at the syntactic level (424 occurrences) and L1SE used the least (143 occurrences), VSLE stood in the middle with 327 occurrences. CSLE used *some* clusters three times as many times as L1SE and 1.3 times as much as VLSE. There were four types of *some* clustering: *some* + noun (N), *some* + noun phrase (NP), verb + *some*, and *some* of + N/NP. Compared with other two groups, the L1SE were more interested in using *some* of + N/NP, VSLE used more of *some* + N, and CSLE used more of *some* + NP and verb + *some*. Overall, L2SE expressed their preference in using these clusterings of *some* much more than L1SE.

Regarding the Chi-Square test results, the different use of *some* clusters at the syntactic level is statistically meaningful significant (χ^2 [d.f.2, n = 894] = 136.718, *p* <0.01) among the three groups. The same results were found between L1SE and CSLE (χ^2 [d.f.1, n = 567] = 139.261, *p* <0.01), between L1SE and VSLE (χ^2 [d.f.1, n = 470] = 72.034, *p* < 0.01) and between the two groups of L2SE (χ^2 [d.f.1, n = 751] = 12.529, *p* < 0.01).

Table 4.5 shows that the L1SE were consistent in applying *some* clusters in their talks, with similar frequencies of *some* + N, *some* + NP, and verb + *some*. On the contrary, L2SE were somewhat inconsistent in their frequencies in using the four *some* clusters, for example they use much fewer *some of* + N/NP, compared with the other three groups. Lack of language competence may contribute to this phenomenon, as L2 speakers may have limited in language varieties.

4.2.1 *Some* + noun

This section presents the frequencies of *some* + N, comprising *some* + mass (uncountable) noun, *some* + countable noun, and *some* + people noun.

Table 4.6: Frequencies of *some* + noun

Item	*some* + noun			
Group	**L1SE**	**CSLE**	**VSLE**	**Total**
Frequency	41	144	147	332
Percentage	12.35	43.37	44.28	100
Chi-Square test	L1SE and L2SE	χ^2 [d.f.2, n =332] = 65.825, *p* <0.01		
	L1SE and CSLE	χ^2 [d.f.1, n =185] = 57.346, *p* <0.01		
	L1SE and VSLE	χ^2 [d.f.1, n =188] = 59.766, *p* <0.01		
	CSLE and VSLE	χ^2 [d.f.1, n = 291] = 0.031, *p* = 0.86024039*		

Table 4.6 shows that the total use of *some* + N was 332 times by all three groups. VSLE had the highest use of *some* + N, CSLE ranked second. The least were the L1SE who used *some* + N 3.5 times less compared with CSLE and VSLE. In percentage terms, the frequency of N following *some* amounts to 12.35% for L1SE, 43.37% for CSLE, and 42.28% for VSLE.

The results of the Chi-Square tests revealed that the difference among L1SE, CSLE and VSLE is statistically significant in their use of *some* + N. However, there is no statistical significance for the difference between CSLE and VSLE. This means that the L1s and L2s are different, but not within the two L2 groups.

Table 4.7: Frequencies of *some* + mass noun

Item	*some* + **mass noun**			
Group	**L1SE**	**CSLE**	**VSLE**	**Total**
Frequency	5	21	20	46
Percentage	10.87	45.65	43.48	100
Chi-Square test	L1SE and L2SE	χ^2 [d.f.2, n =46] =10.478, $p < 0.01$		
	L1SE and CSLE	χ^2 [d.f.1, n =26] = 9.846, $p < 0.01$		
	L1SE and VSLE	χ^2 [d.f.1, n =25] = 9, p < 0.01		
	CSLE and VSLE	χ^2 [d.f.1, n =41] = 0.024, p = 0.87688491*		

Table 4.7 illustrates that L1SE and L2SE used 46 occurrences of *some* + mass noun in total in which there was an opposite trend between L1SE and L2SE. CSLE and VSLE had nearly the same frequency of *some* + mass noun: 21 and 20 respectively. In contrast, only 5 occurrences were found in L1SE's data. *Some* + mass noun appeared in L2SE's talks more than four times as often as it occurred in L1SE's data.

Regarding to the results of Chi-Square test, there is a statistically significance for the difference in the use of *some* + mass noun between L1SE and L2SE; between L1SE and CSLE; and between L1SE and VSLE. However, there is no statistically significant difference between CSLE and VSLE. The following excerpts demonstrate how the cluster of *some* + mass noun were used in the data.

Extract 4.15 (English)
Context: Five speakers (a teacher and four students) over seven speaking turns.

The participants try to find out what the senior management of Hauser Foods in Atlanta needs to do for their job security.

S32: Um they complain about the amount of time they have, because they have to fill out so much_ so many papers for those people in Atlanta, they say they don't have enough time to actually do the job they're supposed to be doing. (L1:1:137)

T1: So, like, you want, time, free alright, they want their freedom and, God this paperwork is an annoyance, other things, Chaitanya? (L1:1:138)

S18: They wanna keep their jobs secure because they're not sure that they'd be earning the same kind of money, that their, education (L1:1:139)

T1: So, they want *some security* there, Supriya? (L1:1:140)

S19: They care more for the betterment of their team than the company. (L1:1:141)

T1: Aha, so let's preserve the welfare of the team before the company. Petro? (L1:1:142)

S20: *I think* it's actually they want control over the sales plan because, they're they're you know going crazy over why, over over why they might lose their jobs and, and if they just had *some input* into the plan, cuz there's a disconnect between what the executives want and what they deliver, [T1: uhuh] so if they had *some sort of* a say, in what, you know projections should be maybe, they won't have to worry that much. (L1:1:143)

In Extract 4.15, S18 gives a reason why the senior management in Atlanta needs security. In turn 1:140, the teacher repeats S18's ideas before asking for opinions from other students. T1 summarizes the student's opinion by using *some security*, where *security* is a mass noun. *Some* in *some security* "is contrasted with zero quantity" and expresses "a greater than expected quantity" from the speaker (Duffley & Larrivée, 2012, p. 140).

In turn 1:143, S20 starts with an epistemic stretcher *I think* (Zhang, 2015) and later adds another epistemic stretcher *might* to soften the tone of his/her speech with the purpose of self-protection when giving reasons why the senior management wants control over the sales plan. These vague words help to shield S20 from the risk of argument with his/her attitude (Channell, 1994; Jucker et al., 2003; Ruzaitė, 2007a;

Trappes-Lomax, 2007). The quantity stretcher *some* in *some input* conforms to the maxim of 'go just-right' to provide the right information (Zhang, 2011), because it is unnecessary to specify how much input they might have into the plan. Also, *some input* can be used as a strategy to assert that the amount of input is "contrasted with zero quantity" (Duffley & Larrivée, 2012, p. 140) which could be used to express a small amount of input and/or as an evading strategy to avoid mentioning the exact kind of input in the utterance.

S20 continues the turn with two more vague expressions: *some* and *sort of*. This reveals the greater effort (using double softeners) of the speaker to present a hedged speech. *Some* functions here as a mitigating strategy to soften the tone of expression "so that they do not appear too direct or unduly authoritative and assertive" (Carter & McCarthy, 2006, p. 202). Similarly *sort of*, according to Jucker et al. (2003), is a downtowner with the purpose of softening the tone of speech. It makes the interpretation of *a say* blurry, reflecting the speaker's uncertainty (Zhang 2015, p. 21). *Sort of* implies a speaker's tentativeness if the words *sort of* modifying it is apt (Kay, 2004, p. 700). *Sort of* can be a softener or a discourse particle (Aijmer 2002), a quantity stretcher or a quality (general) stretcher (Zhang, 2015, p. 87). It seems that *some sort of* in Extract 4.15 is more of a quality modifier, rather than a quantity modifier.

Extract 4.16 (Chinese)

Context: Two speakers (one examiner and one student) over two speaking turns. The discussion topic is scholarships.

Teacher: Ok, Mr. [a surname], it is your turn. (C:12:29)

Student 2:   In my picture I can see mm a college students mm was write an application for scholarship. It is a way for a students get *some money* from a, from the college. Mm I can see he his mark is very good, and he got several A mm in his mm examination. I think it is a good way for students to applicate for scholarship but you should study very hard and pay more time mm than other students. (C:12:30)

The student talks about a university student who was filling in an application form for a scholarship. *Some money* is a *some* + mass noun cluster, was used here because the amount of the scholarship is not shown in the picture, so the precise amount is not available to the speaker, or it may be unimportant to know. VL such as *some* + *money* indicates "a low degree of certainty" of the speaker (Zhang, 2015, p. 33).

Extract 4.17 (Vietnamese)

Context: Four students over six speaking turns. They are discussing fashion.

S3: Can you say it again, say it again? (V:23:48)

S6: Yah, I think you will go to the market with your friends not your mother? (V:23:49)

S2: Boyfriends? (V:23:50)

S6: No, your friends, not boyfriends. It means your friends will have *some advice* for you, to you and you will have many, many choices when you get clothes so do you think it's, do you think it's great for you? (V:23:51)

S2: I, I often go to market with my mother not, not friends, [the group: yeah] my mother is the, is the fashion woman. (V:23:52)

S1: It's amazing (V:23:53)

In Extract 4.17, S6 assumes that S2 would go shopping with his friends, as he can have many choices to choose clothes by getting *some advice* from them in turn 23:51. In this situation, it is impossible for S6 to clarify any specific advice, thus S6 choose to use *some* to avoid a precise explanation. However, S2 surprises the listeners by saying that he often goes shopping with his mother.

Table 4.8: Frequencies of *some* + countable noun

Item	*some* + **countable noun**			
Group	L1SE	CSLE	VSLE	Total
Frequency	36	123	127	286
Percentage	12.59	43	44.41	100
Chi-Square test	L1SE and L2SE	χ2 [d.f.2, n =286] = 55.476, p <0.01		
	L1SE and CSLE	χ2 [d.f.1, n =159] = 47.604, p <0.01		
	L1SE and VSLE	χ2 [d.f.1, n =163] = 50.804, p <0.01		
	CSLE and VSLE	χ2 [d.f.1, n =250] = 0.064, p = 0.80028196*		

Table 4.8 shows a difference between L1SE and L2SE in using *some* + countable noun and is confirmed by the statistical test results, which is in the same pattern with *some* + mass noun. L2SE were more keen on using *some* + countable noun than the L1s. L2SE used *some* + countable noun more than three times as often as L1SE. The difference between CSLE and VSLE, however, is more or less the same again (similar to *some* + mass noun), with no meaningful statistical significance shown in the table. The following excerpts demonstrate how *some* + countable noun are used in the data.

Extract 4.18 (English)
Context: Two participants (one teacher and one student) over seven turn speaking. This conversation is about the Song of Deborah.

T1: So take another look at the Song of Deborah you don't think so? Um, with you know with that in mind, because the Song of Deborah elaborates *some things*. It's a high song it's a great song it's a heroic song. We'll talk about the Song of Deborah *some more*, and then we'll get into Jephthah's daughter and Beth is going to talk to us. Right? On rape next time? (L1:5:86)

S2: Yeah, on Valentine's Day. (L1:5:87)

T1: Pardon me? (L1:5:88)

S2: On Valentine's Day I'm talking about rape. (L1:5:89)

T1: Ah yes. I hadn't made that connection. (It's true.) (L1:5:90)

S2: Happy Valentine's Day everybody. (L1:5:91)

T1: So I will show you *some slides* because we have *some great slides*. Not so many. But they're really very fine. So, you know we talk about women, in the prophetic tradition. And it's there. Do you like the story of Deborah? (L1:5:92)

In turn 5:86, the teacher mentions that the Song of Deborah elaborates *some things*, where *things* is a countable noun. The teacher uses *some things*, because at this point the teacher does not want to say what these *things* are, he uses the underspecified term to encourage students to comment on it instead. The teacher then continues not to confirm what they will talk about: *we'll talk about the Song of Deborah some more*. *Some more* is an approximation, as there is no need to give a precise time period here. Both vague clusters suit the communicative purpose of eliciting students' ideas.

In turn 5: 91, the teacher uses *some slides* and *some great slides* (countable noun) to give the right amount of information, because students may not want to know precisely how many slides will be played. The use of VL here may also be a strategy for arousing students' curiosity: the teacher may only want to inform students about the slides, but not the number of slides, to motivate them to look forward to watching the *great slides*.

Extract 4.19 (Chinese)

Context: Two participants (one teacher and one student) over two speaking turns. They are talking about the problems of the internet.

Teacher: That's OK, right. Now we all have some idea of various kinds of mass media, right? Yes. I'd like you to discuss this topic further and see if you can agree on which is the best way to get the latest news, yes? …

… (C:1:33)

(… …)

Student 1: Yeah. En another problem of internet _I think_ is that nowadays there are many fake news on internet since people have can not judge can not judge which news true or false. So we should pay attention to this problem and en _some_ _I think_ the the China should make _some rules_ to strengthen the control of the internet news on this on this point. And I'd like to ask a question since com en what do you think of advantage of radio since compared with TV, you can not see the the person or see the whole whole things, and compared with newspaper en newspaper is cheap, and compared with internet internet is faster. So what do you think of the advantage of radio? Maybe it should be en en maybe it is out of date. What do you think of that? (C:1:38)

In turn 1:33, the teacher asks students to discuss the best way to get the latest news. Student 1 mentions fake news on the Internet in turn 1:38, and suggests that _some rules_ (countable noun) should be enforced for that. The student is proposing a general idea, so may not have an exact number to offer, thus a vague term is more appropriate here. After the first _some_, the speaker does some self-repair, then repeats _some_ for the second time and by then the proper phrase is found by the speaker.

In turn1:38, the student also uses _I think_ twice for "mitigating the assertive tone" (Blum-Kulka, House & Kasper, 1989; Rue & Zhang, 2008; Zhang, 2015, p. 34). The second _I think_ also functions to lengthen the time for the speaker to search for words to finish the sentence. The student takes more time for cognitive processing due to somewhat inadequate competence in the language by pausing when using _some_ and adding the second _I think_ in the utterance.

Extract 4.20 (Vietnamese)

Context: Group of speakers over five speaking turns. They are discussing who tells more lies: men or women.

> T1:   Who tells more lie? Man? (V:24:49)
>
> The boys: No (V:24:50)
>
> The girls: Man, man, man, man. (V:24:51)
>
> T1:   Ok, man. Tell me why? (V:24:52)
>
> S3:   When a man returns from the office, and they have, they have _some parties_ with friends and when he comes back to his house. The wife asks hmm "Where did you go? Tell me, where did you go?", "Oh oh, I work in the office" oh oh. (V:24:53)

In the discussion of who tells more lies, men or women, S3 mentions an example to support the idea that men tell more lies in turn 24:53. For instance, a husband tells his wife that he has to work in the office when he goes home late. Actually, he joins *some parties* with his friends after work. *Some parties* (countable noun) is vague but nobody complains, as the exact nature or number of the parties is not required here. Even if it was required, the student would not be able to specify the nature and the number of the parties, because she is talking about a general situation rather than a specific case. The speaker might not plan to identify which parties the husbands go to, all she wants is to lead the listeners' attention to the behaviour of going out to parties after work. The vague term serves well in this situation, as both a quantity and quality stretcher (Zhang, 2015).

Table 4.9: Frequencies of *some* + people noun

Item	*some* + people noun			
Group	**L1SE**	**CSLE**	**VSLE**	**Total**
Frequency	7	35	57	99
Percentage	7.07	35.35	57.58	100
Chi-Square test	L1SE and L2SE	χ^2 [d.f.2, n =99] = 38.061, $p < 0.01$		
	L1SE and CSLE	χ^2 [d.f.1, n =42] = 18.667, $p < 0.01$		
	L1SE and VSLE	χ^2 [d.f.1, n =64] = 39.063, $p < 0.01$		

	CSLE and VSLE	χ^2 [d.f.1, n =92] = 5.261, p = 0.02180848*

As Table 4.9 shows, there is a remarkable difference between L1SE and L2SE in using *some* + people noun, such as *some* students, *some* teachers, etc. It is noticeable that L1SE rarely used this cluster, while the cluster is common in L2SE's communication. VSLE used this cluster the most, about eight times as much as L1SE, and 1.6 times as much as CSLE. The difference is statistically significant between L1SE and L2SE, between L1SE and CSLE, and between L1SE and VSLE. Again, like *some* + mass noun and *some* + countable noun, there is no statistically meaningful difference between CSLE and VSLE. This reinforces the similarity between the two L2 groups in using *some* + noun. The following excerpts demonstrate how *some* + people noun have been used in the data.

Extract 4.21 (English)

Context: Two speakers (one teacher and one student) over two speaking turns. They are discussing anti-pornography legislation.

T1:   Okay. Um, who, somebody else had their hand up over here Allison, no? okay. [S15: just] yes Molly. (L1:2:254)

S15: Not about that but I wan- I I don't know if this um, is taking us where we wanna go but, [T1: mhm] I really wanna talk about this idea of like, w- how feminists and right-wing activists are like on this same [T1: mhm, yeah] like, you know *some feminists* and, [T1: right] lots of right-wing activists are on the same plank for, anti-pornography [T1: mhm] legislation and I think that's really interesting cuz like what are the, [T1: mhm] discussing what are the benefits of, anti-pornography legislation [T1: mhm] you know what do we really think, that's doing, I mean I don't know know if that helps us. (L1:2:255)

S15 gives his/her opinion about anti-pornography legislation in turn 2:255, where *some feminists* refers to an unspecified number of feminists who are against pornography legislation. *Some* is used here in contrast with *lots of*, indicating that the speaker suggests 'a small number' for the former. *Some feminists* might be a contrast

here, "the possibility of this type of contrastive impression exists only with plural and mass nouns" (Duffley & Larrivée, 2012, p.144). *Some feminists* in this case pulls a small subset of feminists who are anti-pornography out of the total category. Additionally, this leads to the possible contrast of these feminists with the rest of the category of feminists because the speaker cannot confirm that all feminists are anti-pornography.

Extract 4.22 (Chinese)

Context: Two female students over five speaking turns. They are discussing Eastern and Western festivals in China.

Student 1: Yes, I said that Spring Festival is the most important but the Christmas is getting more and more important. (C:7:47)

Student 3: But my point is that mm the Christmas is already subsided the subsided the mm Spring Festival. (C:7:48)

Student 1: I don't agree with you. Because you you can always see there are *some students* and I think not a small part mm but a *I think* a middle part the students still study in the reading room on the Christmas eve. (C:7:49)

Student 3: But there are still many students on Spring Festival. (C:7:50)

Student 1: O we all come back home and have the reunion with my family with our families. (C:7:51)

Student 1 shows her disagreement with Student 3's opinion about whether Christmas is superseding the Spring Festival in China in turn 7:49. S1 argues that the students still study in the reading room on Christmas Eve. *Some students* (people noun) is used as a confirmation of a number of students in the reading room. Immediately after using the *some* cluster, S1 stresses that the number indicated by *some students* is not small, around 50%. This uncovers the fluidity of the interval of *some*, varying from a small quantity to a bigger number. S1 could not estimate how many students there are in the reading room, but her expectation is that it is not a small number of students.

Some may also be a tone of appreciation as *some* students still work hard on Christmas' Eve. This supports Duffley and Larrivée's (2012) finding that *some* also presents an appreciative tone (p. 138). *Some students* in this example performs both quantity and quality functions: an unspecified number of students and an appreciative tone regarding students. By adding the epistemic stretcher *I think* in turn 7: 49, S1 is trying to increase the illocutionary force in order to strengthen her argument against the idea that Christmas is becoming popular in China.

Extract 4.23 (Vietnamese)

Context: Three speakers over eight speaking turns. They are discussing dating in high school.

S5: Yes, *some* uh *some girls* are in love with many, many men and [. (V:24:59)

S2: [Laugh) Like [a name] (V:24:60)

S5: Yes, and *some girls*, they tell lie to seduce. (V:24:61)

S4: Seduce… haha (C:24:62)

S5: *Some, some* men to fall in love with her to provide her with money. (V:24:63)

S2: You [laugh). You look the bad, you look to the bad side. (V:24:64)

S5: *Some, some* and everything and when they satisfy, she breaks up with him. (V:24:65)

S2: Boys also seduce girls. Of course. (V:24:66)

In this extract, the participants are discussing how high school students look for a relationship. *Some* is a common word for S5 who uses it in every turn in this extract. The use of *some* in this situation appears to express "a more limited applicability" (Ruzaitė, 2007a, p. 99). *Some* here performs as a quantifier to express "a small amount", a "narrowed or restricted" generalization (Ruzaitė, 2007a, p. 100). S5 repeats *some* twice in turns 24: 63 and 24:65, perhaps because she is having difficulty searching for words.

The data show that *some* can combine with various kinds of nouns (mass nouns, countable nouns, people nouns). The difference in the number of uses *some* + noun

between L1SE and L2SE is statistically significant. There is also a statistically significant difference between L1SE and each group of L2SE (CSLE and VSLE, respectively). However, between the two groups within L2SE (CSLE and VSLE), the difference was not found to be statistically significant.

4.2.2 *Some* + **noun phrases**

This section discusses the frequency of *some* + NP amongst three groups, including adjective + noun which is commonly used in the data.

Table 4.10: Frequencies of *some* + noun phrase

Item	*Some* + **noun phrase**			
Group	**L1SE**	**CSLE**	**VSLE**	**Total**
Frequency	41	103	81	225
Percentage	18.22	45.78	36	100
Chi-Square Test	L1SE and L2SE	χ^2 [d.f.2, n =225] = 26.347, $p < 0.01$		
	L1SE and CSLE	χ^2 [d.f.1, n =144] = 26.694, $p < 0.01$		
	L1SE and VSLE	χ^2 [d.f.1, n =122] = 13.115, $p < 0.01$		
	CSLE and VSLE	χ^2 [d.f.1, n =184] = 2.63, $p = 0.10486171$*		

Table 4.10 demonstrates that L2SE preferred to use more NP following by *some* than L1SE. CSLE used this cluster most often among three groups, while VSLE used it less frequently and the L1SE used it the least. VSLE employed the cluster twice as much as the L1SE, and CSLE 2.5 times as much as the L1SE. The difference between all groups are statistically significant, except between CSLE and VSLE.

Table 4.11: Frequencies of *some* + noun + noun

Item	*Some* + **noun** + **noun**			
Group	**L1SE**	**CSLE**	**VSLE**	**Total**
Frequency	3	27	5	35
Percentage	8.57	77.14	14.29	100
Chi-Square Test	L1SE and L2SE	χ^2 [d.f.2, n =35] = 30.4, $p < 0.01$		
	L1SE and CSLE	χ^2 [d.f.1, n =30] = 19.2, $p < 0.01$		
	L1SE and VSLE	χ^2 [d.f.1, n =8] = 0.5, $p = 0.47950012$*		
	CSLE and VSLE	χ^2 [d.f.1, n =32] = 15.125, $p < 0.01$		

As shown in Table 4.11, CSLE were the most frequent users of *some* + N + N, where the other two groups used very few. CSLE used *some* + N + N more than 9 times as often as L1SE did and more than 5.4 times as much as VSLE did. The difference is statistically significant between the L1 and L2 groups. The same result was found in comparision between L1SE and CSLE, and between CSLE and VSLE. There was no statistically significant difference between L1SE and VSLE though. This is one of the rare occasions where the CSLE differ VSLE significantly, but not between L1SE and VSLE. The following excerpts demonstrate how the cluster of *some* + N + N are used in the data.

Extract 4.28 (Chinese)
Context: Two Students (one female and one male) over two speaking turns. They are discussing a given picture.

Student 1: Ok, I'll start. Yeah, the picture told that a doctor is irresponsibility, irresponsible to his, to his patient. That patient want to cut off his left tooth, but the doctor to cut off his right tooth. Well, even though *I think* it is *not very* common in our daily life but *I think* it usually erm

it usually problems in our our society. Yeah, erm, *I think* for the, for the doctor *maybe* in our China, the doctor is not well treated and *maybe* if the patient don't give the doctor er, *maybe* we can say that "red bag", the doctor *may* not be very responsible to the patient. Erm so *I think* in China, erm our government should should should change the how to say, ern should change the, to change the way to treat the doctor, to give the doctor give their month salary and the doctor should have the emotion that they are, ern *maybe* the patient's death is controlled by them. They must treat the patient very well. And also it not the problem about only about the doctor, also in *some other career*, such as *some on the teachers*, also *some* how to say, *some factories, some food makers*. Ern they also have to be respon-responsible for all their, all their, all their con, all their mn how to say, all all the people who use their products, and ern also the teachers and their students. So *I think* Yeah, ok, good. Yeah, yeah, ok, very good. (C:18:33)

Student 2: Shall I look at the picture? (C:18:34)

In turn 18:33, S1 describes the irresponsibility of the doctor to his patient in the given picture. She extends the irresponsibility problem to other careers, such as *some teacher*s (*some* + N))*, some food makers* (*some* + N + N). *Some* in this utterance offers a tone of disapproval (Duffley & Larrivée, 2012) about the group of people who are irresponsible. *Some* also contains a contrastive implicature (Israel, 1999; Duffley & Larrivée, 2012) in that it is only a small number of doctors, teachers or food makers who are irresponsible. Hence, *some* in *some on the teachers, some food makers* combines contrastive and disapproval meanings.

S1 in this extract seems to have a limited competence in English. She is not a very confident speaker, using several times *how to say*. For example, S1 finds it difficult to express her opinion, for example she says … *also some how to say, some factories* …. *Factories* sounds like a wrong word choice as she is talking about careers; the right word could be *workers* rather than *factories*.

S1 also uses many other vague expressions, for example a few *I think* and *maybe* are used to soften the tone of the speech, and to mitigate the seriousness of doctors doing the wrong thing. The modality words such as *maybe*, according to Ruzaitė (2007a), "suggest a lower degree of speaker commitment to the truth of the claim and make the claim less categorical" (p. 158). Also, *I think* and *maybe* may give S1 more time to arrange or seek words.

Extract 4.29 (Vietnamese)

Context: Four participants (one teacher and three students) over seven speaking turns. Their discussion is about 'telling a lie'.

T1: (…) What's about anybody else? Any friend? Any friend to tell lie? (V:24:5)

S4: I don't have any friends tell lie but hmm my, I remember when I was, when I was a kid I ask my parents about *some adult problems*. [group laugh] I don't know, I just ask them why. What it is. What they are and they tell a lie to me. (V:24:6)

(group laugh)

T1: How old, how old were you? (V:24:7)

S3: About four or five (V:24:8)

T1: Yeah (V:24:9)

S2: You are a very curious person. (V:24:10)

T1: So your parents, your parents, your parents, not you. (…) (V:24:11)

Responding to the question as to whether any friends told them a lie, S4 says that his parents told him a lie, not his friends when he was a kid in turn 24:6. He uses *some aldult problems* (*some* + N + N) to avoid a full list of aldult problems, which is both not feasible, nor called for, and inappropriate in front of the class. *Some* is applied as a mitigating strategy since adult problems are sensitive and embarrassing, and VL can deal with that type of problem quite well (Zhang, 2015).

Table 4.12: Frequencies of *some* + adjective + noun

Item	*Some* + **adjective** + **noun**			
Group	**L1SE**	**CSLE**	**VSLE**	**Total**
Frequency	19	47	47	113
Percentage	16.81	41.59	41.59	99.99**
Chi-Square Test	L1SE and L2SE	χ^2 [d.f.2, n =113] =13.876, $p < 0.01$		
	L1SE and CSLE	χ^2 [d.f.1, n =66] = 11.879, $p < 0.01$		
	L1SE and VSLE	$\chi2$ [d.f.1, n =66] = 11.879, $p < 0.01$		
	CSLE and VSLE	$\chi2$ [d.f.1, n =94] = 0, $p = 1*$		

** after rounding

Table 4.12 shows that the two groups of L2SE employed the same frequency of *some* + adjective + noun, which is 3.5 times as many as L1SE. The differences among all groups listed in the table are significant statistically, except between the two groups of L2SE (CSLE vs VSLE).

Table 4.13: *Some* + positive (+), neutral (*) and negative (-) adjectives

Group	**L1SE**			**CSLE**			**VSLE**		
Adjective type	+	*	-	+	*	-	+	*	-
Frequency	6	10	3	14	27	6	5	28	14

Table 4.13 shows the same trend of using neutral adjectives among the three groups where all of them had the highest frequency, compared with positive and negative adjectives. There is an opposite trend between the L2SE in using positive and negative adjectives: the CSLE preferred positive adjectives, while the VSLE was interested more negative adjectives. This might have been influenced by of the slightly different settings. Under the oral test, the CSLE seemed to be avoiding a negative tone. In contrast, the VSLE sounded more comfortable in using negative

tone in a classroom setting. The following excerpts demonstrate how *some + adjective + noun* are used in the data.

Extract 4.30 (English)

Context: Three participants (one teacher and two students) over four speaking turns. They are discussing pornography.

T1: Thanks. Okay, pornography what is pornography? Yes. (L1:2:15)

S4: Um maybe like, sexual acts, um in an erotic manner I don't, I dunno. (L1:2:16)

T1: Okay, in an, I was just thinking as you said that hm are there *some sexual acts* that aren't erotic? Um, erotic, manner. Okay, yes. (L1:2:17)

S5: It's like sex that's, made to be viewed. (L1:2:18)

The teacher is trying to get the definition of pornography from the students. In turn 2: 16, S4 has difficulty in expressing his/her own definition about pornography indicated by VL used, such as *maybe*, *I dunno*. The teacher then questions *hm are there some sexual acts that aren't erotic*? The cluster *some sexual acts* (*some + adjective + noun*) indicates the uncertain tone of the teacher towards the however small number of the acts.

Extract 4.31 (Chinese)

Context: One female student talks about hobbies.

Student 1: Also, er mm having these common hobbies can er can make you er lot lot of friends. Mm we can make a lot of friends, and er because you have the er common idea and er when you, how to say. Second thing, I want to, I want to, illustrate an example er such as reading, do *some readings*. If you likes reading *some novels* er and you can communicate with *some close friends*. Then if you have the common idea, I think it can make you er friendship more close. (C:2:28)

S1 is not very fluent in her talk, with *er* used nine times in turn 2:28. *Some readings* and *some novels* indicate an unspecified number most likely small. *Some* is used with *close friends* to make a *some* + adjecitve + noun cluster, as an exact number of close friends is not important in this situation. *Some* as a vague quantifier "may convey more relevant meaning than would a precise number" (Jucker et al., 2003, p. 1755), as S1 might want to put the focus on the relationship itself rather than giving the number of friends.

Extract 4.32 (Vietnamese)

Context: Three participants over five speaking turns. They are discussing the pros and cons of falling in love at high school.

S2:   Do you have a best friend? (V:19:2)

S1:   I have many best friends in group 1. (V:19:3)

(group laugh)

S1:   And, and around me, there are *some couples* and sometimes I feel alone, hmm sometimes I I wonder that should I, should I have a friend, a boyfriend. But, I know *some, some bad points* of it but sometimes I need a shoulder, and, so, and do you think it is good if I have a boyfriend? (V:19:4)

S3:   I think all you need now is just a good friend and whether you want, whether he or she turns whether that's a girl or boy. That is, that depends on you. That don't, don't need, that don't need to be a boy. (V:19:5)

S2:   I, I think the, the right time to have a boyfriend is the just, is just come naturally, it doesn't matter; it doesn't depend on your, your instant feeling. Hmm, you, you, you don't have to find a boyfriend instantly when you, when you feel you need a shoulder. I think that feeling can, can fade soon hmm and that's my opinion. (V:19:6)

Some is used twice: *some* + N (*some couples*) and *some* + adjective + N (*some, some* bad points) in turn 19:4. *Some couples* is used as an evading strategy which helps the speaker to not expose the names of couples during the discussion as the listeners

might know about the couples. Moreover, starting a relationship at high school is rarely acceptable in Vietnam, *some* in this case serves the purpose of "showing intimacy and solidarity" to mark group membership (Evison et al., 2007; Zhang, 2011), because the friendship between the speaker and the couples might be broken if the speaker reveals their names in public. The combination *some, some bad points*, where *some* as a mitigating strategy helps the speaker avoiding listing the bad points of having a boyfriend. *Some* in S1's utturance elastically moves from serving solidarity to mitigating.

4.2.3 Verbs + *some*

This section discusses the cluster of verb + *some*, including the four most frequent clusters that occurred in the data.

Table 4.14: Frequencies of verb + *some*

Item	Verb + *some*			
Group	**L1SE**	**CSLE**	**VSLE**	**Total**
Frequency	43	169	92	304
Percentage	14.15	55.59	30.26	100
Chi-Square Test	L1SE and L2SE	χ^2 [d.f.2, n =304] = 79.625, $p < 0.01$		
	L1SE and CSLE	χ^2 [d.f.1, n =212] = 74.887, $p < 0.01$		
	L1SE and VSLE	χ^2 [d.f.1, n =135] = 17.785, $p < 0.01$		
	CSLE and VSLE	χ^2 [d.f.1, n =261] = 22.716, $p < 0.01$		

Table 4.14 reveals a clear difference in using verb + *some* between L1SE and L2SE. CSLE showed a stronger preference of using verb + *some*, 3.9 times more than L1SE, and 1.8 times more than VSLE. The differences among all four groups as listed in the table are all statistically significant: L1SE vs L2SE, L1SE vs CSLE,

L1SE vs VSLE, and CSLE vs VSLE. This is the first time that all four groups differ; meaning that verb + *some* is something that divides participants in the data.

There are four verb + some clusters that mostly appear in the data: *to have some, to do some, to get some* and *to be some*.

- **To have some**

Table 4.15: Frequencies of *to have some*

Item	To have some			
Group	**L1SE**	**CSLE**	**VSLE**	**Total**
Frequency	11	34	23	68
Percentage	16.18	50	33.82	100
Chi-square test	L1SE and L2SE	χ^2 [d.f.2, n = 68] = 11.676, *p* < 0.01		
	L1SE and CSLE	χ^2 [d.f.1, n = 45] = 11.756, *p* < 0.01		
	L1SE and VSLE	χ^2 [d.f.1, n = 34] = 4.235, *p* = 0.03959862*		
	CSLE and VSLE	χ^2 [d.f.1, n = 57] = 2.123, *p* = 0.14510208*		

Table 4.15 shows the L1SE did not use *to have some* very much, while the L2SE were more interested in the cluster. The CSLE used the cluster about three times as much as L1SE did and about 1.5 times as much as the VSLE. There is a statistically significant difference between the L1SE and the L2SE, and between the L1SE and the CSLE. However, this does not apply to the remaining two groups: L1SE vs VSLE, and CSLE vs VSLE, that are not that different statistically.

Extract 4.33 (English)
Context: Three participants (one teacher and two students) over three speaking turns. They are discussing how the Florida team can keep their sales.

T1: Mhm. Uh okay anybody here w- wanna play Jay? Anybody here from the Florida sales team? Anyone? Okay. Go ahead, Brenda, you're having a conversation with Jay. You gotta get you have a plan of action go ahead. You *have some ideas* let's see the follow-through. (L1:1:41)

S8: Um, so Jay how do you, keep your sales uh ten percent above the prime, throughout the year? (L1:1:42)

S3: Good teamwork we work together, [S8: teamwork] we stay, in contact, that's about it. (L1:1:43)

The teacher attempts to get more ideas from the students by asking Brenda to give her opinion. As Brenda had a conversation with Jay, the head of the Florida sales team, she is expected to present as many ideas as possible in class. *To have some* (*ideas*) in turn 1:41, *some* is a quantitative stretcher to strengthen the tone of speech by the teacher who expects as many ideas as possible from Brenda. The cluster also releases a positive tone encourages Brenda to share her opinions with her classmates.

Extract 4.34 (Chinese)

Context: Two participants (one teacher and one student) over two speaking turns. They are discussing about whether college students should be encouraged to have hobby.

Teacher: Thank you. Now we all have the idea of various kinds of hobbies. I like to discuss the topic further and tell us whether college students should be encouraged to have hobby. During the discussion, you may argue with each other or ask each other questions to clarify the point. You have about four and half minutes for your discussion. Your performance will be judged according your contribution to your discussion. (C:2:24)

Student 4: In my opinion, I think a college student should be encouraged *to have some hobbies*. Well, personally *I think* the hobby is very good for our students, er *do some*, such as *do some doing some outdoors exercises*, we can make our body more strong. We can enjoy the er

enjoy ourself very much. (C:2:25)

In turn 25, *to have some hobbies* shows Student 4's agreement to the idea that college students should be encouraged to have hobbies, where *some* may be a quantifier (referring to a small number) or a qualifier (indicating the focus is to have hobbies, the quantity is not important). The combination of *should* and *some* moves S4's opinions from agreement to advice. One of the specific suggestions is to do *some outdoors exercises* in which *some* suggests there are a number of outdoors exercises that is not necessary to speak out. When *some* is accompanied by *I think* in the turn, the cluster may be a plausibility shield to act as a "tentative assertion" (Stubb, 1986, p. 18) for self-protection (Zhang, 2015, p. 35). S4 repeats *some* three times, in the process of refining her words.

Extract 4.35 (Vietnamese)

Context: Two participants (one teacher and one student) over two speaking turns. They are discussing the boundary between danger and exciting.

T1: And, we were, right, as I came in and probably the rest of you came in, right, there is a physical educational now. No, not the physical education, that's the class where you, physical education, right? Down the practicing they were taking the gun which I think but it's not real as I am working and I wanted to go. Hmm, in one of your semester exam, last semester, semester, semester, you were listening, I was in the class [xx] about, about dangerous and sport, right. So, what do you think about things like skydiving or rock climbing or other extreme sport, extreme sport that involve a lot of possible danger, so something that you would be interest in skydiving, skydiving or that would be other sport. (V:27:26)

S2: I think it is very exciting and it makes me feel curious because I don't know about it. I just a see people and I very interested in. *I think* if I have an opportunity I will, I will, I will try to try and I will *have some experience* about it. (V:27:27)

In turn 27:27, being asked about participating in an extreme sport related with possible danger, S2 shows the excitement of having a chance to try some extreme sport. S2 also expects to *have some experience* from joining in these dangerous activities. *Some* here indicates a possible amount (Channell, 1994; Ruzaitė, 2007a), as S2 is unsure about what experiences she can get in dangerous sports in the future, so *I think* is also used to make "the speaker sounds less than committed to the statement" (Zhang, 2015, p. 37).

- ***To do some***

Table 4.16: Frequencies of *to do some*

Item	To do some			
Group	**L1SE**	**CSLE**	**VSLE**	**Total**
Frequency	--	46	6	52
Percentage	--	88.46	11.54	100
Chi-square test	L1SE and L2SE	χ^2 [d.f.2, n = 52] = 72.154, $p < 0.01$		
	L1SE and CSLE	χ^2 [d.f.1, n = 46] = 46, $p < 0.01$		
	L1SE and VSLE	χ^2 [d.f.1, n = 6] = 6, $p < 0.01$		
	CSLE and VSLE	χ^2 [d.f.1, n = 52] = 30.769, $p < 0.01$		

As indicated from Table 4.16, the CSLE continued to be dominant users of *some* having the highest frequency of using verb collocation *to do some*, 7.6 times as often as the frequency of the VSLE. Alternatively, the L1SE did not use *to do some* at all in their talks. In terms of the results of the Chi-Square test, with the huge difference in the frequency of use of *to do some*, the difference between L1SE and L2SE is statistically significant. This is also true of the differences between the L1SE and the CSLE, CSLE and VSLE. The only pair between which there is no statistical difference is the L1SE and the VSLE.

Extract 4.36 (Chinese)

Context: A student is introducing herself.

Student 3: My name is [a name]. And I my major is material science and engineering. And I am a sophomore this year. *I think* I am just a normal girl and I like small animals and *do some reading* in my spare time. (C:14:12)

In this extract, S3 introduces herself to the group before the discussion begins. *To do some reading* indicates her modest attitude here, meaning 'not a lot, so no big deal, I am not boasting here'. In a way this cluster serves as a politeness device. The speaker does not specify which kind of reading and the amount of reading, because it is not relevant here. Even it was relevant, the speaker would not be able to specify it. As a hedge, *I think* in the turn helps to make the speaker's tone more modest.

Extract 4.37 (Vietnamese)

Context: Two participants (one female S1 and one male S3) over two speaking turns. They are discussing plans for the summer vacation.

S3: I have a question. Who here must go to the military school at summer vacation? Oh Miss [a surname], after that mission, what do you want to do after that mission? (V:25:26)

S1: Yes, as I said I want to be a volunteer is a volunteer at *some international schools* and I want to, I want to *do some fund raising* that my favourite hobbies. Yah, and and I want to visit the disable children and give them, give and teach them. That's what I want and I really hope I can do that. And how's about [a name]? What's your plan? (V:25:27)

In responding to S3's question, S1 says that she will become a volunteer at *some international schools* and *do some fund raising* as well in turn 25:27. *Some* in *some international schools* seems to be a tool to save the speaker from mentioning the

names of the international schools which are unimportant. The participants in this conversation are students at colleges of foreign language and their major is translation, therefore, she might seek the environment of an International School to practice her English during the break holiday. However, she might not be sure which international schools she will choose. *Some* helps her to cover her uncertainty at the time of delivering the utterance. In contrast, s*ome* in *do some fund raising* has a different function. This is a verb + *some* cluster, the focus may be shifted to the action rather than the quantity. *Some* in this instance acts as a quality stretcher, indicating S1 will do funding raising, but how many times or how much she may raise from the activity are not relevant here. Or S1 doesn't want to unveil her plans in detail at the moment so *some* is picked to generalize the activities of fund raising, hence *some fund raising* can be a general stretcher too in the sense of Zhang (2015).

- *To get some*

Table 4.17: Frequencies of *to get some*

	To get some			
Group	**L1SE**	**CSLE**	**VSLE**	**Total**
Frequency	6	12	1	19
Percentage	31.58	63.16	5.26	100
Chi-square test	L1SE and L2SE	χ^2 [d.f.2, n = 19] =9.579, $p < 0.01$		
	L1SE and CSLE	χ^2 [d.f.1, n = 18] = 2, $p = 0.15729921*$		
	L1SE and VSLE	χ^2 [d.f.1, n = 7] = 3.571, $p = 0.05879689*$		
	CSLE and VSLE	χ^2 [d.f.1, n = 13] = 9.308, $p < 0.01$		

Table 4.17 shows that the CSLE had the highest frequency of *to get some*, the VSLE used very little of this cluster, and the L1SE used only a half as many as the CSLE. There is a statistically significant difference between the L1SE and the L2SE, CSLE and VSLE, but not between the remaining two pairs as shown in the table. The following excerpts demonstrate how *to get some* is used in the data.

Extract 4.38 (English)

Context: Two participants over two speaking turns. The teacher is talking about possible materials for references.

T1: Now one announcement, Diane I won't use her last name. [S3: why?] recorded for us [S3: oh] a an A-and-E program which ran Sunday night right? and I missed it cuz I never have time to watch T-V. But she recorded it. It's a video recording and it's excellent. Um, it's actually called, The Good Book of Love, colon, Sex in the Bible. Um, it's really fine. It's quite excellent. Um, there it's well done. There's a lot of artwork in it as background, the narration is good. They have, one two three four five six seven eight nine ten eleven esteemed Biblical scholars. Giving different perspectives on the various topics on sex in the Bible. I have put it, in the Language Resource Center. The Language Resource Center is on the second floor of the Modern Languages Building. You can look at it I think up to five of you can look at any one time so if there's more than one of you who shows up, these are the hours they're quite liberal I thought about how do I get this, best uh how is this best accessible to you, and I figured if I put into the Language Resource Center it would be very fine. So it'll be there till the end of the term, it'll give you ideas. There_ they_ the the discussion is excellent also in terms of attitudes towards sexuality in the Old Testament as opposed to the New Testament as opposed to the early Christian writers Saint Augustine and so on, so, look at it *get some ideas* it might help you with your paper who knows, and uh, thank Diane. (L1:5:8)

SS: Thank you, Diane. (L1:5:9)

The teacher, in turn 5:8, introduces the video 'The Good Book of Love: Sex in the Bible'. The recording might be helpful for students, so the teacher asks them to check it out to *get some ideas*. The teacher knows that it contains useful ideas for the students' papers, however, she is unable to know exactly how many ideas students may get, therefore a general quantifier such as *some* comes handy here. The teacher here is encouraging the students to go and *get some ideas*, i.e. to push for the action rather than to convey a quantity of how many ideas.

Extract 4.39 (Chinese)

Context: Two participants (one female teacher and one male student) over four speaking turns. They are discussing about whether or not people personally benefit from using computers in their study.

Teacher: Have you personally benefited from using computers in your study? (C:10:93)

Student 2: Yes, because my major is communication engineering. And (C:10:94)
(Interrupted)

Teacher: Give one example. (C:10:95)
(Interrupted)

Student 2: Yes. Er for example, now I I'm in the four year and I will graduated in a few month. And I must prepare prepare for my papers. And the information is is getted on the Internet. We must access the website everyday. And er and we can er somebody said you can er *get some information* from books from the library. And the news and information is not is too old for for for me to get it. We have to get it from the Internet. And on the other hand, another im- important advantage of using computer is its convenience, just like he said. (C:10:96)

The student agrees that using the computer brings benefit to his study in searching for more information on the Internet for his papers instead of using the old information in the book. *To get some information* is used when he refers to the information from the books in library. It is a verb + *some* cluster, so the focus may be again more on the action of getting information. *Information* is a mass noun, so the speaker may want to convey a general quantity in using *some information*. In terms of *some* itself, it may be interpreted as *some but not all* in this case.

Extract 4.40 (Vietnamese)

Context: Three female students over eight speaking turns. They are pretending to try to persuade the teacher to reduce their workload. S2 acts as a teacher and the other two speakers (S3, S4) are students.

S3:   Please reduce the lesson for us to review. (V:13:7)

S4:   We don't have enough time to do all of this. (V:13:8)

S2:   But this is an exact amount that I give to the lecture in class, so you should able to do that. (V:13:9)

S3:   Please, so many other subjects I have to learn to. (V:13:10)

S2:   What do you mean "doesn't change anything"? I should change, right? I should change some questions in this paper? Right? (V:13:17)

S3:   Let's change completely like you did the last time. (V:13:18)

S2:   Oh (V:13:19)

S4:   It's too low. We don't have enough preparation so we will *get some bad marks*. Please reduce. (V:13:20)

The group: Please. [very loud] (V:13:21)

Students are trying to persuade the teacher to reduce their workload, otherwise they would be *getting some bad marks* due to the lack of time for preparation as stated in turn 13:20. The implicature here is more of getting some bad marks, rather than how many bad marks. S4 does not know the exact number of bad marks since it is a presumed future event which hasn't taken place yet. *Some* is used here as a strategy of giving the right amount of information to serve the communicative purpose of persuading the teacher to reduce their workload.

- **To be some**

Table 4.18: Frequencies of *to be some*

Item	To be some			
Group	**L1SE**	**CSLE**	**VSLE**	**Total**
Frequency	8	11	19	38
Percentage	21.05	28.95	50	100
Chi-square test	L1SE and L2SE	χ^2 [d.f.2, n = 38] = 5.105, p = 0.07788671*		
	L1SE and CSLE	χ^2 [d.f.1, n = 19] = 0.474, p = 0.49115271*		
	L1SE and VSLE	χ^2 [d.f.1, n = 27] = 4.481, p = 0.03427366*		
	CSLE and VSLE	χ^2 [d.f.1, n = 30] = 2.133, p = 0.14415837*		

Table 4.19 shows that the verb cluster *to be some* is used mostly by the VSLE, this means that CSLE are not the dominant user anymore. The VSLE used *to be some* 2.3 times more than the L1SE and 1.7 times as much as CSLE. The most striking Chi-Square test results for this case is that none of the three groupings yields any statistically significant differences; all groups involved behave similarly. The following excerpts show the use of *to be some* cluster in the data.

Extract 4.41 (English)

Context: Three participants (a teacher and two students: S2 is a female, S3 is a male) over eight speaking turns. They are discussing about obscenity.

T1: (…) Good. Okay well let's go on to obscenity what's obscenity? What was the famous quote about obscenity? (L1:2:157)

S2: I know it when I see it (L1:2:158)

S3: I know it when I see it (L1:2:159)

T1: I know it when I see it. Yeah. And we're not gonna spend too much time on

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obscenity right now cuz I wanna come back to this when we get to the readings but I know it when I see it. But but, the big point that I wanna make about obscenity as Catherine MacKinnon was certainly pointing out is that it's, again it's the same kind of problem that we were having in distinguishing between pornography and erotica, like which is which where do you draw the line what's obscene for you might not be obscene for me. Uh remember one of the things they they rely on ar- is community standards or are community standards. Um which of course vary which means maybe something, is obscene in, I dunno *what's some small town, some small town* in Michigan? [maybe] one of your [SU-f: Paw Paw] home towns. Where? (L1:2:160)

S2: Paw Paw (L1:2:161)

T1: Paw Paw? (L1:2:162)

S2: Paw Paw Michigan (L1:2:163)

T1: I've never heard of it but okay.(L1:2:164)

The teacher explains briefly about obscenity because more will be discussed later. The teacher points out the line of obscenity based on the community standards and picks up small towns in Michigan as an example in turn 2:160. She, however, could not remember the name of small towns at the time of speaking hence the *to be some* cluster is employed as a mental gap device to keep the conversation going. This cluster is called a 'placeholder' (Channell, 1994, p. 157), which is useful when a speaker stalls due to a mental or speech void, because they cannot remember the name.

Extract 4.42 (Chinese)

Context: A male student is describing the given picture in an oral test.

Student 4: Erm in this picture I see *some famous er fast food* Mc-McDonalds McDonalds. I'm sorry I don't know whether my pronunciation is right. We know, there *are some famous fast food* to Shanghai, you know. And it's a fashion er for it's a fashion to have dinner in this restaurant, especially for kids. Er McDonalds provide various food

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> for us, such as hamburger, Coca Cola or something else. They provide good service for us, but I think the price is high at least for me. And er if if possible I will never have dinner in this places. (C:9:38)

The student comments on McDonalds, he uses the *to be some* cluster here to refer to fast food outlets in Shanghai. The first use of *some famous fast food McDonalds*, where *some* is a quality stretcher highlighting the nature of McDonalds. The second use of <u>*are some famous fast food*</u>, this time *some* is more of a quantity stretcher, which conveys a vague amount. The context indicates that the two *some* clusters also imply the speaker's negative tone towards fast food eateries.

Extract 4.43 (Vietnamese)

Context: Four participants (one teacher and three students) over seven speaking turns. They are discussing danger and risk in life.

T1: Hmm, have you ever felt that your life was in danger? Is there ever been something that happens where you felt? (V:27:51)

S3: Always, for example my mum calls me and I run, I run to her so fast and I go down stairs and maybe I will fall or I run too fast and may I bump my head to the wall. (V:27:52)

S5: But you shouldn't scare always. You know anything and you always scare how can you finish one thing if you think that dangerous is around and you can't. (V:27:53)

S3: No, I, I don't scare, I just say that danger is always everywhere. (V:27:54)

S2: Yes, it's, it <u>*is some normal things*</u> but I think you are, you know about the end of the earth and of the world, yes, the date. (V:27:55)

T1: In December (V:27:56)

S2: So it makes me feel a little worried because I don't know it will be happen or not. Yes (V:27:57)

In turn 27:52, S3 gives an example of things which makes him feel in danger. S2 in turn 27:55 thinks the dangerous situation S3 mentioned *is some normal things*. At the time of delivering the utterance, S2 might not have more ideas about what exactly the normal things are, hence *some* becomes a generalized tool to avoid listing the normal things in her argument. S2 and S3 have different ideas on what is dangerous and what is not, which contributes to S2 using the vague word *some*, because the normal things from S2's perspective might be different to those from S3's perspective. *Some* is able to cover an elastic boundary in this case.

4.2.4 *Some of* + nouns/noun phrases

Table 4.19: Frequencies of *some of* + noun/noun phrase

Item	*Some* of + noun/noun phrase			
Group	**L1SE**	**CSLE**	**VSLE**	**Total**
Frequency	18	8	7	33
Percentage	54.55	24.24	21.21	100
Chi-Square Test	L1SE and L2SE	χ^2 [d.f.2, n =33] = 6.727, *p* = 0.0346139*		
	L1SE and CSLE	χ^2 [d.f.1, n =26] = 3.846, *p* = 0.04986478*		
	L1SE and VSLE	χ^2 [d.f.1, n =25] = 4.84, *p* = 0.0278069*		
	CSLE and VSLE	χ^2 [d.f.1, n =15] = 0.067, *p* = 0.79575593*		

Table 4.19 shows that the L1SE preferred to use *some of* + N/NP more than the L2SE. More specifically, the L1SE used the cluster 2.3 times as often as the CSLE and 2.6 times as often as the VSLE. However, statistically speaking none of the four groups listed in the table has a meaningful difference, meaning that the four pairs use *some of* + N/NP in a similar way, as far as the statistics are concerned. The following three excerpts show how the cluster is used in the data.

Extract 4.44 (English)

Context: Two participants (one teacher and one student) over two speaking turns. The teacher is checking something with the student.

T1: Um, any questions on that? It takes, oh I don't know an hour and forty-five minutes if you look at the whole thing. So it's time well spent. Any questions, or comments *some of you* missed last time *some of you* were busy dancing, or dancing. What was the dancing for, Rina? (L1:5:10)

S4: It was, um, a fund-raiser for the children's hospital and Beaumont Hospital (L1:5:11)

The teacher is finding out why some students missed class last time. The explanation of choosing *some of you* might be because the teacher could not remember all students who missed the lesson; or there were too many absent students so it is not possible or unnecessary to list all the students' names in front of class. The teacher might also purposely prevent losing face for those who missed the class by not pointing out their name in the class. Another possibility is to maintain the teacher's own face, if many students don't think that the class is important to attend. Dealing with the problem of face-saving, the English teacher in this case chooses *some of you* for its elastic use, to keep the face of the students and/or teacher.

Extract 4.45 (Chinese)

Context: Two participants (one teacher and one student) over four turns. They are discussing about how different habits of roommates can affect each other.

Teacher: [a name], er do your roommates have different living habits? (C:11:29)

Student 3:   Yes, of course (C:11:30)

Teacher: Mm do you think it's a problem? (C:11:31)

Student 3: Erm yes, *maybe* sometimes. Because *some of my roommates* like to er listen to the music late in the evening. Er and I think *maybe* it influence er our our usual study. And *maybe* *some of them* get up very early. And bo- most of us get up er get up at about seven o'clock or

> later than that. So, *maybe* at *some*, I mean, *maybe* it can it has *some er*
> *effects* on on us. And (C:11:32)

Asked about the different living habits of roommates, Student 3 asserts that it does happen and can create problems such as listening to music late in the evening or getting up early in turn 11: 32. However, the speaker uses *some of my roommates* and *some of them* with the purpose of indicating only a small number of roommates who are listening to music late in the evening or are getting up early. *Some of*, in this case, in combination with a noun referred to human beings makes "narrowed or restricted" generalizations to express "a small amount" (Ruzaitė, 2007a, p. 100). *Some of* is functioning to mitigate the stretch the number of roommates because the speaker does not mean all of the roommates cause problems in the house. At the end of turn 11:32, Student 3 uses *some effects*, to indicate the impact of the annoying roommates, *some* here is a hedge to soften the tone of the speaker.

Notably, another vague word *maybe* located in front of *some of them* is a signal to express the speaker's tentativeness about who gets up early in the house. The student uses *maybe* five times in the turn, emphasising her uncertainty in what she says here. Student 3 also reveals difficulties in finding words to express her ideas through this sentence: *So, maybe at some, I mean, maybe it can it has some er effects on on us*. The use of VL here enables her to find time to extend the sentence and then picks up *some er effects* in the utterance. This might be another possible reason to explain why Student 3 does not describe the *effects* in detail, but uses the vague word *some* instead.

Extract 4.46 (Vietnamese)

Context: Three participants over six speaking turns. They are discussing whether having a boyfriend motivates students at high school.

S4: I think having a boyfriend in university is much better because when we are high school students we should concentrate our study? (V:10:18)

S3: But I think when I have a boyfriend hmm during high school, it hmm (0.4) motivates to, for us to learn better. (V:10:19)

S4: Really? (V:10:20)

S3: Yes, yes. (V:10:21)

S4: It depends on you not the … all of them. (V:10:22)

S1: I think that to someone that love is to support them to learn better but I think
    some of them will not concentrate on the study and keep texting or chatting on
    the internet, say loving in and blablabla [laugh] (V:10:23)

S1 in turn 10:23 confirms that having a boyfriend at high school is a motivation to help students to learn better; at the same time S1 also thinks that *some of them* lose concentration on their study by texting or chatting on the internet. *Some of them* is applied in order to make generalizations about "opposing phenomena" (Ruzaitė, 2007a, p. 100), which distinguishes between a small number of students who do not focus on their study and the ones who can get support from the relationship.
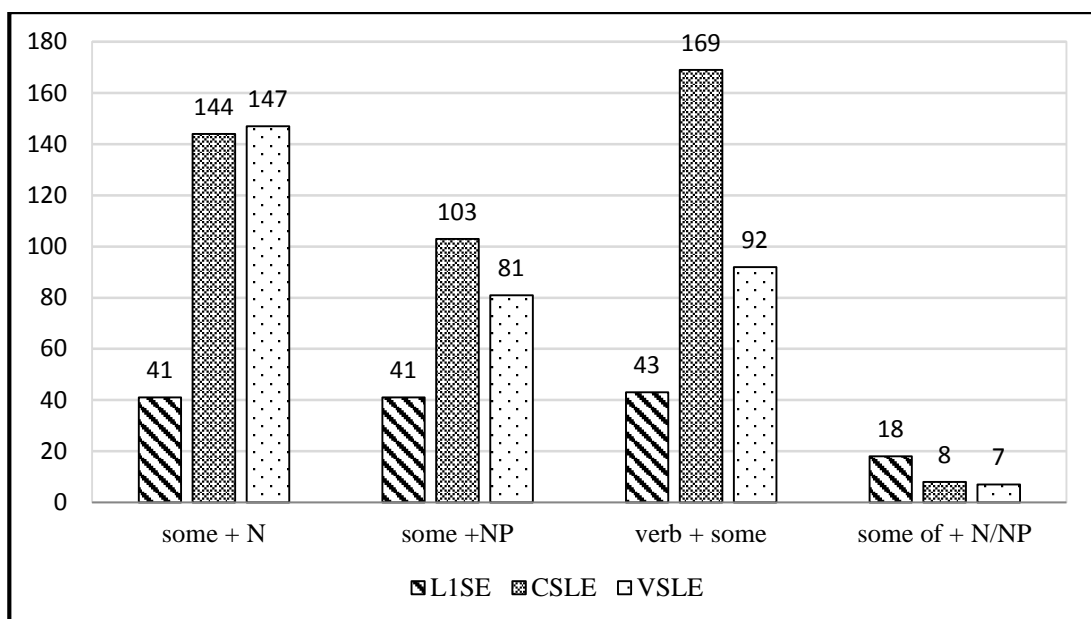
Figure 4.2: Overall frequencies of *some* clusters: at syntactic level

Figure 4.2 provides an overall picture of *some* clusters from a syntactic perspective. Generally speaking, the L1SE and L2SE have different frequencies for their use of *some* clusters at the syntactic level. The Chinese is the most dominant group for the second and the third items. The Vietnamese use the first item the most (although only slightly more than the Chinese), and the L1 speakers use the last item the most.

Overall, the frequency is the highest for the Chinese, the second highest for the Vietnamese and the lowest is the L1 group.

Figure 4.2 reveals that the L1SE is consistent in applying *some* clusters, especially for the first three items with nearly same frequency in, *some* + N, *some* + NP and verb + *some*. The L2SE however are inconsistent, used some items much more than other items. For example, the Chinese used 1.6 times the number of verb + *some* clusters as *some* + NP, and 21 times as many of that of *some of* + N/NP. This suggests that the native speakers used a wider range of VL and were able to control the use of *some* clusters more consistently than the L2SE. Here, language competence might be a contributing factor to the difference.

4.3 *Some* groups

The *some* groups in this study include *something*, *sometimes*, *someone*, and *somebody*.

Table 4.20: Overall frequencies of *some* groups

Group Item	L1SE		CSLE		VSLE		Total	
	Frequency	Percentage	Frequency	Percentage	Frequency	Percentage	Frequency	Percentage
Something	108	29.03	120	32.26	144	38.71	372	100
Sometimes	12	8.76	41	29.93	84	61.31	137	100
Someone	13	21.67	10	16.67	37	61.67	60	100.01**
Somebody	15	37.5	16	40	9	22.5	40	100
Overall	**148**		**187**		**274**			

** after rounding

Table 4.20 shows that VSLE preferred *some* groups most, the Chinese second, and the L1 the least. There is a remarkable difference in frequency between *something* and the other three *some* groups, *sometimes, someone* and *somebody*, where something is clearly used more than the others. The overall order from most frequent to the least is *something*, *sometimes*, *someone* and *somebody*, namely from an unspecific item, a time, to a person.

There is statistically significant differences between L1SE and L2SE in using *some* group (χ^2 [d.f.2, n = 609] = 40.995, *p* < 0.01).), between L1SE and VSLE (χ^2 [d.f.1, n = 422] = 37.621, *p* < 0.01), and between CSLE and VSLE (χ^2 [d.f.1, n = 461] = 16.419, *p* < 0.01). The one exception is the difference between L1SE and CSLE, which was found not to be statistically significant (χ^2 [d.f.1, n = 335] = 4.54, *p* = 0.03311159).

4.3.1 *Something*

This section discusses the frequency of *something*, *something* + adjectives, lexical items + *something*, and *something* + lexical items.

Zhang (2015, p. 92) states that *something* refers to an unspecific item. There are two kinds of *something*, "specific indefinite and non-specific indefinite". For example, 'I have brought *something* for dinner' vs. 'I might get *something* for dinner'. While both are indefinite, a specific thing is identified in the first sentence, but not in the second.

Table 4.21: Frequencies of *something*

Something				
Group	**L1SE**	**CSLE**	**VSLE**	**Total**
Frequency	108	120	144	372
Percentage	29.03	32.26	38.71	100
Chi-square test	L1SE and L2SE	χ^2 [d.f.2, n = 372] = 5.419, *p* = 0.07*		
	L1SE and CSLE	χ^2 [d.f.1, n = 228] = 0.632, *p* = 0.42662265*		
	L1SE and VSLE	χ^2 [d.f.1, n = 252] = 5.143, *p* = 0.02334028*		
	CSLE and VSLE	χ^2 [d.f.1, n = 264] = 2.182, *p* = 0.1396329*		

Table 4.21 shows that the VSLE used *something* most frequently, CSLE the second and L1SE the least. The VSLE used it 1.3 times as much as the L1SE and 1.2 times

as much as the CSLE. The differences between all four groups though, as listed in the table, are not statistically significant. This means that all groups used *something* a similar number of times. The following excerpts illustrate how *something* is used in the data.

Extract 4.47 (English)

Context: Two participants (one teacher and one student) over two speaking turns. They are discussing what erotica is.

T1: Okay, okay um. Let me just add this here then. I'll just write equally objectifying and then put a question mark there. You can be thinking number one of course what your own view is on this but also what would like what would MacKinnon think of that? Would she make a big distinction, between Hustler and Playboy? Um, or Segal, um etcetera. Well let's go into erotica. What's erotica then? What is erotica...? Anybody? Yeah? Leslie. (L1:2:41)

S10: I would guess that it would be like sort of the insinuation, [T1: Okay] of, like *something* sexual, [T1: okay] and not necessarily like graphic. I don't know. [T1: Uhuh okay] this is my, this is my interpretation of [T1: Uhuh] Whenever I hear that word, that it's like, more of like, not as graphic [T1: okay] and just kind of like suggesting. (L1:2:42)

Responding the teacher's question of 'What is erotica?', S10 suggests it is like *something* sexual in turn 2:42, then says *I don't know*, apparently she is unable to give a clear and firm opinion about what erotica is. *Something* is a general stretcher and shell-like word used to generalize the scale of things related to sexuality, but no specific items are identified. *Something* is used as a shield by S10 for self-protection from being wrong. *Something* performs at least two functions here: self-protection and generalization.

Extract 4.48 (Chinese)

Context: Two participants (one teacher and one student) over two speaking turns. This discussion is about which newspaper is most interesting to college students.

Teacher: Ok, thank you [a name], yes. Which newspaper do college students like most, and why? (C:1:44)

Student 3: I think the 21th Century is the most likable newspaper in college life because people can en can always learn en regard this newspaper as a tool to learn English, and also provides many latest news and many news that we are really interested in, such as environment news, the sports news and *something* about politics. You really want to to to see some some new thing from newspaper. And I think 21st has special value main campus life. And it has a close relationship with our daily life. People has see the students can see the how the students lead their life in campus and how they spend their s s s spare time in college. And also provides some en useful information to go abroad to study in the foreign foreign universities such as the examination, very useful examination, such as TOFEL and GRE. And provide us many thing important for us to to to to to very important news for us to for us new. (C:1:45)

In responding to the question, Student 3 recommends *The 21th Century*, because this newspaper includes news useful for students who learn English. A number of news items are listed such as environment, sport and politics. In *something about politics*, *something* is specific indefinite, because the speaker knows in principle there are items in the newspaper relating to politics. *Something* suggests that the speaker does not know what the items are precisely, or does not want to specify them for some reason, or there is no need to specify what those political items are.

Extract 4.49 (Vietnamese)

Context: Four participants (one teacher and three students) over nine speaking turns. They are discussing danger and risk.

T1: Anybody, anybody think is the world, is the world going to the end in the December? (V:27:58)

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S2: No, I don't think so because. (V:27:59)

T1: No, me really no, right. (V:27:60)

S3: I hope it will, it will not happen because I heard that if it will happen on the twenty-four of December and the twenty-eighth is my birthday. (V:27:61)

[laugh]

S3: I want to have my birthday (V:27:62)

T1: So you will be eighteen? (V:27:63)

S3: Seventeen (V:27:64)

T1: Seventeen. Yeah, you want to make *something*. That will be great. What's about… but does anyone ever face, have you ever faced the possibility of dying? Anybody? (V:27:65)

S4: I have, in, well, in my primary school, I had a road accident and I will really danger, yes, I lost a lot of blood and have to do some operations [xx] surgery, yes, and it's the back of my body and I have, I have off for school for a long time to this. (V:27:66)

The teacher questions the students about whether or not the world is going to end in December in turn 27:58. S3 wishes this disaster would not happen as his birthday is on the 28th of December in turn 27:61. Knowing that the student will turn seventeen in December, the teacher says *Seventeen. Yeah, you want to make something* in turn 27: 65. *Something* here is a non-specific indefinite, referring generally, as the teacher would not be able to specify what this *something* is.

4.3.1.1 *Something* + **Adjectives**

L1SE and VSLE tend to use adjectives after *something*, but not the CSLE as shown in Table 4.22.

Table 4.22: Frequencies of *something* + adjectives

Item	L1SE	CSLE	VSLE	Total
Frequency	8	1	17	26
Percentage	30.77	3.85	65.38	100

Chi-square test	L1SE and L2SE	χ^2 [d.f.2, n = 26] = 14.846, $p < 0.01$
	L1SE and CSLE	χ^2 [d.f.1, n = 9] = 5.444, $p = 0.01963565*$
	L1SE and VSLE	χ^2 [d.f.1, n = 25] = 3.24, $p = 0.07186064*$
	CSLE and VSLE	χ^2 [d.f.1, n = 18] = 14.222, $p < 0.01$

Table 4.22 shows that the VSLE used many adjectives following *something*, twice as many as the L1SE, and 17 times as many as CSLE. VSLE used this group word mostly with negative adjectives, while L1SE used it more with neutral adjectives. The differences are statistically significant for the L1SE and L2SE, CSLE and VSLE, but not for the remaining two pairs, as shown in the table. The following excerpts illustrate how *something* + adjective is used in the data.

Extract 4.50 (English)

Context: Two participants (one teacher and one student) over three speaking turns. The teacher is trying to turn on the light to start the class but she is unsuccessful.

T1: Lights Power... I always have this problem. Can you turn the lights off please...? I know why. Hold on. [pause] Has to do with all these cords. Why don't we get a light? I'm not the best one for equipment you know. I should give up. Is there *something wrong* with this bulb? Help help, the bulb won't come on. Power. Maybe we won't get any, pictures today, shoot. I think the bulb's burned out. Anybody got any ideas? (L1:5:93)

S4: What, what happened? (L1:5:94)

T1: No ideas. (L1:5:95)

In turn 5:94, the teacher has trouble in turning on the light. She questions whether there is *something wrong* with the bulb. *Something wrong* shows her uncertainty regarding whether the bulb caused the problem, so *something* is non-specific indefinite here, combining with the negative adjective *wrong*.

Extract 4.51 (Chinese)

Context: A female student is describing a given picture.

S3: My picture's question is smoking is is really a bad thing. I want to say yes. First picture, on the first picture, the man has slept. And the cigarettes are still on the on fire. And we can see that his bed has got fire. And man didn't noticed it. And on the second picture, the man are working and smoking. And and he is so concentrated on his work and didn't notice that the bin of cigarettes has has been full. And I think smoking, when something when somebody didn't notice. I mean not very not very careful er it's very dangerous. Because very easy to get fire. And er get fire especially when they they didn't they don't er don't notice er the the danger. And er on the in in this two pictures, there are there are *something easy* to get fire, and I think it's more dangerous. (C:11:37)

The student says *there are there are something easy to get fire, and I think it's more dangerous*. *Something easy* is in a format of *something* + adjective, and in a negative discourse that talks about smoking as a dangerous fire hazard. *Something* here is specific indefinite referring to things that are dangerous goods, although the speaker is unable to list all the dangerous goods. The speaker also uses *I think* to emphasize the danger of smoking. As can be seen from the extract, the student has some limitation in communicating in English, using many discourse management devices, such as *er* and *and*. So *something easy* may also be a placeholder strategy, because the speaker is unable to find a better word to express her thoughts.

Extract 5: 52 (Vietnamese)

Context: Three female participants over five speaking turns. They are discussing the role of the teacher in an English speaking class.

S1: Uh uh, how's about you, [a name]? (V:7:17)

S3: I see your point but however I think the most important part of teacher in

> this stage is that he has to be a monitor, observer because he can't stay in a group for too long, he has to take a look of all the groups so he has to go around, around and observe what's going on. I think so.(V:7:18)
>
> S2: Yes, I think that a good idea and I quite agree with you. (V:7:19)
>
> S1: I also think that teacher must be an advisor because you know students they, they don't know everything so when they talk, maybe _something right_ and _something wrong_ and sometimes they don't know how, don't know what to say and how to speak and teacher must advise them all: "in this point, you must say this" or "you, you can use this word, that word", something like that. (V:7:20)
>
> S2: So, from your point, I see that the teacher should be also faci-, facilitator because when you know some students very passive. (V:7:21)

S3 says that teacher should be a monitor or observer, but S1 in turn 7:20 argues that the teacher needs to guide students as well, to put the students on the 'right track'. S1 points out that students may say _something right_ or _something wrong_. The opposite clusters are suitable in this situation, because there is no need to specify anything concrete here. The general comparison serves the purpose of S1, as he or she may not be able to provide more specific information here. The tentativeness is also indicated by the use of the word _maybe_, together with the _something_ clusters.

4.3.1.2 Verb + _something_

This section discusses the three most frequent verb + _something_: _to be something, to do something_, and _to say something_.

Table 4.23: Frequencies of _to be something_

Item	_To be something_			
Group	**L1SE**	**CSLE**	**VSLE**	**Total**
Frequency	26	3	11	40

Percentage	65	7.5	27.5	100
Chi-square test	L1SE and L2SE	χ^2 [d.f.2, n = 40] = 20.45, $p < 0.01$		
	L1SE and CSLE	χ^2 [d.f.1, n = 29] = 18.241, $p < 0.01$		
	L1SE and VSLE	χ^2 [d.f.1, n = 37] = 6.081, $p = 0.01$		
	CSLE and VSLE	χ^2 [d.f.1, n = 14] = 4.571, $p = 0.03251758*$		

Table 4.23 shows that *to be something* was most commonly used by the L1SE, twice as much as by the VSLE, and eight times as much as the CSLE. The differences are statistically significant for the L1SE and L2SE, L1SE and CSLE, L1SE and VSLE, but not for the CSLE and VSLE. This suggests that the differences here are related to L1 and L2 factors. In addition, L1SE used *to be something + that +* clause seven times, and CSLE used *to be something +* adjective five times. The following excerpts reveal how *to be something* is used in the data.

Extract 4.53 (**English**)

Context: Two participants (one teacher and one student) over six speaking turns. They are discussing the difference between a human sensibility and a human understanding.

S9: Could I uh ask a really general question? (L1:4:116)

T1: Definitely. (L1:4:117)

S9: Okay uh, do you think you could, discuss the difference between a human sensibility and a human understanding cuz it seems to me that, they're kind of similar or actually, that human understanding, kind of encompasses_ one of the things that it would encompass, is human sensibility. (L1:4:118)

T1: Okay good. (L1:4:119)

S9: So do you think you can just, discuss the difference? (L1:4:120)

T1: Yeah yeah yeah. Um, you're right to think there's a similarity here because both of these things are imposing, frameworks on, the numina. So *there's something, something* really similar going on. But, the important difference is

---

> twofold. one of them is, this one, if you think about it sort of, in a very naive but, sorta accurate, Kantian way, this one processes first, and then this one processes what that one processed, so in a sense what happens is you've got your numina, and it comes down and processed first by your sensibilities. You get output number one. Which is, a sense datum that's organized in terms of space and time. Then, it's processed next by your human understanding, and you get output number two, okay? Which is gonna be, not only processed by space and time, but also processed by the categories of the understanding. (L1:4:121).

In turn 4:118, S9 asks for explanation about the difference between a human sensibility and a human understanding as according to him, it seems there are similarities between the two concepts. In turn 4:121, the teacher avoids listing the similarities between the two concepts by saying *So there's something, something really similar going on. There is something* refers to the category of similar things between a human sensibility and a human understanding. The teacher seems to think that the similarity is not as important as the difference, so there is no need to specify exactly what it is, leaving it vague serves the purpose well. On the contrary, the teacher spends much more time talking explicitly about the differences between the two concepts.

Extract 4.54 (Chinese)

Context: Three participants (one teacher and two students) over four speaking turns. The students are introducing themselves in an oral English examination.

Teacher: Ok. Now, would you please briefly introduce yourselves to each other? Remember you should not mention the name of your university. (C:17:8)

Student 1: Well, hello, everyone. My name is [a name]. Now I spare sophomore year in my university. Er, I major in electronic engineering. Thank you. (C:17:9)

Teacher: Ok. (C:17:10)

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Student 2: My name is just I saying [a name]. And Em my major is biology. I
choose it because I think it will greatly improve the er, life level of all
the human beings. I think er, our major *is something* relating. (C:17:11)

Student 1 is studying electronic engineering, and Student 2's major is biology. The
latter explains the reason why he chose biology is because *I think it will greatly
improve the er, life level of all the human beings.* He uses *I think* as an emphatic tool
(Zhang, 2014, p. 236) to reinforce what he said. S2 then continues to say *our major
is something relating*. The student may know how their majors are related, but the
time limit for the introduction might prevent S2 from giving details. As a general
pronoun *to be something* here is used to provide the appropriate level of information.

Extract 4.55 (Vietnamese)
Context: Two students over two speaking turns. They are discussing whether
smokers should get free treatment.

S3: Hmm, I think smokers should get a free treatment because that they have to
suffer the pain, some di-, diseases you have said and if, if government only
pay a small, small amount of money who say not the life of smokers but also
other people because smoking, smoke, smoke only affect to the smokers, only
to people around. (V:11:6)

S2: Yes, but in some countries smoking is banned, in some ethnic groups, smoking
is a custom so there's a different. Do you think people should have free
treatment? So what, when, when do people will be, will have free treatment?
Even though they know that smoking is harmful, they can't, they can't give up
smoking. I think we shouldn't encourage smoking, it's a bad habit. In my
opinion, it's a bad habit, so is there some, there *is something* difference. What
do you think about it? (V:11:7)

S3 expresses her opinion that smokers should get free treatment in turn 11: 6.
However, in turn 11: 7 S2 points out that smoking is banned in *some countries*, but
smoking is also a custom in *some ethnic groups*, free treatment for smokers can

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develop into a bad habit. *Some* in *some countries* and *some ethnic groups* are used, because the speaker might not be able to give the exact names of those countries and ethnic groups. S3 argues that *there is something difference* here, as smoking is a bad habit. The vague cluster might help the speaker to get away without a well thought out argument, not begin able to find a way to express her logic exactly at the time. S3 then quickly transfers the speaking turn to the next interlocutor.

- *Do something*

Table 4.24: Frequencies of *do something*

Item	*Do something*			
Group	**L1SE**	**CSLE**	**VSLE**	**Total**
Frequency	6	22	19	47
Percentage	12.77	46.81	40.43	100.01**
Chi-square test	L1SE and L2SE	χ^2 [d.f.2, n = 47] = 9.234, $p < 0.01$		
	L1SE and CSLE	χ^2 [d.f.1, n = 28] = 9.143, $p < 0.01$		
	L1SE and VSLE	χ^2 [d.f.1, n = 25] = 6.76, $p < 0.01$		
	CSLE and VSLE	χ^2 [d.f.1, n = 41] = 0.22, p = 0.63903992*		

** after rounding

Table 4.24 shows that *do something* is preferred by the CSLE most, the VSLE is not far behind, but L1SE used it much less. CSLE and VSLE used *do something* more than three times as much as L1SE. All the differences between the first three pairs in the table are statistically significant, but not the last pair: between the two L2 groups, as they used *do something* at similar rates. Three kinds of *do something* clusters are used by the L1SE: *do something* + clause*, do something* + to-infinitive, and *do something* + N/NP. CSLE and VSLE used six clusters: *do something* + clause*, do something* + to-infinitive*, do something* + adjective*, do something* + preposition*, do something* + adverb, and *do something else*.

Extract 4.56 (English)

Context: Two participants (one teacher and one student) over six speaking turns. This discussion is about whether grades motivate students to learn.

T1:   Mhm. so, you've just suggested that there are, remember back to the uh, second class? Individual differences in how we're going to react to the exact same, type of motivation. Other thoughts about this? Dan? (L1:1:13)

S35: Um I think grades are definitely a motivator, but I don't know that they motivate, towards the right behaviour (L1:1:14)

T1:   Like what? Kim [SU-m: yeah] any thoughts about? (L1:1:15)

S35: Well I think there's, um it's definitely possible to m- with so much emphasis on grades you can motivate yourself to *do something* to get a grade without, actually learning, which is what the grade is supposed to make you do. (L1:1:16)

T1:   So, [SU-m: focusing xx] it's called does anyone, know what that's called? Tariq? (L1:1:17)

S5:   Rewarding A while hoping for B (L1:1:18)

In turn 1:14, S35 states that grades play a part as a motivator but may not motivate the right behaviour. This opinion is explained further in turn 1:16: the behaviour might be motivating one to *do something to get a grade without, actually learning*. Using *do something*, S35 might not know what exactly that *something* refers to, or knows it but is reluctant to come out and say it to avoid offending someone. In the latter case, *something* is fluid enough to withhold the sensitive information.

Extract 4.57 (Chinese)

Context: Four participants (one teacher and three students) over four speaking turns. They are discussing whether or not man can conquer natural disasters.

Teacher: Ok, now er, we all have some idea of the harm natural disasters can did. I'd like you to discuss this topic further and see if you can agree on whether man can conquer the nature. During the discussion you may argue with each other or ask each other questions to make a point clear. And will you about 4 minutes for discussion. Now please. (C:16:33)

Student 1: As for me, I don't think men can conquer the the nature because we live in the earth. Er the nature is part of the earth so so I think people have to live to live through(C:16:34)

Student 2: I agree with him because we all know that men have tried to... conquer the ...nature. But in spite of it the the nature can conquer our human beings in in er in some meanings. (C:16:35)

Student 3: I disagree with them. Er I think er people can conquer with natural disaster. Just like forest fire. I think the main reason caused the forest fire is just by people, er... ari- er rain, er the er... adv- adv- advertisement on the er TV. Er government will tell people that you should you should er you should er do- er not *do something* that cause the forest fire. I think just like er flood, er I think er just like I said that I said that if er if men *do something* that can er pro- protect the mm... protect that to to... er...... to the er natural disaster happened. Mm... but I think if we say that men couldn't conquer the natural disaster that mean we should not we shouldn't do any anything to er conquer the natural disaster. That will will... mm … (C:16:36)

Students 1 and 2 concur with the opinion that men cannot conquer the natural disaster in turn 16:34 and turn 16:35 respectively, while Student 3 gives his contrasting opinion in turn 16:36. Student 3 supports her argument by giving examples about forest fires and flood. According to her, governments could help to prevent forest fires by telling civilians what they should not do. However, the student only says *you should er do- er not do something that cause the forest fire* instead of saying what civilians should or should not do in detail. Student 3 continues utilizing *do something* when saying that men could do something to protect themselves when flood is coming. Student 3 disagrees that people cannot conquer natural disasters however she does not clarify in detail what people should do. *Do something* is used

in both examples to avoid a more detailed explanation, as it seems that the student lacks the vocabulary to build up the ideas she has in mind. Her utterance lacks fluency with many pauses and discourse markers (e.g. *mm*, *er*) due to insufficient level of English.

Extract 4.58 (Vietnamese)

Context: Three female students over 10 speaking turns. They are discussing the role of the teacher in an English class.

S3: I think that the teacher is also a controller. I mean, which mean the teacher has to make the class silent, they can make too much noise, that is not acceptable, necessary. (V:7:4)

S1: Yah, I see your point and I think they, she can control the, what the class will say. Maybe if she's, she is a … (V:7:5)

S2: What? (V:7:6)

S1: … how to say. Uhhh, an organizer because she creates the ability for students to do and she controls the class to do what, to do the task (V:7:7)

S3: And also that if he is an organizer so his job is to divide the class into pairs or group, that [. (V:7:8)

S2: In that case who will work with whom. That's right. (V:7:9)

S1: Maybe if, I think that she or he must be a model giver because before you told the students to *do something* you must be a model so that they know how to do that and what... (V:7:10)

S2: to correct (V:7:11)

S1: Yep (V:7:12)

S2: And also he or she will be a conductor, it means that make the class repeat the model correctly and maybe the whole class will speak or just individual, make themselves, ok. (V:7:13)

S3: Yep. I think so. (V:7:14)

The three students give different ideas about the role of teacher in an English class such as controller or organizer. In turn 7:10, S1 says that the teacher can tell *the students to do something*, meaning that the teacher can instruct students to do some

activities in class. S1 is here expressing a general idea and does not intend to clarify actual instructions or activities, so the *something* cluster is appropriate and economical.

- ***Say something***

Table 4.25: Frequencies of *say something*

Item	*Say something*			
Group	**L1SE**	**CSLE**	**VSLE**	**Total**
Frequency	2	32	19	53
Percentage	3.77	60.38	35.85	100
Chi-square test	L1SE and L2SE	χ^2 [d.f.2, n = 53] = 25.623, $p < 0.01$		
	L1SE and CSLE	χ^2 [d.f.1, n = 34] = 26.471, $p < 0.01$		
	L1SE and VSLE	χ^2 [d.f.1, n = 21] = 13.762, $p < 0.01$		
	CSLE and VSLE	χ^2 [d.f.1, n = 51] = 3.314, $p = 0.0686921*$		

Table 4.25 shows that *say something* was used mostly by the CSLE, while L1SE was the group who used this cluster the least, and the VSLE sit in the middle among the three groups. The CSLE used *say something* almost 16 times as often as the L1SE, and 1.7 times as often as the VSLE. There is a statistically significant difference for L1SE and L2SE, L1SE and CSLE, and L1SE and VSLE. On the contrary, there is no statistically significant difference between the two groups of L2SE, CSLE and VSLE. This means that the difference here is likely related to L1 and L2 factors.

In terms of extended clusters with *say something*, the L2 groups used more active than the L1 group. For example, there are only two occurrences (*say something* + preposition) that appeared in the L1SE data, but 32 occurrences in the CSLE and 13 occurrences in the VSLE. The CSLE used *say something about* + N/NP more (26 occurrences) viz. *say something* + preposition, *say something* + NP, *say something* + adverb; VSLE used *say something* about + N/NP*, say something* + adjective, *say*

something + adverb and *say something* + clause. The following excerpts show how *say something* is used in the data.

Extract 4.59 (English)

Context: Two participants (one teacher and one student) over two speaking turns. The discussion is about Kant's theories.

S2: Well Gold did a bad job of explaining that (L1:4:88)

T1: So analytic and synthetic this is a distinction about, what makes the sentence true and analytic, is, basically, the relations of the concepts in the sentence, just say the concepts make it true. And synthetic is, something else, makes it true. So like in the case of bachelors are fun, you might say, the world makes it true. Right, and Kant's gonna wanna *say something* about the structure of our mind makes it true. So those are just examples of things that could make it true besides the concepts. Then, the distinction between a priori and a posteriori, is not a distinction that's being drawn about what makes, the sentence true, but, how we came to know its truth... or came to know the sentence. Um, so, in a posteriori we come to know it through experience, and a priori is we learn it some other way, than experience. (L1:4:89)

In turn 4: 89, the teacher introduces Kant's ideas associated with the structure of our mind to make the sentence true: *Kant's gonna wanna say something about the structure of our mind makes it true.* The teacher probably knows the details of Kant's theories, but she obviously does not think an elaboration on the theory is needed here, so she just briefly mentions it via *say something*, which allows her to not go into detail about Kant's ideas.

Extract 4.60 (Chinese)

Context: Two participants (one teacher and one student) over two speaking turns. They are discussing university life.

Teacher: Ok, now that we know each other, we can do some group work. First of all, I'd like to ask each of you to *say something* about your university life. [a name], what do you think is the most interesting aspect of your university life? (C:5:15) Student 1: I think mm er there are a lot of activities in the university, er and the campus is big and beautiful, er there are a lot of equipment, er mm like the running ground, er the er the tennis er ground. We can do a lot of sports? And there are a lot of er organizations, er just like some mm music organizations? we can take part in it and have a lot of er activities, er there are a lot of fun. (C:5:16)

The teacher is seeking ideas from students regarding their university life. She herself does not know what the students are going to say, so *say something* is chosen here. The cluster is a general stretcher serving to elicit students' contribution, the details of the content of the pronoun *something* is expected to be filled later by the students. The nature of 'emptiness' of *say something* is well suited to the demand of the particular discourse in this case.

Extract 4.61 (Vietnamese) **Context:** Three female students over seven speaking turns. They are sharing their plans for the summer holiday. S1: Now this month is May and maybe after a few weeks later, we will enjoy our summer vacation and you, guides have any plan for your summer and the first person is Yen Anh? (V:25:1) S2: I am going to volunteer in idea school. (V:25:2) S3: Really? (V:25:3) S2: Yes, I just volunteer that. (V:25:4) S3: Come on, it's amazing, could you *say something* about this (V:25:5) S2: That's a school of some children, some children in Hue, yeah and most of teachers is, is abroad guide, abroad guide like Mr. Noir last year (V:25:6) S1: I can join with you. (V:25:7)

S2 is talking about her plans to volunteer for a school during the summer holiday. In turn 25:5, S3 is seeking more information about S2's plans by asking *could you say something about this*. The *say something* phrase has the same function as *say something* in the above Chinese extract aiming to encourage the interlocutor to talk more about the mentioned issue. As requested, in turn 25:6 S2 talks about her planned volunteer activities in detail.

In summary, the L2SE used the verb + *something* more than the L1SE speakers. The frequency of use of *do something* and *say something* by L2SE was more than the L1SE, whereas L1SE used *to be something* more often than the two L2 groups.

4.3.1.3 *Something* + lexical items

In this section, *something + lexical items* includes two clusters: *something more* and *something that.*

- ***Something more***

Table 4.26: Frequencies of *something more*

<table>
<tr><td colspan="5" align="center">***Something more***</td></tr>
<tr><td></td><td>**L1SE**</td><td>**CSLE**</td><td>**VSLE**</td><td>**Total**</td></tr>
<tr><td>Frequency</td><td>1</td><td>17</td><td>1</td><td>19</td></tr>
<tr><td>Percentage</td><td>5.26</td><td>89.48</td><td>5.26</td><td>100</td></tr>
<tr><td rowspan="4">Chi-square test</td><td>L1SE and L2SE</td><td colspan="3">χ^2 [d.f.2, n = 19] = 26.947, p <0.01</td></tr>
<tr><td>L1SE and CSLE</td><td colspan="3">χ^2 [d.f.1, n = 18] = 14.222, p < 0.01</td></tr>
<tr><td>L1SE and VSLE</td><td colspan="3">χ^2 [d.f.1, n = 2] = 0, p = 1*</td></tr>
<tr><td>CSLE and VSLE</td><td colspan="3">χ^2 [d.f.1, n = 18] = 14.222, p < 0.01</td></tr>
</table>

More in *something more* tends to bring in an adjective to further modify *something*. Table 4.26 shows that there is a remarkable difference between the CSLE and the other two groups. *Something more* was used most frequently by the CSLE with 17 occurrences, while it occurred only once in the L1SE's and VSLE's interactions. Consequently, the differences between all three groups having CSLE in it are statistically significant. The difference between L1SE and VSLE however is not significant, as they both employ the same frequency of the cluster ($p = 1$). The following excerpts illustrate the use of *something more* in the data.

Extract 4.62 (English)

Context: Two participants (one teacher and one student) over four speaking turn. They are discussing pornography.

S11: The usual porn that you see on like TV or something like something that you would like, just be flipping through on the channels [T1: mhm] where it's like when I think of erotica I'm seeing like something that's more, not (L1:2:100)

T1: More deviant? (L1:2:101)

S11: More more deviant more creative more, more, out of the ordinary, [T1: okay] whereas like, pornography like it's so like readily available on the internet [T1: mhm mhm] and like on the_ and just erotica's *something more* like people've been saying it's more creative, expression of s- of you know sex maybe. [T1: mhm] so, (L1:2:102)

T1:   Okay. Um just a couple more and then actually we need to go on to what's obscene but yes let's go ahead [xx] (L1:2:103)

In turn 2:100, S11 could not find the word to express her ideas about pornography so the teacher takes a turn and suggests the right word to S11. S11 is then able to explain her idea further in turn 2:102. She says *something more like people've been saying it's more creative. Something* is applied with the aim of giving the listener a flexible interpretation about erotica (and pornography) being *deviant* and/or *creative*. Here S11 decides that *something more* is better suited to the context, perhaps based

on her belief that the listener would be able to infer with the vague category (deviant/creative things) represented by *something*.

Extract 4.63 (Chinese)

Context: Teacher is giving instructions in an English oral test.

Teacher: Ok, now let's move on to *something more* specific. The topic for our discussion today is the eastern and the western festivals. Each of you will be given a a picture showing two festivals. I'd like you to talk about the two festivals and say something about how they are celebrate it. You will have one minute to prepare, and each of you will have one and a half minutes to give your presentation. Don't worry if I interrupt you if time is up, thank you. Now, Miss [a name], please begin. (C:7:31)

The teacher is giving the students a topic and expecting them to talk about it. She instructs them by saying *now let's move on to something more specific. Something more specific* indicates a category with a fuzzy boundary, but it is good enough to direct students to work within the category. The vague cluster provides fluidity for students to be creative. It is impossible for the teacher to be more specific than this, because the students have a wide range of different tasks to carry out, thus a vague cluster like *something more specific* serves much better than a non-vague expression.

Extract 4.64 (Vietnamese)

Context: Four participants over seven speaking turns. They are discussing danger and risk.

S3: I will never go to some, some places at night if it is very dark a lot. Yes. (V:27:189)

S6: You are afraid dog. You're a boy… [group laugh] You are not suppose to be scared of dog. (V:27:190)

S2: Dark. (V:27:191)

> S3: Because in the dark, in dark street, especially at night hmm and I'm, if I am alone. I can, I can not a, maybe I am not afraid of the night, of the dark but hmm there's _something more_ dangerous than the dark and you know, people. (V:27:192)
>
> S6: Someone will pop out and kill you. (V:27:193)
>
> S3: Yes, yes, I think about that. (V:27:194)
>
> S5: Kick you before kill you. (V:27:195) [group laugh]

S3 says that he is scared of the darkness in turn 27:189 and then gives more explanation about his fear in turn 27:192. He thinks _there's something more dangerous than the dark_, which is people. The meaning of '_something more dangerous than the dark_' is vague, until later the speaker clarifies that what he means is 'people'. In this case, _something_ (a member of the _some_ group) refers negatively, which supports the claim made in Duffley and Larrivée (2012) that _some_ contains a denigration meaning especially in the case of its combination with a singular pronoun. _Something_ is a singular pronoun here, which contains the denigration meaning in expressing danger.

- **_Something that_**

Table 4.27: Frequencies of _something that_

Item	**_Something that_**			
Group	**L1SE**	**CSLE**	**VSLE**	**Total**
Frequency	24	4	8	36
Percentage	66.67	11.11	22.22	100
Chi-square test	L1SE and L2SE	χ^2 [d.f.2, n = 36] = 18.667, $p < 0.01$		
	L1SE and CSLE	χ^2 [d.f.1, n = 28] = 14.286, $p < 0.01$		
	L1SE and VSLE	χ^2 [d.f.1, n = 32] = 8, $p < 0.01$		
	CSLE and VSLE	χ^2 [d.f.1, n = 12] = 1.333, $p = 0.24827222*$		

That in *something that* tends to bring in a clause to modify *something* further. Table 4.27 demonstrates that the L1SE used *something that* most frequently, six times as many times as the CSLE and three times as many times as the VSLE. The results of the Chi-square tests show that the differences are statistically different between L1SE and L2SE, L1SE and CSLE, L1SE and VSLE. However, there is no statistically significant difference between the CSLE and VSLE, meaning that the two L2 groups used this cluster a similar number of times. The difference in this case is mainly between the L1 and L2 groups.

Extract 4.65 (English)

Context: Two participants (one teacher and one student) over two speaking turns. This conversation focuses on motivation for learning.

S5: Rewarding A while hoping for B (L1:1:18)

T1: Yeah so we have the folly going on there and then there's also, there's another term that was used in your reading anyone, have any thoughts about that? There's *something that* they they talk about goal displacement right? That the grade is there to try and reinforce, try and motivate a certain type of behavior and instead of, learning the stuff what you're really, reinforcing is getting the grade. That the grade is there to motivate a certain type of behavior. Other thoughts about this, how you feel? Kelly? (L1:1:19)

In turn 1:19, the teacher is trying to give a hint to the students so that they can find the answer she is looking for from them, which is *something that* talking about goal displacement. The teacher knows exactly what it is she is looking for, but she only gives them a hint. *Something that* here appears to be a withholding strategy used by the teacher to encourage students to work it out for themselves.

Extract 4.66 (Chinese)

Context: Two participants (one teacher and one student) over two speaking turns. They are discussing the 'must-have qualities' to be a successful person.

Teacher: OK. Now [a name], what qualities would you say that a successful person must have? (C:14:62)

Student 1: Qualities. I think is the first diligent. Er because-because we know through hard working, we can we can achieve anything that we want. And also he must be intelligent. And if he didn't have the ability to-to think of things, he can not he can not do something. And he must be creative and imaginary. Er because through cre-creation, he may he may made *something that* never exist and will-will-will and will...sorry. (C:14:63)

According to Student 1, a successful person must be diligent, intelligent and creative so that the person could *make something that never exists*. *That* in *something that* introduces the clause *that never exists* to modify *something*. Hence, the meaning of *something* is narrowed to the thing *that never exists* which only could be done by a creative person. The student uses this vague cluster, as it is a future event being talked about, so it is impossible to know exactly what it is now. *Something* here is a general term or a name holder to serve the purpose of representing a future thing of some sort.

Extract 4.67 (Vietnamese)

Context: Four participants comprising three female (S1, S2, S5) and one male (S4) over twelve speaking turns. They are talking about the age for getting married.

S5: Now I ask ma-, I ask many people about when you want to get married and they said that twenty six is a, is a good a good age to get married and they said something about age because we graduate from university and we have job. It must be more stable job, yes stable job and then we get married we would [xx]. (V:19:119)

S4: Maybe at the end of twenty five or twenty six. (V:19:120)

S1: Twenty five and twenty six for woman. (V:19:121)

S4: The age of male maybe older. (V:19:122)

S1: Over thirty. (V:19:123)

S5: No, over thirty is very old. (V:19:124)

S4: Too old. Maybe two or three years after, two or three years older than woman. (V:19:125)

S1: I think it is good time for man such as [a name], he get married at the, the thirty. (V:19:126)

S5: Thirty one (V:19:127)

S1: Thirty, yes thirty one years old. (V:19:128)

S5: He is too old. (V:19:129)

S2: I think that a problem, that's a *something that* we can't plan, we can't plan hmm what age will we get married. (V:19:130)

During this conversation, the four students give a variety of ages for settling down as a family. In turn 19:130, S2 states that a marriage is *something that* we can't plan. Again, *that* brings in a modifier to make a vague category for *something* to convey: marriage is similar to the things that people cannot plan ahead for as it depends upon things like when 'love knocks on your door'.

To sum up, comparing the frequency of *something more* and *something that*, the CSLE and L1SE are in reverse, because the Chinese used *something more* 17 times but the L1SE it only once; for *something that* the Chinese use it only three times, but the L1SE used it 24 times. The other L2 group, the VSLE are closer to L1SE though, so this is not a case of contrast between the L1 and L2 groups. There suggests there may be some other factors contributing to this phenomenon, such as first language transfer, which can be a topic for future research.

4.3.1.4 *Something* as part of a tag

Something in this study is also examined as it is used as part of a vague tag (Channell, 1994). This section discusses three types of these, (*or/and*) *something like that*, (*or*) *something like this*, and *or/and something*.

- **(*Or/and*) *something like that***

Table 4.28: Frequencies of (*or/and*) *something like that*

Item	(*Or/and*) *something like that*			
Group	**L1SE**	**CSLE**	**VSLE**	**Total**
Frequency	4	6	14	24
Percentage	16.67	25	58.33	100
Chi-square test	L1SE and L2SE	χ^2 [d.f.2, n = 24] = 7, p = 0.03019738*		
	L1SE and CSLE	χ^2 [d.f.1, n =10] = 0.4, p = 0.52708926*		
	L1SE and VSLE	χ^2 [d.f.1, n=18] = 5.556, p = 0.01841745*		
	CSLE and VSLE	χ^2 [d.f.1, n=20] = 3.2, p = 0.07363827*		

Table 4.28 shows that the VSLE were keener on using (*or/and*) *something like that* than other two groups, 3.5 times as often as the L1SE and 2.3 times as often as the CSLE. In term of the Chi-square test however, none of the differences among the four pairs listed in the table is statistically significant. This means while there are different frequencies, they are not different enough to be considered as a meaningful result as far as the statistical test is concerned.

Extract 4.68 (English)

Context: Two participants (one teacher and one student) over five speaking turns. They are discussing pornography magazines.

T1: Okay um Playboy is porn, naked women in erotic poses. Does anybody think that Playboy is maybe not pornography? (L1:2:31)

S3: It's it's not [S2: is it erotica?] like more soft pornish? (L1:2:32)

T1: Okay soft pornish? (L1:2:33)

S3: Like there's more hard-core porn like, isn't_ I don't, [S8: yeah] it's not Maxim

---

but it's *something like that* Hustler. [S1: w- okay] Hustler now isn't that hard-core porn? (L1:2:34)

T1: Okay um, Hustler, d- I- I haven't seen Hustler in a few years [S3: I have] but I remember the last t- [S3: well yesterday when I was-] I'm not that seri- yesterday when you were at the grocery store. Um, now, no Hustler was much more graphic and much more um the poses of women were very different, the social class of the women portrayed looked very differe- in other words you could tell, their social class was lower or was supposed to appear lower, than the women posed in Playboy so y- (L1:2:35)

In turn 2:32, S3 thinks that Playboy magazine is not pornography and adds that it is more of 'soft pornish' in responding to teacher's question about Playboy. In turn 2:34, S3 considers Playboy is not like Maxim, but *something like that* Hustler. *Something like that* is used as a tag to avoid providing a precise explanation of Hustler magazine. The tag implies that Hustler is the exemplar of a vague category, consisting of things with characteristics of Hustler magazine. Channell (1994, p. 143) calls 'Hustler and the like' a vague category identifier, which is a 'good example' of the intended category. In this case, S3 employs *something like that* to link Playboy magazine to the category of items exemplified by Hustler.

Extract 4.69 (Chinese)

Context: Two participants (one teacher and one student) over two speaking turns. They are discussing possible solutions to help a classmate in financial difficulty.

Teacher: Ok, now Miss [a name], if one of your classmates were in financial difficulty, how would you help him? (C:12:52)

Student 3: Oh, I think the first one it depends on what is the relationship between us right? If he is my boyfriend or if he is my best friend *or something like that* I mean I will try my best to help him. Ok, suppose he is my best friend ok and mm first I will for mm for sure I will talk to him about problem I will see mm so the most important solution is to give him money or find some money for him *or something like that* right?

So how to get the money? That's the next question so the next question how to get money so we can work out its mm by a lot of solutions like we can apply a student loan or we can erm I can talk to him if he is a g student I say you can work much harder to get scholarship, it is another way; the third way is that mm like the other students say doing the part-time jobs *something like that*. And mm so the most possible way is ask for a student loan and if I have financial erm supports I mean I-I have superior money I will give some to him give some to him that's it. Thank you. (C:12:53)

Responding to a question about helping a classmate who is in need financially, S3 confirms that she will do her best to help if the person is her boyfriend or best friend *or something like that*. This tag refers to a vague category exemplified by people like boyfriend or best friend, meaning a group of people with whom the speaker has a close relationship. *Or something like that* in this case reveals a solidarity between the speaker and the one who needs help.

The same tag is used second time when the student suggests solutions to give financial support to the person in need. The application of *or something like that* now belongs to a vague category of solutions, such as give money or find some money for the person in need. The third time the student uses *something like that* is to refer to a vague category where the example is 'doing a part-time job'. All three tags used in this example indicate that there is no need to provide a long list of the items for the relevant category which most of time is impossible as well. The use of tags meets the relevance principle in that an utterance needs to achieve optimal cognitive effect using minimal processing effort (Sperber & Wilson, 1985). Another important point is that the speaker assumes that the vague meaning of a tag can be inferred by the listener, otherwise she would not use them.

Something like that can be used to "suggest the multitude of possible elements of the set" (Dubois, 1992, p. 182) which the speaker mentions in their utterance. The first *or something like that* signifies solidarity, one of the characteristics of rapport elasticity (Zhang, 2015, p. 130), while the last two *or something like that* makes the communication more relevant.

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A cultural note is that the speaker makes it clear that how much effort she is willing to put in to help depends on how close she is with the person in need. She will do her best to help people very close to her. This reflects a mentality that the Chinese feel obligated to try their best to help people they know well, but this responsibility is not necessarily applicable to strangers (Yan, 2009).

Extract 4.70 (Vietnamese)

Context: Two participants over four speaking turns. They are talking about their favourite types of films.

S1: How's about… [a name], yes. (V:29:25)

S4: I like watching roman and fiction film. Hmm, like roman film like Love story in Harvard, Romeo, Romeo and Juliet and Titanic *and something like that*. (V:29:26)

S1: Wow! (V:29:27)

S4: And fiction film like Harry Porter, Nonie and, and I don't remember. How's about you, [a name]? (V:29:28)

S4 likes watching romantic movies as mentioned in turn 29:26 in responding to S1's question. A few are listed, such as *Love story in Harvard, Romeo, Romeo and Juliet* and *Titanic*. At the end of the listing, S4 uses the tag of *and something like that*. S4 prefers to shorten the utterances by using *and something like that*, instead of adding more names of romantic movies. Or, S4 might not remember more names to add to the list. By employing *and something like that,* the listener may understand what S4 wants to convey based on the structure of the tag and refer to "semantic categories in an open-ended way and helps the conversation go smoothly" (Shirato & Stapleton, 2007, p. 396). That is, S4 assumes that given the examples provided, the listener should be able to infer the type of romantic movies mentioned, so there is no need to list all the movies in this category.

- **(*or*) *something like this***

The VSLE were the only ones who used the tag (*or*) *something like this* in their data with 19 occurrences. L1SE and CSLE failed to use this tag in their speech. In terms of the results of Chi-square test, the differences in using *something like this* are all statistically significant between L1SE and L2SE, between L1SE and VSLE, between CSLE and VSLE. As both L1SE and CSLE used none, they are exactly the same and thus there is no difference between them. The following excerpt shows how *or something like this* is used in the VSLE data.

Extract 4.71 (Vietnamese)

Context: Three participants over three speaking turns. They are discussing their favourite movies.

S4: And fiction film like Harry Potter, Nonie and, and I don't remember. How's about you, [a name]? (V:29:28)

S1: Wow, I think it is amazing because we have the same hobbies about romantic films and especially about, even the name of the film. Yes. And besides that I love the film of the the film you can have, you can have many learn or you can study something after each film, for example some films like, like High School Music *or something like this*. After that, after the film you can learn about how, what does friendship or love *or something like this* mean, and what's about you? How's about you, [a name]? (V:29:29)

S2: Yeah, I like honour film, yes. The name, the film is honour story of America. Yes, it's, it's honour hot movie channel. Yes [xx]. And I like romantic film, of course the girl is like this. Hmm, I like Harry Potter too [xx] and the new film is Tangled. (V:29:30)

S1 likes educational movies, in turn 29:29 he says he prefers *High School Music or something like this*. The use of the tag here enables S1 to avoid presenting a list of similar movies. Later in the turn, S1 again uses a tag in *friendship or love or something like this*. S1 uses these two tags to make his utterance effective and efficient, in that he provides the highlighted information and at the same time also covers the extended range without wasting anyone's time.

- **(*and/or*) *something***

Table 4.29: Frequencies of *(and/or) something*

Item	Or/and something***			
Group	**L1SE**	**CSLE**	**VSLE**	**Total**
Frequency	11	10	2	23
Percentage	47.83	43.48	8.7	100.01**
Chi-square test	L1SE and L2SE	χ^2 [d.f.2, n = 23] = 6.348, p = 0.04183592*		
	L1SE and CSLE	χ^2 [d.f.1, n = 21] = 0.048, p = 0.8265807*		
	L1SE and VSLE	χ^2 [d.f.1, n = 13] = 6.231, p = 0.01255328*		
	CSLE and VSLE	χ^2 [d.f.1, n = 12] = 5.333, p = 0.02092534*		

** after rounding

***The frequency of (*or/and*) *something* in this table excludes that of (*or/and*) *something like that* and (*or/and*) *something like this* which have been discussed previously.

Table 4.29 shows that (*and/or*) *something* was used almost the same amount by the L1SE and the CSLE. In contrast, the VSLE used it only twice, so they used this cluster five times fewer than CSLE and L1SE. Similar to (*or/and*) *something like that* as in Table 4.28 previously, the Chi-square test shows that none of the differences among the groups in Table 4.29 is statistically significant, except between L1SE and VSLE. These result indicates that the discrepancy is unlikely to be related to L1 vs L2 factors. The following excerpts are selected to demonstrate how (*and/or*) *something* is used in the data.

Extract 4.72 (English)

Context: Two participants over two speaking turns. Pornography is discussed in this extract.

S1:   Oh absolutely yes and in fact it's bu- it's interesting though because when

---

> you said ageist I was also thinking ageist in the other direction, um because who is it Farrah Fawcett, who posed for Playboy like at the age of, what? What is she like fifty *or something*? I don't remember. Um but that was like a really big deal, um because you don't see too many fifty-year-old women in Playboy. Um, and you don't see too much pornography of like older women unless that's like part of the story line right it involves wh- whatever story line they have or to what extent they have one yeah. Yeah so no that's a good point. Good. Okay well let's go on to obscenity what's obscenity? What was the famous quote about obscenity? (L1:2:157)
>
> SU-f: I know it when I see it (L1:2:158)

In turn 2:157, S1 uses *or something* to express a numerical approximation about the age of Farrah Fawcett who was said to have posed for Playboy. *Or something* is a signal for the listener to infer the age of Farrah Fawcett to be around fifty, as S1 could not give the exact age. More importantly, it is not necessary to give a precise number, an approximation is good enough in this case, as the speaker's purpose is to indicate that older woman can still pose for Playboy. *Or something* is also used to "express tentativeness" (Overstreet, 1999, p. 107), as S1 is unsure about the exact age of Farrah Fawcett.

> **Extract 4.73 (Chinese)**
>
> **Context:** two students (S4: male, S5: female) over two speaking turns. They are taking about places for having meals.
>
> S5: Ok, then [a name], where do you usually have your meals? (C: 9: 29)
>
> S4: Meals, er usually I have it in my dining-room. Erm I like have my dinner and at the same time I like to er watching some movie or er read some book *or something* else. I feel er is comfort in my dining room. (C:9:30)

S4 states that he usually has his meals in his dining room. He extends his utterance by adding that he has dinner while watching a movie, reading books *or something else*. *Or something* followed by *else* suggests some other activities, similar to

watching a movie or reading a book, while having dinner. S4's use of *or something* also gives the impression that activities during dinner time could be varied instead of sticking to only one activity or two every day; and watching a movie or reading books are two possibilities. The usage of *or something* simply "keeps options open" for the listeners (Carter & McCarthy, 2006, p. 202).

Extract 4.74 (Vietnamese)

Context: Four students over eleven turn takings. They are discussing the marks they received for a test.

[S1 is delivering the results of the test]

S1: Oh, this is our test. This's yours, this's yours. I wish you will get good mark (V:15:1)

S2:   Oh, I got A (V:15:2)

The group: Oh (V:15:3)

S2: Oh, what happens to you? (V:15:4)

S3: I got F. (V:15:5)

S2: Wow, let me see this. This answer to the question is too easy, why don't you learn by heart? (V:15:6)

S3: I don't understand the lesson so I can't learn by heart. (V:15:7)

S4: Really? (V:15:8)

S2:   Oh, so why don't you cheat? It's so easy. Writing the test on your arms <u>or something</u> (V:15:9)

S4: I think our teacher very busy for us. (V:15:10)

S3: Oh, I am afraid that she knows that and I will be punished. (V:15:11)

In turn 15:9, S2 asks why S3 did not cheat during the test to get a better mark, given cheating is 'so easy' according to S2. S2 also mentions how to cheat, such as writing the answers on the arms *or something*. She doesn't recount all the ways of cheating and instead uses *or something.* Based on the context, the listeners could infer that *or something* refers to similar methods of cheating. Using the tag, S2 is able to avoid listing more specific cheating methods, which is good for self-protection to ward off

"the potential impact that an overtly direct utterance might have" (Quaglio, 2009, p. 142).

In summary, the VSLE were interested in using vague tags than the other two groups as found in the three sets of data. There were three kinds of tags appearing in the VSLE data: (*or/and*) *something like that*, (*or/and*) *something like this* and (*or/and*) *something*. In contrast, only two of the three kinds were found in the L1SE and the CSLE data. The cluster (*and/or*) *something* seems to be a shortened version of (*and/or*) *something like that* and (*and/or*) *something like this*. The three types of tags function similarly, except (*and/or*) *something* can make an approximation, which rarely occurs with the two longer versions of vague tags in this study.

4.3.2 *Sometimes*

Sometimes is an adverb, indicating infrequency of somewhere between *never* and *often*. *Sometimes* as a vague adverb was found in the three groups of data with frequency being the least for L1 speakers and the most by the VSLE, as shown in Table 4.30.

Table 4.30: Frequencies of *sometimes*

Item	*Sometimes*			
Group	**L1SE**	**CSLE**	**VSLE**	**Total**
Frequency	12	41	84	137
Percentage	8.76	29.93	61.31	100
Chi-square test	L1SE and L2SE	χ^2 [d.f.2, n = 137] = 57.474, p <0.01		
	L1SE and CSLE	χ^2 [d.f.1, n = 53] = 15.868, p < 0.01		
	L1SE and VSLE	χ^2 [d.f.1, n = 96] = 54, p < 0.01		
	CSLE and VSLE	χ^2 [d.f.1, n = 125] = 14.792, p < 0.01		

Table 4.30 shows that *sometimes* was most heavily used by the VSLE, while the L1SE used *sometimes* the least and the CSLE ranked in the middle. The VSLE used this word seven times as many times as the L1SE and twice as much as CSLE. Checking the results of the Chi-square test, it is revealed that the differences in using *sometimes* are statistically significant for all four pairs listed in the table, which suggests that the discrepancy is caused not only by L1 and L2 factors, but also by other factors, because the two L2 groups differ between themselves as well. The following excerpts show how *sometimes* is used in the data.

Extract 4.75 (English)

Context: Two participants over two speaking turns. They are discussing the motivators in studying.

T1: So, [SU-m: xx] we we [SU-m: xx xx] good, like, points of view here that say yeah they're they're a crucial motivator. Emily? (L1:1:12)

S34: Um, I think it really depen- depends on the individual because I know for me, um, I like to learn just to learn and [S1: uhuh] I get pleasure out of that, and so when there's grades and, that puts a lot of um, it puts a lot of pressure that I don't need and I think it detracts from learning *sometimes,* so I think it really depends on whether you're, already a very motivated individual, or whether you need, like external motivation. (L1:1:13)

The crucial motivator for studying depends on individuals, according to S34 in turn 1: 13, as S34 simply loves learning. She herself feels diminished by the amount of pressure which happens to her *sometimes*. By using the vague word *sometimes*, S34 implies that she still could be very motivated under strong pressure in some situations under pressure situations as this only occurs *sometimes*. Giving an exact number of times of ineffective study due to pressure is impossible; *sometimes* is chosen to avoid providing precise information.

Extract 4.76 (Chinese)

Context: Two participants (one teacher and one student) over two speaking turns.

150

> They are discussing fast food.
>
> Examiner: Ok, that's the end of our discussion. Now, I have to ask you just one last question on the to er on the topic of changes in people's life. Now Miss [a name], please. Er nowadays there are more and more fast-food restaurants, what do you think of fast-food? (C: 3: 35)
>
> Student 1: I think fast-food restaurant is erm a sign of er the people's living conditions erm which has improved, and you see in-in early times, mm not a restaurant mm erm erm so little er so few person can go to a restaurant and so few the fast-food restaurant, and that's for the mm er for the higher person to enter the restaurant to have a me-meal, and nowadays er you see, and er general person er with their kids, and with their senior students erm can go to the fast-food restaurant to have their dinner or have their er meal to mm er change the life style, they they can eat outside the home and to get a better life, and maybe mm this is er this means the it can *sometimes* means the er better condition of the living situation. (C: 3: 36)

The student suggests that eating fast foods is a result of better standards of living, but emphasizes that this is true only *sometimes.* She might say this because the question of 'what do you think of fast food' is in the series of questions belonging to the topic of 'changes in people's life'. *Sometimes* is used when the student suggests this interpretation, as it sounds that this way of interpretation infrequently happened in other explanations. This interpretation about fast food is relevant to other things related to living standards.

Additionally, the use of *sometimes* in this case may "convey the newsworthiness of a proposition, that is, how expected or unexpected it is" (Jucker et al., 2003, p. 1763). The student seems to have the expectation that better standards of living will lead to more people have meals in restaurants generally, fast food one or not.

> **Extract 4.77 (Vietnamese)**
>
> **Context:** Four students over eight speaking turns. The influences of using

computer is the topic of this discussion.

S1: And [a name], I know that your family owns a computer shop, for people to search the internet and, can you…, have you seen many cases of people get affected, affected by using, using computer ineffectively? (V:2:6)

S4: Ahhh, I see many people come to my house everyday and most of them are game players. They are very addicted to game, *sometimes* they make crazy, and… (V:2:7)

S3: And shout? (V:2:8)

S4: and *sometimes* they make fighting to each other to get the things in the game (V:2:9)

S1: And about your age, your …? (V:2:10)

S4: The game players can be every age … *sometimes* they are little kids, and *sometimes* I see a … (V:2:11)

S5: An old man? (V:2:12)

S4: An old man, maybe fifty years old come to play game with the kids. (V:2:13)

S4 is discussing how computers influence people 'ineffectively' (negatively). *Sometimes* appears four times over three turns in S4's utterance in which she enumerates the 'ineffective influences' of computers. *Sometimes* helps to indicate that these influences do not happen continuously. As seen from turn 2:7; 2:9 and 2:11, *sometimes* is always placed at the beginning of a clause describing things that happen in the computer shop. This sounds as though the student is aware of the estimation in describing the frequency of things that happen in the shop. She seems to make sure that *sometimes* is used as a shield to protect herself from any arguments from the listeners as everything she is describing are only an approximate expressions. She probably also knows that a precise number of frequency is not required in this case, and the vague adverb *sometimes* serves just fine.

4.3.2.1 And + sometimes

The conjunction 'and' appeared most commonly before *sometimes* except for L1SE who did not use it all, as shown in Table 4.31.

Table 4.31: Frequencies of *and + sometimes*

Item	*And + sometimes*			
Group	**L1SE**	**CSLE**	**VSLE**	**Total**
Frequency	0	6	17	23
Percentage	0	26.09	73.91	100
Chi-square test	L1SE and L2SE	χ^2 [d.f.2, n = 23] =19.391, $p < 0.01$		
	L1SE and CSLE	χ^2 [d.f.1, n = 6] = 6, $p < 0.01$		
	L1SE and VSLE	χ^2 [d.f.1, n = 17] = 17, $p < 0.01$		
	CSLE and VSLE	χ^2 [d.f.1, n = 23] = 5.261, $p = 0.02180848*$		

Table 4.31 shows that the VSLE used *and sometimes* 2.8 times as often as the CSLE. Given that L1SE did not use the cluster, there is a statistically significant difference between L1SE and L2SE groups as shown in the table. The difference is however not meaningful significant between CSLE and VSLE, so the discrepancy in this case is probably related to L1 and L2 factors.

Extract 4.78 (Chinese)
Context: Two participants (one female teacher and one male student) over two speaking turns. The student talks about how he spends his spare time.

Teacher: Ok, then [a name], how do you usually spend your spare time? (C:9:21)
Student 2: Well. I I have very little spare time now. But basically I would spend my leisure time on sports. I like to play badminton, soccer. I don't play badminton very well. But it's a very good sports which can train my

---

> muscles and also er to er to to improve your reactions. Er _and sometimes_ I spend my time to read some novels and enjoy some music. Tha-that's it. (C:9:22)

The student plays sports such as badminton and soccer, when he has spare time. He says that he _sometimes_ reads novels and listens to music, but no precise frequency is given. The reason could be that he is unable to do that, as the actual frequency varies from time to time, so he uses the vague _sometimes_ to provide the needed elastic meaning here. The clause starts by _and sometimes_ aiming to adjoin a variety of activities which he does in his free time, and asserts that sport is not the only thing he participates in. While it is perhaps not necessary for him to say exactly how often he reads novels or listens to music, the use of _sometimes_ suggests that these activities are mixed with sports during his free time.

Extract 4.79 (Vietnamese)

Context: Three female students over six speaking turns. They are discussing about preparation for university's life.

S1: Hmm I think before you go to the university you must learn how to cook? (V:6:16)

S4: No, I like to go out for meal. (V:6:17)

S1: Why? (V:6:18)

S4: Because cooking by myself is hmm very difficult for me and it's time consuming. (V:6:19)

S2: time-consuming? No, I think cook by yourself is very good for you. Hmm, it has, it is very useful, you, it helps you to keep fit and stay healthy because the food in the restaurant or the food store is very dirty and not good for your health _and sometimes_ it is very expensive. (V:6:20)

S4: Oh, I see. Thanks for your advice. (V:6:21)

S2 in turn 6:20 is trying to persuade S4 that cooking for yourself is good for your health as eating in restaurant might bring health issues because of the low standard of

hygiene in restaurants and food stores. S2 organizes strengthens her argument by adding restaurant food is very expensive and also hedges her ideas by mentioning it only happens *sometimes*. This might be because there is still cheap food available for students. S2 gives firm but flexible evidence to prevent opposing opinions. It is not necessary to give the name of a particular restaurant or the price of food in that restaurant, therefore the vague word *sometimes* serves quite well here.

4.3.2.2 Clause-initial *sometimes*

This cluster puts *sometimes* in a clause-initial position, which occurred in the data quite often for the two L2 groups, as shown in Table 4.32. However, the L1 group did not use it at all.

Table 4.32: Frequencies of clause-initial *sometimes*

Item	*Clause-initial sometimes*			
Group	L1SE	CSLE	VSLE	Total
Frequency	0	25	59	84
Percentage	0	29.76	70.24	100
Chi-square test	L1SE and L2SE	χ^2 [d.f.2, n = 84] = 62.643, $p < 0.01$		
	L1SE and CSLE	χ^2 [d.f.1, n = 25] = 25, $p < 0.01$		
	L1SE and VSLE	χ^2 [d.f.1, n = 59] = 59, $p < 0.01$		
	CSLE and VSLE	χ^2 [d.f.1, n = 84] = 13.762, $p < 0.01$		

Table 4.32 demonstrates that, similar to *and sometimes* discussed previously, the L1SE again did not use clause-initial *sometimes*. The VSLE used clause-initial *sometimes* the most, 2.4 times as much as the CSLE. The differences among all four groups as listed in the table were statistically significant, indicating that they are all different from each in the use of this cluster. The following excerpts reveal how clause-initial *sometimes* is used in the data.

Extract 4.80 (Chinese)

Context: Three participants (one teacher and two students) over three speaking turns. The students are introducing themselves at the beginning of an oral English test.

Teacher: Ok, ok, thank you. Now would you please briefly introduce yourselves to each other? Remember, you should not mention the name of your university. Please? (C:12:8)

Student 1: My name is [a name]. And my major mm my major is computer science. And my hobby is collecting stamps. And I have an mm habit of just reading books before I go to bed. That's all. (C:12:9)

Student 2: Mm my name is [a name]. I came from East China University of Politics and Law. My major is civil and convention mm commercial law. Mm I have to say my spoken English is not very good. *Sometimes* I can't express my mind very fluent, mm but I will try my best today. Thank you. (C:12:10)

In turn 12:10, Student 2 introduces himself briefly, then he mentions that his English speaking skills as not very good. S2 says *Sometimes I can't express my mind very fluent*. *Sometimes* positions in the beginning of the sentence here. It is impossible to give an exact frequency of when S2 could not express his mind, which explains why the vague adverb *sometimes* appears in his utterance.

Extract 4.81 (Vietnamese)

Context: Two students (one male S1 and one female S5) over two speaking turns. The conversation is about choosing a job based on one's passion or on money.

S5: I have a question for you. Because do you, do you think we choose a job, a favourite job relying on our passion or only for money? What do you think about this? (V:16:34)

S1: Yah, I think it is a very relative question. I think it depends on what, what kind

> hmm of job in a thinking of people. You know, <u>*sometimes*</u> hmm some people think that money is too important even it's the most important in his or her life hmm but some people think that a good teacher maybe better than a rich people. It depends. (V:16:35)

S1 gives a neutral opinion about the question that one should choose a job based on passion or money in turn 16: 35. He confirms that it depends on individuals as different people have different criteria for their own life. He emphasizes that *sometimes* some people consider money as the most important thing in their life whereas others value the importance of being a good teacher more than being a rich person. He uses *sometimes* to support the idea that the decision of each person is different based on their own values. The function of *sometimes* seems to make S1's views more realistic and flexible.

4.3.3 *Someone* and *somebody*

Vague words referring to an unidentified person are represented by *someone* and *somebody* in this study. L1SE had a heavier use of *somebody*, whereas L2SE preferred using *someone* most.

4.3.3.1 *Someone*

Table 4.33: Frequencies of *someone*

Item	*Someone*			
Group	**L1SE**	**CSLE**	**VSLE**	**Total**
Frequency	13	10	37	60
Percentage	21.67	16.67	61.67	100.01**
Chi-square test	L1SE and L2SE	χ^2 [d.f.2, n = 60] = 21.9, $p < 0.01$		
	L1SE and CSLE	χ^2 [d.f.1, n = 23] = 0.391, $p = 0.53177423^*$		

	L1SE and VSLE	χ^2 [d.f.1, n = 50] =11.52, $p < 0.01$
	CSLE and VSLE	χ^2 [d.f.1, n = 47] =15.511, $p < 0.01$

** after rounding

As Table 4.33 shows, VSLE used *someone* much more than the other two groups: 2.8 times as much as L1SE and 3.7 times as much as CSLE. The overall difference between L1SE and L2SE in using *someone* is statistically significant. In particular, the difference is also found to be statistically significant between L1SE and VSLE, between CSLE and VSLE. In contrast, with similar frequency rates of using *someone*, the statistically significant difference between L1SE and CSLE is very small and not meaningful.

There are some differences in terms of the placement of *someone*, it is used in different positions. L1SE and VSLE located *someone* predominantly as an object in a sentence and only once did *someone* appeared as a subject. CSLE on the other hand employed *someone* more frequently as a subject.

> **Extract 4.82 (English)**
> **Context:** Two participants (one teacher and one student) over two speaking turns. They are discussing whether grades motivate students.
>
> T1: Mhm so who n- so grade it's not clear what grades are necessarily rewarding or even motivating Rich? (L1:1:23)
> S36: I think that a concrete example of this like goal displacement thing is that, like you look at *someone*'s G-P-A, the concept of a G-P-A presupposes that all classes are created equal, but what you have at Michigan especially is that people actively seek out the absolute easiest classes in the school, because they know they'll get an A in those classes, and th- n- and in doing so they they're removing you know the challenges away from their academic experience and I think that's at the sense where, grades just you know, ruin things. (L1:1:24)

The teacher asks whether grades necessarily reward or motivate students. S36 gives an example that when you look at *someone*'s GPA, people suppose that the concept of GPA is equal in all classes. *Someone* is an indefinite pronoun, used as an object in the prepositional phrase. *Someone* is a general stretcher in Zhang's terms (2015) and by using it the speaker does not want to mention any individual name for obvious reasons, of what happened in Michigan, S36 states that in fact students are looking for the easiest class in order to achieve As in the GPA, which may become the motivation for students to seek high marks at university.

Extract 4.83 (Chinese)

Context: Two participants (one male teacher and one female student) over two speaking turns. They are talking about whether it is necessary to save water.

Teacher: Ok. Thank you. Now, Miss [a name], do you think it is necessary for us to save water? (C:13:21)

Student 3: Of course, because in the home China is a country suffer suffering from the water shortage and mm because we are living in the coast area mm in Shanghai we didn't see this shortage in our daily life so many of my classmates didn't pay attention to this problem, and when in my dormitories mm when they are washing-washing clothes they never turn on turn off the taps mm so many waters are wasted and even *someone* moved territory and without turning off the taps mm. I think it is a very a very bad habit. Mm it is a... it is... mm example of the-theirs lack of responsibilities. (C:13:22)

Student 3 presents arguments about the importance of saving water especially in Shanghai, pointing out the bad habits of students in the dormitories such as running taps leading to the waste of water. The speaker notes the case of when *someone* moved territory without turning off the taps. She may or may not know the name of this *someone*, if the former is the case then *someone*'s function is to withhold information for purposes such as politeness, because naming and shaming that someone might be offensive to the person involved. While attributing to such people a lack of responsibility, the speaker does not need to expose the name of any

individual, as exposing bad habits is more important than revealing a proper name. Even with an unidentified noun, the listeners still get the speaker's point.

Extract 4.84 (Vietnamese)

Context: Two female participants over eight speaking turns. They are discussing their criteria for choosing a boyfriend.

S3: If I have a boyfriend I prefer he's good looking, kind. (V:10:54)

S4: Rich? (V:10:55)

S3: Rich. Maybe. Maybe. (V:10:56)

S4: It's characteristical. (V:10:57)

S3: No, he's funny and ... (V:10:58)

S4: Tall? (V:10:59)

S3: No ... What's about you [a name]? (V:10:60)

S4: I would prefer *someone* who is smart and has great sense of humour. He may not be very good looking but he's kind because if he's too good looking, you're busy. [laugh](V:10:61)

A person who is good-looking coupled with being funny and rich might meet S3's standard in searching for a boyfriend. In contrast, S4 does not pick good-looking as a primary criterion for a boyfriend, but a great sense of humour is preferable. This is a discussion about future boyfriends so both of the participants do not give proper names. The vague word *someone* is used in turn 10:61 by S4, as neither participant could know who they are talking about – it is all hypothetical. The meaning of *someone* is elastic enough to be filled by anyone who fits as a boyfriend. *Someone* here is used as an object of the verb *prefer*.

4.3.3.2 *Somebody*

Table 4.34: Frequencies of *somebody*

somebody				
Group	**L1SE**	**CSLE**	**VSLE**	**Total**
Frequency	15	16	9	40
Percentage	37.5	40	22.5	100
Chi-square test	L1SE and L2SE	χ^2 [d.f.2, n = 40] = 2.15, p = 0.34129776*		
	L1SE and CSLE	χ^2 [d.f.1, n = 31] = 0.032, p = 0.85802766*		
	L1SE and VSLE	χ^2 [d.f.1, n = 24] = 1.5, p = 0.22067136*		
	CSLE and VSLE	χ^2 [d.f.1, n = 25] = 1.96, p = 0.16151332*		

Table 4.34 shows that L1SE and CSLE used *somebody* almost at the same rate, but VSLE used it less than the other two. Both L1SE and CSLE placed *somebody* as a subject in the data, while the VSLE did not use it as a subject at all. CSLE and L1SE are similar in both frequency of the use of the word *somebody* and in its syntactical position. While there appear various differences among the three groups, as far as the statistical tests are concerned, those differences are not statistically significant.

Extract 4.85 (English)

Context: Two participants (one teacher and one student) over three speaking turns. Human sensibility is discussed here.

S8: Okay I've got an example maybe, [T1: yeah] like if you're playing basketball, and, you have like, people that are on your team and people that are on the other team, like initially, you process it as, okay there's like shapes and basketball player, <u>*somebody*</u> with socks on, but when, but y- when you start distinguishing it between, opponent and teammate, that's something that, it's not there but y- that would be your understanding, when you make that distinction, but the the, when you view it as just like, people and colors and

shapes and, [T1: mm] that would be your sensibility. (L1:4:143)

T1: No even people colors and shapes are gonna be the understanding cuz all your sensibility does is space and time. Okay? (L1:4:144)

S8: Okay. (L1:4:145)

S8 is giving an example to clarify the concept of human sensibility in turn 1:143. S8 thinks that when you are trying to recognize your teammate among opponents when playing basketball it is revealing your sensibility. You can distinguish whether *somebody* with socks on is your teammate or not. *Somebody* is used to refer to basketball players who might be your teammate or not. The individual could not be identified in this case, as the speaker is giving an example. Hence, the listeners can still understand the unclear meaning of *somebody* based on the context of the conversation.

Extract 4.86 (Chinese)

Context: Three female students over three speaking turns. They are discussing banning smoking.

S3: Yes. I think maybe relates to economics. And maybe to some persons dedicates. So, maybe it's hard. But I think should be pro-prohibited. (C:11:46)

S1: I I think we can do it, we can make it. Although it will takes a long time. (C:11:47)

S2: Yes, I am sure of that. And er I think as we know, the average age of a of the people in some developing country is not as high as the developed countries. And they said that in China people who smoke is state a thing like that. People who smoke in China is much is much more than people who smoke in the United States. And the average age is not as high as them. So I think that's why er er I think that's why smoking should be prohibited. Should be pro-should be forbidden. Because that really affects *somebody*'s age and *somebody*'s health, right? I think so. (C:11:48)

S2 agrees with S1's opinions that it will take a long time to prohibit smoking in China. In turn 11: 48, S2 gives more evidence to support her argument, such as the average age of Chinese is not as high as in the United States which might be the result of smoking. She emphasizes smoking has effects on *somebody*'s age and *somebody*'s health. The two occurrences of *somebody* might be to present smokers who are directly harmed by cigarettes. *Somebody* might also be used here to target the ones who inadvertently receive the bad effects of smoking when being in contact with the smokers as well. The fluidity of *someone* serves the speaker's purposes quite well.

Extract 4.87 (Vietnamese)

Context: This is a discussion among five students (S5 male, and S6, S7, S2, S3 female) over fourteen speaking turns about how to recognize a person is telling a lie.

S6: Well, sometimes when you have conversation with *someone*, just by looking at her eyes or his eyes you can tell that he lies or not. (V:24:153)

S7: Yes (V:24:154)

S6: The eyes, the eyes... (V:24:155)

S2: I think it is the sixth sense, I think it is the sixth sense. (V:24:156)

S6: No, no, it's not something like sixth sense. (V:24:157)

S4: It will be science. (V:24:158)

S6: It is, it is our hmm... (V:24:159)

S2: It's... (V:24:160)

S6: Feeling, it's just a feeling come out and they tell us that the people... (V:24:161)

S2: I think this feeling we can call ... (V:24:162)

S3: We can't realize on it. (V:24:163)

S5: [xx] It's our emotion but scientific call the fact if we look into. (V:24:164)

S2: Body language (V:24:165)

S5: If we look into *somebody*'s eyes when we talk with him or her, we can find out that he will take a real lie or not because scientific cause evidence and police

> has used it to find out the criminal say, tell lie or not. (V:24:166)

In turn 24:153, S6 states that you can feel if a person you are communicating with is telling a lie or not by looking at his/her eyes. S6 uses a 'go general' maxim (Zhang, 2011) by apply *someone*, as she is talking about a general situation without focusing on any particular individual. In turn 24:166, S5 confirms that by looking into *somebody*'s eyes one could find out if that person is lying or not, which is 'scientifically proven'. *Somebody* in this second case also refers to someone non-specific.
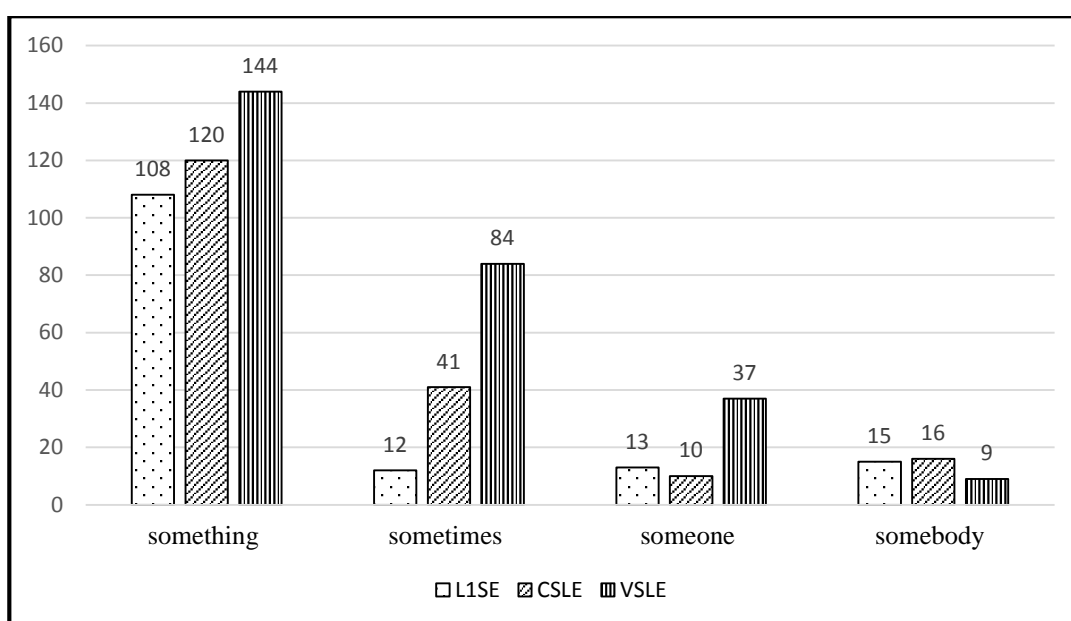

Figure 4.3: Frequencies of *some* groups

As demonstrated in Figure 4.3, *some* groups appear in the L1SE and L2SE data with four items: *something, sometimes, someone* and *somebody*. *Something* was used most frequently by both L1SE and L2SE. The general trend here is that the VSLE used *something, sometimes* and *someone* most, the CSLE sit in the middle and the L1SE were the least users. On the contrary, VSLE used *somebody* the least compared with L1SE and CSLE. It seems that L1SE and L2SE were not interested in using *someone* and *somebody* to indicate the unspecified persons in their utterances, so *someone* and *somebody* is less used than the other items of *some* group. However, both groups used *something* to refer to items that are unspecific, in contrast to the way they used people related words, *somebody* in particular.

4.4 Concluding remarks

The data analysis in this chapter revealed a number of patterns in the use of *some* and its clusters and *some* group members. Firstly, regarding the lexical pattern of *some* based on the use of *and/but/in* + *some*, L1 speakers were less interested in using them than the L2 groups. The two L2 groups preferred *and* + *some* more than *but* + *some*, VSLE used *in* + *some* twice as much as the other two groups. In fact, the VSLE used all three *some* clusters more than L1SE and CSLE groups, the L1SE group only preferred *in* + *some*, the CSLE mostly used *and* + *some*, and the VSLE mostly used *in* + *some*. It seems that *some* does not often suggest a contrast, as there were fewer uses of *but* + *some* in the data. There were statistically significant differences between L1 and L2 groups, L1SE and VSLE, CSLE and VSLE, but not L1SE and CSLE. This means that at the lexical level, VSLE behaved more differently from L1SE and CSLE, and the latter two groups are more similar than with VSLE.

Secondly, regarding the syntactic pattern of *some* based on the use of *some* + N/NP, verb + *some*, *some of* + N/NP, the CSLE were the most frequent users, three times as much as the L1SE and 1.3 times as much as the VLSE. The L1SE used more of *some of* + N/NP, VSLE used more of *some* + N, and the CSLE used more of *some* + NP and verb + *some*. The different use of *some* clusters at the syntactic level is statistically meaningful among and between all three groups. L1SE were consistent (with similar frequencies) in applying *some* clusters in their talks, but the L2SE are somewhat inconsistent, for example they used much fewer *some of* + N/NP. This may be attributed to L2's limited vocabulary.

Thirdly, regarding *some* groups, *something*, *sometimes, someone* and *somebody*, the VSLE preferred the *some* group the most, the Chinese were second, and the L1 group used them the least. All three groups used *something* much more heavily than the other three, clearly they preferred to refer an unspecific item *something*, but less frequently used *somebody* to refer to an unspecific person. The overall order from most frequent to the least is *something*, *sometimes*, *someone* and *somebody*, namely from an unspecific item, a time, and a person. There is statistically significant

difference between L1SE and L2SE, between L1SE and VSLE, between CSLE and VSLE, except between L1SE and CSLE, suggesting that the L1 and the Chinese groups are similar in their use of *some* groups.

The data showed that *some* clusters and *some* groups can be both quantity and quality markers. Patterns that emerged in the data were that *some* + mass noun tends to be a quality marker, especially with *sort of* in combination while *some* + countable noun tends to be a quantity marker. The nature of the item that *some* modifies might contribute to this phenomenon, such that when *some* modifies a mass noun, this type of noun is uncountable, thus the focus of *some* shifts to what is represented by the mass noun, rather than the numerals. For example, in *some kind of security*, security is a mass noun, *kind of* hedges the normal standard of notion of security, therefore *some* here is more of a quality stretcher, rather than a quantity stretcher. *Some* + noun (countable) and verb + *some* also have different focuses; in the former *some* tends to indicate a small amount as a quantity stretcher, but in the latter *some* focuses more on the action represented by the cluster, so it is more of a quality stretcher.

In general, the data revealed that L2SE used *some* more frequently than L1SE, but L1SE used *some* more constantly than L2SE. The use of *some* adheres to Grice's (1975) Maxim of Quality and Maxim of Quantity, for telling the truth and giving the right amount of information as required. It also meets the requirements of Sperber and Wilson's (1985) Relevance Theory: using *some* can achieve more cognitive impact and cost less processing effort. The analysis of *some*'s pragmatic functions is carried out in next Chapter.

Chapter 5 Pragmatic Functions of *Some*

VL has versatile pragmatic functions in various settings (Cutting, 2007; Zhang, 2015) and in various languages (e.g. Parvaresh & Tayebi, 2014; Zhang & Feng, 2013). This chapter presents data on the way in which the strategic *some* was used to target communicative purposes by L1SE and L2SE in educational settings. It also investigates the social-cultural factors influencing the selection of *some* in the three sets of data, given that the participants originate from different cultures (Western and Asian cultures).

The data analysis in this chapter is primarily qualitative. *Some* is investigated based on the interactions among the speakers using VL as "an interactional strategy" (Jucker et al., 2003, p. 1739). The data in this study are primarily "interactional" rather than "transactional" (Brown & Yule, 1983, p. 1-4). In communication, conversationalists "are generally satisfied with vague expressions, such as vague amounts and propositions of persons, ideas, and objects, because they fit with the purposes of interaction" (Cheng & Warren, 2001, p. 83).

Some and its clusters can be used to serve the pragmatic functions of expressing uncertainty, mitigating, self-protection, and the like (Zhang, 2015, p. 88). This chapter explores the pragmatic functions of *some* under four categories: right amount of information, mitigation, withholding information and structural function. There are also sub-categories in each of the four main categories.

5.1 Right amount of information

VL is "one device which speakers use to tailor their contributions such that they give the right amount of information for the purpose of the conversation" (Channell, 1994, p. 173-174). According to Channell, the function of giving the right amount of information observes Grice's (1975) Maxim of Quantity, in that speakers tailor their contributions in particular ways to provide information as required (not too much and not too little), when VL seems more appropriate than precise language. The subcategories of the right amount of information function include approximation,

generalization and uncertainty, as all three functions are used to convey an appropriate level of information suitable to the context in question.

5.1.1 Approximation

From the perspective of VL, approximation consists of two major parts: numerical (e.g. *about 20*) and non-numerical (e.g. *many*). *Some* is a non-numerical vague quantifier (Crystal & Davy, 1975; Channell, 1994) which quantifies a statement without using numbers of any kind. Non-numerical quantifiers are tools to create implicature resulting breaking Grice's Maxim of Quantity (Channell, 1994). While people do not normally push for precise numbers (Zhang, 2015, p. 127), the use of VL "has to yield additional contextual effects which are worth the processing effort" (Jucker et al., 2003, p. 1749) by following the principles of Relevance Theory (Sperber & Wilson, 1995/1986). *Some* is called an 'approximate stretcher' in Zhang (2015), in that words like *some* can stretch the meaning of the item it modifies to make an approximation. The following excerpts illustrate how *some* performs the approximation function in the data for this study.

Extract 5.1 (English)

Context: Two L1 speakers over two speaking turns. They are discussing how a senior manager increases sales in the company.

T1: Okay so you're not punished for, increasing the quota. But, you're in fact rewarded for it. Other ideas? Mike? (L1:1:284)

S3: We kind of like thought that in like the short term, and then in the long term like, in the long term there's a lot of like, better alternatives as far as like her going through senior management and getting things like passed but like, something is due to like profit-sharing whereas like, if you increase profits and you're getting *some percent* of it reflec- reflected in your bonuses as opposed to like a one-time deal, also like you know, stock options or, things that just happen in the short term, where she has little control over what senior management does it just, um, kinda like managing the role system [xx] in such

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> a way that it's like um, rewarding the entire region, therefore like they might be like they might one district might be more prone to like, share their ideas because if someone's slacking in their district then, they're gonna actually be hurt. It has its like, negative side, but like as a whole it might, stimulate (L1:1:285)

According to S3, there are a variety of ways to increase the sales of the company including short term and long term. S3 provides a specific example like propelling profits, getting *some percent* of profit transferred to the bonus. It seems impossible for S3 to give a precise percentage in this case; hence an approximation is used to support the argument more persuasively, rather than giving a specific number that might be questionable. As an exact number is not necessary the imprecise number helps to "guide the hearer towards the best interpretation of the speaker's intention" (Jucker et al., 2003, p. 1766).

Extract 5.2 (Chinese)

Context: Two participants (one teacher and one student) over six speaking turns. They are discussing global problems.

Teacher: Thank you, now, mm Mr. [a name], is water shortage a global problem? Please give us some examples? (C:13:36)

Student 2: Sorry? (C:13:37)

Teacher: A global problem. (C:13:38)

Student 2: A global mm... (C:13:39)

Teacher: Yes. (C:13:40)

Student 2: Mm it is a big question. Global? Mm I think each-each country met the met the problem of water shortage. Mm we often watch TV *some areas* are *some areas* are seriously mm polluted by mm polluted by the by the mm by the pollution mm and it included water pollution mm and even *in some in some country* which is mm which is near the desert mm they mm they mm they are mm they are lack of water mm naturally and but mm to mm but it is very sorry that they still-still mm seriously

> polluted the water and mm and the government don't take any method to forbid-forbid their-their-their sorry their wastage. Mm and I think mm I think everyone should mm should pay attention to it because it is not a-a easy problem it will improve it will mm in influence our future and our earth I think mm if we don't-don't do something today I think we will maybe we will we will lost future. (C:13:41)

In turn 13:41, Student 2 confirms that water pollution occurs in every country. However it seems that the student does not target the goal of the question when talking about water pollution instead of water shortage. She uses *some areas* when mentioning the polluted areas. The possible reason for using *some* is that the exact amount might be too large to enumerate as this is a global issue which is also asserted by Student 2 when she starts her turn with *it is a big question.* Hence, Student 2 chooses approximation to express such a big number on a big issue. Another reason is that the student does not know the exact number of polluted areas. These two reasons might be applied to explain the use of *some* in *some country* as well. Student 2 follows the Grice's Maxim of Quantity by "providing 'not less and not more' information than suits the situation" (Zhang, 2015, p. 129) in using *some areas* and *some country.*

Extract 5.3 (Vietnamese)

Context: Two female students over three speaking turns. They are discussing their plans for their summer holiday.

S1: Hello [a name], what is your plan in this summer? (V:1:1)

S2: Uhm, my priority is travelling with my best friend to *some special destinations* in Vietnam. Uhm. If I have a lot of money, I will travel to Thailand. What's about you, [a name]? (V:1:2)

S3: Uhm, I, after taking an entrance examination to the university, I will come back to Tuy Hoa and learn to play guitar with my friends and maybe have a picnic to … in Nha Trang City with Tam and we … in every evening I will uhmm walk, I will walking to the, to the park with her [laugh]. (V:1:3)

S2 expresses a wish to travel with her best friend to *some special destinations* in Vietnam in turn 1:2. S2's utterance reveals a general plan rather a specific itinerary; that is why the general term *some* is used here. An approximation might be better than an exact number as it is not necessary to say exactly how many special destinations there are in Vietnam and how many of then she is going to visit.

Furthermore, the expectation of special destinations is different based on individual interests which might result in the approximation rather than an exact number, as "a quantifier is more informative than the number, since it contains an internal reference to baserate expectation" (Moxey & Sanford, 1997, p. 212). The use of *some* as an approximator could be explained via the principles of Relevance Theory where "an approximation may lessen the hearer's processing effort" (Zhang, 2015, p. 83). Or, when "the contextual clues suggest that the precision is not a priority, the speaker uses approximation" (p. 128), so S2 might want to focus on the priority of travelling with her best friend than the number or names of the destinations in her utterances.

5.1.2 Generalization

Vagueness may provide generality of meaning (Crystal, 2008; Zhang, 2015). Zhang (2015) found that *some* can be both an approximate stretcher and a general stretcher, the latter conveys a general meaning instead of a specific meaning.

The generalization function of a quantifier like *some* is strongly supported by collocation patterns (Ruzaitė, 2007a). Ruzaitė asserts that it is common to use quantifiers when making generalizations about people. In her study of quantifiers in British and American English, Ruzaitė found that the noun *people* and other nouns related to human beings have the highest frequent collocates of the majority of quantifiers, and *some* collocated with such noun could make the generalizations of "a more limited applicability" (p. 99). Due to this limited applicability, *some* expresses "a small amount" (e.g. '…*some* people are desperately poor compared with others') or "opposing phenomena" (e.g. '*Some* are winning and *some* are losing…' (p. 100). The following examples demonstrate the use of *some* for generalization function in the data for this study.

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Extract 5.4 (English)

Context: Two participants (one teacher and one student) over three speaking turns. They are discussing the pictures in the Hustler and Playboy magazines.

T1: Okay um, Hustler, d- I- I haven't seen Hustler in a few years [S3: I have] but I remember the last t- [S3: well yesterday when I was- I'm not that seri-] yesterday when you were at the grocery store. Um, now, no Hustler was much more graphic and much more um the poses of women were very different, the social class of the women portrayed looked very differe- in other words you could tell, their social class was lower or was supposed to appear lower, than the women posed in Playboy so y- (L1:2:35)

S5: A- are they less um, do they have less um, like fake breasts and stuff, do you know [T1: in Playboy?] like than than in Playboy does Playboy have more have the [S1: boy] because it, advertised [T1: xx] more like the lifestyle versus like the actual explicit acts of, [T1: right] you know submissiveness and, yaddayadda. (L1:2:36)

T1: You know that I don't know um, [S5: I dunno. I've, never looked at it.] right, no th- [S3: we actually bought one] no I [SU-f: mhm] assume, *some women* in Playboy probably have had, artificial, whatever um I- as much as, women in Hustler or whatever, um I don't know if there have been any studies on that, actually. But you can check yes Rachel. (L1:2:37)

T1 is talking about the differences of the poses of women between Hustler and Playboy magazines in turn 2: 35. S5 adds the idea that the women in Playboy's pictures normally have fake body parts. Using *some women* in turn 2:37, T1 makes a generalization about the type of women having artificial parts in Playboy and Hustler. *Some*, then, suggests a small number of women in Playboy and Hustler magazines with artificial parts in their body, but not all of them. Also, an exact number is not important here, it is the general characteristic of the type of women that is the focus. By using *some* instead of a precise number, T1 aims to "speak as informatively as, but not more than, is required for the purpose of exchange" (Zhang, 2015, p. 127).

In turn 5:18, the student attempts to enumerate many of the activities on the campus such as tennis, football, computer games and so on. However he could not give the precise number of people who choose the particular kind of activities as it might be impossible or unavailable. *Some students* appearing three times is a generalization of the number as well as type of people participating in different organizations such as music or financial.

Furthermore, Student 2 also uses *some* with a generalization function in *some organizations*, referring the various kinds of organizations which students might join in the university. The speaker lists a few organizations such as music and financial to support the previous sentence: the idea spreads from a global level to a local level, to narrow the ideas from general to more specific.

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impact on the loser of a competition in reality television shows.

S1: Ok, that would be enough for the winner, how's about the loser, the loser after they, they get back to their normal life and they have a very bad impression on the judges, on the audiences, and they have a very bad experience themselves, so what is difficulty for them? (V:21:180)

S5: I think, think it would be a memorable experience for them. And they, it can help them [S1: They can learn a lesson], they learn very much from that experience, they can become better and they can improve their talent. (V:21:181)

S1: Yeah, but *some people* keep, [a name]: Keep saying] keep saying bad words about them. It is not easy to find to get over. (V:21:182)

S5: That's the problem of how they, how they lost, how they lost. (V:21:183)

S2: How they lose the competition. (V:21:184)

S5: Ya. (V:21:185)

In turn 21:180, S1 raises the issue of how the loser gets back to 'normal life' after the 'bad impressions' from the reality TV show. S5 responds with an optimistic perspective by confirming that the loser could improve their talent through their experience in a reality TV show in turn 21:181. In turn 21:182, S1 tries to persuade the listener that it is still difficult for the loser to integrate back into their normal life as *some people keep saying bad words about them. Some*, as a general stretcher, characterizes the small number of people who say 'bad words' about them. By observing the Relevance Theory, S1 picks *some* "when there is no need to process precise information, the speaker redirects resources to non-precise information to reduce the hearer's processing efforts" (Zhang, 2015, p. 128). The use of *some* is successful when the hearer continues the conversation smoothly.

It is noticeable that the wide scope of generalization is based on the different contexts. In this extract, the scale of people might be limited to the small group of unpleasant people, the loser's social relationships such as family, friendship or work environment. Comparing Extract 5.6 and Extract 5.5, it is hard to identify which *some* is larger. But it seems that the scope of 5.5 might be larger than the scope of 5.6 as the former is related to the number of students joining a variety of activities in a

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university and the latter is restricted to a relatively small group only. Adding the scales of generalization of *some* in Extract 5.4 to the comparison, it is difficult to measure which one has the largest scope among these three examples, when each *some* has different scales based on the context. Hence, *some* serving a generalization function has a fluid scale, and according to the Elasticity Theory (Zhang, 2015), can stretch elastically to achieve the communicative purpose.

The *some* clusters in the three extracts are all with countable nouns, and the same explanation applies to *some* clusters as with mass nouns. For example, in Extract 4.15 *some sort of, a say*, some here modifies an uncountable noun. The function is to generate a degree of 'a say'. *Some* in this study has a strong tendency to quantify generic lexemes, such as *people* and *women*, an important indicator for quantifiers with the salience of the generalising functions (Ruzaitė, 2007a, p. 150). The findings of this study also support the views that *some* functions "in kind more than in number", and follows the maxims of both 'go approximate' and 'go general' (Zhang, 2015, p. 88).

5.1.3 Uncertainty

VL is used to convey uncertainty (Channell, 1994; Ediger, 1995; Myers, 1996; Jucker et al., 2003; Ruzaitė, 2007a). Channell suggests that the two situations in which uncertainty is most used by speakers is when talking about the past, or the future. Vague expressions function as uncertainty in a statement about the past because of either "a general lack of knowledge about that past event or fact" or "the speaker cannot remember something" (Ruzaitė, 2007a, p. 186). Regarding uncertainty in the future, Ruzaitė states that references to the future are even more uncertain than references to the past given that prediction with certainty is difficult. Dubois (1987) also agrees that vague expressions are more appropriate than precise ones in the case of prediction. Furthermore, vague expressions can be used as a "circumlocutory device by a speaker who is not quite sure of what she wants to say" (Drave, 2002, p. 35), since uncertainty is the most obvious reason for the speaker to use them (Jucker et al., 2003, p. 1765). The interlocutor, according to Jucker et al, does not have enough information about the given quantity, quality or identity, which

leads to the imprecision occurring in the interlocutors' utterances. *Some* functioning as uncertainty is present in the following examples from this study.

Extract 5.7 (English)

Context: Three participants (one teacher and three participants) over four speaking turns. They are talking about pornography.

T1: (…) But um, but Jim what were you going to say? We only have a, a couple minutes left. (L1:2:284)

S7: Well this'll give everyone a laugh. Um, I was in the_ I had *some sort of*, uh, I can't remember what course I was in it was just another course similar to this and, um, it was just addressing like what kinds what kind of porn exists [T1: mhm] and there w- there w- we had looked at *some sort of* um, like recent news bit or article where a s- a survey had been done with local, porn you know dealers or stores or whatever an- in some in a city center, and th- and and apparently the most popular um, popular video, rented, [T1: mhm] um when the survey was done, being rented was called Back Door Boyfriend, [T1: mhm] and the video featured, women, who were wearing, who were wearing um strap-on dildos, [T1: uhuh] and, you know having oral sex with their boyfriends, (L1:2:285)

S4: Bend Over Boyfriends. (L1:2:286)

S7: Or Bend Over Boyfriends, thank you. Great. (L1:2:287)

In turn 2:285, S7 plans to give a laugh to the class by telling a story about when he joined a course which discussed pornography. S7 cannot recall the name of the course, leading to the use of the vague expression *some sort of*, indicating uncertainty regarding a past event. While S7 continues talking about the activities in the course, all activities of the course could not be relayed in detail. For instance, it is impossible for him to tell where the survey was released during the course, in the news or in an article. S7 again uses *some sort of* to express the uncertainty on a past event. In this turn S7's lack of information about the course/survey happened in the past so *some sort of* is applied twice to express the tentativeness of the speaker.

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Extract 6: 8 (Chinese)

Context: Two female students over five speaking turns. They are discussing how family background can influence people's future life.

Student 1: Family background is also very important. Because it can have *some* have *some* im-impression have *some* in- It can have *some*... (C:14:48)

Student 3: Infection. (C:14:49)

Student 1: Infections on-on himself on-on her on her own. (C:14:50)

Student 3: That's why I say it just help you to get the ability. We can... (C:14:51)

Student 1: And the parents can also guide you to get *some* decisions. And will-will infect will have *some infect influence* on your future life. (C:14:52)

Student 1 gets stuck searching for words to express her ideas during the conversation, especially in turn 14: 48. She is unable to find suitable words to finish her utterance and *some* is used four times as a strategy for lengthening the time in an effort to find the words she needs. She then receives support from Student 3 to continue her talk. Student 1 supports the opinion that family background plays an important role in making personal decisions which might have an influence in their future life. *Some* in turn 14:48 and 14:52 (many of them) expresses Student 1's uncertainty about the use of an appropriate word as well as about the *influence* the family may have on future life, as she is unable to pick a correct word in turn 14:48 and also unable to clarify what will happen in the future in turn 14:52.

Extract 6: 9 (Vietnamese)

Context: Two students over three speaking turns. They are discussing reality television programs in Vietnam.

S5: I think serious program in reality program means people talk about some problems of the society and they are not joking in that. So... (V:21:108)

S2: Yeah. And I think TV, people use, use it to relax when they have, after they have work and I think to reduce, to reduce stress. So I don't, I don't agree with

> the statement. I think if, if they can arrange the program, I, they should add more program not only ridiculous program but also serious program to other people watch and relax, yes and know more about the life. Yes. (V:21:109)
>
> S3: As a result, *I think* in *some days* in the near future, Vietnamese audiences will, will be tired with, catch up with the reality program with have the participation of famous, famous person. It only attract in a short time. (V:21:110)

S2 suggests that 'ridiculous' and 'serious' programmes should be broadcast interchangeably to attract the audience in turn 21:109. S3, however, expresses her concern about the tiredness of audiences in following reality programmes in which celebrities participate in turn 21:110. She suggest that these kinds of reality programmes only attract audiences for a short time. S3 makes a prediction about reducing audience numbers, but it is impossible giving an exact period of time. S3 can only say that it will happen *some days in the near future* to express the uncertainty. Together with *some*, S2 also adds *I think*, another elastic expression, performing self-protection (Zhang, 2015, p. 106) to shield her being challenged later on.

The data in this study supports the assertion that vague expressions "signal the speaker's lack of confidence or to assert something tentatively" (Holmes, 1982, p. 18). Jucker et al. also add that downtoners "introduce vagueness into a proposition or increase the degree of vagueness of an utterance" (2003, p. 1746).

5.2 Mitigation

One of the most recognized functions of VL is its capacity to mitigate (Channell, 1994; Zhang, 2013). Mitigation is defined as the modification of a speech act to reduce "certain unwelcome effects which a speech act has on the hearer" (Fraser, 1980, p. 341). Mitigation functions "to smooth interactional management in that it reduces risks for participants at various levels, e.g. risks of self-contradiction, refusal, losing face, conflict and so forth" (Caffi, 1999, p. 882); or to "soften a negative impact, and are frequently used when the topic is sensitive or embarrassing" (Zhang, 2015, p. 136).

Some as a mitigating quantifier (Ruzaitė, 2007a, p. 96) "can mitigate not only a quantity, but also the force of requests, apologies, advice, instructions and criticism" (p. 183). *Some* functioning as mitigation is investigated under two subcategories in this section: politeness and downtoning. Both serve the function of mitigating, although with slightly different priorities.

5.2.1 Politeness

Lakoff (1975) states that politeness is "developed in societies in order to reduce friction in personal interaction" (p. 64). According to Leech (1983), politeness reveals a relationship between speaker and hearer and indicates the importance of avoiding or minimizing conflict.

Politeness is also related to the notion of face. Face is "an image of self delineated in terms of approval social attributes - albeit an image that others may share, as when a person makes a good showing for his profession or religion by making a good showing for himself" (Goffman, 1967, p. 306) and "the public self-image that every member wants to claim for himself" (Brown & Levinson, 1987, p. 66). Brown and Levinson propose two important concepts: positive face (wants to be accepted by others) and negative face (do not want to be imposed upon). Face-threatening acts happens when conversations "run contrary to the face wants of the addressee and/or the speaker" (Brown & Levinson, 1987, p. 70). Hamilton and Mineo (1998) consider VL as a strategy to minimize face-threats as "a precisely worded message might come across as too personal, threatening a receiver's self-esteem" (p. 6). Politeness also has a close relationship to indirectness (McCarthy, 1998). Indirectness helps to save face and the relationship between people (Leech, 1983). Scollon & Scollon (1995) state that "power, distance, and the weight of the imposition" are three main factors involved in a politeness system (p. 42).

Regarding the L2 speakers in this study, both with Confucian Cultural Heritage, the notion of face is one of the important values in their communication (Hofstede & Hofstede, 2005; Wang, Wang, Ruona & Rojewski, 2005; Monkhouse, Barnes & Stephan, 2012). In their communication, the speaker must "protect the others' self-image and feelings, he or she is not confronted directly" (Chang & Holt, 1994, p.

115). VL is "tightly related to politeness" (Ruizatė, 2007a, p. 49) and "is used as one way of adhering to the politeness rules for a particular culture, and of not threatening face" (Channel, 1994, p. 190). VL, therefore, can function as a strategy of politeness (Stubbs, 1996; Zhang, 2015). The use of *some* functioning as politeness is demonstrated in the following examples.

Extract 5.10 (English)

Context: Two participants (one teacher and one female student) over five speaking turns. The student wants to confirm whether the teacher received her paper or not.

SU-f: And also, do you have my paper? (L1: 4: 176)

T1: No you know what? [xx] She gave it to me? (L1: 4: 177)

SU-f: Um no actually I didn't when I emailed you I didn't realize that, [xx] on Friday morning, so I had my roommate, bring it to class. And she said she di- i no, she didn't she didn't stay for the class she gave it to *someone* in class... and, I, assumed that you had (gotten it) (L1: 4: 178)

T1: I looked through my stack and I was like, I don't remember Cheryl giving it to me and I don't remember getting it. So... [SU-f: Okay] um, cuz I don't have I don't have it in my stack of papers. And I've graded almost everything. [SU-f: okay] um but I've also looked at everything, [xx] [SU-f: okay] [xx] [SU-f: okay] so can you just print it out again? (L1: 4: 179)

SU-f: Yeah. [xx] I'm sorry (L1: 4: 180)

When realizing that the teacher hadn't received the paper, the student explains that she asked her roommate to bring it to class on Friday in turn 4:178. However, the roommate didn't stay for the class and handed the paper to *someone* else in the class. The student does not name the person who received the paper from her roommate. While it is possible that her roommate does not know that person's name, a more likely explanation is that the student does not want to name the person in front of class due to politeness. The person who forgot to hand in the paper might lose face in this situation. Even when the teacher requires the student to print out another copy, the student responds with an agreement without disclosing the name of the person who might still hold her paper. In this situation, *someone* is a word with unspecified

meaning to mitigate for politeness (Ruzaitė, 2007a; Zhang, 2015), namely *someone* is intended to ward off any potential criticism the teacher might make of the person who did not pass on the paper. Extract 4.44 and Extract 5.10 show that in L1 data, face-saving occurs in different situations. *Someone* in Extract 5.10 does face-saving not for the interactants but for the one who does not join the conversation. On the contrary, *some* (*of you*) in Extract 4.44 does face-saving for the interactants (listeners and/or the speaker). That is, *some* can be used for face-saving in different levels in American culture, as shown in the two examples.

Extract 5.11 (Chinese)

Context: Three participants over (one teacher and two students) over four speaking turns. They are discussing whether the younger generation has a strong sense of responsibility.

Teacher: … Ok, I'd like you to discuss, ok to discuss whether the young generation today has a strong sense of responsibility? Ok? During the discussion, discussion, you may argue with each other, or ask each other questions to make a point clear. You'll have about four and a half minutes for the discussion, please. (C:18:41)

(Interrupted)

Student 1: Ok, maybe I should say first. Yeah, I think the responsibility is the most important thing for our this generation. I think for us, we are all only one daughter or one son in our family. So we are lack of responsibility to others. And for me, I think one of the experiences I I remember very much because and in the last debating, I don't want to take part in it but my teacher force me in it. So I don't want to take any responsibility for it. And at last, we are forced. I think from that. I think maybe there is something maybe can contribute for me because I didn't put all my heart in it. From this, I learned that responsibility is very very important, not in our school, maybe when we are in our good society. We have to build up this responsibility for others, and for our factory, for our corporation. (C:18:42)

Teacher: Yeah, ok. (C:18:43)

Student 4: I, actually for me, I don't agree with you to *some degree*. The responsibility does not appear, does not disappear. You just now you young people they just er narrow the kind of sense of the responsibility. Can't you see they really now because family planning, one child, er one couple one child and a lot of erm young people they are now concentrate er to be, be obedient to their families, and erm they have very responsibilities to their mothers, to their fathers, even to their grandparents. But actually they narrow this kind of responsibility to the society. They do not care about others. We cannot say they do not have responsibility. (C:18:44)

Responsibility, according to S1 in turn 18:42, is the most important thing which the younger generation possesses nowadays. She strengthens her argument by saying that this characteristic is needed for both families and society. S4 disagrees with S1, arguing that the younger generation has a narrower sense of responsibility and lacks care for other people in turn 18:44. S4 quite gently states her disagreement, using hedges such as *actually for me, I don't agree with you to some degree*. Being from a collectivist culture such as Chinese (Chang, 2001), S4 expresses "the avoidance of conflict and competition" (Walker & Dimmock, 2000, p. 165), particularly S4 does not want to offend S1. Hence, S4 makes an effort to be polite by carefully choosing words (*some* in particular) to mitigate her disagreement with S1. *Some degree* here is used as "a politeness strategy to minimize face-threat" (Ruizatė, 2007a, p. 183), as "FACE IS AN IMPORTANT CHINESE CULTURAL CONCEPT that has penetrated every aspect of Chinese life" (Dong & Lee, 2007, p. 204. capital letters in the original). The use of *some* here reflects the cultural background of the speakers in that the Chinese prefer to employ mitigating quantifiers as a politeness device to serve their communicative purposes.

Extract 5.12 (Vietnamese)

Context: Two students over four speaking turns. They are talking about a dangerous thing that you've done.

S1: What is the most dangerous thing that you have ever done you think? The most dangerous thing, right? (V:27:114)

S6: I think the most dangerous thing that I have done is when, when I made a decision hmm it was with my boyfriend I had a very long time. It was with my hmm (V:27:115)

S2: Ah, your boyfriend? It's related to boyfriend. (V:27:116)

S6: Hmm, he, he is *some*, he was *some kinds* of delinquency but he treats, he treats me well, and he was kind to me, and I didn't mind if he was delinquency or what. I did like him yeah and somehow I decided to break up [S1: break up] with him and he was very mad. One day morning he came to my house with a very red eye, he stared at me and he [xx] like why you dump me. I was very scared. I told, oh my God, [xx] he might kill me but at last he didn't do anything and that was a very unforgettable experience to me. (V:27:117)

When being asked about the most dangerous thing that one has done, S6 retells her unforgettable experience in turn 27:117 when making a decision to end the relationship with her boyfriend. She was very scared of him at that moment. She depicts her boyfriend as a delinquent person, however she still loved him due to his kindness to her. S6 mentions her boyfriend's delinquency politely by using *some*, and then *some kinds of delinquency* instead of stressing this characteristic. While S6's boyfriend was not part of the conversation, the participants in the conversation might know him. Hedging the word *delinquency* and mentioning his kindness to her is the way S6 is trying to save face for him in front of her classmates. Her politeness might be explained by Vietnamese culture in which there is "concern with preserving harmony and the related concern for saving face: one's own as well as that of others" (Nguyen, 1994, p. 70). This situation is similar to Extract 5.10 (English data) where the speaker also tries to save face for someone who does not join the conversation. This shows that speakers from different cultures behave similarly when face-saving.

The use of vague words, such as *some*, is influenced by cultural factors (Zhang, 2015). The data in this study indicate that while all three cultural groups use *some* in the speech act of face-saving, there seems to be a degree of difference: L2 speakers

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used more *some* and preferred using *some* for face-saving more than L1 speakers. This may be attributable to the observation that indirectness and face-saving are characteristics of Asian cultures including Chinese and Vietnamese (Nguyen, 2008; Scollon & Scollon, 1995; Tsui, 2007). *Some* is thus a useful politeness device to perform a mitigation function.

5.2.2 Downtoning

VL can perform a downtoning function. Holmes (1984) considers downtoners as lexical devices "which may be used to attenuate illocutionary force" (p. 359). Downtoners can "soften the tone of speech" (Zhang, 2011, p. 574). Jucker et al. (2003) "indicate that the meaning the speaker wants to convey is not sufficiently covered by an available word" (p. 1748) as "the degree of resemblance between this thought and the utterance varies" (p. 1746). Downtoners perform "weakening rather than enhancing" (Zhang, 2015, p. 33) functions. Such hedges are also called downgraders (House & Kasper, 1981), detensifiers (Hubler, 1983), adaptors (Prince et al., 1982), or softeners (Holmes, 1990; Zhang, 2015). *Some* with downtoning function is presented in the following examples.

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Extract 5.13 (English)

Context: Four participants over four speaking turns. They are discussing changing a plan to reach the sales target.

S26: Yeah, I definitely think, that it's ridiculous that they always increase the plan... um, no matter what [S2: yeah] they don't take into anything except the fact that, you know sales. (L1:1:254)

S2: Right cuz you have an incredible year one year because [S26: right] the if the economy's doing really well and then, [S26: yeah] The next year the economy could be, be doing horribly and sales will go down there's nothing to … (L1:1:255)

S27: What if you just went, entirely on based on commission rather than bonus as

</div>

> a, as a percentage of your sales. Do you think that would motivate in the same way? (L1:1:256)
>
> S25: It would but, in some instances like some markets might be have a higher demand than others. So that, I mean if you had better sales manager in one mar- [xx] market, it you would maybe get cheated because they don't have the access of more employees but, then yo- s- it might be good to set like, *some kind of*, commission off of like, okay you're expected *maybe* this much, and if, after you exceed that [SU-m: exceed] you exceed from what you're expected you [xx] it's all commission (L1:1:257)

S2 is concerned that an unstable economy every year would have an effect on the specific plan to boost the sales of the company in turn 1: 255. In turn 1: 256, S27 then suggests that the plan should focus on commissions rather than on bonuses. S25 still doubts S27's suggestion as each market has a different demand. The problem is that the sales manager could not oversee all employees so they might cheat. Even while worrying about the cheating, S25 still recommends that it's good to have *some kinds of commission*. *Kind of* itself as a downtoning particle (Aijmer, 2002, p. 208) that can be used to "lessen the forcefulness of the utterances" (Ruzaitė, 2007a, p. 159) so *some kinds of commission* doubly softens the tone of S25's utterance. Furthermore, according to Jucker et al. (2003), double downtoners "emphasise the vagueness of the utterance in which they are embedded" (p. 1747). The neighbouring tentative word *maybe* in turn 1: 257 also enhances the downtoning function here. Hence, with the two vague words *some* and *kind of* combined with *maybe,* S25 hedges the tone of the suggestion as though he is less sure about the given suggestion.

Extract 5.14 (Chinese)

Context: Two participants (one teacher and one student) over two speaking turns. They are discussing the issue that students are often late for class.

Teacher: [clear throat] Ok, good. Now Miss [a name], er, how do you feel about the students who are often late for class? (C:18:23)

Student 3: Oh, in my junior, I am the erm represent of the mens. So I mm collect

---

the homework to the teacher. Every time the students, one or two students will be late, so I am very hate of them in my, in my one. Because I think mn I will lose time to hold ern their mn homework to the teacher again. Erm but ermerm after I grow up, I think people may, is ern they have their reasons, will erm, everyone will not to not let them ermselfly first first to the teacher or the, or the parents erm will mm how to say will clear the reason. Then, ern to perform thems mn in their own way. So I think stu-students late for class *maybe* in *some sense* they are wrong, but they are after all, they are students, nothing no no one mn will have one. (C:18:24)

In turn 18:24, the student's view about the students who are often late for school changes over time. At junior school, she hated the ones who are not on time at school as that delayed her collecting the homework for the teacher. However, when she grew up, her thinking about punctuality is different and she says that each student has their own reason resulting in their lateness at school. By using *maybe in some sense they are wrong*, Student 3 suggests that when students are late at school, they are wrong. However, it is a hedged criticism, an attempt to soften her tone as after all, *they are only students and could do things wrong*, as she mentioned later in the turn to support her softened tone. In this case, the statement *they are wrong* is mitigated by two vague words: *some* and *maybe*. *Some* as a vague word can "help to soften what is said" (Carter, 2003, p. 11) to reduce the strength of the criticism (*they are wrong*). *Maybe* expresses the tentativeness of the speakers which helps to downtone as well.

Extract 5.15 (Vietnamese)
Context: Four students over four speaking turns. They are discussing why people cannot give up smoking.

S4: Why, why, why don't *some kinds of people* can't give up smoking? (V:11:21)
S3: I think giving, giving up smoking is a, is a difficult but it isn't impossible and people who are can't giving up smoking that they are, uh, they are people who

> less of, less of… (V:11:22)
>
> S2: When *people* is addicted they can't give up smoking. (V:11:23)
>
> S6: Yes, you said that *people* smoke in bad mood but I think there are many reasons that make *people* smoke, for example what do you think about teenagers can't stop smoking as a hobbies and that side of [xx]? (V:11:24)

S4 starts his utterance by raising a question why *some kinds of people* can't give up smoking in turn 11:21. S4 mitigates the tone of the question purposely in order not to maintain that all people can't give up smoking. His question only targets *some kinds of people* who can't give up smoking, to distinguish them from the ones who can quit smoking. Compared with *people* used in turn 11:23 and turn 11:24, S2 and S6 only use *people* to express their idea related to smoking. S2 and S6 might assume that the listeners could understand that they only mention the ones who fail in giving up smoking based on the context. However, as the one who starts the discussion S4 chooses to use *some* as a downtoner to specify people who cannot give up smoking. This is also to make a clearer question to the listeners.

5.3 Withholding information

Speakers sometimes use VL "to withhold information which in some sense might be expected by their hearers in a given situation" (Channell, 1994, p. 178). According to Channell, even deliberately withholding information "which the speaker possesses and which would be appropriate in the situation, are violations of the Quantity maxim, and triggers implicature" (p. 179). There are two subcategories in the category of withholding information: self-protection and evasion, as these are two functions that can be used as strategies to support the interlocutors to withhold their information to serve certain purposes.

5.3.1 Self-protection

Some can "express not only fluid quantity, but also qualified certainty, perhaps to minimise the risk of being wrong" (Zhang, 2015, p. 88). Self-protection (Channell, 1994) is a similar concept to self-distancing (Ruzaitė, 2007a; Zhang, 2011). It is a

protective strategy to protect the speaker from risks or wrongs by expressing a propositional attitude (Channell, 1994; Jucker et al., 2003; Ruzaitė, 2007a; Zhang 2011). *Some* used for self-protection is revealed in the following examples.

Extract 5.16 (English)

Context: A student is talking about the interpretation of the Song of Songs.

S10: I've also heard an interpretation that um, the Song of Songs was, like, about God's gift of like love and sexuality and marriage to, to people. Like like a gift for us, and that it was written in there like, because nowhere else does it say it. Um, I don't know cuz... all the all the, mainly poetic books are pretty much lumped together. and like a lot of 'em, are about like, all kinds of random things but this one's like all about, like love marriage, and this, this whole theme and I- and I I don't know one interpretation is just that, it was in there to show that, it was a gift for us *or something*. I don't I don't have references for that though. (L1:5:49)

S10 is mentioning an interpretation of the Song of Songs in which S10 states that the Song of Songs is like a gift of God about love, sexuality and marriage. However, S10 does not have references for this interpretation as explained and S10's only heard about it. S10 says *it was a gift for us or something*, the vague tag *or something* brings the possibility that the interpretation given here is not unique and another interpretation of the Song of Songs might exist. With the exemplar of the vague tag, a gift, the speaker follows the principles of Relevance Theory (Sperber & Wilson, 1986) by providing processing instructions that can help the listeners to choose the relevant options for *or something*.

The tag is a hedge to protect S10 him/herself in case this interpretation is rejected by the teacher and other students, as it can "cover a lot of ground, without having to go into too much detail" (Koester, 2007, p. 48).

Extract 5.17 (Chinese)

Context: Three Students over seven speaking turns. This is a discussion about the disadvantages of using computers.

Student 1: On the computers, er because we rely rely on the computers so much. So if the computer have *some problems*, we also will have a lot of disa- erm erm a lot of erm, how to say, disasters. (C:10:56)

Student 3: Yeah. I agree with you. But er in in terms of the problem, I think computer virus should be take into account. Right? Virus. (C:10: 57)

Student 2: I think this is (C:10:58)

Student 3: They do harm, do lot of harm to computer. Yeah. Make it deteriorate, I think. (C:10:59)

Student 2: I think this is a safet-safety er problem. Er but I think this is er (C:10:60)

Student 1: You are so professional. (C:10:61)

Student 3: Yeah, yeah, yeah. (C:10:62)

Student 1 raises her concern that people reply on the computer too much. She emphasizes that it will become a 'disaster' when computers have *some problems* in turn 10: 56. However, Student 1 does not specify the computer problems in detail, perhaps because she is lacking the words to describe the computer problems or knowledge about computers. She offers a compliment *You are so professional* in turn 10:61 to S2 and S3 when hearing the latter discussion on computer problems. It reveals that Student 1 values her classmates' computer knowledge. Going back to the phrase *some problems* which Student 1 uses in turn 10: 56, it might be used to hide her inadequacy with computers. *Some* in this case plays a role as a self-protective mechanism to keep Student 1 safe from her lack of knowledge in the computer area.

Extract 5.18 (Vietnamese)

Context: Two students over four speaking turns. They are talking about which age one should get married.

> S2: I think that a problem, that's a _something_ that we can't plan, we can't plan hmm what age will we get married. (V:19:130)
>
> S3: I think people only want to get married if they have a, if they have a ... (V:19:131)
>
> S2: A job. (V:19:132)
>
> S3: A good job and high, good salary. (V:19:133)

In turn 19: 130, S2 does not suggest an age like most of her classmates do in the previous discussion. She might have observed the strong reaction against any proposed age given by the other students and decided it is better not to give an exact age. She is trying to protect herself from the listeners' disagreement by only saying _that's a something that we can't plan_, where _something_ is a vague word. This shows her ability to control the discussion and not be swayed by the trend of deciding a suitable age for marriage as other students did. In addition to self-protection, she also changes the discussion to another direction, i.e. when people are ready for marriage instead of the age for marriage.

5.3.2 Evasion

Evasion occurs when the information received from the speaker is unsuccessful to meet the expectations of the listener (Fraser, 2010, p. 27). Fraser also adds that whether an utterance is evasive or not depends on the information given by the speaker and the expectations of the listener. "Like vagueness, evasion is a property of hearer interpretation and, as such, is a perlocutionary effect" (p. 27). A vague word functioning as evasion "deliberately avoids conveying correct/accurate information to manipulate the situation to the speaker's advantage" (Zhang, 2011, p. 577). In other words, "the speakers adopts a competitive approach and shows little cooperation" in order "to make use of hidden meanings of language" (Zhang, 2015, p. 146).

VL is used as a shield to perform evading functions. Prince et al. (1982) suggest that the concept of shields can be further divided into plausibility shields and attribution shields, which can be used as explicit conventional devices to convey a lack of

commitment. Shields can "help convey the speaker's commitment to a proposition" (Jucker et al., 2003, p. 1763). There are several ways of evading such as, a) bald, on record avoidance; b) hedging, by providing a vague contribution; c) claims of ignorance; d) in response to a question, stating that the answer is well known; e) referring the questioner to another; and f) challenging the questioner or the source (Partington, 2003). *Some* used as evading strategy is presented in the examples below.

Extract 5.19 (English)

Context: Three participants (one teacher and two students) over four speaking turns. The issues of pornography and erotica are discussed here.

T1: Mhm, hm yeah um Leah and then Debbie again. (L1:2:93)

S17: I just have a question for people who see erotica as being considered more mainstream and accepted, like what's an example of erotica then? Like cuz I like when I think of pornography, you know Playboy Hustler [T1: mhm] things like that, I think we all um, I'm generalizing but um, you know associate those but then what is erotica then are there like, is it, I mean I just don't know I mean I'm just asking for anyone. (L1:2:94)

T1: Mhmmhm yeah Debbie did you wanna, respond to that? (L1:2:95)

S11: Yeah I, I'm actually, um I'm agreeing with Leah in the sense like, *I think* of almost pornography as *something* that is kind of accepted by society in the sense that we do sell magazines that like they're readily like available [T1: mhm] at like a, newsstand whereas like, when I think of erotica I'm thinking of this like crea- like people've been saying this creative art like, [T1: mhm] more like, I don't think that's [xx] I think that is definitely like a different thing like when I think erotica I'm thinking like of things like, transvestites that are like, [T1: huh] I mean not transvestites just people like people that dress up in like these crazy outfits and like, you know express themselves very sexually and it's, [T1: mhm] so different than, just normal, like porn that you see in magazines that you see like on the [xx] channel (L1:2:96).

In turn 2:94, S17 raises a question for the ones who *see erotica as being considered more mainstream and accepted*. S17 seems to look for an example of what erotica is. From S17's point of view, Playboy and Hustler magazines are examples when she thinks about pornography. S17 shows she is still confused about what erotica is by saying *I just don't know I mean I'm just asking for anyone*. S11 in turn 2:96 agrees with S17's opinion and explains more on how it is accepted *pornography as* <u>*something*</u> *that is kind of accepted by society in the sense that we do sell magazines*. However, S11 does not give the details regarding the extent to which erotica is accepted by the society, as each person might have a different evaluation about the acceptable level for it. S11 shows the ability to control the conversation by evading to focus on what erotica exactly means but giving more examples after that instead. Evasive strategy using *something* here is "routinely interpreted by the hearer as implicating uncertainty or lack of commitment" (Aijmer, 2002, p. 219), as the speaker seems to not be committing completely to what he or she says. Notice that *I think* is also used by S11 in turn 2:94 to "convey a speaker's lack of full commitment to a proposition under consideration" (Rowland, 2007, p. 87), which again helps S11 to evade.

Extract 5.20 (Chinese)

Context: A student is describing a given picture in an oral English test.

Student 1: Ok. From my card, we can see a lot of advantages and disadvantages from using computers in everyday life. Erm there are mainly two purposes for students to surf on the Internet. Er one is search the information and news they want on the Internet. Second is to sent and write emails to their friends and their families. Mm it's very convenient for students to using erm use computers to see the informations and send emails. And and also it is very faster. We just use few seconds to send our messages to each other. But er it is also have a lot of disadvantages. For example, first er we will be addicted being erm talking on the Internet, for example for example, the OICQ.

> It is a waste of time if you use very mm very er if you use it mm day by day. And second erm, because the Internet is open to everyone, to every company, so er we may touch the _something very unhealthy_. For example, _something about the sex._ It is very harmful for the students, and especially the young children. And other disadvantages I think is it is a waste of time and it is very mm harmful for our healthy, for example our eyes. A lot of young children erm had a poor sight because of the Internet. So I think it's many disadvantages and advantages of using computers in everyday life. Thank you. (C:10:30)

S1 talks about the advantages and disadvantages of using computers in daily life. She is concerned about Internet addiction and the things that are harmful to students. _Something_ appears twice. The first time is when Student 1 says _something very unhealthy_. This _something_ might be used to cover up the embarrassing situation in which Student 1 has a mental void, and could not explain her thoughts. The second _something_ is used when she is trying to give an example about what is unhealthy: _for example, something about the sex_. The use of _something_ here might be because the examinee does not want to spend too much time discussing a specific problem as she is trying to list the disadvantages of using the internet. For this reason, S1 moves to another disadvantage of using internet in the next sentence. Hence, the second _something_ may be used to give the right amount of information.

The use of _something_ here may relate to cultural influences, as the Chinese tend to avoid discussing sex, particularly in a public place such as in an oral English test like this example. _Something_, thus, becomes an evading tool to avoid mentioning sex specifically. The above possibility needs to be contextualised in the contemporary Chinese culture, as cultures are not static and may vary in different historical periods.

Extract 5.21 (Vietnamese)

Context: Four students over seven speaking turns. Dangerous sport is the topic for the discussion in this extract.

S1: … So, what do you think about things like skydiving or rock climbing or other extreme sport, extreme sport that involve a lot of possible danger, so something that you would be interest in skydiving, skydiving or that would be other sport. (V:27:26)

S2: I think it is very exciting and it makes me feel curious because I don't know about it. I just a see people and I very interested in. I think if I have an opportunity I will, I will, I will try to try and I will have some experiences about it. (V:27:27)

S4: It is dangerous but it give us or the pleasure of the high, the dept and the experience of human limit and why one has overcome the human limit, he will be, he will be very brave and he must be. (V:27:28)

S2: Strong (V:27:29)

S4: … Strong and encourage. I think that's very good. (V:27:30)

S6: I am so shy, I don't want to try which one in my life. I don't like strong feeling at all. I will very scare and *something bad* can happen to me any time is a really dangerous sport. (V:27:31)

S2: But I think if you have an opportunity, you should try, hmm it's... (V:27:32)

S6 explains why she does not want to try extreme sports. She says she is afraid *something bad* might be happen to her. She herself cannot point out what might happen to her, she only says *something bad*, as an evasive strategy. This is a cultural feature in Vietnam where people avoid raising any bad signals in the conversation because they fear that it might then happen in real life. Hence, they only want to talk about good things and luck in the future. However, the listener still understands what is being said based on the context of the conversation.

5.4 Discourse management

VL performs structural functions for discourse management. An investigation of approximators and quantifiers in academic setting by Ruzaitė (2007a) found that "Discourse management is especially important in academic discourse since metastatements with quantifiers help teachers organize discourse and make interrelations between the future, present and previous discourse" (p. 187). *Some* is

one of the quantifiers mentioned by Ruzaitė. Structural functions were investigated in this study with three subcategories: hesitation, searching for words and repairing. They are designed to help the interlocutors keep the conversation flowing smoothly.

5.4.1 Hesitation

Hesitation, according to Wiese (1984), may manifest in different forms, for instance, pauses (e.g. uh, mhm), repetitions, and drawls. Hesitation markers (or delaying markers) assist the speakers to maintain his or her turn of speech in the case where the silent pause is too long. Gilquin (2008) stresses the importance of hesitation for L2 learners as "in their search for a formulation which is acceptable in the foreign language, they are likely to experience many planning problems and, therefore, need techniques that enable them to gain time while they are trying to solve these problems" (p. 121). *Some* used as a hesitation function to keep the conversation continuing as demonstrated in the following examples.

Extract 5.22 (English)

Context: Three participants (one teacher and two students) over six speaking turns. They are discussing erotica in this extract.

S11: I actually was thinking, the opposite of what a lotta people're saying for erotica when when I, think of the term erotica like, I think of *something* that's like, so like, different and like, it's like, porn in a more like, I dunno this is just my interpretation [T1: mhm] of like I Ito use the word like kinky manner, in like you know more like, (L1:2:54)

T1: Oh interesting um, porn that's more kinky than usual? (L1:2:55)

S11: Yeah [SS: laugh] [T1: okay] like more different more when I think like erotic it's like, it's like different and like more um crazy, [T1: okay] more, like [SU-f: more tempter] I don't know like, I'm for …(L1:2:56)

T1: Oh so it's even more ad- advanced I don't know if that's the right word, than, than porn (L1:2:57)

S3: I keep thinking about Madonna and Erotica (L1:2:58)

> S11: Yeah like when right like Madonna Erotica like different [SS: laugh] like [S1: okay] not more like, like with porn it's like, it could be just like standard sex but like when I think of *something* that's like erotica it's like very, [T1: hm] different extravagant kind of like um, being more creative, with sex. (L1:2:59)

S11 hesitates to give a clear meaning of erotica leading to the appearance of *something* in turn 2: 54. S11 attempts to explain the term erotica by lengthening the utterance with *that's like, so like, like, it's like*. However, he still keeps hesitating about what she has just presented by adding more markers, i. e. *I think, I dunno* (I don't know). It seems that S11 is having difficulty in expressing his ideas, hence *something* coupled with other discourse markers help him to overcome his difficulties which might be due to lack of knowledge or shortage of vocabulary. Another reason might be because S11 doesn't know how to manage the information in such a wide scale like erotica and how to handle such a sensitive topic. The hesitation is revealed even more clearly when S11 ends turn 2:56 with *I don't know* in responding to T1's question about porn. The hesitation also appeared in turn 2:59 with *something* used by S11 as well. Therefore, S11's hesitation is built through the conversation with a variety of vague words such as *something, I don't know, I think.*

Extract 5.23 (Chinese)

Context: Two participants (one teacher and one Student) over two speaking turns. The Student is asked about the demand for jobs.

Teacher: Ok. Now Mr. Liu, er what jobs do you think are in great demand? (C:4:12)

Student 2: Er I think doctors and teachers is very in great demand because er in China erer some area is very poor, and they the teachers is able. And many saying many tea- er children, and they can't go to school. The is that er they can't find the proper teachers. Some teachers may be er the farmers, and some er person at er the local station. Eh I think er the second job is doctor, er so is the same. Some area is very poor, and they can't find doctor to treat the patient. Mn and also the er *maybe* the doctor should should have *some ability* to mn own very er useful technolo-

Responding to the question about job demand, Student 2 says more doctors and teachers are required in China. He explains that there is shortage of teachers in some areas where currently the teachers might be farmers. He is also concerned about the lack of doctors to treat patients in some poor areas in China which leads him to make a suggestion about the possibility of using technology. However, he adds *maybe* in front of the suggestion indicating his hesitation and places *some* (vague quantifier and/or qualifier) in the middle of the suggestion to not focus on any specific *ability* as he, himself is unsure about his suggestion.

Extract 5.24 (Vietnamese)

Context: Three students over thirteen speaking turns. They are discussing the issue of a couple living together before getting married in Vietnamese modern society.

S1: Hmm, now we can see many couples who live, nowadays we can, we can see many couples who live together before getting married. Do you agree with this? (V:19:181)

S5: This is a phenomenon maybe in big city. (V:19:182)

S1: Do you think it's, it's, it's good. (V:19:183)

S5: Maybe, in foreign country, maybe it is normal, popular and they think. But they, they know, they know, they know very about sex education much more us so, much more than us so if we live together before getting married, *maybe* it will lead to *some serious problems* that we can't show, your, our own… (V:19:184)

S2: Yes. (V:19:185)

S1: I, disagree with their behaviour. It isn't com-, suitable with their traditional. (V:19:186)

S5: Yes. Culture. (V:19:187)

S2: Our traditional Vietnamese culture. (V:19:188)

S5: Yes. (V:19:189)

S1: Hmm. Vietnamese people appreciate highly the beauty of the woman so if we,

> the couple live together before getting married [S5: No]. It isn't good. (V:19:190)
>
> S5: Maybe, beauty it is in foreign country, they can protect themselves from many sexual problems. They, their … (V:19:191)
>
> S2: They are taught well. (V:19:192)
>
> S5: Yes, so in, because we don't have enough knowledge, so we think it is hmm, the girl, the girl are not hmm beau, beau. But _maybe_ it depends in _some cases, some situation_. (V:19:193)

Asked about young couples living together before getting married, S5 hesitates to respond 'yes' or 'no' in turn 19:184. S5 is worried about *some serious problems* resulting from living together but still doesn't say what the 'serious problems' are. *Some* indicates hesitation, highlighted through its clustering with *maybe* and other words with a tone of hesitation: "*maybe* it will lead to some serious problems that *we can't show*, *your*, *our own…*". Later on, S5 suggests that living together before marriage is more suitable in foreign countries where sex education is taught appropriately at school. Moving to turn 19:193, S5 continues showing concern about a lack of knowledge leading to unexpected problems which might ruin the traditional values which Vietnamese society expects from a girl. However, S5 hesitates to confirm that all girls don't know how to protect themselves, so she adds *maybe it depends in some cases, some situation* to end this turn.

5.4.2 Search for words

Searching for words during communication reveals lexical lack of the interlocutors' language competence. According to Channell (1994), speakers employ vague expressions in a number of situations, "where they do not have at their disposal the necessary words or phrases for the concepts they wish to express" (p. 180). She adds that vagueness is a ploy for the speakers to use in the cases when they cannot find the words they need. The following examples demonstrate how *some* helps the speaker in searching for words.

Extract 5.28 (English)

Context: Three participants over four speaking turns. They are discussing the difference between pornography and erotica.

T1:   Um, yeah somebody else was, next good oh Mustafa yeah [xx]. (L1:2:64)

S8:   Uh, I guess when I think of that, I think *something* that's more artistic, [T1: okay] *something* that you'd see at like I dunno m- more at like an art show, [T1: uhuh [laugh] okay] I don't know, rather than pornography itself as far as it's much more graphic and, I don't know it could be like, like you know like amateur porn and [T1: mhm] stuff like that it's just like really it's just sleazy but erotica's more, [T1: mhm] artistic and, … (L1:2:65)

S11: That's where I am … (L1:2:66)

T1:   Yes okay yeah um, yeah sleazy like porn without the sleaze? Maybe? [S12: um] Okay Janet? (L1:2:67)

The teacher keeps asking for more opinions about the pornography and erotica in turn 2:64. S8 states that erotica is *something that's more artistic*, *something that you'd see at like I dunno m- more at like an art show*, which shows that S8 could not find the exact words to describe what he wants to say. He repeats *something* twice, and then tries to give more details about the erotica while searching for the right word. However, S8 is not successful and concedes by saying *I don't know* before moving to talking about pornography.

Extract 5.29 (Chinese)

Context: Two participants (one teacher and one student) over two speaking turns. They are discussing having a part time job while studying.

Teacher: Ok, now that's the end of the discussion. Now I'd like to ask you just one last question on the topic of ways of financing one's college education. Now Miss [a name], have you ever worked at part time? Can you say

something about it? (C:12:40)

Student 1: Mm yes I... mm during the summer vacation mm I worked in a high school at the computer-computer room mm I just do *some-some* just mm [pause] I plan the best because the study is very strict; I always *do some* erm I say mm I don't think much about job because my study is very hard mm I only do it during the summer vocation or winter vocation. Thank you. (C:12:41)

Asked about working at a part-time job as a way to support oneself financially during college education, Student 1 responds that she only works part-time during summer or winter vacation due to being busy with her study during school time. She is trying to give more details about what she did in the computer room, but she only manages to say, *I just do some-some just mm*. The use of repeated *some* here suggests a stall for words, strengthened by a non-verbal pause which "may indicate a search for words" (Zhang, 2015, p. 120). Student 1 is not successful in her search for the right words in this situation.

Later in the turn, Student 1 mentions that she needs to design a plan because of the strict study and tries to say how she does this. However, Student 1 could not find the suitable words again: *I always do some rm I say mm I don't think much about job because my study is very hard mm I only do it during the summer vocation or winter vocation.* To lengthen the time for searching the words, she uses *some*, *erm, I say, I think*, etc. Noticeably, there is a change from *I always do some* into *I only do it* during the word search. In the end, the word S1 has been searching for could be *job*, even it does not place next to *some*.

Extract 5.30 (Vietnamese)

Context: Five participants over thirteen speaking turns. They are talking about love.

S1: We can't live without, hate so-, hating someone or loving someone. So, if hmm we can see the bad sides and the good sides of love but... (V:19:92)

S5: You keep silent (V:19:93)

S1: If there are someone who are handsome, tall, study well and "galang" ['gallant' in English]. (V:19:94)

S4: Rich? (V:19:95)

S5: Call "galang" in English. (V:19:96)

S2: "Galang". (V:19:97)

S3: Gentlemanly. (V:19:98)

S5: Gent... (V:19:99)

S3: Gentlemanly. (V:19:100)

S5: *Something the same meaning of polite.*(V:19:101)

S3: Gentleman ... Gentlemanly. (V:19:102)

S5: Gentlemanly, gentlemanly boy. (V:19:103)

S3: Yes. (V:19:104)

In turn 19:93, S5 suggests that we should keep silent in responding to S1's idea which states that we can't live without hating someone or loving someone even we could see the bad sides and good sides of love. In turn 19:94, S1 continues raising the case that if there is someone who is handsome, tall and *galang*, but could not find the word to express the meaning of *galang* in English. Actually, due to the colonization of France from 1884 to1945, French was taught at school during this time and for some time after that. Some French words were transferred to Vietnamese pronunciation and commonly used even now. *Galang* is one of Vietnamese words belonging to this trend of history, as it originates from *galant* which is a French word. The participants here do not know that there is an English word with a similar meaning and nearly the same pronunciation, i.e. *gallant*. Hence, S2, S3, S4 and S5 are all trying to help S4 to find the right English word which has the same meaning as *galang* (Vietnamese word). In turn 19:101, S5 adds more details for searching the word: *something the same meaning of polite*; however, the group only think of *gentlemanly* instead of *gallant.*

The data in this section show that *some* coupled with other discourse devices help "the hearer to get ready for processing" (Zhang, 2015, p. 121).

5.4.3 Repairing

The study of repair in conversation originated with Schegloff, Jefferson and Sacks (1977) who stated that repair appearing in the parties' utterances during a talk-in-interaction, displays that the interlocutors find themselves facing troubles or problems in speaking, hearing or understanding the talk. More work on this has been done by Schegloff (2000, 2007) and Schegloff, Koshik, Jacoby and Olsher (2002). According to Heritage (2001), repair concerns:

> the resources with which participants deal with problems in speaking, hearing and understanding talk, including the interactional mechanics of self- and other- initiated repair, and the ongoing management of problems in sustaining intersubjective understanding (p. 2743).

Repairing or correcting through VL is considered as a strategy in communication by Ruzaitė (2007a) to demonstrate "the speaker's lack of commitment to the validity of the utterance" (p. 169). She also states that the frequent use of approximate numbers in corrections may be taken as evidence of the speakers' effort to be maximally precise. Especially, "Self-correction is an important aspect of classroom communication, where correctness is a principal requirement" (p. 189), as self-correction is a conscious communicative act deliberately used in such cases.

Extract 5.31 (English)

Context: Two participants over four speaking turns. They are discussing how to increase the sale in a company.

S2: I I was also thinking [S25: okay] even um, creating a stock option, for the in the company cuz that's one thing that, doesn't seem like there is, right now the, the employees are don't really feel like they're that much like it doesn't matter what happens to the company like they just wanna, like themselves they wanna do well, [S25: especially] if they're given stocks (L1:1:243)

S25: Especially for like the new ideas they bring [S2: right] that would increase the

---

> sales and increase profitability of the company (L1:1:244)
>
> S2: Exactly and if they if they own stock in the company that's gonna want they're gonna want the company to do better (L1:1:245)
>
> S25: And, to go along with um, like setting go- setting goals like at the lower levels they should just like increase the communication and that's [S2: yeah] like definitely lacking [S2: yeah that goes along with Kate's idea] they're keeping secrets I mean if she'd have like, talked to them developed some trust you know maybe develop *some like, some kind* of retreats [S2: yeah] some team-building you know and just kinda worked together in those kinda like, one-on-one situations. (L1:1:246)

The interlocutors are giving a lot of options regarding boosting the sales of the company and also analysing how these suggestions could motivate the employees. The employees, according to S25 in turn 1:244, could help to increase the sales by using these new ideas. S25 adds that the communication at the lower levels is very important in developing trust and *some like, some kind* of retreats in building the relationship among team members in turn 1:246, where S25 repairs *some kind* from *some like* when recognizing that it is not suitable for the context and might be wrongly used.

> **Extract 5.32 (Chinese)**
>
> **Context:** Two participants (one teacher and one student) over two speaking turns. The discussion focuses on the topic of cheating.
>
> Teacher: Ok. Thank you. And [a name], please. Have you ever been cheated by anybody? If yes, please tell us about this. If not, how do you do to avoid being cheated? (C:17:42)
>
> Student 3: Well, I have been cheated. But ern I think I don't ern- I don't quite hate them. I think although they cheat me, ern they be quite dishonest with me, I think, they may lost a good friend. I think, for example, ern ern at the at ern before exam in our major, exams are quite difficult. A friend of mine he told me that *some of, erm some content* may be tested. And and he also told me that he know the information. She, he got

information from some of the teachers, or something else. But, ern later I found that they were not the ern ern the contents we have to test. And I felt that he maybe want to, ern want to com-com-, want to compete ern compete with me, to conquer me in the exam. After that I felt very very disappointed at, with him. I think how can how dare he be such a man. But that only by this way can he conquer me in the test. I felt I felt very disappointed, I think he he lost a friend in in his life. But maybe my loss is very little as I only fail in one test. But I think I saw a people more clearly, very that is the most important thing I got. (C:17:43)

Student 3 tells the story of how she was cheated by her classmate. The classmate persuaded her to focus on the content that might be asked in the examination, as a friend of the classmate got this information from teachers or other sources. Student 3 firstly uses *some of* but then repairs to *some content* which might be more suitable for her expression. She then continues her story smoothly without getting into any more trouble with her speech flow. S3 later found that the content mentioned by the classmate did not actually appear in the test. While S3 feels disappointed, she is happy that she gets to know that the classmate is not trustworthy.

Extract 5.33 (Vietnamese)

Context: Five participants over twelve turn takings. This conversation is about who tells more lies, men or women.

S3: Man tells more lies. (V:24:57)

S1: I think that's very diplomatic. He said it very diplomatically. I think woman also lies so you [xx] and give me an example. (V:24:58)

S5: Yes, some uh some girls are in love with many, many men and … (V:24:59)

S2: [laugh] Like Hien (V:24:60)

S5: Yes, and some girls, they tell lie to seduce …. (V:24:61)

S4: Seduce … haha! (V:24:62)

S5: Some, some men to fall in love with her to provide her with money. (V:24:63)

S2: You [laugh]. You look the bad, you look to the bad side. (V:24:64)

> S5: *Some, some* and everything and when they satisfy, she breaks up with him. (V:24:65)
>
> S2: Boys also seduce girls. Of course. (V:24:66)
>
> S4: But nowadays they are more like …. (V:24:67)
>
> S2: I think because, because they says, they says very sweet things, sweet, sweet things. Hmm, they seduce, they attract a girl to do *something it, something bad* hmm for example to have a sexual relationship. I think, I think. (V:24:68)

During the conversation about who tells more lies, men or women, the men support the idea that women tell more lies and in contrast, the women suppose that men are the ones who lie more frequently. Through the conversation, the speakers take turns to pick up the bad points of the other gender; however, *some girls, some men* are used instead of *all*, or bare nouns like *girls, men*. This might be because the speakers only want to mention *some but not all* (which is one of the conventional meanings of *some*) in blaming the other gender. In turn 24:65, S5 starts with *some*, *some*, then changes to *everything*, here *some* is used to prepare speech. Similarly in turn 24:68, S2 produces an example of a boy who uses sweet words to attract the girl with the purpose of doing *something bad* with her. S2 firstly uses *something it* but then realizes that she is wrong so she repairs it immediately to *something bad.*

5.5 Concluding remarks

This chapter investigated the multi-functional uses of *some* and its clusters: right amount of information, mitigation, withholding information and discourse management. The subcategories discussed for right amount of information were approximation, generalization, and uncertainty; mitigation with politeness and downtoning; withholding information with self-protection and evasion; and discourse management with hesitation, searching for words, and repairing. The analysis reveals the discourse level of *some* use. The function of the right amount of information focuses on how *some* could be used in the case of unspecific information to smoothly manage the conversation. Differently, mitigation is used to soften the tone of the speech, withholding information shows how *some* is applied as a tool to ward off

potential risks. When *some* is used for discourse management, it helps the conversation flows smoothly.

Some performs a wide range of pragmatic functions, but they are not meant to be static and clear-cut, they can be overlapping and interconnected, which will be discussed further in next chapter.

Chapter 6 General Discussion

This chapter discusses the findings to identify general patterns and issues that emerged from the data.

6.1 Frequency, clustering, and position

This section investigates general patterns in relation to the frequency, clustering and position of *some*, including interconnections among the three aspects.

Table 6.1: Overall frequencies of some and some groups

Group		L1SE	CSLE	VSLE
Lexical level	*and + some*	0	9	15
	but + some	0	4	10
	in + some	10	7	23
Syntactical level	*some* + N	41	144	147
	some + NP	41	103	81
	verb + *some*	43	169	92
	some of + N	18	8	7
Total *some*		**153**	**444**	**375**
Some groups	*something*	108	120	144
	sometimes	12	41	84
	someone	13	10	37
	somebody	15	16	9
Total *some* groups		**148**	**187**	**274**
Total *some* and *some* groups		**301**	**631**	**649**

Table 6.1 presents the total frequency of *some* and *some* groups used by L1SE and L2SE. The Chinese used *some* most, the Vietnamese used *some* groups most, and the L1 speakers used both the least. The difference between L1 and L2 groups was greater in the use of *some* than in the use of *some* groups. Overall combining both *some* and *some* groups, VSLE used the most with 649 occurrences in total, followed closely by CSLE with 631; L1SE were the least users with 301 occurrences. VSLE used them more than twice as often as L1SE, just slightly more than CSLE. It means that VLSE is vaguer than L1SE but similar to CSLE. The two L2 groups had similar frequency distribution patterns which are different to the L1 group. This L1 vs L2 result is different from Sabet and Zhang (2015)'s finding. They investigated VL use among L1 (American) and L2 speakers (Chinese and Persian), and found that the CSLE used vague expressions approximately twice as often as Persian and L1 speakers. This discrepancy may be caused by the fact that Sabet and Zhang's study had different sets of data, as well as different sets of vague expressions studied, all these leading to the different trends of using VL among L1 and L2 groups.

Looking at the overall use of vague expressions, this current study is consistent with Sabet and Zhang's (2015) and Metsä-Keletä's (2006, 2012) findings in that generally speaking, L2 speakers use VL more than L1 speakers. However, this trend is different to Drave's (2002) results which found that the frequency of VL used by his L1 speakers of English was actually higher than L2 speakers (Cantonese). Explaining the different trends between Drave's (2002) and Sabet and Zhang's (2015) study, Sabet and Zhang argued that these discrepancies might have two reasons. Firstly, the different groups of participants: Drave's L2 speakers spoke Cantonese, while Mandarin and Persian speakers were selected in Sabet and Zhang's study. L1 speakers spoke American English in Sabet and Zhang's study, while the variety of English spoken by participants in Drave's study was not specified. Secondly, there was a different scope of data analysis in the two studies. Drave focused his study on approximators and placeholders, while Sabet and Zhang expanded the scope of their study to a variety of categories, i.e. subjectivisers, possibility indicators, vague quantifiers, vague intensifiers, and placeholders. The above two reasons are also applicable to this study.

In this study the use of *some* by the CSLE (444 occurrences) and the VSLE (375 occurrences) are very much higher than the L1SE (153 occurrences). However, L1 and L2 speakers were not always different; sometimes they behaved similarly. For example, verb + *some* is the most favourite cluster for both L1SE and CSLE, while the VSLE preferred *some* + N most. L1SE and CSLE tended to use *some* more when describing actions in their utterances, while VSLE preferred to use *some* to depict people or things in their communication. This is different to Sabet and Zhang's (2015) finding that all three groups preferred *some* + N the most in their communication. This different trend of using *some* clusters might be because of the different groups of participants between Sabet and Zhang's (2015) study and this current one as mentioned previously. Another possibility is that the groups are talking about different things and different topics.

Regarding the use of *some* groups, both L1SE and L2SE used *something* more than other *some* groups with VSLE using the most and L1SE using the least. The three groups all used *someone* and *somebody* less in their data. L1SE and L2SE were interested in using the unspecified thing more than the unspecified person in their talks. This is different from Sabet and Zhang's (2015) results in that Persian speakers used *something* the most, L1 users sat in the middle and Chinese speakers ranked the least.
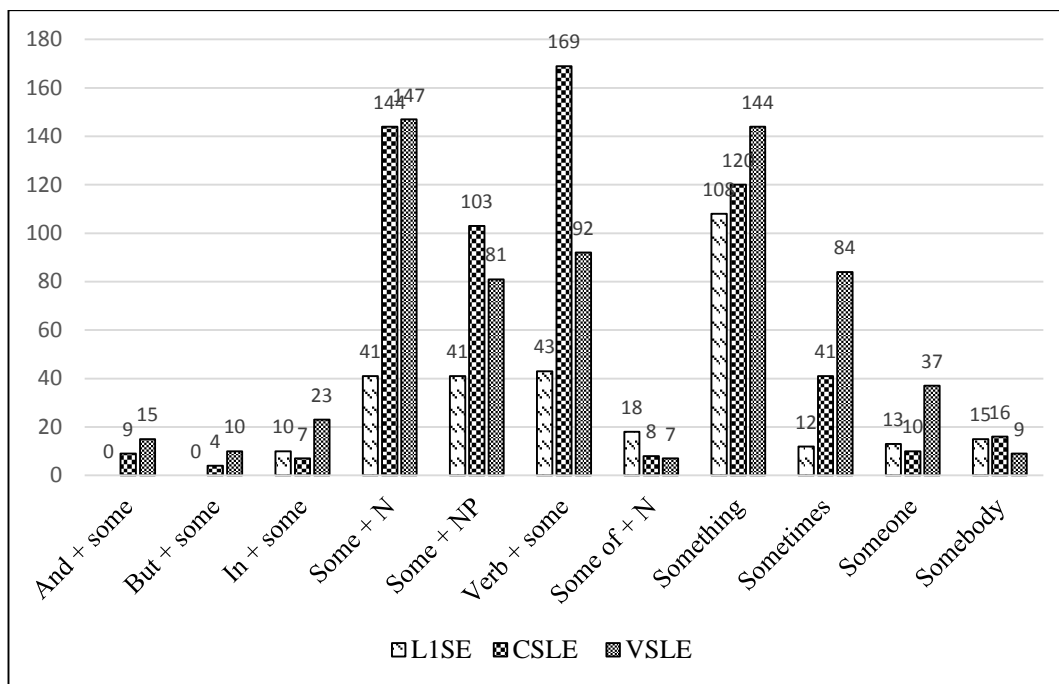
Figure 6.1: Overall frequencies of *some* and *some* groups

As shown in Figure 6.1, the focused use of *some* and *some* groups by L1SE and L2SE is similar. For example, the three most popular clusters of *some* are *some* + N, *some* + NP and verb *some*, while *something* and *sometimes* are the two most common items in *some* group. Hence, even though L1SE and L2SE have the different frequencies in their use of *some* and *some* groups, they still reveal a comparable trend of using the form of *some* in their communication.

Table 6.2: The frequencies at micro level of some and some groups

Clusters		Groups / Items	L1SE	CSLE	VSLE
Lexical level	Elements before *some*	*and + some*	0	9	15
		but + some	0	4	10
		in + some	10	7	23
Syntactical level	*Some* + N	*some* + mass noun	5	21	20
		some + countable noun	36	123	127
	Some + NP	*some* + noun + noun	3	27	5
		some + adjective + noun	19	47	47

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	Verb + some	to have some	11	34	23
		to do some	0	46	6
		to get some	6	12	1
		to be some	8	11	9
	Some of + N/NP	some of + noun/noun phrase	18	8	7
Some groups	Something clusters	something + adjective	8	1	17
		to be something	26	3	11
		do something	6	22	19
		say something	2	32	19
		something more	1	17	1
		something that	24	4	8
		(or/and) something like that	4	6	14
		(or) something like this	0	0	19
		or/and something	11	10	2
	sometimes	and sometimes	0	6	17
		clause-initial sometimes	0	25	59
	Someone/ somebody	someone	13	10	37
		somebody	15	16	9

Within the use of *some* + N, Table 6.2 shows that *some* + countable noun was always more than *some* + mass noun in each of the three groups of data. *Some* + countable noun was used 7.2 times more than *some* + mass noun by L1SE, 5.9 times more by CSLE and 6.4 times more by VSLE. This means that both L1SE and L2SE used *some* as a quantifier. In terms of *some* + NP, all three groups preferred *some* + adjective + noun more than *some* + noun + noun, also *some of* cluster is one of the popular *some* clusters in the data. In terms of verb + *some* (four items), overall all three groups preferred *to have some* more than the other three clusters. Individually L1 and Vietnamese groups preferred *to have some* as well, but the Chinese preferred *to do some* the most.

Moving to the use of clusters within the *some* group, *something* with various clusters was used by both L1SE and L2SE whereas *sometimes, someone* and *somebody* were less used clusters. However, each group used them differently in their communication. For example, the top two items used by L1SE ranked from the most to the least are as follows: *to be something* and *something that*; by CSLE with *say something* and clause-initial *sometimes*; by VSLE with clause-initial *sometimes* and *someone*. Looking closely at the frequency of the top two items, different settings appeared to influence the use of *some* groups in some extent as the most interested cluster by CSLE is *say something* which is mostly appeared in the teacher's utterances (29 occurrences by teachers out of 31 in total) requiring more information from the students.

Table 6.3: Chi-Square test results of some and some groups (individual)

Items		L1SE/L2SE	L1SE/CSLE	L1SE/VSLE	CSLE/VSLE
Lexical level	*and* + *some*	Yes	Yes	Yes	No
	but + *some*	Yes	No	Yes	No
	in + *some*	Yes	No	No	Yes
Syntactical level	*some* + N	Yes	Yes	Yes	No
	some + NP	Yes	Yes	Yes	No
	verb + *some*	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
	some of + N	No	No	No	No
Some groups	*something*	No	No	No	No
	sometimes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
	someone	Yes	No	Yes	Yes
	somebody	No	No	No	No

Table 6.3 shows that there were statistically significant differences for six items (at least three of the four compared groups): *and* + *some*, *some* + noun, *some* + noun phrase, verb + *some*, *sometimes*, and *someone*; but there was no such majority meaningful differenced for three items: *some of* + noun/noun phrase, *something*,

somebody; and the remaining two items sits in the middle (two pairs with a statistically difference, the other two without): *but + some*, *in + some*. According to the items listed in Table 6.3, the ranking from the most different pair (those having the least items with no meaningful difference) to the least different pair is: L1 vs L2, L1SE vs VSLE, L1SE vs CSLE, CSLE vs VSLE. The findings show that the L1 speakers differed most to L2 speakers in using *some*, while the two L2 groups used *some* in similar ways.

Table 6.4: Chi-Square test results of some and some groups (overall)

Items	L1SE/L2SE	L1SE/CSLE	L1SE/VSLE	CSLE/VSLE
Total *some*	Yes	Yes	Yes	No
	χ^2 [d.f.2, n = 972] = 142.722, *p* <0.01	χ^2 [d.f.1, n = 597] = 141.844, *p* <0.01	χ^2 [d.f.1, n = 528] = 93.341, *p* <0.01	χ^2 [d.f.1, n = 819] = 5.813, *p*=0.01590813
Total *some* groups	Yes	No	Yes	Yes
	χ^2 [d.f.2, n = 609] = 40.995, *p* <0.01	χ^2 [d.f.1, n = 335] = 4.54, *p* = 0.03311159	χ^2 [d.f.1, n = 422] = 37.621, *p* <0.01	χ^2 [d.f.1, n = 461] = 16.419, *p* <0.01
Total *some* and *some* groups	Yes	Yes	Yes	No
	χ^2 [d.f.2, n = 1581] = 145.685, *p* <0.01	χ^2 [d.f.1, n = 932] = 116.845, *p* <0.01	χ^2 [d.f.1, n = 950] = 127.478, *p* <0.01	χ^2 [d.f.1, n = 1280] = 0.253, *p*=0.61497056

Table 6.4 shows a consistent overall pattern in that there is a statistically significant difference in the use of *some* between L1 and L2 speakers, but no such meaningful difference within two L2 groups. It is noticed that this general pattern does not quite apply in the use of *some* groups, where the two L2 groups do have meaningful difference, but the use of *some* groups are a minority in the data.

6.2 Quantitative and qualitative use of *some*

This study found evidence of the use of both quantity and quality uses of *some*, supporting Larrivée and Dufley's (2012) and Zhang's (2015) arguments that *some* expresses both quantity and quality. The quantity of *some* depends on the nouns it modifies, singular or plural/mass nouns. In terms of the singular noun, the meaning of *some* is found in "a fixed referent to which the utterance applies and the idea of non-identification can only concern the identity of that referent" (Farkas, 1999;

Duffley & Larrivée, 2012, p. 143). For instance, a singular noun phrase following *some*, as in Extract 6.1, helps the speaker to focus her response to the teacher.

Extract 6.1 (Chinese)

Context: Two participants (one teacher and one student) over two turn-takings. Student 3 is expressing her opinion about working while studying.

Teacher: Do you think it is possible for a student to work his way through college?

     (C:12:24)

Student 3: Work his way through college? Work? Ok I got it. Sure. I think to I think it is good because when I was in Grade erm the first-year student when I was a first-year student I did *some part time job* and did some work out of school or mm in school. Because I think it is very good because you have social experience, you can improve yourself a lot, you can meet different kinds of people and mm later you can meet the needs of the society because college is totally different from... mm society …

    (C:12:25)

Student 3 states that a student should work while still going to the college. She also mentions that she herself did *some part time job* when she was a freshman student. By combining *some* with the singular noun phrase *part time job*, the speaker means that she definitely had a part time job but does not want to clarify what it is. Hence, *some* in this situation performs as a quality stretcher. It seems that the student used the singular noun after *some* purposely as she continues the utterance without identifying more about kinds of part-time work she did in the past, but stresses the social experiences she got from the part-time job.

With the plural/mass nouns after *some,* there is "a possibility of quantitative variation from a small to large amount of what they denote" (Duffley & Larrivée, 2012, p. 143). This can result in a lower than expected value on a quantitative scale of *some* (Israel, 1999). The findings in this study support Duffley & Larrivée's view that

some does not only refer to a lower scale value but also expresses "a greater than expected quantity" (p. 140).

Extract 6.2 (Vietnamese)

Context: Two female participants over three speaking turns. They are discussing the role of teacher.

S1: I also think that teacher must be an advisor because you know students they, they don't know everything so when they talk, maybe something right and something wrong and sometimes they don't know how, don't know what to say and how to speak and teacher must advise them all: "in this point, you must say this" or "you, you can use this word, that word", something like that. (V:7:20)

S2: So, from your point, I see that the teacher should be also faci-, facilitator because when you know *some students* very passive. (V:7:21)

S1: Yes. (V:7:22)

According to S1, the teacher should be an advisor to support the students how they can deliver their ideas correctly in turn 7:20. In turn 7:21, S2 argues that facilitator is another role of the teacher, as *some students* are very passive so the teacher as a facilitator should help them. *Some students* suggest a smaller quantity than the whole category, thus expressing a lower scale, since the speaker may not expect a large number of passive students.

Extract 6.3 (Chinese)

Context: Two participants (one teacher and one student) over four speaking turns. The student is being asked about how to take good care of elderly people in the community.

Teacher: Ok, [a name], are elderly people taken good care of in your community? (C:8:33)

Student 1: Yes. Er... (C:8:34)

Teacher: Give one or two examples. (C:8:35)

Student 1: Yes, er I think I should take my grandpa for example. Er...I live with my grandma at home. Er...we communicate very well. And sometimes when I feel depressed and in mood, I will turn to him ask for _some advice_. And he will help me with his fully life expe life experience. And although sometimes he can't help me, er...but he will make me calm calm calm down to think a way by myself. Er...and he is get along well with my parents also. Er he take care of me er...when I was a...when I was a small girl, give love to me. So we knew each other very much. And there is no difficult to communicate each o- with each other. Er...sometimes we will go to the park and to and to do some exercise with her. I think he live in a happy life with us. (C:8:36)

In turn 8:36, Student 1 tells how her has grandfather influenced her life. Her grandfather gives her _some advice_ when she gets depressed. With _some_, Student 1 seems to express a greater than expected quantity to emphasis the good points of living with elderly people.

The findings of this study also showed that there is a difference between countable and uncountable _some_: the former (286 occurrences) was six times as much as the latter (46 occurrences). It seems that the countable _some_ tends to be a quantifier, and the uncountable _some_ tends to be a qualifier (e.g. _some security_ in Extract 4.15). The participants in the data preferred to use _some_ much more as a quantifier than as a qualifier. Another trend that emerged from this data is that when _some_ was coupled with _kind of_, the combination tends to be a qualifier, for example, _some kind of women_ in Extract 4.4, and _some kind of objective criterion_ in Extract 4.13.

6.3 Positive and negative *some*

Some in this study expressed positive and negative tones, which is in the line with Zhang's (2015, p. 98) claim that VL is used in both positive and negative utterances. As shown in Extract 6.4 and Extract 6.5 below, an elastic use of *some* occurs in opposite discourses.

Extract 6.4 (Chinese)

Context: Two participants (one teacher and one student) over two speaking turns. The student is asked about the changes in China due to the wide use of internet.

Teacher: What changes will the wide use of internet in China bring about? (C:3:17)

Student 2: Internet, mm, I think the internet is very convenience convenient to everyone. Er it is a very useful media for us, we can we can receive many messages from it, and we can also we can learn *something* from the network, such as er the the education, and worker, also for-for me its for me I can find a work in five one job er station there. Mm in my opinion the network is a promising is a promising er media, and it can change our er life very deeply, very deep mm. (C:3:18)

Student 2 has a positive tone when describing the wide use of Internet leading to changes in Chinese society. As mentioned by Student 2, the internet is a convenient tool for everyone to get useful information and to learn *something* in a wide range of careers such as worker, teacher, and student. The use of *something* here can be interpreted as being useful information to support the internet users.

Extract 6.5 (Vietnamese)

Context: Two participants over six speaking turns. They are discussing their decision to study at the College of Foreign Language.

S1:   What's about the another boy? Come on, Lai. Can you say something, Lai? Do you have any thinking about a boy must be work in one kind of position or not? (V:16:110)

The group: Can you repeat? Can you repeat? Can you repeat? (V:16:111)

S1:   I mean hmm for example, when, so what's kind of feeling of you and your family can they… you said they, they say something when you want to become a student in a College of a Foreigner? (V:16:112)

S4:   No, my parents, my parents don't, my parents is not sad when I, when I become a student in the College, University of Foreign Language. Because it is my, it is [S2: I think] the thing I want to be, I want to be a student of English. (V:16:113)

S1:   So, so you like and your parents like. (V:16:114)

S4:   Hmm, my parents like too. (V:16:115)

S1:   Yes, it's good because you know I know _some families_ they will disappointed when a boy work in a, in a place that they think must be a woman _or something like that_. (V:16:116)

Asked about what his family members thought when S4 decided to enrol as an English major in the College of Foreign Languages, S4 asserts that his family is happy with his decision in turn 16:113. However, S1 seems to doubt S4's response by saying "So, so you like and your parents like" in turn 16:114, S4 has to confirm his parents' approval in turn 16:115. S1, then, explains this further, because he knows _some families_ are disappointed when their son works in a place which is assumed to be only for girls in turn 16:116. A Vietnamese family expects their son to follow natural or physical sciences rather than social sciences such as languages study. In turn 16:116, S1's utterance contains a negative tone in blaming _some families_ who still think traditionally and so might affect on their son's decision.

6.4 Elasticity of *some:* meaning perspective

The findings of this study support the theories discussed in Section 2.3 that the use of VL and specifically *some* can be explained by the three theoretic frameworks: Grice's (1975) conversational maxims, Sperber and Wilson's Relevance Theory (1986/1995), and Zhang's (2011, 2015) Elasticity Theory. The focus of this study was Elasticity Theory, as it has been developed specifically for the study of VL and thus was more relevant to the investigation of *some* in this study.

In this study, *some* observed Grice's Maxims (1975) and Relevance Theory (Sperber & Wilson, 1995/1986). For example, the conversations ran smoothly as *some* was used to follow the Maxim of Quantity to give enough information as required by the hearer (e.g. Extract 6.2). *Some* was also used instead of a precise number to reduce the listener's processing effort, thus following the Principle of Relevance Theory (e.g. Extract 6.3). *Some* as a vague word is "more relevant than a precise expression" (Jucker et al., 2003, p. 1766) in many situations and the use of *some* is effective and relevant (Zhang, 2015, p. 87).

Zhang's Elasticity Theory has three principles: fluidity, stretchability and strategy. It was clearly shown in Chapter 5 that the participant in this study used *some* strategically in all kinds of discourses. The other two principles were manifested through various phenomena that emerged in the data.

As discussed in Section 6.2, *some* was used as a quantity as well as a quality stretcher, and that there was stretchability and fluidity between the two categories. The quantitative and qualitative uses *some* are were clear-cut, for instance, *some advice* in Extract 6.3 purposely gives a greater than expected quantity; meanwhile it could be also Student 1 appreciates her grandfather. Due to the lack of clear-cut boundaries between quantity and quality, *some* manifests the elasticity in expressing either or both meanings in communication. As discussed in Section 6.3, *some* has been found to express both positive and negative tones, showing its versatile nature enabled by its fluid characteristics.

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This study found that the meaning of *some* is elastic in the sense that it is context dependant, and similar to conventional implicature in that it is only generated by contextual triggers (Sperber & Wilson, 1986; Carston, 1998; Larrivee & Duffley, 2014). The data revealed that the conventional meanings of *some* (e.g. 'some possibly all', 'some but not all') are interpreted according to the specific contexts and speakers' intended meaning. This is illustrated in the following Extracts 6.6 and 6.7, showing the stretch of the meaning of *some*.

Extract 6.6 (Chinese)

Context: Two students over two speaking turns. They are discussing making a phone call in class.

Student 3: No, I don't think so. Because in the colleges I also see *someone* er making phone calls loudly when when others are studying in the classroom. What about your opinion? (C:19:57)

Student 2: Er I agree with you. Especially in the class, *somebody somebody's* mobile phones ring, and they and the bell is is very loud, and teacher must stop. (C:19:58)

Extract 6.7 (Vietnamese)

Context: Three students over four speaking turns. They are discussing the disadvantages of computers.

S6: I think as our age we shouldn't use computer much because it makes, it will make us lazy to think and find the solution, uhm example, when we have homework, exercises, we go home and we turn off … (V:2:17)

S2: Turn on (V:2:18)

S6: Turn on the computer and search on the internet so I think it is not good for us to do that. (V:2:19)

S3: And *some game players*, who very really addicted to playing game, they tend

> to be lack of communication, they don't want to, they don't want to communicate with everyone, they just want to sitting, to sit in front of the computer and play, play, play all day. (V:2:20)

In Extract 6.6, *someone* and *somebody* are used to point out that at least one person in the classroom is making a phone call, however *some* in 6.7 indicates that a small number of players are addicted to computer games. The meanings of *some* in Extract 6.6 and 6.7 stretch from 'at least one' to 'but not all'. These stretches of *some* only take place in context. Adopting the concept of elasticity (Zhang, 2011), *some* is like a rubber band going through three stages to achieve the target of communication. Stage one: stretch, the meaning of *some* is stretchable like a rubber band in order to create a basis for communication. Stage two: adjust, *some* is adjustable by the speaker to search for the suitable meaning. Stage three: release, *some* is adjusted along a meaning continuum until the speaker finds a suitable meaning for *some* that fits the context.

What is a meaning continuum like for *some*? First of all, a conventional continuum would be something like this: none → at least one → (*some*) but not all → (*some*) possibly all. However, the findings in this study showed that the interpretation of *some* goes beyond these conventional meanings and produces an elastic meaning suitable to different contexts. The meaning of *some* is fluid and elastic enough to target a variety of communicative purposes.

Elastic meanings can form a set for *some*. For example, approximation, right amount of information, uncertainty, politeness, and appreciation, were all identified in the data. It appears that this set of meanings is much bigger than the conventional continuum. There is fluidity between the members of a conventional continuum as well as the pragmatic set, for example, there may be overlap between 'some, but not all' and 'some, possibly all', or between approximation and uncertainty.

Some is fluid in the sense that it was employed in different positions in the data. Looking at the combination of *some* in Table 6.1, *some* appeared in combination with elements at both the lexical level and syntactical level. At the syntactical level, *some* is flexible in clustering to the following elements, e.g. *some* + noun (countable/

mass), *some* + noun phrase, verb + *some*, and *some* of + noun/noun phrase. *Some* was also placed elastically along the continuum from clause-initial to clause-final. As in Extract 6.8 below, *some* + noun is located as a clause-initial (*some teachers*) and clause-intermediate (*some rules*). The findings here are in line with the work of Zhang and Sabet (in press), where *I think* also behaves in a similar way.

Extract 6.8 (Vietnamese)

Context: Four participants over six speaking turns. They are discussing a television game show.

S2: Excuse me, can you hmm I want to know the role to Olympia, it is a game show or a hmm … (V:21:213)

S5: I think it is a game show. (V:21:214)

S3: A knowledge game show. (V:21:215)

S4: A knowledge game show and it is difficult to, if we want to take part in, we should the the … (V:21:216)

S2: The age limit. (V:21:217)

S4: The allowances of the school, and some and when we take part in and *some teachers* must go to there to do *some rules* for us. (V:21:218)

In turn 21:213, S2 is trying to find out more about a game show named Olympia which tests the knowledge of high school students in Vietnam. S2 seems confused as it's different from other game shows on TV. S4 confirms that this is a knowledge game show in turn 21:215. In turn 21:218, S4 explains more about this game show by adding that '*some teachers* must go to there to do *some rules* for us'. *Some teachers* possibly means that S2 refers to only the teachers who come and support the students during the games. Meanwhile, *some rules* might refer to things related to paperwork which need to be confirmed by teachers, not the students. However, S2 might not know exactly how the rules work so *some* is used to give the right amount of information here.

6.5 Elasticity of *some*: pragmatic function perspective

The findings demonstrate that the elasticity of *some* manifests through the fluidity and stretchability of its pragmatic functions. There is interconnection of the categories of stretcher. For example, in Section 5.1 *some* as a quantifier performs an approximation function, and also presents generalization (a general stretcher) where "precision is impossible" (Ruzaitė, 2007a, p. 98). This supports Zhang's position that *some* can perform either as a general stretcher or an approximate stretcher (2015, p. 122). *Some* can also act as a scalar stretcher (Section 6.2) and as an epistemic stretcher (Section 6.1.3). These findings are in line with Zhang (2015): the four categories of stretcher can "play more than one role and belong to more than one category" (p. 121). *Some* is fluid enough in responding to different communicative needs.

There are patterns observed in the data in terms of the relationship between the pragmatic meanings and the functions of *some*. As an approximate stretcher and a general stretcher *some* can perform the functions of right amount of information and mitigation. As a scalar stretcher, *some* can perform the functions of mitigation and evasion. As an epistemic stretcher, *some* performs the function of self-protection. There seems to be some correlation between the types and functions of *some* here, in which *some* can perform more than one pragmatic function through different types of stretchers. These pragmatic meanings and functions are used strategically, enabling interlocutors to "negotiate and co-construct" in communication (Zhang, 2015, p. 122).

As presented in Chapter 5, *some* serves various pragmatic functions, as shown in Figure 6.2
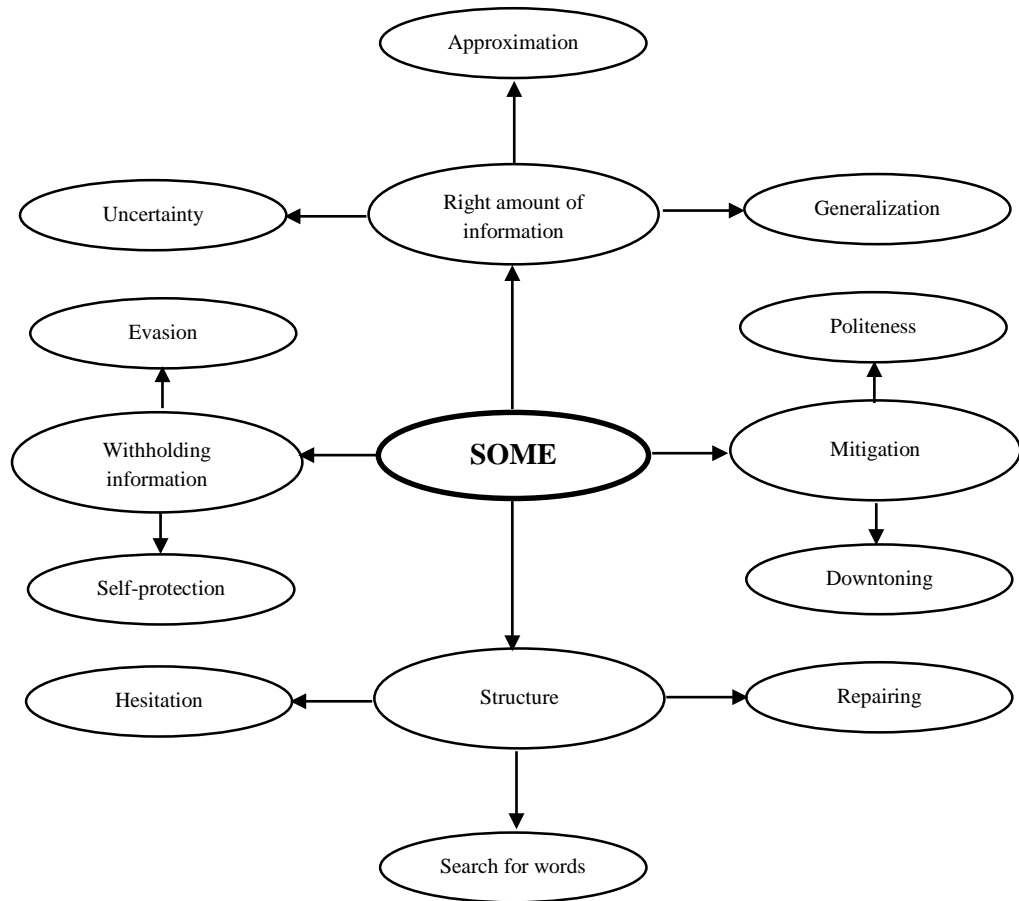
Figure 6.2: Stretching *some* functions

Figure 6.2 shows that the pragmatic functions of *some* are multi-directional: four major functions of the right amount of information, mitigation, withholding information, and structure. Each of them expands to have more sub-functions: approximation, generalization, and uncertainty for the right amount of information, politeness and downtoning for mitigation, self-protection and evasion for withholding information, and hesitation, searching for words and repairing for structure. The pragmatic functions of *some* are multifaceted and "stretched in varying directions to serve pragmatic functions and maxims" (Zhang, 2015, p. 209), showing the elastic nature of *some*.

There is no all-or-none boundary between the function categories of *some*; fluidity does exist. It is evident in the data that there are overlaps between the functions of *some*. For example, *some* in Extracts 5.16, 5.17 and 5.18 is primarily used for the purpose of self-protection, but at the same time it can also be seen to be expressing

uncertainty. As another example, *some* in Extracts 5.19, 5.20 and 5.21 could be seen as performing both evasive and self-protection functions simultaneously.

Extract 6.9 (Chinese)

Context: One female student is describing a picture in an oral English test.

Student 3: Er, in my pictures, erm, the irresponsibility, the irresponsible people person is gate keeper. Erm he is sleeping when erm he keeps his work, and this is the first picture. And the second picture erm is that two children is take taking *some things* out of the gate erm when the gate keeper is sleeping. Erm, this is, this two pictures is very simple, but I think there is erm *some important things*. Erm. Everyone should realize his his responsibility and erm even even he is not in his stance. So he should keep his responsibility in the erm how to say work time or job time, and every everyone should cares about the, erm things he keeps it. Because he is there is ern, because he is ern responsible for his things that he keep. (C:18:38)

There is an irresponsible gate keeper who is sleeping in the first picture, which enables two children take *some things* out of the gate as shown in the second picture. When *some* is used, perhaps the speaker could not identify what the children take, or she might not be able to find the exact words to describe the items so *some* is a tool to hide her vocabulary limitations. Therefore, *some* here seems to be being used for uncertainty as well as discourse management. As for *some important things*, it may serve both approximation (focus: unspecified quantity) and generalization (focus: the quality of importance) purposes. Extract 6.9 suggests that fluid functions manifest the elasticity of *some*, indicating that different focuses in the use of *some* do co-exist.
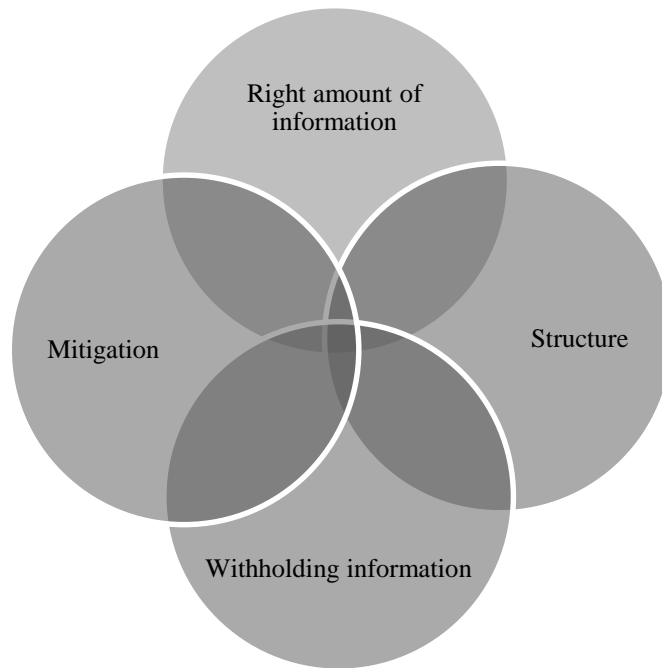
Figure 6.3: Overlapping functions of *some*

Figure 6.3 depicts the characteristics of interconnection among the functions of *some*, overlapping between functions. The pragmatic use of *some* is multifaceted and often plays more than one role (Zhang, 2015). The linguistic behaviours of *some* in this study is similar to *I think* in Zhang's (2014) study. She found that *I think*'s pragmatic functions are non-linear, multi-trajectory, overlapping, complementary, co-existed, representing the elastic nature of language (p. 225).

Some could be co-operative with the functions of giving the right amount information, mitigation, and politeness. At the same time, *some* could be competitive when used to withhold information for self-protection or evading. Structural functions of *some* (hesitation, searching for the words, and repairing) are neutral functions. Again, there is an overlap between the cooperative, competitive and neutral here, another manifestation of the elasticity of *some*.

6.6 Local and global *some*

Stretchability, one of the three principles of Zhang's Elasticity Theory, manifests through the scope of its meaning of *some*. The concepts of local and global *some* are defined based on how far *some* stretches: local *some* stretches along a narrower

neighbouring range and global *some* stretches along a wider range. This follows Sabet and Zhang's (2015) position, in which they consider *a few* in 'I saw a few students' as local vagueness as *a few* applies to *students* only; but *I think* in 'I think she is a student' as global vagueness as *I think* extends vagueness to the entire sentence. The two phenomena are illustrated through the following extracts from the data.

Extract 6.10 (Vietnamese)

Context: Four participants over seven speaking turns. They are talking about their teacher.

S1: What's do you think about the teacher? She is so easy. (V: 15: 23)

S3: Yes, she is very easy. Yes, she do *something else*, she did many things else when we, we are examined. Oh, so how, how do you think about our teacher teach us very difficult to understand? (V: 15: 24)

S5: So boring (V: 15: 25)

S3: Maybe we, we can sleep in the class because the lesson very boring. (V: 15: 26)

S2: So, hmm, I think she is in [xx] but I want to know what do you think? You? (V: 15: 27)

S3: She often goes out and answers the phone call. (V: 15: 28)

S2: Oh, yes, she does here too. So [a name], what do you think? (V: 15: 29)

In turn 15:24, S3 describes the teacher as an easy person who does not invigilate the examination strictly. She does *something else* when she is invigilating the examination. S3 may just be trying to impress that the teacher does not focus on the observation of students during the examination so what the teacher actually did is not mentioned in the utterance. However, following the extract in turn 15:28, the listener gets a clearer picture of the teacher's irresponsibility, for example, going out or answering a phone call. It seems that the meaning scope of *something* is a global one, as it is elaborated further across several speaking turns (from 15:24 to 15:28).

Local vagueness has also been found in the use of *something*. For instances, *something + adjective* narrowly spreads the vagueness to the adjective. In the case of a vague tag (e.g. *a book or something like that*), the vagueness is locally accessed through the exemplar of the tag.

Extract 6.11 (Vietnamese)

Context: A female participant is talking about her friend who is having trouble with love.

S5: My friend has a problem but I can't help her, can you help me? Yes. I will tell my story. She, she has a special feeling about, about him, yes, about him. And he said to her "I love you", very, so he says *something very sweet, very sweet*, and hmm she thinks maybe she also love her, love him, and then they are couple but at school they don't have time to see, to meet and they only chat on phone sometimes. So the relationship becomes, has a distance and then she becomes, she thinks very, it is very boring and she don't want to, don't want to continue this relationship hmm but she thinks it will hurt him so so she don't, don't want to ... (V:19:25)

Extract 6.12 (Chinese)

Context: A student is talking about the internet.

Student1: Oh, oh, oh. Internet, er I'm sorry, internet. I think I I'm very like it. Because we can search many useful information on the internet such as er er ler-learning materials, movies er *or something like that*. Erm I can know many friends from the internet. For example, we can chat with my friend abroad through the QQ or MSN, you know. I enjoyed the the the way of chatting very much. And I think the internet er the materials on the internet of my university is very plentiful, er er including many pictures and movies and English materials er er where

> we can improve ourselves very much. So I'm very happy to see so many there are so many materials on the internet. I think it's a best way to learn. (C:9: 20)

As can be seen in Extract 6.11, *very sweet* is used to narrow the vague scope of *something*. The procedure of accessing the meaning of *something* is then only focused on the 'sweet words' of the man who is mentioned in the story. Moving to Extract 6.12, the tag *or something like that* is used to refer to things that can be done through the internet. The speaker does not need to list all the things as the listener can still access the gist of things from the exemplars, i.e. learning materials and movies. Vagueness then is accessed locally in these exemplars. When *sometimes* is placed at the beginning in the data it brings in a global vagueness, in contrast to other places, where it tends to signal a local vagueness.

Extract 6.13 (Chinese)
Context: The student is talking about the changes in Shanghai city.

Student 2: Mm there is are great changes have taken place in the last ten years. Mm I think in my in my memory, er when I was very young er just the buildings in Shanghai are very are not very high and the road is very crowded, *sometimes* you can't mm go to work in time, and er the kitchen in in in our house is very busy and dirty, *sometimes* I can't find something I want to I want to do with I want to I wanted. Mm and the bedroom is very slim there are no enough room in our bedroom, the roo the bed the we must eat at eat, we must eat our super our meal and our meal are very... (C:3:26)

Extract 6.14 (Vietnamese)
Context: Two students over three speaking turns. They are discussing dangerous environments at work.

S2: Yes, I, I mean a, a dangerous job is they are, they are, they work in dangerous environment. Yes. (V:27:102)

S5: Dangerous environment. Yes. (V:27:103)

S2: For example a worker who, who works in, who work in a mine, a coal mine for example some-, *sometimes a nuclear plant*. Yes, it's really dangerous. (V: 27:104)

In Extract 6.13, *sometimes* is used twice both placed at the beginning of the sentences, which effects on the meaning of the whole sentences following them, thus they have a global vagueness. By contrast, *sometimes* attached to a noun phrase, as in Extract 6.14, identifies that the nuclear plant is also a dangerous environment for the workers. *Sometimes* is used to demonstrate that the nuclear plant is not regularly chosen by the workers because it might be more dangerous than the coal mine. In the latter case, *sometimes* locally targets the nuclear plant only.

6.7 Impact of language ability

That language competence of L2 speakers influences on the use of VL (Zhang, 2015; Sabet & Zhang, 2015), is supported by the findings in this study. For example, the combination of *some* clusters may link to the language ability of L2SE, as shown in Figure 6.4.
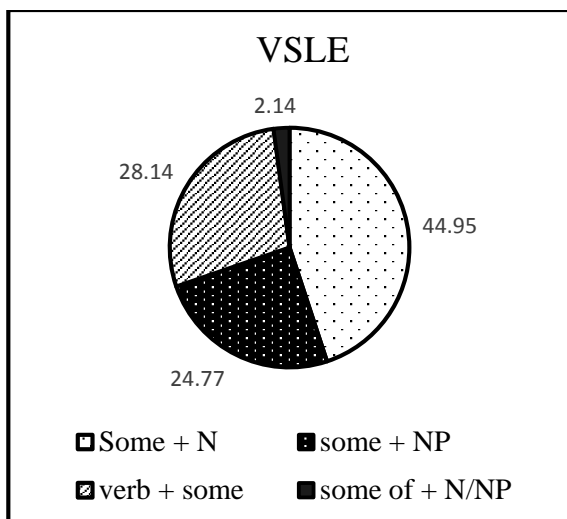

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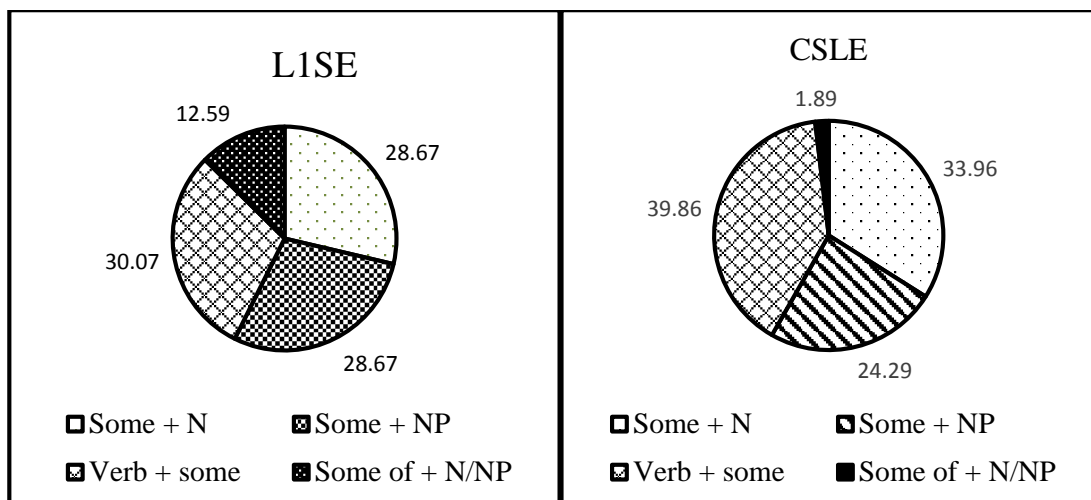
Figure 6.4: Percentage of *some* clusters: L1SE and L2SE

As illustrated in Figure 6.4, the percentage distributions of *some* clusters at the syntactic level used by L1SE and L2SE are different. L1SE has a similar percentage distribution in three out of the four items, indicating their consistent linguistic ability in using a variety of *some* clusters. By contrast, the two L2 groups show unevenly distributed percentages of *some* clusters within their groups, possibly indicating their lack of linguistic skills in using a variety of *some* clusters. Neither L2 groups used *some of* + N/NP much, perhaps because their limited language ability prevented them from using more complex structures. This finding is in line with Sabet and Zhang's (2015) finding that "L1s tend to use various types of vague language more evenly, and the L2 groups concentrate on a fewer number" (p. 71). The reason for a higher percentage of *some of* clusters in L1 data compared with L2 data may be because the native speakers feel more confident of using more complex structure than the L2 learners, and the less frequency by L2SE might be the result of limited language efficiency.

The limitation of language skills has is evident when L2SE have difficulty in searching for words to express their opinions as shown in Extracts 6.15 and 6.16:

Extract 6.15 (Chinese)
Context: Two participants (one teacher and one student) over six speaking turns. They are discussing festivals.

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Teacher: Ok, well I think that's the end of the discussion. Now I'd like to ask you one last question on the topic of festivals of the eastern and the western. Now Mr Chen, can you say something on most unforgettable festival you have celebrated? (C:7:53)

Student 2: I celebrated Children's Day. Children's Day and my I my when I was when I was I in primary school. (C:7:54)

Teacher: What do you still remember about? (C:7:55)

Student 2: I remember I I take a and I fall down and mm start star? And mm my mum my mum I I cry and my mum brought me my mum brought me to the zoo to the zoo and buy *some, some, some* good to for me and as better as its its (C:7:56)

Teacher: How old are you? (C:7:57)

Student 2: About nine years old or eight. It's, it's not it is not so good but I remember it is very very well. It is national festival I went to went to o o Ma Macao Macao traveling traveling. It is good. But it is not not not better than my my my young child mm (C:7:58)

Student 2 remembers a Children's Day festival when he was at primary school. He uses *some* three times when telling his story. Looking closely at turn 7: 56, Student 2's utterance is not fluent, with him repeating words and phrases such as *I, my mum, to the zoo.* This can be explained by the limited language ability of the speaker. Or, the speaker may be trying to remember the exact details of that special day while looking for the exact words to express the idea. With limited English, Student 2 cannot manage two procedures smoothly, i.e. remembering the situation and choosing the right words at the same time, leading to the fractured sentences with inexact words. *Some* is used three times by the speaker, providing more time for him to search for the right words, however it is unsuccessful, as he could not finish the sentence. *Some* served the purpose of discourse management to keep the student's utterances moving when searching for the right words. The inadequate language ability might increase the cognitive processing required so Student 2 uses three times of *some* to extend the time while he searches for the right words.

> **Extract 6.16 (Vietnamese)**
>
> **Context:** Three participants over five speaking turns. They are discussing about telling a lie.
>
> S3: *I think* *some, some, some* situations; hmm tell a lie is good such as I ask, I ask him "Do you think I am beautiful?" [laugh] and I know his answer that he, he must say "Yes" in anywhere. (V:24:12)
>
> S5: Oh my God (V:24:13)
>
> S4: Oh my God (V:24:14)
>
>   [group laughs]
>
> S3: Because I am beautiful. (V:24:15)
>
> S5: I don't think so. (V:24:16)

In turn 24:12, S3 says that it is okay to tell a lie in *some, some, some situations.* This might be because the speaker could not find the right word at the time of communicating so she repeats *some* three times to keep the speech going while searching for a word to accompany *some*. This suggests that a low level of language skill in a L2 student may impact upon how he or she uses *some*.

The findings of this study confirm the difference between L1 and L2 groups, in that the L2 speakers use more *some* than the L1 speakers. Does this mean that L2 overuse *some*? This study supports the view of Zhang (2015) that the differences of L1 and L2 simply mean that:

> L1 and L2 speakers have different preferences, not that L1 speakers set the standard and L2 speakers miss the mark. Particularly if the difference in word frequency between L1 and L2 speakers does not cause any communicative misunderstanding, then labelling L2 speakers as under-users or over-users is unwarranted. (2015, p. 198-199)

As demonstrated previously (for details see Section 6.1 in particular) at an overall level, the speech event type of CSLE (in an oral English test setting) does not show much difference compared with classroom settings of L1SE and VSLE. However,

there are limited anecdotal cases where the setting factor may contribute to certain preferences for *some* clusters. For example, with 46 occurrences CSLE use *to do some* remarkably higher than the other two groups, whereas it was found only 6 times in the VSLE data and not at all in the L1SE's data. Furthermore, of the 46 cases the CSLE used the first person subject pronoun, *I* (8 times) and *we* (19 times), combined with *to do some*. The *we* combination mostly occurred in teachers' utterances when directing students to move to another part of oral test, as in Extract 6.17.

Extract 6.17 (**Chinese**)
Context: The teacher is directing students.

Teacher: Ok. Now that you know each other*, we can do some* group work. First of all, I'd like to ask each of you a question. Now, [a name], Do you think the living conditions of people in rural areas have improved? (C:15:16)

The teacher has to follow the procedure of a test, resulting in a higher frequency of *we + to do some* clusters in their utterances compared to the other two groups. The findings show that the settings may influence the use of *some* and its clusters, but it is only in a few individual cases.

The findings show that the behaviour of the Chinese group was similar to that of the Vietnamese in terms of the overall frequency distribution of *some*, and also similar to the L1 speakers in some other aspects. This indicates that the slight setting difference between the Chinese (oral test setting) and other two groups (classroom setting) does not make much impact on the data, which justifies the methodology used in this study.

6.8 Cultural influence on the use of *some*

The use of *some* may be influenced by cultural factors (Zhang, 2015). With a common Confucian heritage culture, the two groups of L2SE in this study seemed to reveal some influence of Confucian characteristics in using *some*, especially paying

attention on the notion of face, an important value of Confucianism (Hofstede & Hofstede, 2005; Wang et al., 2005; Monkhouse et al., 2012). The evidence in Section 5.2.1 presents the politeness use of *some* by L2SE. This accounts for Scollon and Scollon's (1995) findings that Asians are more concerned with establishing and maintaining good relationships. Politeness influences 'social harmony' which has been identified as a 'key construct' in Chinese communication (Chang, 2001, p. 157) and is "highly valued in the Vietnamese society" as well (Nguyen, 2010, p. 212). This is also similar to the findings of Sabet and Zhang (2015) who confirmed that the learners of English's cultural backgrounds "can be influential in the employment of vague language when they communicate in English, as in the example of politeness" (p. 192).

L2SE seemed to pay more attention to protecting their own or others' face by using *some people*. VSLE had the highest frequency of using *some people* with 31 occurrences, while CSLE ranks second with 20 occurrences. Alternatively, L1SE were not interested in using *some people* only twice. The preference of using *some people* might have been used to "reduce the impact of negative assessment" (Zhang, 2015, p. 85) during the communication.

Extract 6.18 (Chinese)

Context: Two participants (one male teacher and one female student) over two speaking turns. They are talking about water waste.

Teacher: Mm do people around you mm waste water? (C:13:17)
Student 1: Yes, I see *some people* around me mm waste water. They mm they wa-
            they wash mm clothes with many waters I think it is a waste and say
            they don't mm mm always ton mm ton off the water when they finished
            washing. Mm... I think it is a very bad thing. (C:13:18)

In turn 13:18, Student 1 provides an answer to the question about whether people around her waste water. She only mentions that *some people* around her waste water without giving a precise number as it is not necessary in this situation. She observes the Maxim of Quantity (Grice, 1975) by giving enough information to the listener.

Another possible reason of using *some people* is to maintain those people's face by not naming and shaming them in public, otherwise the speaker might sound offensive. Hence, *some people* as a shield prevents the speaker from the risk of being blamed (Channell, 1994).

Extract 6.20 (Vietnamese)

Context: Two participants over three speaking turns. They are discussing telling a lie.

S6: Well, do you think that if you are good at lying you will make more friends? (V:24:99)

S2: Make more friends? Yes, of course. I think, because hmm sometimes they don't, they don't know, they don't know about me and I want to know him or her who they are and I tell a lie. And some, some, I think if in this case it's, it's really bad to him or her, [S6: and they, they] but it's good for me. *Some people* think that. (V:24:100)

S6: It's good for you, it's good for you but they will never, never known who you really are. (V:24:101)

In turn 24:100, S2 thinks that she can make more friends by telling a lie to those people she does not know as *it's really bad to him or her, but it's good for me*. The speaker follows the 'go general' maxim (Zhang, 2011) strategically to strengthen her own opinion by adding the sentence '*Some people* think that' instead of using *I think*, which indicates that this is not her own opinion, it is an opinion from others. *Some people think* is a strategy of self-protection (Channell, 1994; Jucker et al., 2003, Zhang 2011). Notably, *some people think that* only appeared in Vietnamese data, VSLE used it instead of using *I think that* to deliver their opinions.

Indirectness, another characteristic of Confucian heritage cultures (Tsui, 2007, p. 139), is also found in the talk of L2SE. For example, *some* is used as a hedge in combination with *should* to offer less imposing and less authoritative advice. CSLE use the *some* cluster 14 times, VSLE 16, but it was used only once by the L1 group, perhaps suggesting there were cultural factors in the data. With the heavier use of the

cluster*, it seems that cultures may influence on the use of *some*. This supports Gudykunst, Matsumoto, Ting-Toomey, Nishida, Kim and Heyman's (1996) and Gudykunst's (2003) arguments that Asian people culturally express their ideas indirectly more than Western people. In Nguyen's (2008) study about giving criticism in peer-feedback tasks conducted by Vietnamese learners of English and L1 speakers, her findings reveal that the learners gave more indirect criticism than the L1 speakers.

Extract 6.21 (Chinese)

Context: Three students over four speaking turns. They are discussing the prohibition of smoking.

Student 2: OK. In my opinion, I think smoking should be prohibited. Because as we know, we got three three pictures and say that first it's bad it's a bad thing because it's dangerous. And the second one is not good for public relations and the third one is it's not good for one's health. So I think er smoking should be prohibited. (C:11:41)

Student 3: Yes. I agree with you. (C:11:42)

Student 1: I agree with you too. But I think it is not easy thing. You see many people smoke in public and in pri-private place is very difficult. (C:11:43)

Student 3: And I think we *should maybe* set up *some places* especially for the smokers and in the public area people are prohibited to smoke I think. (C:11:44)

Following the discussion of smoking issues, Student 2 proposes the idea that smoking should be banned which meets the agreement from Students 1 and 3. Even while agreeing with smoke prohibition, Student 1 worries that it is difficult to ban smoking in public and private places with so many smokers. Meanwhile, Student 3 suggests that *we should maybe set up some places especially for the smokers* in turn 11:44. *Some* as an approximator is more relevant than a precise number (Jucker et al., 2003) in this case as it is not necessary to enumerate the places for smokers. At the same time, *some* is also a hedge here, indicating the informal and casual nature of the

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suggestion. *Maybe* is used to "suggest a lower degree of the speaker's commitment to the truth of the claim" to soften the use of *should*, "implying a speaker's positionality" (Zhang, 2015, p. 105). Hence the cluster of *should*, *maybe* and *some* contributes to bring in indirectness when giving advice by Student 3.

Extract 6.22 (Vietnamese)

Context: Two female students over two speaking turns. They are discussing how group work should be designed.

S3: Ok, I see your point but sometimes do you think that group work makes the class really noisy and that feel irritating, I can feel really irritating. (V:12:14)

S1: I think in order to solve this problem the teacher must do something, for example she *should* *have some rules, materials* in order to forbid the students not, not to talk in class so much, just focus on the lesson and, not, not chatting or doing something else. (V:12:15)

S3 thinks that the group work makes the class really noisy which irritates her. Responding to S3's opinion, S1 makes suggestions about what the teacher could do to solve the problems, i.e. creating *some rules, materials* during the English speaking lesson. S1 uses *should* with *some* rules/materials, so *some* acts as a quantifier indicating things that the speaker does not want to specify (Biber et al, 1999, p. 351ff), as well as a qualifier to indicate less authority. Hence, *some* plays a role as a hedge to express her indirect advice. L2SE tended to be indirect in giving advice by using double the number of elastic expressions, *should* and *some*, to mitigate the blunt directness in their communication.

Sabet and Zhang (2015) confirm that the Chinese culture seems to "encourage vague language use in their second-language patterns" (p. 173). The findings of this study supports their view in that under the Confucian heritage cultures the Chinese and Vietnamese groups used *some* strategically to express politeness, face-saving, indirectness and the like. This is a feature of linguistic behaviour in contemporary China and Vietnam.

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6.9 Concluding remarks

This chapter presented a general account of the use of *some*, backed by the empirical evidence emerged from the three sets of data in this study. Through the analysis of frequency, clustering and position of *some*, it concludes that L2 groups are vaguer than the L1 group. *Some* is fluid and stretchable between a quantifier and a qualifier, positive and negative, local and global. The elasticity of *some* manifests at both lexical and syntactic levels. The data also showed the influence of speaker's language ability and cultural backgrounds on the use of *some*.

The data demonstrates an interconnection between conventional and pragmatic meanings of *some*. There is also overlap among the pragmatic functions of *some* to meet different and complex needs of communication. L2SE differ from L1SE in that the former use *some* clusters less consistently or evenly than the latter, due to their lower language ability. However, this does not mean that L2SE overuse or under use *some*, the L1 and L2 groups simply have different preferences of *some* clusters, which supports the position of Zhang and Sabet (in press).

Chapter 7 Conclusions and Implications

This study is one of the first comprehensive and pragmatic studies of *some* by investigating the linguistic patterns associated with it and highlighting its elastic nature. While the previous works on *some* have useful findings, they seemed to lack an integrated view to account for the important characteristic of *some*: elasticity, which underpins the ways in which *some* is able to perform a wide ranging of pragmatic functions. This study fills the gap in the existing literature, by bringing new insights and a rare mix of resources to the study of *some* and beyond.

The use of *some* in this study adheres to Grice's (1975) Maxim of Quality (telling the truth) and Maxim of Quantity (not providing more information than is required), and also meets the requirements of Relevance Theory (Sperber & Wilson 1985) in which more cognitive impact than is required with less cost processing effort. More importantly, the use of *some* is explained effectively by Elasticity Theory (Zhang 2015) which consists of three principles, fluidity, stretchability, strategy, which adequately explains the working of *some* in this study.

This study was based on three sets of naturally-occurring classroom data (L1 speakers of American English, Chinese-speaking learners of English, and Vietnamese-speaking learners of English). The mixed methods methodology combined quantitative and qualitative analysis to maximise the strength of both. The conventional meanings of *some* are 'some and possibly all', 'some but not all', among others, but this study found that *some* is much more than that, consisting of rubber-like pragmatic meanings including approximation, generalization, uncertainty, politeness, downtoning, self-protection, evasion, discourse smoother, and the like.

7.1 L1 vs L2 speakers

This study was conducted through a comparative study between L1 and L2 speakers in academic settings using both qualitative and quantitative approaches to analyse the data. The data analysis of *some* and *some* group (*something*, *sometimes*, *someone* and

somebody) at both lexical and syntactic levels, shows that the two L2 groups had similar frequency distribution patterns which were opposite the L1 group, L2 speakers used more *some* than L1 speakers meaning that the Chinese and Vietnamese speakers are vaguer than the American speakers.

The heavier use of *some* by the L2 groups does not necessarily mean that they overuse or under use it, all this show is that the L1 and L2 groups have different preferences in using *some*. L1 and L2 speakers do not use *some* differently all the time though, for while they differ in overall frequency distribution, they are similar in using types of *some* clusters. For example, both groups preferred *something* more than *sometimes*, *someone* and *somebody*, meaning that they focussed more on unspecified things than unspecified persons.

7.2 Manifestation of the elasticity of *some*

The findings revealed the elasticity of *some* manifested through fluidity, stretchability and strategy, observing these three principles in Zhang (2015). The elasticity of *some* can be represented through an interconnection between conventional and pragmatic meanings of *some* at both lexical and syntactic levels. In particular *some* is fluid and stretchable between being a quantifier and a qualifier, having positive and negative meanings, and local and global interpretations. There is also overlap among the pragmatic functions of *some* in order to meet different and complex needs of communication.

The data showed that *some* can be both a quantity (e.g. *some* + countable noun) and a quality (e.g. *some* + mass noun, especially coupled with *sort of*) marker. The participants used *some* much more as a quantifier than as a qualifier. The quantitative and qualitative uses of *some* are not always clear-cut though, and the two types can co-exist simultaneously. *Some* was also found to express both the positive and negative meanings. The meaning scope of *some* can stretch locally along a narrower neighbouring range and globally along a wider range. All these findings show *some*'s versatile nature enabled by its fluidity.

The meaning of *some* is elastic in the sense that it is context dependant, it is interpreted according to the speakers' intended meaning. The meaning of *some* is like a rubber band, stretching along a conventional linear continuum (e.g. none → at least one → *some* but not all → *some* possibly all), or a pragmatic nonlinear member set consisting of approximation, uncertainty, politeness, evasion, and the like.

Some is multi-directional, consisting of four major functions (right amount of information, mitigation, withholding information, and structure), and 10 subfunctions (approximation, generalization, uncertainty; politeness and downtoning; self-protection and evasion; hesitation, searching for words, repairing). These functions overlap and not categorical, and can be stretched in different directions depending upon the need of the context. For example, *some* is used for both approximation and generalization simultaneously. The findings of this study clearly demonstrated that *some* is strategic in every way. It can convey the right amount of information, speak with a tender tone, withhold information for self-protection or evasion, and manage speech flow smoothly. *Some* stretches strategically, transforming among varying pragmatic functions to target various communicative purposes.

Correlation between the pragmatic meanings, types, and the functions of *some* emerged in the data. *Some* functions to be co-operative (e.g. giving the right amount of information, mitigation, and politeness), competitive (e.g. withhold the information), or neutral (e.g. discourse management).

7.3 Linguistic and cultural factors

This study found evidence of the influence of speakers' language ability and cultural backgrounds on the use of *some*. L2 speakers differed from L1s in that the former used *some* clusters less consistently and more unevenly than the latter, due to their lower language ability. In particular, their limited vocabulary prevented them from using more complex structures. The limitation of language skills was also found when L2 speakers were having difficulty in searching for words to express their opinions, when *some* came to their aid.

This study suggests that under the influence of the long existing Confucian heritage cultures that both Chinese and Vietnamese groups have a tendency to use *some* for the purpose of politeness, face-saving, indirectness, and the like. This indirect cultural style may contribute to the fact that L2 groups appear less straightforward than the L1 group by using more of the vague word *some* in their communication.

7.4 Implications

This study investigated *some*, but its findings have important implications for language in general. Through the lens of *some* in educational settings, this study went into uncharted territory and explored *some* from the elasticity perspective. The findings imply that language does have vague and elastic characteristics, which demands a rethinking of our approaches to language and more attention to the elasticity of our language in general.

This study revealed how *some* is used elastically to target communicative goals. The findings add a new dimension to the study of *some* and elastic language in general. In particular this study widens choices for the learners of English in applying *some* to diversify their ideas, mitigate their claims, or even to cover their weaknesses.

The findings have particular implications for language education by contributing a fuller understanding of *some* in multi-cultural backgrounds. The learners of English can benefit from managing *some* via the concept of elasticity to harmonize their utterance in multi-cultural classes, to reduce misunderstandings caused by different cultures. The findings can also help the teachers to teach *some* with an integrated approach. Based on the differences in using *some* in multi-cultural backgrounds, teachers could give their instructions more effectively and design lesson plans more suitably to meet the students' demands from diverse cultures.

With a limited study of VL in educational settings in general and *some* in particular, this study adds new resources for teachers and learners of English. This study showed that the learners of English sometimes lack of ability to use *some* skilfully, unlike the L1 group who can manage *some* in a more consistent manner. Therefore,

teachers might need to draw a fuller picture of the semantic and pragmatic functions of *some*. The traditional *some* vs the elastic *some* brings to the lesson plan a new perspective of approaching the meaning of *some* in communication. Furthermore, the pragmatic functions of *some* can enable students to use it strategically to build up competence in using language elastically.

Further research could expand the scope of this data, to include more cultures and settings, which are necessary for a more comprehensive account of the use of *some*. The outcomes will help teachers and learners of English to communicate using vague language more effectively. This study focused on investigating *some* in the spoken language between L1 and L2 speakers, but further research could examine *some* in written language to compare whether *some* is employed differently in different speech genres.

Due to the data limitation (no audio for the Chinese data), this study did not investigate *some* from the perspective of prosody. This is an important part of research which could be done in a future research to provide a complete picture of *some* use, and add more insights and new empirical evidence to the existing literature.

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