A Construction Grammar Approach to the Phrase *I mean* in Spoken English[1]

1. Introduction

The aim of this analysis is to combine two linguistic methods and theoretical approaches: Conversation Analysis and Construction Grammar. In the first part I will examine the collected data and provide a working definition of discourse markers, claiming that *I mean* can indeed be considered a member of that functional class of expressions. Then I will analyze actual instances of the phrase *I mean* in spoken American and British English, using the methods of Conversation Analysis for describing the prosodic, syntactic and functional features of *I mean* in specific interactional contexts. In the third part I will apply the terminology and concept of Construction Grammar (mainly based on Crofts (2002) "Radical Construction Grammar") to constructions with *I mean*, showing their relevance to spoken interaction and linking them to some general concepts of Construction Grammar.

2. The Data[2]

The data is taken from different corpora containing transcribed American and British radio phone-ins and private conversations. The total time of the analyzed transcripts is about 12 hours and 20 minutes. I was looking for any token with the verbal stem *mean* but not for nouns, adjectives or adverbs such as *meaning*, *meaningful* or *meaningfully* and I found a total of 449 tokens which I divided into three groups:

a) *I mean* (deictic grounding *I-here-now*, mainly utterance-initial position) 382

b) Specific Constructions *(if) you know what I mean* and
(if) you see what I mean 8

c) Forms of the verb *to mean*, mostly with deictic variations in terms
of person or time (for exceptions see below) 59
(e.g. *I meant my ice-cream*)

[1] Thanks to Elizabeth Couper-Kuhlen and Susanne Günthner for their comments and ideas and to Chad Rusk for proofreading the manuscript.
[2] I like to thank Elizabeth Couper-Kuhlen for letting me use her collected data.

3. Discussion of the Data

The phrases *you know what I mean* and *you see what I mean* were listed as separate entries because they were the only fixed constructions apart from the construction involving the discourse marker *I mean*. The eight cases of group *b* are based upon a single constructional pattern *you X what I mean*, which follows a schema similar to the "What's X doing Y" constructions described by Kay and Fillmore (1997). In Crofts (2002) terms, the [*you X what I mean*]-construction can be classified as located between the extreme poles of schematic and specific constructions. It is partly schematic as it leaves a slot (marked by the *X*) open for the insertion of at least two verbs, *know* (six cases) and *see* (two cases). Fully schematic constructions such as [verb + complement][3] and others don't prescribe the actual lexical forms that have to be inserted. One could also imagine other verba sentiendi such as *understand*, *get* or *realize* filling the slot, though I haven't found any of these in the analyzed data. The construction is also specific, as a disproportionately large part of the expression *you X what I mean* is frozen. Despite the limited openness of [*you X what I mean*], the relative fixedness and the functional and pragmatic properties attached to it place it closer to the pole of specific than of schematic constructions. The description of the idiosyncratic functional, pragmatic, semantic, prosodic etc. properties which mark this construction off from both group *a* and *c* would be the topic of an independent analysis, though, and cannot be attempted here.

Group *c* comprises a variety of forms, most of which can be analyzed by using the regular inventory of grammatical rules, or, to be consistent with Croft's (2002) terminology, by using schematic constructions.

The following examples illustrate the range of the combinatory possibilities of *I mean*:

The basic [verb + complement] construction yields sentences such as "i don't mean two brand new cars but…"[4], "no i mean legal" or "in the sense that it means that we can say....". The semantic content of *to mean* can be paraphrased by *to intend to convey or indicate or refer to (a particular thing or notion)*. This construction can be expanded by adding one of the question formats of either a [*wh*-question] or an [inversion]: "why does capitalism now mean you have to be the biggest?", "how do you mean?" or "do you mean michael?". Again the semantic content is the same as in the [verb + complement] construction quoted above. Another construction would involve the activation of the meaning of to *intend* or *to plan*,

[3] Henceforth square brackets will be used to mark constructions.

[4] Examples in quotation marks and in lower case are taken from the data, those in italics with conventional spelling are invented. The transcription system used here is the GAT developed by Selting et al. (1997). According to the conventions of GAT, all transcribed spoken data are spelled in lower case, upper case marking either a primary accent, when a whole syllable is set in upper case or a secondary accent, when only one vowel within the accented syllable is set in upper case.

coupling it with an object or infinitive construction: "i've been meaning to ask you", "i didn't mean to stop you" etc. Although the instances of *to mean* in group c differ in the types of constructions they are used in and even in the type of semantic content that is activated, what they all share is:

1.) The fact that a semantic content can be given, that is, a paraphrase is possible and the verb *to mean* contributes necessary semantic information to the proposition it is part of and therefore cannot be omitted and

2.) the fact that the syntactic status of *to mean* in all these constructions is unequivocal, i.e. *I mean* can be described by using traditional grammatical rules (which are to a large extent equivalent to schematic constructions).

Group c almost only comprises instances of *to mean* where the deictic placement has been moved from the centre of I-here-now either on the axis of tense or person. Among the 59 tokens in the data only four are realized in first person present tense singular and all of these are unambiguous concerning their grammatical and semantic interpretation: one is a rhetorical question ("what do i mean by that"), which can be analyzed in exactly the same way (excluding the special pragmatic functions a rhetorical question has) as any other question involving *to mean*, the second one has already been mentioned above ("i mean legal"), and the third and fourth ones follow the same pattern of referring to an object complement ("that's what i mean" and "i mean exactly that"). When we look at the syntactic and semantic status of the other cases of *I mean*, we will see more clearly where the differences between these two cases and the rest of the *I mean* tokens lie, namely in the status of *I mean* as some kind of semantically reduced projective phrase that on a purely syntactic level looks similar to a matrix clause but usually cannot be analyzed as one.

The first group, group a, will be in the focus of this analysis. As has already been mentioned, all these instances of *I mean* in group a have in common the fact that they are deictically linked to the speaker (they all occur in first person singular) and the present tense, and that they usually cannot be analyzed in terms of [verb + complement] or other schematic constructions. How can these cases of *I mean* be described then? A short look at some grammars and dictionaries quickly reveals that *I mean* can indeed occur in such a special function:

Quirk et al (2003:1181) state that *to mean* can be combined with various types of complements, such as "a *that*-clause", "a *to*-infinitive" or "a noun phrase", which can be followed further by a to-infinitive. In their grammar, though, they don't differentiate between the different meanings of *to mean*, which are linked to the type of complements by which they

are followed (compare "i mean legal" to "i've been meaning to ask you"). In a chapter on apposition Quirk et al (2003:1313) mention that it is possible to do "'mistake editing' by the use of *I mean* in order to correct a phonological or semantic mistake (…), e.g. *The thirst thing, I mean the first thing to remember is that… Then you add the peaches – I mean the apricots…*".

In Swans (1997:339f) grammar, which is oriented to learners of English as a foreign language, the following options are listed under the entry of *mean*:

1.) questions (What does hermetic mean? What do you mean by hermetic?).

2.) "mean" in the sense of "intend" or "plan" (*I mean to find out what's going on*) or in the sense of "involve" or "have a result" (*This means war!*). Only when referring to intentions can "mean" be used in the progressive form.

3.) "What do you mean…?" This expression is listed separately with the choices of using it in front of another utterance (*What do you mean, I can't sing?*) or of adding a prepositional construction (*What do you mean by waking me up at this time of night?*). This construction occurred only once in the data I was looking at, and Swan doesn't make clear at any point his motivation for choosing (only) this specific construction, ignoring others such as "if you know what I mean".

4.) "*I mean* is used informally as a 'discourse marker' (…) to introduce explanations or additional details. In this use, it is separated from what follows by a pause." On a functional plane *I mean* can introduce "expressions of opinion", "corrections" or it can serve as "a general-purpose connector of 'filler' with little real meaning". In an extra chapter on discourse markers Swan (1997:159) adds "softening" and "gaining time" as further functions of *I mean*. Swan (1997:340) specifically mentions that when used as a discourse marker there is no complementizer after phrase with *I mean*.

In Collins Cobuild's English Dictionary (1997:1031) two pragmatic uses of initial *I mean* are mentioned: "You can use 'I mean' to introduce a statement, especially one that justifies something you have just said. *I'm sure he wouldn't mind. I mean, I was the one who asked him.* (…)" and "You say 'I mean' when correcting something that you have just said. *It was law or classics – I mean English or classics.*"

The Concise Oxford Dictionary of Current English (1990) lists regular uses of *to mean* as well as some phraseologisms, but not *I mean* as a discourse marker.

So what this short look into some grammars and dictionaries reveals is the fact that there is indeed a special and well-established pattern of usage documented for the phrase *I mean*. Swan even explicitly refers to it as a discourse marker, claiming that it is always marked off

by a pause from the following utterance, that it can never be used with the complementizer *that* and that it has a variety of functions, including that of a "filler". In Collins Cobuild's English Dictionary an obligatory pause is not required for *I mean* and in one of the examples given to illustrate the function of *I mean* as an introductory device to a repair there is no comma or colon to indicate a pause.

4. Discourse Markers

The limited space of this article doesn't allow for an extensive discussion of the wealth of literature existing about discourse markers in English. Some of the most important approaches to discourse markers[5] in the English language are those of Schiffrin (1980, 1987), Schourup (1998), Fraser (1990), Kroon (1995, 1998), Brinton (1996) and Lenk (1998). My working definition of discourse markers is mainly drawn from Lenk's (1998) list of definitions.

- Discourse markers are short lexical items: "usually they are single words (…) or two- to three word phrases (…) or contractions" (Lenk 1998:50).
- They have a general indexical function which is actualized in a context-dependent way and can yield a variety of specific interpersonal or textual functions.
- They do not contribute anything to the proposition of the utterance in which or next to which they occur, since they are used in a strictly pragmatic manner. Although pragmatic meaning may be related to the lexical meaning of the same item, these two do not overlap in discourse: where they occur, discourse markers only signal relationships between two or more parts of discourse and they do not express the propositional meaning of their homonyms at the same time (Lenk 1998:50).

Further secondary criteria are:

- "The front position of the item used as a discourse marker leads to a marked prominence of that item in the utterance and as a result its structural function becomes more easily recognizable for the hearer". (Lenk 1998:50) As will be shown in the discussion below, it is actually less the front position but rather a kind of projective power which leads to that prominence.
- It is possible to combine several discourse markers.

[5] There is no consensus about the term "discourse marker". Alternative expressions include, for example, "pragmatic marker", "pragmatic expression" or "discourse particle" and these differences in terminology often go along with slight differences in terms of concepts.

- Often discourse markers are the product of grammaticalization processes, where adverbs, conjunctions or even phrases are reanalyzed to work on a purely pragmatic level.

5. Prosodic and Syntactic Features of *I mean*

5.1. The prosodic properties of *I mean*

One of the central features of discourse markers – which has been remarked upon by all approaches mentioned above – is the alleged initial position of these items. Indeed most instances of *I mean* occurring in the data were realized either initially in one intonation contour together with the rest of the utterance or in a separate intonation contour preceding the utterance they frame.

The following examples are taken from an NBC radio phone-in program with presenter Leo Laporte. The topic is the 1991 start of the Gulf war.

```
Laporte: time to say
382   L     but MAYbe that's not the THIS is not the time to VOICE that
            opinion,
383       → i mean maybe it's time to say Okay;
384         we LAUNCHED the attack,
285         too LATE for SANCtions;

Laporte: right now
602   L     after things are Over we can talk about that and deCIDE that;
603       → i mean-
604         RIGHT NOW it's imPORtant for THEM to know;
605         that they HAVE the support of the COUNtry.
```

In both cases *I mean* is positioned initially, marking the following utterance starting in line 384 and 604 as a contrastive opinion ("it's not time to voice the opinion that sanctions may have worked in the end, it's time to voice the opinion that now that the attack has started we don't need to talk about sanctions any more" in *Laporte: time to say* and "when the war is over we can discuss whether the government was wrong to wage it, but now we need to support our troops" in *Laporte: right now*). In the first example, though, "i mean" is realized within the intonation contour of the utterance it is marking, while in the second example it occupies a separate intonation contour. This results in different levels of saliency: The second "i mean" in line 603 has a stronger signalling effect than the first one, highlighting the contrast of the two conflicting propositions more strongly than the "i mean" in line 383. The marked pattern of stress and rhythm in line 604 supports the view that "i mean" here is indeed used to draw attention to the strong contrast between line 602 and the emotionally loaded utterance in 604-605.

Besides initial realizations of *I mean* there were also medial ones, usually connected with repairs or parenthetical asides. The following example, again taken from the NBC radio programme, is typical for these cases:

```
Laporte: wrong
12    L     a:nd we can't take a: an isoLAtionist ATtitude;
13       →  a:nd sit over here and say it's NOT WRO::=i mean it's WRONG
            to FIGHT-
14          uhm how LO:ng can we alLOW-
```

Here "i mean" is integrated seamlessly into the intonation contour of the utterance in lines 13 and 14. Prosodically, it is not possible to analyze this instance of "i mean" as positioned initially, because Laporte neither started a new turn nor a new sentence. Instead, a part of the utterance is recycled (it's NOT WRO:: and it's WRONG). Laporte draws the vowel "o" of "wro::" directly into the "i" of "i mean", thereby at once effecting a smooth and economic correction which – with the help of the discourse marker – is nevertheless salient enough for the listeners to recognize it as a repair.

The third group is comparatively rare. Here *I mean* is realized *prosodically integrated in an utterance-final position*. Again the example is taken from the NBC programme, this time a caller, Chris, is talking.

```
Laporte: Caller Chris I
67    C     ninety nine percent of the (.) SERvice PEOple o- Over there
            supPORT the PREsident,
68       →  but they're ALL afrAID i mean,
69          WAR is SCAry.
70    L     what the what SERvice is he in.
```

In spite of the prosodic integration into the turn of line 68, "i mean" doesn't refer to this utterance (**but I mean that they are all afraid*) but to the utterance in line 69 (*they are all afraid → I mean (that's no wonder because) → war is scary*). *I mean* seems to be able to be positioned in a lot of different positions prosodically and syntactically and yet never loses its projecting quality.

The fourth group comprises instances of *I mean* which are realized either in a separate intonation contour or in an utterance-final position but then are not followed by an utterance by the same speaker. In some of these cases the reason for the abortion of the following utterance is due to other speakers or external events interrupting the speaker. Yet there seems to be a pattern where *I mean* can be used to signal problems of formulation and at the same time to invite co-participants to join. These uses of *I mean* are similar to tag-questions in that they are used to manage the smooth transition of turn-allocation. This is the reason why Auer/Günthner (2004:2, my translations) broadened the range of candidates for discourse

markers to include "Diskursmarker in der Funktion von tag-questions" (*discourse markers in the function of tag-questions*) which are named according to their topological position "äußerungsfinale Diskursmarker" (*utterance-final discourse markers*). Those discourse markers are placed not in an initial position, but they have a "'periphere' syntaktische Stellung" (*peripheral syntactic position*). The advantage of such a broad definition of discourse markers is that it can include utterance-final *I mean* without problems. On the other hand, while it may be right to assume that in German *tag-question* is just one function of discourse markers, this doesn't necessarily work for the English language. Productive tag-questions such as *isn't it*, *won't they*, etc., which don't exist in German, are of a marked difference morphologically and functionally to frozen tags such as *y'know* or *you see*. For the English language it would be more appropriate in these cases to speak of "tag-questions in the function of discourse markers".[6] The second problem is that in order to fit medially positioned discourse markers into the pattern of peripheral realizations one would have to ignore the prosodic embedding of some of the discourse markers and instead view repairs as complete and new constructions with their own periphery. For these reasons, instead of working with a concept of prosodic or syntactic positions, I decided to view discourse markers as parts of speech possessing a power of projection. This assumption can account for all members of the four groups: concerning their scope, initially positioned discourse markers are completely unambiguous. Medially positioned discourse markers have the (following) repair as their scope, and as we have seen, even discourse markers in final position project an utterance and do not to refer to the utterance they are attached to. What about those cases in which *I mean* is not followed by an utterance by the same speaker? The following example again is taken from the NBC programme. Laporte is reporting the feelings of anti-war protesters.

```
Laporte: Caller Chris II
325   L     you can you can sup you can SAY: uh;
326         LOOK;
327         we DON'T believe in WAR,
328         we don't want you people to DIE,
329         we're doing this for YOU
330   C     HOW do you not believe in WAR.
331         (.)
332   L  →  WELL i don't know i mean duh:::;
333   C     you don't believe in WAR [in any way (         )]
334   L                              [uh i'd NOT (.) I'd not] that's NOT my
            PERsonal opinion
```

What "i mean" projects here is not an utterance, but rather the absence of further utterances. Laporte employs several linguistic means to show that he has problems formulating a reply:

[6] The use of *y'know* in initial or medial positions or in connection with *I mean*, for example, shows that there is indeed a difference in distribution and use of *y'know* to tag questions such as *won't they*.

the micro pause in line 331, the discourse marker "well" in 332, the explicit statement "i don't know" in the same line, the second discourse marker in the same turn ("i mean") and finally the filled and drawn-out pause ("duh:::"). The phrase "i mean" signals a break between "i don't know" and what is coming after, but as there is only a filled pause Chris is able to interpret the "i mean" as having projected an utterance that can not be uttered at the moment. He then reacts by reformulating the utterance.

Thus, the prosody of *I mean* can be realized in a variety of ways, with the initial position the most common one (as has been stressed by most approaches to discourse markers) but with medial and final positions occurring as well. The reason why it is generally perceived that discourse markers are prone to be realized in front of an utterance has less to do with their topological positions or prosodic realizations but rather with their projecting power. This is not comparable to semantic or syntactic projection, as assumed by valence theory. Instead, it is a functional/pragmatic type of projection, opening a slot for a variety of functions I will discuss below.[7] The scope of the projection of *I mean* can be quite limited (e.g. in the context of repairs) or it can be applied on a larger scale (e.g. framing topic changes). In some cases the projection is that of an anacoluthon, a meaningful "coming-to-a-stop", which leaves the interactants with enough information to act upon and take over the turn that has come to a stop (see *Laporte: caller Chris II*).

So while one set of "small words" (Schwitalla 2002) – namely tag questions – doesn't have projecting but concluding power, discourse markers have projecting but not concluding power. Constructions such as *y'know* can either be used as tag questions with concluding functions or as discourse markers with projecting functions, while other tag questions such as *isn't it* only have concluding power.[8]

5.2. *I mean* in combinations with particles or discourse markers

One feature of discourse markers is that they are often combined with other discourse markers, conjunctions or particles. Besides occasional instances of combinations with *well* (one case each of "well i mean" and "i mean well") and *I think* (four cases of "i mean i think"), the most common co-occurrences in our data were with *you know* (five cases of "i mean you know" and eight cases of "you know i mean"), *(be)cause* (seven cases of "because i mean") and *but* (ten cases of "but i mean"). The reason why *I mean* is often coupled with conjunctions such as *but* or *because* lies in the indexical function of discourse markers: as soon as *I mean*

[7] See Auer (2002) for a wider concept of "projection in interaction and projection in grammar".

[8] Erman/Kotsinas (1993:83-86) also differentiate between *you know* with "an emphasizing function" which "usually follows the focussed element and by virtue of the second person pronoun more directly urges the listener to pay attention" and *you know* "used as an introductory device (…) pointing forward in discourse".

occurs, it acts as a signal for the listeners that the following utterance will be marked out for some reason. In the context of conjunctions the ordinary, smooth p – q relation is interrupted by the indexical marker *I mean*. This means that q becomes detached from p, getting the status of a more independent utterance compared to an uninterrupted production of p and q.

The following transcript is taken from an informal conversation.[9] The interactants are talking about some oak trees shading the building, and Bert suggests cutting one down. Albert replies why he cannot do that.

```
Oak Trees
100   A     I want to
101         but Ann won't let me!
102   B     he he
103   A     hey these are like
104         hundred-year-old oak trees
105       → I mean
106         everybody goes
107         God
108         they're nice trees
109         and I'm like
110         /you dont/have to/rake the/leaves
111       → I mean we have leaves all year round
112       → cause I mean a little bit falls all the time
113         everytime it rains?
114         or everytime the wind blows
115         we have leaves in the yard
116         and dead branches all over.
```

The "I mean" in line 105 marks the transition of the statement of lines 103 and 104 to the enactment of a prototypical conversation Albert has with "everybody" about these old trees (lines 106 to 110). The "I mean" in line 111 then marks the return to the narrative mode, giving the reason for the unenthusiastic reply to the praise of the trees ("we have leaves all year round"). The third "I mean" (line 112) breaks up the straightforward p – q relation ("we have leaves all year round because a little bit falls all the time every time it rains") and reanalyzes the q part as a complaint. The rising intonation, indicated by the question mark, supports the view that q is no ordinary giving-of-a-cause but that it is used for pragmatic purposes instead.

The combination of the discourse marker *you know* with *I mean*, and especially the fact that the cases with *I mean* placed in front or after *you know* are evenly distributed can be explained as follows. There is a slight tendency for *you know* to precede facts that are supposed to be known to the hearer(s), while *I mean* is used when the speaker's own opinions are voiced. The following two examples illustrate the change of discourse markers according to the utterance

[9] As I haven't got access to that particular audio file I have to rely only on the roughly transcribed data.

they are preceding. The first one is taken from an ABC radio programme, the second one from the NBC programme with Laporte, P is a caller:

```
ABC News: agrophobia
314   BC    is it Agrophobia or whatEver the child is-
315         eh whatever the diSEASE is when they get very OLD very
            YOUNG,
316      →  i mean you know they can be THREE and FOUR and look like
            they're NINEty,
317         ehm-

Laporte: my view on that
143   P     .hh but you know anOTHer the GOOD part of that;
144         which I wanna bring up is <clears his throat <uhm;>>
145      →  you know i mean THAT'S MY view on THAT;
146         BUT; (.)
147         WHY are people so upset that people wanna make their VIEWS
            known.
```

In the first example, ABC News, the speaker first uses "i mean" and then adds "you know", thus marking the following utterance as a fact that is probably known either to the audience or the recipient (or both).[10] Besides the more obvious functions of coding meta-knowledge of shared knowledge,[11] *you know* can also be used to "(mark) the speaker as an information provider, but one whose successful fulfilment of that role is contingent upon hearer attention" (Schiffrin 1987:290). In the second example, again taken from Laporte on the Gulf War, caller P combines "you know" with "i mean" (line 145). While both discourse markers share a general indexical power, "you know" is hearer-centred and carries at least some of the semantics of *I suppose you know* whereas "i mean" is speaker-centred and can still have some remainder of the meaning of *what I'm referring to is*.... With his "you know" P signals that the attention of the recipients is needed, while with the "i mean" he marks his "orientation to the meanings of (his) own talk" (Schiffrin 1987:309). Yet the differentiation of *you know* as a marker of "interactive transitions in shared knowledge" and *I mean* as a marker of "speaker orientation toward the meanings of own talk" (Schiffrin 1987:309) can only describe a general tendency. Though this inclination, which could be detected in 8 of the 13 cases in the data (two further cases were contradictory, three couldn't be analyzed because the speaker stopped talking) can be linked to Schiffrin's thesis of residual semantics, this residue of semantics nevertheless is not strong enough to account for the choice of a discourse marker alone. Even if the semantic content of discourse markers can in some instances be responsible for the choice of one or the other, the semantics are simply too weak to enforce a continuous pattern

[10] Schiffrin (1987:268f) states that *you know* can be used to mark "meta-knowledge of speaker/hearer shared knowledge" as well as "meta-knowledge of generally shared knowledge".

[11] "So, *you know* has retained some of its original question function (deriving from 'do you know') and could be paraphrased as 'do you follow what I'm telling you' or 'do you agree with what I am saying', that is simultaneously having a confirmation-seeking function." (Erman/Kotsinas 1993:88)

of usage. Therefore it is a tendency at best that can be observed in the distribution of *you know* and *I mean*.

Another remarkable phenomenon linked to the use of *you know I mean* is the fact that a single speaker, a caller on Laporte's radio programme, produced four of the eight cases. This caller seems to have developed an idiosyncratic specific construction, always coupling *you know* and *I mean*. Such clusters are often seen in the use of discourse markers and conversation-oriented phrases.

5.3. *I mean* and matrix clauses

As Swan (1997:339f) mentions, when *I mean* is used as a discourse marker, there is no complementizer following the phrase. Looking at our data, it becomes apparent that there is not a single instance of *I mean* followed by a *that-clause* while with forms of *to mean*, which have been moved from the deictic place of I-here-now, there are five cases ("it doesn't mean that we don't support…, which means that you're gonna have to cut more uh programs…, in the sense that it means that we can say well…, so it means that you don't-, it would mean that you'd have to spend quite a lot of time indoors").[12] All of these cases involve matrix clauses with the full semantic content of *imply* or *involve*. The only semantic content that can be claimed to be present in *I mean*, though, is that of a complement-taking verb with the meaning of *to refer to* or *to intend to say* (as in "i mean legal"). While it is theoretically possible to have complement clauses with *that* as a complementizer, there is no single example of such a construction in the data I looked at.[13] There seems to be a preference for clauses without complementizers to fill the demanded slot of the complement. Nevertheless, the fact that it is possible to use a complementizer[14] yields a test to decide which of the cases of *I mean* belong to the category of "complement-taking verb" (where the complement is a complementizer-less clause) and which belong to the category of discourse marker. The result of this test found that 67 of the 382 cases could be constructed with a complement clause introduced by *that*. Of these, the vast majority are doubtful cases, though. Of the following examples the first one illustrates a case where the complementizer would be unproblematic to add. In the second example, adding a complementizer would change the meaning and functions of *I mean*. *Coffee Shop: extra tip* is taken from private conversation. John, Mary and Carl are talking

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[12] In their analysis of the complementizer *that*, Thompson/Mulac (1999:242) found out that "the most frequent main verbs and subjects are just those which typically occur without *that*" and the first person pronoun singular and "mean" in present tense are used most often indeed. These *I mean* phrases are then reanalyzed as "unitary epistemic phrases" (Thompson/Mulac 1999:249).

[13] Bybee (2001:14) claims that "in those languages where they (the grammatical properties of main clause and subordinate clause) differ, there is an eventual drift towards using main clause patterns in subordinate clauses".

[14] Collins Cobuild (1997:1031) lists "I think he means that he does not want htiss marriage to turn out like his friend's" as an example.

about a stylish new café where one isn't expected to stay after drinking one's cup of coffee. *Laporte: Caller Glen* is extracted from the radio programme on the gulf war presented by Laporte.

```
Coffee Shop: extra tip
31    M     well they GAVE us our cheque in i swear like (.) FOUR minutes.
32    J     yeah that was-
33    M     here.
34    C     do they get an extra TIP for that?
35    M     WHAT?
36          (1.0)
37    M     NO:.
38       →  NO i mean like l-
39          they're obviously not exPECting us to STAY.
40    C     OH.

Laporte: Caller Glen
125   L     GLEN on the line from OAKland;
126         you're on GIant sixty eight Knbr;
127         let's HOPE our ground forces DON'T have to go in.
128   G     yeah let's hope NOT also leo good Evening.
129         RAther MIXed FEELings tonight.
130         HUH.
131   L     YEAH;
132         YEAH;
133      →  i mean uh in ONE WAY uh;
134         it LOOKS LIKE uh; (.)
135         w- we DID what we were s- supposed to DO,
136         and uh and it WORKED,
137         to a CERtain extent,
138         .h there was NO uh iRAqui resPONSE,
139         we can uh (.) thank god that there were no SCUD MISSiles
            launched into Israel,
140         imagine what a conflaGRAtion THAT would have started,
```

In the first example it is marginally possible to reformulate the utterances in lines 38 to 39 into *No I mean that they're obviously not expecting us to stay*. What makes the insertion of the complementizer problematic is the fact that it would be more natural for Mary to use a past form of *to mean* (*no I meant that they're obviously not expecting us to stay*). Nonetheless, compared to the second example, the insertion causes not much of a problem. In *Laporte: Caller Glen* the insertion of *that* would produce the following utterance: *I mean that in one way it looks like we did what we were supposed to do.…* Somehow, the complementizer sounds even more out of place here than in the first example, where the semantic content of *intending to say* or *referring to* at least makes some sense because of the repair situation. So, while there is no clear-cut boundary between *I mean* used in the sense of a verb with a complement and *I mean* used as a discourse marker, there is nevertheless a range of cases with higher and lower probability of one or the other constructions being at work. This probability is not only based on semantic and sequential factors but also on syntactic ones.

Questions or imperatives rule out a reading of a [verb + complement] construction, for example.

```
Oak Trees
100   A     I want to
101         but Ann won't let me!
102   B     he he
103   A     hey these are like
104         hundred-year-old oak trees
105      →  I mean
106         everybody goes
107         God
108         they're nice trees
109         and I'm like
110         /you dont/have to/rake the/leaves
111      →  I mean we have leaves all year round
112      →  cause I mean a little bit falls all the time
113         everytime it rains?
114         or everytime the wind blows
115         we have leaves in the yard
116         and dead branches all over.

Nick Ross: Blakemore
434   B     so SHE has <<laughing> this->
435         DREADful experience,
436         from time to TIME,
437         of having a dePRESSion which is not caused by-
438         her environment and having to DEAL with it.
439         i i TRY to be uh:m-
440      →  sympaTHEtic i mean don't we ALL;
441         when faced with illness in in OTHers,
442         i- i'm SURE i'm not as good AT it as-
443         as many people ARE;
444         i'm sure i'm not as BAD as some.
```

In the first of these two examples sequential and semantic factors make the insertion of a complementizer highly improbable. In all three instances of "I mean" in lines 105, 111 and 112 "I mean that…" would imply that either the utterance following "I mean" had been mentioned before and that it had been misunderstood. In the second example the insertion of that is blocked even more strongly for syntactic reasons.

The following results can be drawn from the data:

- There is a strong tendency not to use any complementizers in the first person singular present tense (compare Thompson/Mulac 1984 and 1999).

- Though there are some cases where a complementizer might be inserted, all these cases sound slightly problematic and there is a scale ranging from near acceptability to definite non-acceptability of the insertion of *that*.

One possible reason for this absence of complementizers and the scale of acceptability will be discussed in chapter 6, section *b*.

6. Functions of *I mean* in Specific Contexts

As mentioned above, the basic function of any discourse marker is indexical. On a context-specific level, two general types of functions can be discerned: textual and interpersonal.[15] The distinction is not clear-cut, of course, and should by no means be seen in an exclusive way. Sometimes *I mean* is active on both of these functional planes, but interestingly enough *I mean* doesn't seem to have only interpersonal functions, there are always some aspects of textual functions left. Textual functions are defined as being concerned with the organization of sequences and repairs, interpersonal functions code the attitude of the speaker to the hearer or to his/her utterance. The choice of functions discussed here is in no way intended to be understood as an exhaustive list but as an illustration of some of the most prominent uses of *I mean* in the analyzed data, and of the ways in which the general indexical function is actualized with the help of specific context. The two central and common functional features that all uses of *I mean* seem to have, are the following:

- *I mean* always opens a pragmatic projection, signalling to the recipients that there is something to follow.
- It acts as a "cut-marker", semantically and/or syntactically interrupting the ongoing flow of utterances and framing the utterance following *I mean* as not to be interpreted as a seamless continuation of the utterance preceding *I mean*.

6.1. Textual Functions of *I mean*

6.1.a I mean and repairs

One use of *I mean* is to mark an upcoming repair. Typically these instances of *I mean* are positioned within an utterance, in medial position:

```
Laporte: wrong
12    L     a:nd we can't take a: an isoLAtionist ATtitude;
13        →  a:nd sit over here and say it's NOT WRO:: i mean it's WRONG
             to FIGHT-
14           uhm how LO:ng can we alLOW-
```

The speaker, Laporte, self-initiates a same-turn self-repair after the trouble source of "NOT WRO::". Schegloff et al (1977:367) state that "self-initiations within the same turn (which contains the trouble source) use a variety of non-lexical speech perturbations, e.g. cut-offs, sound stretches, uh's etc., to signal the possibility of repair initiation immediately following." So, in order to perform a repair, the speaker has to use some kind of index to raise the awareness of the listener that the flow of the utterance will be disrupted and a restart is about

[15] The distinction between interpersonal and functional levels is drawn from Brinton (1996).

to happen. Fox/Jasperson (1995:106) also mentioned two functions repairs have to achieve: "(1) indicate to the recipient that the repairing segment is not a continuation of the syntactic unit under construction; and (2) indicate to the recipient exactly how the repairing segment should be understood with regard to what has come before." The first of these two functions of the repair in *Laporte: wrong* is achieved through the use of the discourse marker (and general cut-marker) "i mean", whose general indexical function is activated as a marker of repair initiation in this specific context. Although in one of the cases analyzed by Fox/Jasperson, a repair is initialized by "I mean" and another by "y'know", they don't mention discourse markers as possible signals for the beginning of a repair. Instead, they rely on Schegloff/Jefferson/Sacks' "non-lexical speech perturbations" as indicators. Nevertheless it is obvious that not only cut-offs or filled pauses but also discourse markers can be used to frame a repair. The second function of repairs mentioned by Fox/Jasperson, namely that of indicating to the recipient how the repair should be understood, is achieved by recycling the whole phrase after "say". This is a common technique described by Fox/Jasperson (1995:109) as "recycle to the beginning of a relevant phrase boundary". In the end what *I mean* accomplishes, is to give the recipients the chance to follow what the speakers have to say in spite of the fact that they have to rely on an "on line-Syntax"[16] that is prone to be changed or aborted at any time during the utterance:

> (…) Since we as recipients cannot know in advance what we are going to hear, (…) the syntax we attribute to the utterance-in-progress is only a guess; we must be able to revise it as we hear more. That is, with every new element in the string, we must be able to be wrong, to fail, and we must be able to repair the failure, to make a new guess at the syntax-in-progress. Syntax must thus be thoroughly organized by the always-tentative nature of temporal interpretation. (Fox/Jasperson 1995:125)

Discourse markers (and, of course, non-lexical signals), through the usage of such contextualization clues, make the task of following a naturally imperfectly planned syntax possible for the recipients.

One of the central functions of *I mean* described by Schiffrin (1987:296) is that of marking "both expansions of ideas and explanations of intention" of the speaker. That *I mean* is used for exactly these purposes is not surprising considering the fact that the predicate (*to mean*) and the pronoun (*I*) work together to "(focus) on the **speaker's** modification of his/her **own** talk" (Schiffrin 1987:299).

[16] See also Auer (2000).

6.1.b I mean and "show concessions"/"concessive repair"

Both "show concessions" (Antaki/Wetherell 1999) and "concessive repairs" (Couper-Kuhlen/Thompson 2005) share several features and for this reason they are discussed together. The expression "show concessions" refers to the practice of "making a show of conceding by using a three-part structure of proposition, concession and reassertion" to the effect of "strengthening one's own position at the expense of a counter-argument". The three parts of the structure of these "show concessions" consist of:

> (1) Material that could reasonably be cast as being a challengeable proposition, or having disputable implications
>
> (2) Okay / allright / of course / you know or other concessionary marker, plus material countable as evidence against the challengeable proposition, or its implications
>
> (3) But / nevertheless or other contrastive conjunction plus (some recognizable version of) the original proposition. (Antaki/Wetherell 1999:9)

The result of these constructions is that by conceding some counter argument a speaker can avoid sounding too dogmatic or biased and at the same time the proposition can be immunized against counter-arguments. Antaki/Wetherell (1999:13) mention "okay", "allright", "obviously", "I agree", "granted", "fair enough" and certain verbs with conceding power as typical concession markers. Only in passing do they remark upon the fact that "multi-purpose knowledge or clarification expressions like *I mean* and *you know* also seemed to work as concession markers". This is a somewhat careful statement considering the fact that of the 18 cases of listed in their article, four were introduced only by "i mean", two by "i mean o.k." and one by "you know i mean". So what follows is that it indeed doesn't require a concession marker to introduce a concession but any indexical marker will do as its specific function will be activated as soon as the concession starts. Nevertheless what often happens is that *I mean* is coupled by some more explicit concession marker, so that *I mean* is used on a more general level to mark a break in the structure of the sequence while the concession marker unambiguously shows the hearer how to interpret the following utterance. The following example, taken from the data I collected, shows such a combination of discourse marker and concession marker. Dick Hatch is presenting a phone-in radio programme on Radio Manchester. He and a caller (Mr. Burgess) are talking about the quality of pet food and the caller accuses some people of overdoing the pampering of pets. Hatch then refers to an earlier caller (Mr. Burgess) who complained about low-quality pet food and goes on to talk about his own pet, a cat:

```
Dick Hatch: cat
673   H     you HAVE to REcognise,
674         as e:r (.) mrs. SACKS sai:d,
675         that there ARE a GREAT many people,
676         who-
677         whose (.) lives are BUILT round,
678         to some exTENT,
679         their their PETS;
680         i mean we have a a a PUSsy cat at home,
681         who is e:rm-
682         (1.5)
683         what-
684         TWENty years old next month;
685         [and-  (1.0)   ]
686   B     [oh absolutely.]
687   H     she- she is part of the FAmily;
688      →  i mean all RIGHT no-
689         we're not silly aBOUT he:r,
690   B     i acce-
691   H     but i would CERtainly never give her,
692         because of what i feel aBOUT her,
693         she's part of our LIVES; (.)
694         she's OLder than any of my KIDS?
```

The three-part structure Antaki/Wetherell (1999) describe as follows: The proposition is put forward in lines 675 to 679 (there are many people whose lives are built round their pets) and in line 680 Hatch goes on to describe his own cat, which has been part of his family for 20 years. This of course makes his point of view vulnerable to the accusations by Mr. Burgess of being an irresponsible, fanatic animal lover and Hatch defends his position by using the format of show concession, introduced by the "i mean" as well as the more specific concession marker "all RIGHT" in line 688. The reprise of the actual proposition is then taken up again in line 691 with the even stronger formulation "part of our lives" that mirrors the expression "part of the family" used before the show concession. In the end Hatch manages to convey the strong feelings he has about his pet yet at the same time he avoids being attacked as a fanatic animal lover.

The second format mentioned in the heading of this sub-chapter is that of *concessive repair*. This construction shares the following two features with show concessions: it, too, has a three-part structure and the concession forms the second part of this pattern. But while show concessions have the structure of [proposition – concession – reassertion of the original proposition] the pattern of concessive repair is that of [overstatement – concession – revised, weakened statement]. Therefore, concessive repair can be called "a linguistic practice for retracting overstatements" with which "English conversationalists handle the job of retracting their own overstatements and exaggerations" (Couper-Kuhlen/Thompson 2005:1-2). When using the construction of concessive repair, the interactants "rely on an implicit linear scale" (Couper-Kuhlen/Thompson 2005:24) on which they place their utterances. These scales can

be based on all kinds of conventionalized or ad hoc concepts which allow for scaling, such as "quantity", "desirability", "being more or less helpful" etc. One example of such a scale is illustrated in Couper-Kuhlen/Thompson (2005:31) by a transcript where the speaker first says "I wish I could knit" (implying she cannot knit), which is then countered by the opposite extreme in the concession ("well I knit, yes") to end in the revised version of "I don't enjoy it". The concessive repair used here has the following structure:

extreme formulation: not to be able to knit

concession: to be able to knit

revised formulation: not enjoy knitting[17]

The scale invoked by the speaker can be described as being "constituted by different senses or ways of 'doing' something: <enjoy, know how to>. These terms are linearly ordered on a metric approximating 'is_more desirable_than'" (Couper-Kuhlen/Thompson 2005:31-32).

While the third part of this structure, the revised formulation, is often introduced by *but* (just as it is in the format of show concession), the part containing the concession is also usually introduced by some marker such as *well*, *uhm* or *I mean*. The following example is taken from an informal, American conversation about sports. The speaker talks about a Marathon race she did together with her friend.

```
After Dinner Chat America
897   M     about TEN miles OUT,
898         i KNEW that i wasn't running a good RACE,
899         and i knew that i had sixteen more miles to GO,
900         and if i WASn't running with-
901         .hh my closest GIRLfriend i-
902         she was literally DRAGging me along on her own energy,
903      →  i mean i stayed WITH her,
904         but she was feeling WONderful,
905         and I was feeling-
906         just like GARbage.
```

In line 902 M uses the extreme formulation that her girlfriend was "literally DRAGging" her along. In line 903 the counter-formulation "i stayed WITH her" is introduced by "i mean", while in line 904 the "but" leads to the revised weaker statement of "feeling just like GARbage".

The scale invoked here is one of fitness and can be described as:

extreme formulation: she was dragging me along

concession: I kept up with her

revised formulation: I was feeling like garbage

[17] See Couper-Kuhlen/Thompson 2005:27f for a detailed account.

As Couper-Kuhlen/Thompson (2005:53 and 56) state, the function of concessive repair affords the producer of a statement or overstatement the possibility of softening a claim, making it more reasonable and therefore more acceptable. So "(…) speakers concede that they may have overstated their case, but that the emphasis of their utterance, though modified to a weaker formulation, still holds". This is exactly what M does in *After Dinner Chat America*: while she is able to soften the claim that she was being dragged along, thereby saving her face by claiming some residue of fitness, she nevertheless upholds the main emphasis of her utterance, namely to contrast her poor performance in the Marathon race with her girlfriend's effortless racing. The discourse marker *I mean* serves to project a general break in the flow of argumentation, which by the utterance in line 903 is then instantiated as a concessive repair.

6.1.c I mean and conclusions, explications, parenthetical asides or specifications

The third function *I mean* can fulfil is that of introducing conclusions, final comments, assessments or specifications of what was said before or explications. The first example (NBC programme with Laporte; Caller Mark-Michael is talking) illustrates the use if *I mean* to signal the transition from a list of abuses of human rights by Kuwait to a list of words describing the political state of Kuwait:

```
Laporte: Caller Mark-Michael
45    M     kuWAIT is a is a dictatorship .hh of a VEry few people.
46          WOmen are BOUGHT and SOLD in Kuwait,
47          there is NO religious freedom;
48          they NEver had an election,
49          (.) .hh
50          if you're HOmosexual you get HUNG. .h
51       →  i mean it's NOT like a democratic COUNtry.
52          it's an Oligarchy.
53          it's a religious uh dele dictatorship.
```

In line 45 the caller states his thesis that "kuWAIT is a (…) dictatorship". This claim is then substantiated by a list of arguments (no women's rights, no religious freedom, no elections, homophobia) and in line 51 "i mean" marks the end of the list of single items and resumes the introductory thesis again, first by denying that Kuwait is democratic, then by calling it an oligarchy and in the end by repeating the word "dictatorship" (line 53). The phrase "i mean" is used here to help structure argumentative talk, and to project a conclusion.

The second example (Same NBC programme, Caller Frank) shows how *I mean* can be used to project a final comment to what has been said before thus bringing a topic or a conversation to an end. Laporte and Frank are talking about the chance for Iraq to get a head of state who is willing to resign his post if he isn't elected again:

```
Laporte: Caller Frank
256   L     okay let's have DEMocratic eLECtions uh;
257         i i I'LL step DOWN;
258         let's let's hope for the b- let's let's assume the BEST
            POSSible WORLD.
259         .hh MAYbe MAYbe we can LOOK uh in the years to come to a world
            where uh it is a little SAfer,
260         for ALLof us
261      →  i i HOPE so i i mean;
262         uh: LIKE YOU frank i uh i would like to believe in the BEST in
            the HIGHest [in this world. ]
263   F                  [i i like to say] good NIGHT to you leo and just i
            wanna leave one FInal NOTE;
```

Laporte has been talking for a while about the "BEST POSSible WORLD" where leaders would behave in a democratic fashion. In line 261 the "i mean" signals a break and in line 262 Laporte produces a concluding assessment, partly based upon what the caller Frank has already said, namely to be willing to believe in "the BEST in the HIGHest in this world". The direct address ("LIKE YOU frank") adds to the finality of the statement, showing clearly that Laporte has finished what he wanted to say and that he is ready to end the conversation. Frank interprets this final comment in the same way, acknowledging the closing-down of the talk with his "good NIGHT to you leo" and by giving a meta-comment about the "one FInal NOTE" he wants to deliver. What gives "i mean" the concluding function here is a set of further contextualizing clues: the direct address in line 262, the falling intonation of the utterance in 262-263 and also the quoting of what Frank has said before. All these instances together help the hearer, Frank in this case, to interpret the general cut-marker "i mean" as projecting a concluding comment in this case. The following two examples from the NBC programme demonstrate the use of *I mean* as a marker for explications or specifications:

```
Laporte: Caller Glen
125   L     GLEN on the line from OAKland;
126         you're on GIant sixty eight Knbr;
127         let's HOPE our ground forces DON'T have to go in.
128   G     yeah let's hope NOT also leo good Evening.
129         RAther MIXed FEELings tonight.
130         HUH.
131   L     YEAH;
132         YEAH;
133      →  i mean uh in ONE WAY uh;
134         it LOOKS LIKE uh; (.)
135         w- we DID what we were s- supposed to DO, …

Laporte: Caller Heidi
28    H     but i also have an alter- alternative;
29          for the amErican PEOple to THINK about. (.)
30          uhm WE get less than TWENty percent of our oil from the
            middle EAST and; (.)
31          ALL i can say is SAVE OIL;
32       →  i MEAN; (.) .hh
33          CUT down on PLAStic,
34          don't don't DRIVE to work-
```

```
35          take the BART,
36          take PUBlic transportation, (.)
37       →  RIDE your BIKE to work i mean; (.)
38          it's ridiculous for us to be over there in a WAR for OIL. (.)
39          KILLing people;
```

In *Laporte: Caller Glen* "i mean" is used to mark the start of the explication following the emphatic and repeated answer ("YEAH") in lines 131 to 132. In *Laporte: Caller Heidi* Heidi announces an "alternative … to THINK about" (line 28-29) which is to "SAVE OIL" (line 31). In line 32 she fills the rather general demand with everyday oil-saving proposals, starting a list introduced by "i MEAN". This explicatory list is then abandoned when the second "i mean" in line 37 introduces the concluding comment that it is "ridiculous to be in a WAR for OIL KILLing people". The third example below shows the organization of textual coherence on a smaller level, namely the organization of parenthetical asides. Here the problem is that although on a formal level the function of "i mean" can be seen as textual (marking a "time-out" of the utterance for the stretch of time the parenthesis is produced), on a functional level the parenthesis as a whole – at least in this case – has interpersonal functions. Therefore this instance of "i mean" could also be interpreted – at least partly – as having interpersonal functions. The example is taken from a BBC Radio 4 interview with Prof. Colin Blakemore.

```
Nick Ross: Blakemore
434   B     so SHE has <<laughing> this->
435         DREADful experience,
436         from time to TIME,
437         of having a dePRESSion which is not caused by-
438         her environment and having to DEAL with it.
439         i i TRY to be uh:m-
440      →  sympaTHEtic i mean don't we ALL;
441         when faced with illness in in OTHers,
442         i- i'm SURE i'm not as good AT it as-
443         as many people ARE;
444         i'm sure i'm not as BAD as some.
```

In lines 440-441 Blakemore produces a parenthetical aside (don't we all when faced with illness in others) which is introduced by "i mean". Again, the discourse marker only signals a cut in the flow of talk, the contextualizing clues helping the listener to recognize a parenthesis are the question format and the third person pronoun ("don't we ALL…"). While the main function of "i mean" is to organize the sequential structure in a way to accept the digression the parenthesis delivers, the parenthesis itself has interpersonal functions, toning down the individual claim of being sympathetic (line 440) as a feeling everybody has when dealing with ill people.

6.1.d I mean and quoting

The last textual function of *I mean* is that of framing quotes, or rather, quoting and unquoting. Albert and Bert are talking about cutting down the trees that are standing around their house:

```
Oak Trees
100   A     I want to
101         but Ann won't let me!
102   B     he he
103   A     hey these are like
104         hundred-year-old oak trees
105       → I mean
106         everybody goes
107         God
108         they're nice trees
109         and I'm like
110         /you dont/have to/rake the/leaves
111       → I mean we have leaves all year round
112       → cause I mean a little bit falls all the time
113         everytime it rains?
114         or everytime the wind blows
115         we have leaves in the yard
116         and dead branches all over.
```

The third "I mean", as has already been mentioned in the discussion of combinations of discourse markers and conjunctions, changes the causal part in line 112 into a complaint, which is marked additionally by the question intonation and the expansion in line 114 to 116. The first two instances of "I mean" have different functions, though: In line 100 Albert explains why he cannot cut off the oak trees that are standing around his house. Without the actual recorded material it is impossible to decide whether in lines 103-104 there occurs what Bakhtin (1981:262-263) called heteroglossia: Albert either impersonates the voice of Ann, mimicking her reproach for thinking about cutting the trees down, or he is using his own voice, giving the reason why Ann is in favour of the trees.[18] In line 105, though, the "I mean" definitely signals a break and a transition, which is then filled with the quotative marker "everybody goes" in line 106. The quoted voice of "everybody" in lines 107 to 108 is then answered after another "quotative complementizer"[19] (Romaine/Lange 1991:261) or rather "quotative" (Golato 2000:29) in an enactment of a typical conversation A has about the oak trees. The second "I mean" in line 111 is used to mark the return to non-reported talking, the acted line 110 "you don't have to rake the leaves" is explained in the statement in 111 "we have leaves all year round". The two instances of "I mean" in lines 105 and 111 can be seen as "brackets" in the sense of Goffman (1974) in that they have the same function a curtain in a theatre has: they signal the start and the end of the enactment taking place in between. The

[18] This ties in with Schiffrin's (1987:307) claim that *I mean* is often used "for an adjustment to the overall allocation of roles (and of) frame".

[19] See also Golato (2000) for a discussion of English "be like" and the German parallel construction "und ich so/und er so".

discussion of parenthetical asides (chapter 6.1.e) already showed that the borders between textual and interpersonal functions are vague. The same holds true for *I mean* and quoting: *I mean* is used not only as a means of marking sequential borders but also to mark the change of perspectives described in 6.2.a below.

6.2 Interpersonal functions of *I mean*

6.2.a I mean and changes of perspective

Sometimes *I mean* is used to mark a change of perspective a speaker takes towards the content of his or her utterances. Speakers can indicate when they are starting to talk about their own views of some topic. A caller, Erica (E), complains about peace protesters burning American flags in the wake of America's declaration of war on Kuwait:

```
Laporte: Erica
615   E     hi::: i'm just CALling up to: uh (.) talk about the
            PROtesters?
616   L     oKAY,
617   E     .hh A:nd uh::m (.) I don't know i think that I'M in the
            NAvy::.
618         and there is a CHANCE that i could be called over THERE. .h
619         a:nd i'm having a HARD time finding PEOple who can BURN FLAGS;
620         calling themselves aMErican. (.)
621      →  i mean (.) for ME:;
622         i i could never do that as a civilian, (.)
623         A:nd as being a NAvy person. (.)
```

What "i mean" does here is to signal a contrast which can be defined as *talking about others* (lines 619 to 620) and *talking about self*. In line 621 this transition is marked by "i mean" and then contextualized by "for ME:". The reason why *I mean* can be used for the purpose of changing the perspective to *talking about self* lies in its residual semantics, especially in the deictic grounding of I-here-now: the speaker can use the shallow yet still present semantics of *I'm referring to* to adjust the modality of the utterance. The speaker, Erika, can use the discourse marker as a contextualization clue for the recipients to indicate what she feels about the peace protesters are her own subjective feelings, thereby making her complaints less face-threatening for others and at the same time less vulnerable to accusations of intolerance.

While the transition of *talking about others* to *talking about self* is one modalizing function of *I mean* there is also the connection to parenthetical asides, where interpersonal and textual functions merge. Pat (P), too, is calling Laporte to speak about violent peace protesters:

```
Laporte: Caller Pat
143   P     .hh but you know anOTHer the GOOD part of that;
144         which i wanna bring up is <<clears throat> uhm;>
145      →  you know i mean THAT'S MY view on THA:T;
146         BUT; (.)
147         WHY are people so upset that people wanna make their VIEWS
            known. .hh
```

On a textual level "you know i mean" is used to mark the aside in line 145 "THAT'S MY view on THA:T", which interrupts the main sequence of lines 143/144 and the re-uptake in line 147. This re-uptake is marked by another discourse marker, a resumptive "BUT".[20] The reason why two discourse markers ("you know" and "i mean") are produced is due to the residual semantics of *I mean*, which makes it better suited to introduce an aside that is referring to the personal opinion of the speaker. *I mean* is therefore no longer a completely neutral cut-marker with the sole function of marking the beginning of a parenthesis. By virtue of its – albeit bleached – semantics, it takes on at least some of the interpersonal functions the parenthesis conveys, namely the framing of the utterances of the main sequence as a purely personal opinion of the speaker.

6.2.b I mean and the marking of "Disfluenz"[21]

I mean is routinely employed in stretches of talk which provide difficulties in formulation, mainly in the context of taboos concerning sex, illnesses or psychological problems. The following excerpt is from a Californian radio programme (KGO Radio) about drugs and sex education, starring Dr. O'Dell (D) as an expert. Sarah (S) is calling to complain about sex education courses where the students were allowed to blow up condoms and drink alcohol. Dr. O'Dell denies the fact that, in these courses, sex is treated lightly:

```
KGO Radio: Caller Sarah
913   S     this is HAPPening DOCtor,
914         and this is WHY parents are SEEing [that-  ]
915   D                                       [I don't] I don't MIND,
916      →  i mean i don't mind SHOWing how to how to-
917      →  i mean i've done that on NAtional TElevision,
918         how to show put on a CONdom;
```

The basic proposition O'Dell puts forth in lines 915 – 918 can be paraphrased by *I don't mind showing how to put on a condom*. As this topic not only touches a general area of taboo but has also just been criticized by the caller Sarah, there is a lot of "Disfluenz" (Fischer 1992:29) in Dr. O'Dells turns: he starts by repeating the "i don't" twice in line 915, interrupts his utterance and recycles it in line 916, finally coming to a stop again after repeating "how to". He then introduces a parenthesis in line 917 and recycles his utterance again in line 918 ("how to-") to bring it to an end. Both cases of "i mean" could also be described in terms of textual functions: the first one introduces a repair ("I don't MIND I mean I don't mind SHOWing…"), the second one a parenthetical aside. Yet in this context of cut-offs, repetitions and repairs the discourse marker itself gets imbued with a certain interpersonal function, signalling in itself

[20] See Mazeland (2001) on the different uses of Dutch "maar" as a marker for sequential structure.
[21] Fischer 1992.

the problems the speaker has in uttering his thoughts. In her analysis of radio phone-ins, Fischer (1992:30) found that when talking about emotionally strongly affecting topics the participants in the conversation systematically produce a high amount of "Disfluenz" in their talk:

> Durch die Produktion von Disfluenzen in diesen Zusammenhängen gelingt es den AnruferInnen den Eindruck zu erwecken, dass es sich bei ihrem Problem um ein besonders ernstes und schweres handelt bzw. den Eindruck von der Dringlichkeit ihres Anliegens zu verstärken. (Fischer 1992:37)

The wish to state one's own problem as important and difficult to solve is one motivation for producing "Disfluenz". In the case discussed above there is a second motivation, namely that of saving face:

> Dass bei der Produktion gesichtsbedrohender Äußerungen deren kritischer Status ausgerechnet vermittels sprachlicher Disfluenzen reflektiert wird, könnte damit zusammenhängen, dass 'unebenes', 'holpriges' Sprechen im Gegensatz zu 'glattem' Sprechen in unserer Gesellschaft relative prestigeärmer ist und Inhalte scheinbar nicht mit derselben Überzeugungskraft zu übermitteln mag. (Fischer 1992:37)

When O'Dell uses techniques of "disfluent" talk, he manages to save face, being potentially threatened by the disapproval that society has placed on talking about a topic such as sex.
In the next example it is rather the first motivation – trying to increase the urgency and graveness of one's problem – that is responsible for the "Disfluenz". The transcript is taken from the open line radio phone-in programme presented by Dick Hatch (H). The participants are talking about whether criminal offenders who only committed less serious crimes should be allowed to choose to wear necklaces with electronic bleepers around their necks instead of being sent to prison. The caller, Mrs. Etchins (E), didn't understand that the bleepers were only meant if minor offences were involved and calls to present her personal case in order to stress the fact that only prison sentences should be fit for severe offenders:

```
Dick Hatch: Caller Etchins
189   E     OH i don't know i'd i'd i'm- (.)
190      →  i MEAN i'm-
191      →  i'm SPEAking now i mea:n,
192         (1.2)
193         <<very fast> i don't know whether i should tell you> but i lost
            my DAUGHter at CHRISTmas.
194   H     ah;
195   E     she was STABBED;
```

All the typical markers for "Disfluenz" are used by Mrs. Etchins: hedges ("i don't know"), cut-offs ("i'd i'd i'm"), discourse markers ("i MEAN", "i mea:n"), pauses and even a meta-comment about her formulation problems in line 193. Again both instances of *I mean* have more than just the interpersonal functions of marking the utterances as problematic to produce. On a textual level they could be interpreted as introducing repairs: the first "i

MEAN" in line 191 repairing the aborted "i'm" in line 189, the second one repairing the aborted utterance in ("i'm SPEAking now"), with the utterance in 193 probably recycling the abandoned "i don't know" in line 189. And yet the textual functions are only part of the mosaic of functions *I mean* has to fulfil here: with its residual semantics of *what I want to say* it occupies the same function as the other meta-comments such as "i'm SPEAking now" and "i don't know whether i should tell you".

The function of *I mean* as contextualizing "Disfluenz" also often accounts for those cases where there is no utterance by the same speaker following *I mean*: the discourse marker is seen as projecting further problems of formulation, sometimes prompting one of the recipients to take over the turn. Oren is calling Laporte about the Gulf war, wondering how far the protesters will go. Carol is calling to support Bush for his decision to go to war:

```
Laporte: Caller Oren
213   O     and WHERE is it WHERE is it gonna END;
214      →  i mean; (.)
215   L     i don't KNOW; (.)
216         let's hope it <<laughing> ENDS> .hh soon.

Laporte: Caller Carol
(In line 326 Laporte voices a hypothetical opinion of the peace protesters)
326   L     LOOK;
327         we we DON'T believe in WAR,
328         we don't want you people to DIE,
329         we're doing this for YOU.
330   C     HOW do you not believe in WAR.
331   L  →  WELL i don't know i mean uh; (.)
332   C     you don't believe in WAR [in any way (   )  ],
333   L                              [uh i'd NOT (.) i'd] not that's
            NOT my PERsonal opinion
```

In both cases the listener takes over the turn after the speaker has uttered the pragmatically projecting phrase "i mean". Yet in both cases, "i mean" is uttered in the context of "Disfluenz": cut-offs, repetitions, filled and unfilled pauses and meta-comments. So what "i mean" can be said to project here is the speaker's inability to go on. In the first case Laporte takes his chance and answers the rhetorical question, thus relieving caller Oren from his problems of formulations, in the second case Carol reformulates her question in line 330 to give Laporte another chance to answer more fluently and to correct the misunderstanding (lines 333 to 334). In these cases, too, there is some semantics left in "i mean" on the lines of *what I want to say is…*. So whenever some of the semantic content of *I mean* comes into play in a given context the interpersonal and textual levels of *I mean* cannot be prised apart. Basically what can be said about the functions of *I mean* in general is that although they are typically centred round the textual pole, in some instances interpersonal functions come into

the picture, too, and it would be too limiting a description to exclude these from the scope of *I mean*.

7. Constructions with *I mean*

7.1.a The central tenets of Construction Grammar

There are at two big strands of Construction Grammar, one that is formally oriented (Fillmore/Kay 1988, 1995, etc., Goldberg 1979, 1998)[22] and one that is cognitively oriented (Langacker 1987, Croft 2002). I will base my discussion of Construction Grammar mainly on the latter one. Langacker (1987:58) states that "grammatical patterns are analyzed as schematic symbolic units". These "symbolic units" are to be understood in exactly the same way as constructions in the terminology of "Construction Grammar", namely as gestalt phenomena comprising syntactic, pragmatic, semantic, functional etc. information about given patterns of language. Croft (2002) denies the value of formal abstractions for the description of language. Instead, grammar has to be realistic in the sense that it has to describe in a cognitively grounded way how language works for actual language users. Therefore primitive syntactic units such as *noun* or *adjective* are abstract generalizations which are only partly useful when one attempts to deliver a realistic account of language:

> The primitive status of constructions and the non-existence of primitive syntactic categories is the central thesis or Radical Construction Grammar. (…) Maximally general categories and rules are highly likely not to be psychologically real; hence the search for maximally general analyses is probably a search for an empirically nonexistent (…) entity. Instead, universals of language are found in the patterned variation of constructions and the categories they define. (Croft 2002:5)

Primitive units of language are those that are used in actual language as units speakers orient to, and these units are constructions, which in turn are form-meaning pairings where "meaning" not only refers to the semantic content of a construction, but comprises "all of the CONVENTIONALIZED aspects of a construction's function". (Croft 2002:19) Constructions are complex signs which cannot be broken down into separate semantic, syntactic, pragmatic etc. modules. Instead they form 'gestalts' that integrate all of these linguistic levels in such a way that the "meaning" (in Croft's wide sense) cannot be generated by rules of linkage of semantics and syntax: there is always some degree of arbitrariness in the form-meaning pairing. Croft's (2002:17) "next logical steps" then were to treat morphological structures such as derivation or flexion as constructions, too. This means that there is no longer an arbitrary bipartite system of a lexicon on one side and a set of combinatory rules on the other side, but

[22] Kay (2000), for example, explicitly tries to link his approach of Construction Grammar to certain generative theories such as HPSG and LFG.

a continuum of constructions starting on the word-level and reaching into textual levels. The advantage is that idioms or short, frozen constructions do no longer pose a problem of integration, as in traditional grammatical approaches: "The lexical component was dedicated for use as a repository for recalcitrant phenomena that were originally syntactic but refused to obey certain preconceived ideas about what syntax should be like." (Langacker 1987:26) In order to account for all of the different constructions of a language three sets of variables are needed. Constructions can be: 1.) complex or atomistic, 2.) schematic or specific and 3.) free or bound. Complex, schematic and free constructions are Construction Grammar's equivalents to grammatical rules: "passive construction", "question construction" and similar unspecified and highly productive constructions can be placed under that heading. Complex, specific and free constructions are idioms (with semi-frozen expressions such as Kay/Fillmore's (1997) "What's X doing Y" construction occupying some point between complex, schematic and free and complex, specific and free constructions). Complex, schematic and bound constructions are morphological patterns such as "plural-*s*". Atomistic, schematic and free constructions are syntactic categories such as "noun" and atomistic, specific and free constructions are lexical items ("tree").[23] When speakers produce utterances, they don't apply a set of semantic and syntactic rules upon a set of lexical items, but they use constructions, i.e. gestalts. All of the constructions of a language form a "structured inventory" based upon a "taxonomic network of constructions" (Croft 2002:25) with some constructions forming close clusters with parent-and-daughter relations. This results in a new picture of grammar as a potentially flexible network which allows us, for example, to map constructions that are "on their way" from one cluster or place in the network to another. Grammaticalization processes can be shown more easily that way. At the same time, Construction Grammar also helps to understand specific constructions by stressing their connections within grammar. A construction such as *I mean* cannot just be described as a discourse marker, as we will see below, but still preserves its connection to the schematic construction [complement-taking verb], for example. Construction Grammar tries to be realistic in the sense of only referring to units which are oriented to by the speakers of a language, not to arbitrarily made-up concepts which are usually imported from the description of other languages. The problem is how to determine what speakers actually orient to:

> One way to determine what are real constructions for speakers and to understand and explain their cognitive properties is to consider the temporal and social nature of spoken language. We can see the ways in which many constructions in conversational language are lexically skewed so that they take on specific functions, and the role constructions play in conversational interaction. For many constructions,

[23] See Croft (2002:21) for an overview of the different constructions.

> their properties can be explained in terms of such interactional features as referent-introduction, turn-taking, floor-holding, expressing subjectivity, and stance taking. We can learn much from carefully observing constructions in their natural habitat. (Thompson 2000:14)

What has been done so far was to look at *I mean* in its "natural habitat" and we have indeed seen that interactional features lie at the bottom of the use of that construction. In the next section I will attempt to bring the results of the analysis in a structured frame to see what Construction Grammar can do to help understand the discourse marker *I mean*.

7.1.b Constructions with "I mean"

I mean-phrases, according to Thompson (2002:9), belong to a special set of "small constructions" consisting of a "restricted set of forms, namely *I* plus an epistemic/evidential/ evaluative predicate (…). These e/e/e phrase constructions are then readily juxtaposed with, and typically introduce, independent clauses." *I mean*-phrases are indeed different from ordinary matrix clauses in that they can be placed in front of any utterance, not just a subordinate clause. The constructional schema has to take account of this special syntactic property, as well as incorporate the functional aspects of *I mean*. The following construction can be said to be a description of how *I mean* could be stored in a speakers' memory:

I mean	
Type of construction: complex, specific, free	
Syntax:	autonomous phrase, can be combined with other discourse markers
Topology:	tendency to be placed in an utterance-initial position
Prosody:	variable prosodic realization (own intonation contour, integrated into the intonation contour of the utterance it precedes, integrated into the intonation contour of some previous utterance)
Semantics:	bleached semantics; only in some cases residual traces of the original semantic content of *to mean* are activated
Pragmatics:	projective power: some further utterance is expected after *I mean*
Function:	general indexical function: cut-marker specific functions are context-dependent and are mainly textual ones; interpersonal functions are only secondary

I mean-constructions are stored as complex and specific constructions in much the same way as idioms. They are vital for the structuring of spoken conversation and therefore have to be

present for quick access in the speakers' minds as "pat phrases"[24] (Shacter/Akamatsu 1976:110 in Fischer 1992:15) to be relied on for textual and sometimes interpersonal functions. But of course this specific construction does not stand isolated, but is integrated into a network of other constructions, specifically the schematic constructions [discourse marker] and [verb + complement]. In what ways does this integration manifest itself? And how great a part do these neighbouring constructions play in giving *I mean* certain specific traits? First we will have a look at how the above mentioned constructions can be represented:

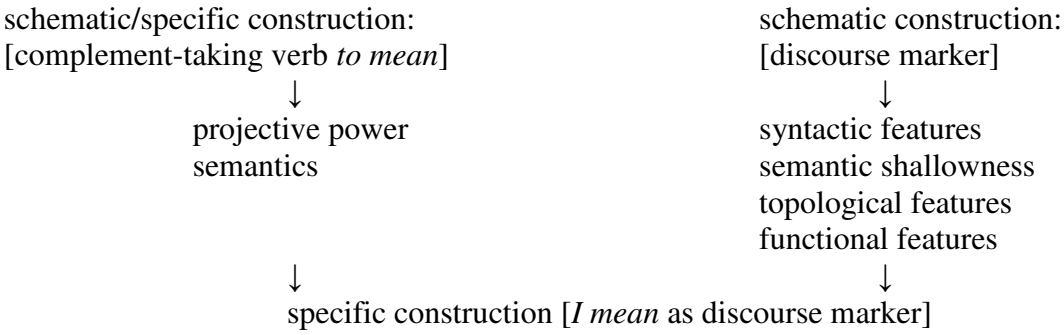
Discourse Markers	
Type of construction: complex/atomistic, schematic, free	
Syntax:	autonomous phrase; can be combined with other discourse markers
Topology:	tendency to be placed in utterance-initial position
Prosody:	variable prosodic realization
Semantics:	bleached semantics
Function:	general indexical function; textual or interpersonal functions depending on type of discourse marker and context

Complement-taking verb *to mean*	
Type of construction: complex, specific/ schematic, free	
Syntax:	verb with a syntactic projection in terms of valence; complement can take a variety of forms (clause with or without complementizer, noun phrase, adjective phrase etc.)
Topology:	initial position
Prosody:	usually one intonation contour
Semantics:	full semantics: *to refer to*
Function:	making clear what one has been talking about/what one had in one's mind when talking about something; correcting other person's misunderstandings of what one has been saying/thinking

As can easily be seen, *I mean* borrows most of its characteristics from the schematic construction of discourse markers, i.e. their general indexical function as well as their

[24] Or, in Thompsons (2002:143) terms "parentheticals", "epistemic adverbial phrases" or "fixed epistemic formulas".

syntactic, semantic and topological features. Nevertheless there are still some elements left in the specific construction *I mean* which are due to some connection to the complement-taking verb-construction, namely concerning the semantics (the content of *referring to*) and the projective power of *I mean*. This projective power is no longer active on a syntactic level, though, demanding a complement clause to fill the empty slot in the valence structure of the verb, but instead becomes reanalyzed on a pragmatic level as the projection of a general expectation: after *I mean* has been produced there has to follow some utterance. Schematically the connection of the discourse marker *I mean* in the network of constructions could be presented like this:



If one accepts the development of *I mean* as one of grammaticalization, the process might look as follows:[25] first there was a recurrent use of the first person singular present tense form of the complement-taking verb *to mean* in certain contexts. This led to the semantics of *I mean* being reduced. At the same time the pragmatic functions became more prominent, so that *I mean* slowly developed into a fixed expression: "Häufigkeit von Elementen und Schemata führt automatisch zu stärkerer mentaler Einprägung und damit zur Bildung von festen grammatischen Mustern." (Haspelmath 2002:274) While *I mean* became a fixed grammatical pattern, this also meant a "loss of analyzability", that is "we grasp (the) composite value (of a unit) with progressively less awareness of the semantic contributions (and even the existence) of its components". (Langacker 1995:168) The loss of semantic content is one prerequisite of discourse markers. When *I mean* experienced that loss of semantics and strengthening of pragmatic functions, it automatically moved away from its original mother construction [verb + complement] into the scope of the construction [discourse marker], changing its syntactic valence into a pragmatic one. While this historical process has yet to be verified by diachronic analyses, what we can say for certain is the following: Today *I mean* has been so far routinized as a discourse marker that the original

[25] The process sketched here is hypothetical. To confirm it a diachronic analysis of *I mean* would be necessary.

connection to the verb *to mean* in the sense of *to refer to* or *to intend to say* is only a very weak one. A parallel process has been described by Günthner/Imo (2003) for the German phrase *ich mein(e)*, where the process has not yet come to an end and where there is a substantial number of cases where it is difficult to decide whether one is dealing with *ich mein(e)* as a discourse marker or as a matrix clause. The same phenomenon can be observed with *I mean*: There are some cases where the insertion of a complementizer is possible and other cases where such an insertion would be doubtful. For most cases, though, the insertion would be impossible. This reflects the process of grammaticalization, namely the transition from [verb + complement] to [discourse marker]. This transition is not finished yet and maybe never will be. The undecided or semi-decided status of those transitional cases supports Hopper's theory of grammaticalization:

> Die vorliegenden Zwischenstufen können zugleich als Indikator einer *Divergenz* im Sinne Hoppers (1991) betrachtet werden. D.h. alte und neue Funktionen bestimmter sprachlicher Mittel existieren nebeneinander und lassen eine Skala an Verwendungsweisen – mit entsprechenden Überlappungen – erkennen. Diese Divergenz kann als Indiz dafür gewertet werden, dass sich *ich meine* in einem Prozess der Grammatikalisierung zum Diskursmarker befindet. (Günthner/Imo 2003:13)

8. Construction Grammar and *I mean*: a conclusion

A realistic grammar somehow has to take into account that one of the main uses of language is to provide a means of interaction. In order to guarantee a smooth operation of communication, it is necessary for the interactants to have fast access to expressions which can help with the task of structuring a conversation on both textual and interpersonal levels. While ordinary grammatical approaches have problems integrating fixed expressions (especially phrasal expressions) into their descriptive systems, Construction Grammar can not only treat them as an integral part of language by denying a difference between a lexical and a rule-based level of language but can also place them within the network of constructions and offer explanations for their idiosyncrasies. Thus, we have seen that some special features of *I mean*, such as its projecting power, residual semantics and the scalarity involving the possibility of inserting a complementizer can be explained by supposing *I mean* to be on a path of grammaticalization from a schematic [verb + complement] construction to a schematic [discourse marker] construction. This latter construction, on the other hand, is responsible for a range of features of *I mean* on functional, topological or syntactic levels. So Construction Grammar is a grammatical theory that is also open for diachronic changes. A specific construction can evolve out of a schematic one in a slow process, gradually loosening its connections with its mother construction and forming new connections with other schematic

or specific constructions.[26] Grammar is not a static system of rules and lexical items, it is a slowly moving, sometimes loosely, sometimes more strongly connected set of constructions. Construction Grammar is one of the theories that can capture and illustrate this aspect of "language on the move"[27].

What else, except for the epistemological advantages, does Construction Grammar have to offer? As Wong-Fillmore (1979) has shown and the learner-oriented grammar of English by Swan (1997) illustrates, second languages are learned by acquiring complete constructions first. The analysis of their components is a step that comes much later, only after a fairly comprehensive grasp of the language has been mastered. If we understand grammar as a connected set of constructions, we might get a better understanding of how languages and their learning work.

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[26] The process of grammaticalization in this case is triggered by the absence of the complementizer *that*: "(…) the complementizer "that" is correlated with the degree of 'embeddedness' of the complement clause. That is, when there is no *that*, the main clause subject and verb function as an epistemic phrase, not as a main clause introducing a complement" (Thompson/Mulac 1991:241). This opens the path for further formulaic fixing processes so that in the end *I mean* can become a "fixed epistemic formula" (Thompson 2000:139).

[27] "Sprache in Bewegung" (Genzmer 1998:1)

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