

# THE USE OF *WAIT* AS A DISCOURSE-PRAGMATIC MARKER IN SPOKEN BRITISH ENGLISH: A CORPUS-BASED ANALYSIS

*EL USO DE WAIT COMO MARCADOR PRAGMÁTICO DISCURSIVO EN EL INGLÉS ORAL BRITÁNICO: UN ANÁLISIS BASADO EN CORPUS*

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## Abstract

Discourse-pragmatic markers—DPMs—have attracted much scholarly attention over the years since they play an important role in our daily lives. Most of them have been analysed by scholars. However, in this paper, I focus on one of these units, *wait*, a DPM which, with the exception of Tagliamonte (*Wait, It’s a Discourse Marker*) in the Canadian context, has been largely neglected. I follow a corpus-based approach, examining data from spoken British English extracted from the BNC2014. The study offers new light on the uses and functions of this DPM in the British English context and allows a comparison with the Canadian English data examined by Tagliamonte (*Wait, It’s a Discourse Marker*).

**Keywords:** Discourse-pragmatic Marker, Speech, *Wait* as a Discourse-pragmatic Marker, Canadian Context, British Context, Corpus-based Study

## Resumen

Los marcadores pragmáticos discursivos—MPDs—han atraído mucha atención investigadora a lo largo de los años, ya que desempeñan un papel importante en nuestras vidas cotidianas. La mayoría de ellos han sido

analizados por los académicos. Sin embargo, en este trabajo, me centro en una de estas unidades, *wait*, un MPD que, con la excepción de Tagliamonte (*Wait, It's a Discourse Marker*) en el contexto canadiense, no ha sido suficientemente estudiado. Mediante un enfoque basado en corpus, he examinado datos del inglés británico oral extraídos del BNC2014. El presente estudio ofrece una nueva visión sobre los usos y funciones de este MPD en el contexto del inglés británico y permite una comparación con los datos del inglés canadiense examinados por Tagliamonte (*Wait, It's a Discourse Marker*).

**Palabras claves:** Marcador Pragmático Discursivo, Discurso, *Wait* como Marcador Pragmático Discursivo, Contexto Canadiense, Contexto Británico, Estudio basado en Corpus

## 1. Introduction

Discourse-pragmatic markers—henceforth DPMs—play an important role “in making our speech coherent and in establishing or maintaining our relations with interlocutors in conversation” (Archer et al. 74). Many discourse-pragmatic markers, namely *well*, *you know*, *I mean*, along with others, have widely been analysed by scholars such as Schiffrin, Brinton (*The development of discourse markers in English*), Aijmer and Simon-Vandenberg, Bolden and Beeching (*Pragmatic Markers in British English: Meaning in Social Interaction*), among others. However, *wait* has not received much attention in its use as a discourse-pragmatic marker, illustrated in example (1) below. An exception to this is Tagliamonte who analysed the use of *wait* in a corpus of Canadian English. Complementing Tagliamonte’s study, this paper offers a corpus-based analysis on *wait* in British English, allowing a comparison between the two varieties of English (*Wait, It's a Discourse Marker*).

I haven't seen her yet. No *wait*. Yes, I have (Tagliamonte, *Wait, It's a Discourse Marker* 424)<sup>1</sup>.

Following this introduction, Section 2 offers a discussion of prior research on discourse-pragmatic markers. This section is divided into four parts: Section 2.1 defines discourse-pragmatic markers and discusses the terms proposed by different authors to address these units; Section 2.2 deals with the development of these units; Section 2.3 shows the characteristics of these terms; and Section 2.4 is concerned with the use of *wait* as a DPM. Section

3 explains the corpus and methodology used, specifically, 3.1 describes the BNC2014 corpus and 3.2 details the methodology followed. Section 4 provides the findings resulting from the corpus study on *wait*. The fourth section comprises four subdivisions; 4.1 dealing with the frequency and lexical variants; 4.2 examining position; 4.3 analysing gender; 4.4 exploring age; and 4.5 addressing functions. Section 5 offers a discussion of the findings and compares the results from my corpus study on British English with those by Tagliamonte on Canadian English (*Wait, It's a Discourse Marker*). Finally, Section 6 closes the paper with some concluding remarks.

## 2. Prior research on DPMs

### 2.1. What is a DPM?

DPMs started to attract scholarly attention in the 1980s, with Schiffrin's seminal work on the topic. In particular, this interest started with *well* and *I mean* in conversations (Schiffrin), as illustrated in examples (2) and (3).

2. **Well** when can I talk to you then? (Schiffrin 122).

3. **I mean** what's your opinion? (Schiffrin 305).

The units object of study in this paper have been labelled as: *discourse markers* (Schiffrin; Fraser (*Contrastive discourse markers in English*); Brinton (*Discourse Markers*); Blakemore; Tagliamonte; Fischer; Lansari), *pragmatic markers* (Fisher; Aijmer and Simon-Vandenberg; Beeching (*Pragmatic Markers in British English: Meaning in Social Interaction*)), *discourse particles* (Aijmer (*English discourse particles: Evidence from a corpus*); Fischer) and *pragmatic particles* (Beeching (*Gender, politeness and pragmatic particles in French*)). This shows that despite the scholarly interest that these constructions have received, there is little consensus on the choice of terminology to refer to these units. In this paper, I will treat these elements as discourse-pragmatic markers—DPMs—, a fusion of the terms “discourse markers” and “pragmatic markers”. Despite this term not being the most widely used—exceptions to this include Wiltschko et al.; Pichler; Tagliamonte (*Wait, It's a Discourse Marker*), among others—, I consider that DPMs is the most comprehensive label to refer to the units we are concerned with and the one that best defines them, carrying all the nuances of meaning proposed by most of the aforementioned terms.

In this paper, the term “discourse-pragmatic marker” will be used, since it compasses both the discursive and pragmatic richness of these elements.

Indeed, Tagliamonte embraces this term in her research (*Wait, It's a Discourse Marker*), in support of what Pichler claims. Then, Pichler defines this term as an optional unit because its meaning is not linked to the grammatical meaning of the sentence, but, at the same time, its use may be crucial to its meaning (Pichler 4).

To begin with, we will deal with the definition of DPM which is not a unanimous one, thus we will consider how different authors have treated these constructions. Some authors consider DPMs as parts of discourse. Along these lines, Schiffrin (31) argues that discourse markers are “sequentially dependent elements which bracket units of talk”. Blakemore (152) supports a similar idea and identifies DPMs as terms whose function is to mark a relationship between the different segments of discourse.

In addition, Brinton argues that DPMs are empty expressions that occur in spoken conversations and represent different pragmatic functions (*Pragmatic Markers in English* 30). In fact, Fraser claims that these kinds of lexical expressions are part of discourse, but do not form part of the content of the message conveyed since they are added to clarify or give a clue about the idea which the speaker wants to transmit (*What are discourse markers?* 295).

However, for other linguists, DPMs are part of the speaker's mental process. In this respect, there are authors such as Aijmer who considers that “pragmatic markers are ‘surface phenomena’” (*Understanding Pragmatic Markers. A Variational Pragmatic Approach* 4). Furthermore, Fischer shows something similar by mentioning that the use of these elements is part of the speaker's attitudes towards the different ideas which they want to express in the conversation (43). Müller also argues that DPMs contribute to the pragmatic meaning in utterances in addition to being important for the speaker's pragmatic competence (20).

On the contrary, there are also authors who consider DPMs to be a mixture of both, that is, parts of speech and part of the reflection of the mental process of the speakers. For Lauwers et al. pragmatic markers are discussed as adverbial sentences that affect the speaker and the message as well as the relationship between the speaker and the hearer (2).

In a nutshell, DPMs are context-dependent elements with the function of interpreting the speaker's intentions and connecting a previous utterance with the next one. These units are used in conversations and have a pragmatic function which prevails over their semantic meaning.

It is important to bear in mind that not all DPMs have received the same attention. The most analysed are the following ones: *well* (Schiffrin; Fraser

(*An approach to discourse markers*); Brinton (*Discourse Markers*); Blakemore; Fuller; Müller; Beeching (*Pragmatic Markers in British English: Meaning in Social Interaction*); Aijmer (*Contrastive Pragmatics and Corpora*), *oh* (Schiffrin; Brinton; (*The development of discourse markers in English*); Fraser (*What are discourse markers?*); Fuller; Tagliamonte (*Wait, It's a Discourse Marker*); Müller), *so* (Fraser (*Types of English Discourse Markers*); Schiffrin; Blakemore; Müller), *like* (Schiffrin; Fuller; Miller; Beeching (*Pragmatic Markers in British English: Meaning in Social Interaction*); Tagliamonte (*So who? Like how? Just what? Discourse markers in the conversations of Young Canadians*), and *you know* (Schiffrin; Fraser (*Pragmatic markers*); Fuller; Müller; Tagliamonte (*Wait, It's a Discourse Marker*); Miller; Brinton (*The development of discourse markers in English*); Aijmer and Simon-Vandenberg; Beeching (*Pragmatic Markers in British English: Meaning in Social Interaction*)). Examples of all these discourse markers are provided in (4) to (8).

4. **Well**, how can I help you? (Aijmer, *Understanding Pragmatic Markers: A Variational Pragmatic Approach* 36).

5. A: your dad and I went over to Joan's last night to talk to her about this land...

B: **Oh**, you did go over there (Fuller 29).

6. [Grandmother to granddaughter] **So** tell me about this wonderful young man you're seeing. (Fraser, *An approach to discourse markers* 393).

7. But **like** it was at night and like the gates were closed and barred down and it was all dark and stuff. (Tagliamonte, *Wait, It's a Discourse Marker* 426).

8. A: It's not like she was some svelte beauty, you know

B: oh, **you know**, the svelte thing is in the mind (Fuller 27).

It is also relevant to mention those that have not received much attention such as: *now* (Schiffrin; Fraser (*What are discourse markers?*), *but* (Schiffrin; Blakemore), and *then* (Schiffrin). Also, *wait* was just analysed by Tagliamonte (*Wait, It's a Discourse Marker*). In section 2.4, I will discuss in detail the aforementioned DPM since my corpus research is based on *wait*. An example of *wait* is provided in (9).

9. I want to see Calum's Chewbacca. **Wait** is that how it's even spelt? (Tagliamonte, *Wait, It's a Discourse Marker* 429).

## 2.2. The development of DPMs

As mentioned in the previous section, DPMs are neutral terms that adapt to the context according to the speaker's illocutionary force to make sense of it. These units have been classified into different types by the linguists who have explored them. Not all of them classify them in the same way, and, therefore, they consider different functions.

As Lauwers et al. state the units under analysis have become DPMs because they have lost propositional meaning over time through their use. Some authors have treated this process as "grammaticalisation" or "pragmaticalisation".

To start with these two terms, many scholars have considered their change from a grammatical category to a DPM as being part of the process of "grammaticalisation" (Brinton, *The development of discourse markers in English* 54; Lauwers et al. 7). In particular, Brinton discusses this term in her study in connection with the "loss of meaning" that these elements undergo (*The development of discourse markers in English* 54).

In addition, Aijmer and Simon-Vandenberg discuss this concept as well, but in relation to polysemy, due to the fact that this makes possible the change from a purely grammatical category to the acquisition of pragmatic functions (Aijmer et al. 228). The term polysemy refers to words that have different meanings. Its meaning varies depending on the function which this word develops in the utterances. It can function as an adjective, as an adverb or, in a pragmatic sense, as a DPM.

In fact, Aijmer and Simon-Vandenberg present another example, *like*, which has also undergone a process of "grammaticalisation" (234), from its use as a verb, illustrated in example (10), to also function as a DPM, in (11). In these examples we can appreciate how *like* has developed its function as a DPM over time, working in other different grammatical contexts which were not possible in earlier English.

10. "I **like** Pat and I was just thinking of." (Hudson 26).

11. But everybody's always **like**, what're you gonna do with an English degree other than teach? And I'm **like**, there's lots of stuff you could do. (Fuller 28).

## 2.3. Characteristics of DPMs

In this section, I will deal with the multifunctionality of DPMs. Once these units lose their propositional meaning, they acquire other functions

in discourse, which are all interpersonal and textual functions (Fraser, *Pragmatic markers* 322-323). In other words, they do not contribute to the propositional content of the utterance. This is the reason why they are not syntactically integrated into the rest of the utterance (Fraser, *Pragmatic markers* 322-323).

In what follows, I will present a list of features of prototypical DPMs, following (Brinton, *Historical discourse analysis* 224; Jucker and Ziv 3). In terms of phonology, DPMs are phonologically reduced and integrated prosodically in a tone group. Second, syntactically, in terms of position DPMs can occur in sentence initially, outside of the syntactic structure or attached to the syntactic structure. In fact, they are optional and can be omitted without provoking any change in the message. That is, they are typically characterised by their initial position rather than medial in addition to depending on both the type of speech event and the speaker. Third, from a semantic point of view, these units have little or have no propositional meaning. Fourth, from a functional perspective, DPMs are multifunctional, that is, they have access to plenty of linguistic levels and may express a wide range of functions in discourse. Finally, in terms of sociolinguistics and stylistics, they are characterised by occurring more in oral discourse than in writing and are stylistically stigmatised. Sometimes, they are associated with nonfluency and are considered to be gender-specific, being more typical in the speech of women (Brinton, *Historical discourse analysis* 224; Jucker and Ziv 3).

DPMs are at a higher level as they present different linguistic domains or different functional-semantic components. The vast majority of linguists distinguish two macro-functions, which are the “textual function” and the “interpersonal function” (Brinton, *Historical discourse analysis* 224-225).

The “textual function” deals with the process of structuring discourse. According to Brinton, this type of DPMs with textual function provides a signal in the discourse about the information to be produced or the information that precedes it, as well as connects both sentences (*Historical discourse analysis* 224-225). The most relevant textual functions are their use to initiate or close the discourse, to be as a turn-holding device, to mark the boundary in the conversation, to signal the change from one element to another or, to repair the speech (Brinton, *Historical discourse analysis* 224).

In contrast, the interpersonal function refers to epistemic modality, that is, these DPMs express the attitude or reaction of a speaker to the hearer. In addition, they express shared knowledge, politeness, or tentativeness

(Brinton, *Historical discourse analysis* 224-225). As I mentioned before, Brinton presents a distinction in terms of the functions of DPMs: (i) “Propositional”, which is about the speaker’s experience, including the environment, participants, circumstances, and so on, (ii) “Interpersonal”, which expresses the speaker’s expressions and attitudes, and the role assigned to the speaker and the hearer, and (iii) “Textual” which deals with how the speaker structures the discourse to make it cohesive (*Historical discourse analysis* 224-225).

In sum, DPMs are part of the message but not part of the content. In other words, the propositional content of the utterance is meaningful without the presence of the DPM. However, they bring plenty of meaning to the message conveyed. Its presence depends on the idea the speaker wants to convey and how he or she wants to convey the message.

## 2.4. *Wait*

This section concentrates on *wait*, which is the DPM on which I will focus for the corpus-based analysis presented in Section 4. The use of *wait* as a DPM has only recently started to attract scholarly attention. In particular, the work of Tagliamonte on *wait* in Canadian English is pioneer in this respect (*Wait, It’s a Discourse Marker*). An example of *wait* functioning as a DPM is provided in (12).

12. Im standing up, near the exit.

**Wait** are u at my wymilwood or burwash? im at burwash  
(Tagliamonte, *Wait, It’s a Discourse Marker* 425).

The DPM *wait* also shows lexical variants, such as *wait a minute*, *wait a second* or *wait now*. Thus, *wait* occurs with an “adverbial specification” and these variants are rarely alternated in the same conversation. Despite the existence of all these different forms, the most dominant one is *wait* alone (Tagliamonte, *Wait, It’s a Discourse Marker* 435-438). An example of one of the variants is shown in (13).

13. 1930 **Wait a minute**,’ said Mr. Knapp. ‘Wait for it... That is just exactly wot I do know. (Tagliamonte, *Wait, It’s a Discourse Marker* 429).

Tagliamonte found that the major use of this unit in discourse is carried out by people who have a lower level of education. Tagliamonte indicates



through her study, by recording people in spontaneous conversations in their daily lives, that the young population made the most use of *wait* (*Wait, It's a Discourse Marker*). Thus, the register and context are noticeably informal. On account of this, the register of the language is not formal, but colloquial (Tagliamonte, *Wait, It's a Discourse Marker* 434).

However, older people— >60—make more use of the lexical variants, such as *wait a minute*. In contrast, people between the ages of 30-59 also prefer to use the lexical variants such as *wait a second*. Finally, young people—17-29—employ *wait now* or *wait* alone. In fact, younger people are the ones who use the DPM *wait* more and they prefer to use the shorter form instead of one of the variants (Tagliamonte, *Wait, It's a Discourse Marker* 434-437).

In addition, concerning gender, women are the ones who tend to use this DPM more frequently (Tagliamonte, *Wait, It's a Discourse Marker* 434-437). And, regarding its position in the context, *wait* and its lexical variants mainly occur in an initial position, at the beginning of the main clause (Tagliamonte, *Wait, It's a Discourse Marker* 438-439).

Tagliamonte provides a functional classification of *wait* which includes three types: “correction”, “commentary” and “interruption” (*Wait, It's a Discourse Marker*). The first one indicates that something needs to be corrected. This is frequent among the youngest speakers, as can be seen in (14). The second one is used to give an additional commentary as example (15) illustrates. Finally, the third one has the purpose of interrupting the discourse, as shown in (16) (Tagliamonte, *Wait, It's a Discourse Marker* 438-440).

14. One of my cousins, she uh- she got lost. No **wait** she ran away herself, right? Because then, I don't know, she got mad at me. (Tagliamonte, *Wait, It's a Discourse Marker* 438).

15. Whenever we had a tournament, we'd get a new spy equipment (laughs). And we'd try it out at the tournament, and our brothers would be playing mini-sticks in the conference room and we'd be spying around, like, “Oh did you see that?” And talking to each other. **Wait**, the coolest thing I had was- it was a headpiece (Tagliamonte, *Wait, It's a Discourse Marker* 439).

16. And Mr. Haskin. **Wait**, did you know Mr. Haskin? (Tagliamonte, *Wait, It's a Discourse Marker* 439).

To conclude, in addition to its use as a verb, *wait* is also employed as a DPM in discourse, especially among young people. Building on prior research, in Section 4, I will explore the use of *wait* as a DPM in contemporary spoken English, based on data extracted from the BNC 2014.

### 3. Corpus and methodology

#### 3.1. Corpus description: the BNC 2014

This paper follows a corpus-based approach to examine the use of *wait* as a DPM. The data are extracted from the British National Corpus 2014. Released in 2017, this is a new corpus on contemporary English language and contains data from different spoken registers.

The British National Corpus 2014<sup>2</sup> offers the orthographic transcriptions of conversations from British English native speakers, recorded from 2012 to 2016 (Love et al. 320). The corpus was compiled at Lancaster University and Cambridge Press University and totals 11.5 million words.

The spoken component of the BNC2014 is the only one freely available nowadays, but there are plans to release a comparable written corpus, which is currently in the final stages of its compilation.

#### 3.2. Methodology

In this section, I will discuss the methodology followed to carry out the corpus-based study. Given the large size of the corpus, I have reduced my analysis to a sample of 300 tokens of *wait*. The data were extracted directly from the corpus interface searching for *wait*. I have used the randomized sample option to select my sample of 300 tokens, in order to prevent that all the cases of *wait* were taken from just a few texts. The data were then manually annotated in an Excel database according to the five variables shown in Table 1.

Following Tagliamonte, I manually disambiguated cases of *wait* as a verb, as illustrated in example (17) and cases of *wait* as a DPM, as shown in example (18) (*Wait, It's a Discourse Marker*). In (17) it can clearly be seen that *wait* works as a verb since the meaning involves a period of time in which a person has to hang up for something, whereas in example (18) *wait* functions as a DPM which is used to rectify the previous sentence that has been said with wrong information.

17. S0391: well the thing is they can easily **wait** it 's not like you 've got a registry office spot is it ? it 's less pressure [BNC14, SWLR 14].

18. S0018: plus four point eight (.) plus nought point nought eight (.) plus nought point three seven (.) plus nought point three eight (.) equals five pounds sixty-eight (.) is that how much it costs? **Wait** there (.) no we 've done it wrong [BNC14, SBVQ 1061].

DPMs have received attention concerning their analysis and have been classified according to the following variables: type, position, function, gender and age. On the right-hand side, Table 1 shows the different values for the variables. Thus, for type, the possible values are verb or DPM; for the position, we distinguish between initial, middle or final; for gender, female or male; for age, we consider the following values: 7-9, 10-19, 20-29, 30-39, 40-49, 50-59, 60-74, and unknown; for function, the possible values are: correction, commentary, interruption, alarming and mirativity.

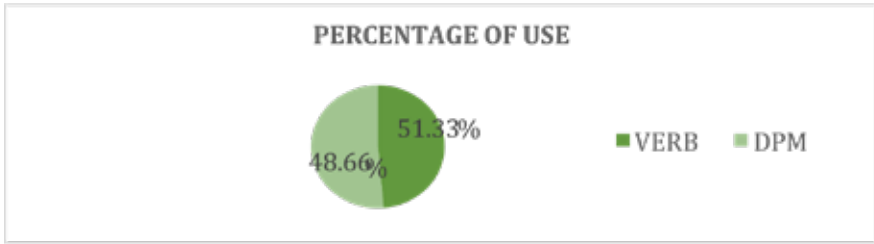
VARIABLES	VALUES
Type	Verb / DPM
Position	Initial / Middle / Final
Gender	Female / Male
Age	7-9 / 10-19 / 20-29 / 30-39 / 40-49 / 50-59 / 60-74 / Unknown
Function	Correction / Commentary / Interruption / Alarming / Mirativity

Table 1. Variables analysed

## 4. Results

### 4.1. Frequency and lexical variants

As mentioned above, the corpus analysis consisted of 300 cases of *wait*. Specifically, the purpose was to determine the cases of *wait* in which it functions as a DPM. The manual analysis of the corpus reveals that 146 of the tokens are DPMs, and the rest, 154 are verbs. Figure 1 illustrates the proportion of both the DPM and the verb *wait*.



**Figure 1.** Percentage of wait as a DPM and verb

The findings reveal that in addition to *wait*, other lexical variants also operate as similar DPMs. These variants are the following ones: *oh wait*, *just wait*, *so wait/wait so*, *oh wait no/wait no*, *(no) wait a minute*, *wait now*, *no wait/oh no wait*, and *wait for it*. Examples of these variants are illustrated from (19) to (26).

19. S0543: >>**oh wait** yeah it depends like it depends where DS gave it like cos they only have the older one well not the ol--UNCLEARWORD [BNC2014, STH5 1529].

20. S0275: listen to the whole story

S0276: >>what? what? what? but you

S0275: **just wait**

S0276: but you (.) why? (.) no (.) understand you [BNC2014, S3S6 305].

21. S0328: **so wait** what is it? it 's like is it a game? [BNC2014, SDJA 179].

22. S0012: **wait no** I 'm saying we have to wait for an invitation we do n't just say we 're coming round to dinner [BNC2014, SH4V 707].

23. S0024: so I was like hang on a minute **wait a minute** I 'm gon na call my husband and just check that this is the right thing [BNC2014, SFRX 124].

24. S0556: **wai- now wait wait wait wait now now wait wait wait wait wait wait wait** just give it a minute to calm down [BNC2014, SMRV 1401].

25. S0603: to baby Jesus (.) **oh no wait** (.) which one was this? [BNC2014, S78P 1909].

26. S0198: **wait for it** wait for it what 's that erm hat he 's wearing? Is that military? [BNC2014, S78E 288].

In the contexts analysed, the DPM *wait* was not used alone in 40.41% of the utterances. In some cases, different lexical variants have been detected, which have been previously mentioned. The data on the frequency and percentages of these variants are provided in Table 2. In particular, *oh wait* is found in 9 cases; *just wait* in 3 contexts; *so wait / wait so* in 6 cases; *oh wait no / wait no* appears 7 times; *(no) wait a minute* occurs in 15 tokens; *wait now* in 3 cases; *no wait / oh no wait* is used in 9 contexts; *what wait / wait what* or *wait how wait* is found 7 times; and the last, *wait for it* in 2 contexts.

VARIANTS	NUMBER OF TOKENS	PERCENTAGES
<i>Wait</i>	94	64.4%
<i>(No) wait a minute</i>	15	10.3%
Oh wait	9	6.16%
<i>No wait / Oh no wait</i>	9	6.16%
<i>Oh wait no / Wait no</i>	7	4.79%
<i>So wait / Wait so</i>	6	4.10%
<i>Just wait</i>	3	2.05%
<i>Wait now</i>	3	2.05%
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>146</b>	<b>100%</b>

**Table 2.** Frequency of the lexical variants of *wait* in discourse

#### 4.2. Position

Regarding the position of *wait* in the 146 DPMs, I have found three positions: initial, middle and final. A total of 92 *wait* were found in initial position. The other two positions are much less frequent. The use of the DPM *wait* in middle position decreases, only occurring in 43 of the utterances. Finally, the final position is rarely used since only 11 tokens have been found in this position. Thus, the initial position is the most commonly used in this context. In Table 3, the distribution of the different positions of *wait* as a DPM is presented.

POSITION	NUMBER OF TOKENS	PERCENTAGES
Initial	92	63.02%
Middle	43	29.45%
Final	11	7.53%
<b>Total</b>	<b>146</b>	<b>100%</b>

**Table 3.** Position in the discourse analysed

### 4.3. Gender

In this subsection, I examine whether the gender variable plays a role in the use of *wait* as a DPM. In the results of the corpus study, it has been observed that 88 cases of *wait* are used by females, while the remaining 58 are employed by men. Thus, this DPM is predominant in women’s discourse. Table 4 shows the distribution of this variable.

GENDER	NUMBER OF TOKENS	FREQUENCY
Female	88	60.27%
Male	58	39.73%
<b>Total</b>	<b>146</b>	<b>100%</b>

**Table 4.** Frequency by gender

### 4.4. Age

As explained before, the ages have been classified by decades. However, in the BNC2014, participants are from 7 years old, so there is also a first category from 7 to 9. In this category, 7 to 9, there are 11 cases of *wait* as a DPM, where the predominant gender is male. From 10-19, there are 42 tokens mostly by males as well. Then, from 20-29, 50 cases are found with higher use among women. From 30-39, the frequency decreases to 10 cases and they are used equally by females and males. From 40-49, the number of cases remains almost the same, with only 9 tokens, but this time mostly by men. From 50-59, 5 cases of *wait* as a DPM occur among women. Finally, from 60 to 74, there are 7 cases, mostly by males. Indeed, there are 12 cases of *wait* in which the age is not specified in the corpus. This group has been removed from the analysis of the age variable. Table 5 shows the distribution of the data according to age.

AGES	NUMBER OF TOKENS	PREDOMINANT GENDER
7-9	11	Male
10-19	42	Male
20-29	50	Female
30-39	10	Female and Male—in the same proportion—
40-49	9	Male
50-59	5	Female
60-74	7	Male
TOTAL	134	MALE

**Table 5.** Number of tokens and predominant gender by ages

#### 4.5. Function

Following Tagliamonte, three main functions of *wait* as a DPM have been identified (*Wait, It's a Discourse Marker*). These three types have been mentioned in Section 2.4 and they are correction, whose function is to correct something that has been said previously. That is, it deals with rectifying a mistake made in the speech. Generally, the speaker tries to self-correct and the DPM *wait* is preceded by a “no”. The use of this “no” indicates that there is something wrong that needs to be corrected. An example is shown in (27) where the speaker is correcting himself/herself since he/she cannot remember how many modules of English he/she did in the past, so he rectified by self-correcting.

27. S0472: you just do n't remember them erm

S0434: but see that 's the funny thing I do n't feel like I did anything at uni I had to cram for and I still do n't remember it

S0472: yeah

S0434: I remember bits but so much of it just like and I did two modules of English no er **wait** tw- yeah two modules of English in my first year and I could n't even tell you what they were

S0472: yeah

S0434: I know we did Shakespeare something because that 's when I first ever read erm (.) winter something Winter [BNC2014, S5YY 563].

The next function is commentary whose aim is to add information to the discourse. This function is about adding an extra information which has not been mentioned before to give more context to the addressee. The example illustrated in (28) shows how the speaker includes a piece of new information about how she wants to do the chocolate egg. That is, she would like to cook a big round egg with the decoration of a chick.

28. S0653: I keep meaning to try and make chocolate s- eggs you know big ones like get a mould

S0654: mama ?

S0653: cos that 'd be great fun

S0654: >>mama ?

S0653: yeah ?

S0654: we should do a big round egg with a teeny chi- chi-

S0655: **wait** I see a big round egg with a teeny teeny chick I see a big round egg with a teeny chick [BNC2014, SQPH 342].

And, the last function, interruption, which is based on the interruption of the speech, mainly to ask a question. In other words, interruption approaches to make a pause by asking a question to clarify the information received. An example is provided in (29) where it can be noticed how the speaker asks to the interlocutor if he takes just two subjects since the speaker wants to know more information about the school course.

29. S0592: I think every time erm (.) four biology modules (.) we have four weeks of teaching and then the last week is where we have our end of module tests

S0599: mm

S0592: and so we do n't have lectures then but I still have to go to psychology so it does n't really feel like time off but (.) I do n't have to get up as much so

S0599: **wait** do you do two subjects ?



S0592: yeah we have to do erm in our first year we have to do a minor  
[BNC2014, SUVL 2054].

In addition, two further functions, absent in Tagliamonte's study, were taken into account in the analysis of the BNC2014 in cases of *wait* (*Wait, It's a Discourse Marker*). These two functions would not fall into any of these categories since they show different purposes in the discourse and have their own characteristics that distinguish them from others. One of these functions is alarming, used to warn someone of something to alert a possible hazard situation to the interlocutor so that they become aware of what is about to happen. In other words, it disrupts the discourse to alarm someone about a perilous moment by repeating sequentially the DPM *wait* in the context to emphasize this warning event that the speaker is addressing. An example is shown in (30), where the speaker is trying to perturb the interlocutor by telling him/her that he/she should wait to talk to this person later until he/she feels less angry.

30. S0555: look at all the dirt like getting into the bottle

S0405: there 's no oh

S0556: >>it 's not in the bottle cos it 's not open yet

S0555: come on --ANONnameM you can do it

S0405: my hand hurts

S0555: maybe just throw the bottle at the tree

S0556: **wai- now wait wait wait wait now now wait wait wait wait wait wait** just give it a minute to calm down

S0405: why ?

S0556: it 's angry at you

S0405: what the fuck are you doing ? I 'll do -UNCLEARWORD  
[BNC2014, SMRV 1401].

The second new function is mirativity, which is defined by Hengeveld and Olbertz as "a linguistic category that characterizes a proposition as newsworthy, unexpected, or surprising" (488). That is, this function expresses surprise for a new information unexpectedly received in the conversation. In this case, there is no always a repetition of DPM *wait* as it occurs with

alarming function. In fact, this function can be consistently seen with a preceded or followed word, which is “what” with a question mark, with the purpose of emphasizing this surprise in the context. An example is seen in (31) where the speaker is surprised when he/she finds out an unexpected piece of information, in this case, number of litres of vodka that the addressee admits to drink.

31. S0041: what ‘s happened here ? I mean she ‘s in a bit of a something over there (.) hang on (.) we ‘re not there yet

S0084: mm

S0041: er (.) du du du du du (.) now here I was a year later (.) it was pure vodka that ran in my blood

S0084: huh

S0041: Three litres was my standard binge

S0084: what ? **Wait**

S0041: three litres of vodka

S0084: not per day ? Surely ?

S0041: standard binge (.) I ‘d simply lie down on the sofa in my pyjamas (.) sick bucket at my side [BNC2014, SJG5 656].

These two new functions, alarming and mirativity, found in my study, are different from the aforementioned three proposed by Tagliamonte (*Wait, It’s a Discourse Marker*). They have been classified independently since they fulfil different functions in discourse. On the one hand, in the case of alarming function, *wait* is used with the aim of perturbing someone about a possible threatening situation. This danger perceived by the speaker can be appreciated in the sequential repetition of *wait*, which alarms the interlocutor about something potentially dangerous happening. On the other hand, in the mirativity function, *wait* is used when the speaker receives unexpected information and she/he expresses surprise to the addressee. It is characteristic of this function that *wait* is accompanied by “what?”, before or after it.

TYPE OF FUNCTION	NUMBER OF TOKENS	FREQUENCY
Interruption	55	37.68%
Commentary	36	24.66%
Alarming	31	21.24%
Correction	16	10.95%
Mirativity	8	5.47%
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>146</b>	<b>100%</b>

**Table 6.** Frequency by function

The different functions of *wait* mentioned in Table 6 have also been analysed in relation to their position in the clause. The first type, which is correction, has been observed in 16 of the tokens, mainly used by women and predominantly in the middle position. The second one, commentary, which occurs in 36 cases, is also mainly produced by women. Its most frequent position is the initial one. The third function is interruption, which is widely used, with 55 tokens. In fact, it is also mostly females who use this function of the DPM. It is dominant in the initial position. The fourth function is alarming, in which 31 cases are found, mostly in males. Its position is more common at the beginning and in the middle, less at the end. Finally, the last one, mirativity, is used in 8 contexts, mainly by women, whose main position is initial or middle, never in final position.

Regarding the function of *wait* used by individuals, results indicate that the population of 7-39 make a greater use of *wait* in the interruption function. In contrast, individuals aged 40-49 prefer the commentary function. In people aged 50-59 years, the most common function is interruption, as it happened with young speakers. However, in the older population, 60-74, the most frequent function of *wait* is to express correction. The alarming and mirativity functions are not predominant in any of the age groups, although they are present across the different ages in low proportions. A summary of the most frequent functions according to age is provided in Table 7.

AGE OF POPULATION	TYPE OF FUNCTION MOST USED
7-39	Interruption
40-49	Commentary
50-59	Interruption
60-74	Correction

**Table 7.** Function used in regard to age

## 5. Discussion

This piece of research, based on the contemporary usage of *wait* in British English speech, has analysed the uses and functions of *wait* as a DPM. In terms of position, the most frequent is the initial one, with 92% of the cases showing a preference for this position, followed by the middle position and final one. Additionally, it has been observed that the use of *wait* is more common among the female population—60.27%—. It is also interesting to note that the use of *wait* as a DPM is significantly high among young people— <29—. Indeed, 92 of the 146 DPM were uttered by people below the age of 30. Furthermore, *wait* fulfils five functions in British English conversation; the most frequent function in British English is to employ *wait* to interrupt the addressee, usually with the aim that the interlocutor makes a pause that allows the speaker to ask something.

The results by Tagliamonte on the DPM *wait* in Canadian English and the findings obtained from my corpus-based study in British English present some similarities and differences. First, *wait* as a DPM seems to have mostly entered into discourse through the youngest generation of speakers, both in the Canadian and British varieties. The lexical variants that Tagliamonte finds in her study of the DPM *wait* in Canadian English are similar to the ones I attested in my corpus analysis of British English. Second, among the lexical variants in Canadian English, Tagliamonte finds *wait a minute*, *wait a second*, *wait now*, *hold on*, and *hang on*, whereas the analysis of British English unveils some further others, namely *oh wait*, *just wait*, *so wait/wait so*, *oh wait no/wait no*, *(no) wait a minute*, *wait now*, *no wait/oh no wait*, and *wait for it*, suggesting that British English may display a wider range of lexical variants than Canadian English. It should be noted, however, that Tagliamonte considers *hang on* and *hold on* as variants given that they fulfil the same functions as *wait* (*Wait, It's a Discourse Marker*). However, I have disregarded these variants in my study of British English, given that they arise from verbs other than *wait*.

Regarding the position of *wait* in the sentence, the preferred position in Canadian English is the initial one. My data on British English are similar in this respect since the initial position is also the dominant one.

In terms of function, the results have shown that the DPM *wait* is multifunctional, serving different functions in discourse, such as correction, commentary, interruption, alarming or mirativity. Tagliamonte's results on Canadian English show that correction and commentary are the most frequent functions in her data (*Wait, It's a Discourse Marker*). This tendency is not maintained in my corpus data, which shows different frequency results with respect to function, with interruption being the dominant function in British English. Although my corpus data are reduced and, therefore, results should be confirmed against larger samples of language, this suggests different cross-varietal functional preferences that are worth exploring in further research.

## 6. Conclusion

This paper focuses on the use of *wait* as a DPM in British English. Despite the wide scholarly interest that DPMs have received, *wait* remains, except for Tagliamonte's study, a largely neglected DPM (*Wait, It's a Discourse Marker*). This pilot study has provided evidence to fill this gap, by analysing the use of *wait* in contemporary spoken English in the BNC2014 corpus. The study, thus, allows us to examine the use of *wait* in British English as well as to explore inter-variety differences by comparing the data obtained here with the findings reported by Tagliamonte on Canadian English (*Wait, It's a Discourse Marker*).

For my corpus-based analysis, I examined a total of 300 tokens of *wait* to detect in how many contexts it was used as a DPM as opposed to a verb. My results show that 146 of the cases are DPMs. Following Tagliamonte, a wide range of functions has been identified for this DPM: correction, commentary and interruption. In addition, this study has unveiled two other functions that *wait* fulfils in British English: alarming and mirativity. These two last functions would be classified as different functions from Tagliamonte's ones since they serve other purposes in discourse (*Wait, It's a Discourse Marker*). In other words, alarming is about to warn someone about a situation that is perceived as being unsafe, whereas mirativity deals with someone's surprising reaction when hearing a piece of information that he/she did not expect.

The corpus findings suggest that the most frequent function of *wait* in discourse is interruption and that when *wait* is employed for this function it

usually appears in initial position. In addition, the DPM *wait* is mostly used by young speakers, especially women.

My results from British English are similar to those reported by Tagliamonte in her study on Canadian English (*Wait, It's a Discourse Marker*). Initial position is the most frequent in both varieties and it is typically used by young speakers, especially by women. Interestingly, however, the most frequent function of this DPM is correction and commentary in Canadian English, whereas the interruption function is dominant in British English. These results should, however, be confirmed by further research.

Given the differences in function reported in these two varieties of English, it is possible that *wait* fulfils a different range of functions in other varieties of English, which would also be worth exploring in future research. Similarly, it would be interesting that further research explores the counterparts of *wait* in other languages, to examine whether the preliminary results reported here are exclusive of English or could also be extended to other languages.

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## Notes

1. DPMs are highlighted in bold in the examples.
2. For further details about the spoken BNC2014, see also <http://corpora.lancs.ac.uk/bnc2014/>