Povolná, Renata

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RENATA POVOLNÁ

SOME NOTES ON THE USE OF *I MEAN*
IN ENGLISH FACE-TO-FACE CONVERSATION

The present paper concentrates on the clausal form *I mean* and its use in English authentic face-to-face conversation. *I mean* tends to be frequently used in everyday communication between people without contributing much to the informational content of a particular conversational situation. Its presence, however, is important because it performs important discourse functions and helps the smooth flow of conversation.

In the following contribution the author tries to view the above-mentioned form from several different viewpoints while commenting on the work of some linguists dealing with or at least touching upon *I mean* in their research. At the same time she endeavours to contribute to the understanding of the function of *I mean* in spoken discourse and offers some results from her own research into authentic spoken material. Her research is based on the analysis of five conversational texts taken from *A corpus of English conversation* edited by Svartvik and Quirk (1980). Each text comprises 5,000 words, which means that the total extent of text under examination is 25,000 words.

Although *I mean* is usually listed among **comment clauses** (CCs) by many authors including Leech and Svartvik (1994), Crystal (1995), Stenström (1995), Biber et al. (1999), many different labels have been used in literature, too. Erman (1986: 131), who himself gives preference to the term **pragmatic expressions,** provides a list of some terms used to label CCs, such as verbal fillers, void pragmatic connectives, softeners, pause-fillers, hesitation markers, discourse markers (DMs), pragmatic particles. He argues that most of the terms used are either too specific (e.g. hesitation markers) or too general (e.g. verbal fillers). Moreover, some of the terms mentioned comprise categories other than just those which can be labelled comment clauses.

Let me first turn to some linguists who deal with CCs in their works and note whether they pay any specific attention to *I mean* or not. Quirk et al. (1985: 1112–1118) do not list *I mean* together with other comment clauses at all. Nevertheless, when talking about reformulation they mention *I mean* as a means of 'mistake editing' used 'in order to correct a phonological or semantic mistake

(which is common enough in impromptu speech)' (Quirk et al. 1985: 1313).
They exemplify *I mean* by the two following examples:

> *The first thing, <u>I mean</u> the first thing to remember is that...*
> *Then you add the peaches—<u>I mean</u>, the apricots...*

It is clear especially from the latter example that *I mean* follows a mistake and
thus can be labelled according to the authors as '**mistake editing**'. However, it
has been quite difficult to find such obvious examples in the data examined be-
cause most occurrences of *I mean* tend to introduce something that can be la-
belled clarification or reformulation rather than follow an obvious mistake. Nev-
ertheless, several possible instances of 'mistake editing' are comprised in the
example that follows. The most obvious one comes last. The transcription of all
the examples in the paper is based on the prosodic system in Crystal (1969):

Example 1
>B   *and I ^don't kn\ow# you ^m\ight 'find# that ^you . ^don't a:gr\ee*
        *with 'various th/ings# * – * ^I should !s\ay so# <<^he>>*
A   **^[_m]# ^[_m]#* ^[_ m]# – – – but ^what f\unctions# do ^people*
        'variously f\ill# I mean ^are you . [\all} 'members of a re'search.
        :pr\oject# – or ^just a gr\oup# I mean ^is M\arilyn# . [e:e:]
        *as^sistant ![le: e:] I mean ^is she a !l/ecturer# . * or ***
B   **^n\o#* ^Marilyn 'does 'no t/eaching# I im\Vagine# ^she's a*
        re:s\earch as'sistant# .   **(S.1.5.408–426)**

The first occurrence of *I mean* in the above example introduces something that
can be labelled as a modification rather than a mistake: the content of the first
proposition *what functions do people variously fill* is made more precise by the
second proposition *are you all members of a research project*. Apart from *I
mean* Example 1 also comprises some other CCs, thus showing how frequent
they tend to be in the studied genre.

In spite of the fact that *I mean* is not mentioned together with other CCs by
Quirk et al., it is possible to agree with Stenström (1995: 291) that 'if we accept
Quirk et al.'s definition of CCs (1985: 1112ff), *I mean* seems to share enough
features with *I think, you know* and *you see* to qualify with them as a type (1)
CC'.

According to Quirk et al. (1985: 1112–1118), who provide the most compre-
hensive classification of CCs, CCs are defined as parenthetical disjuncts func-
tioning either as content or style disjuncts. The former 'express the speakers'
comments on the content of the matrix clause' and are realized by finite clauses,
while the latter 'convey the speakers' views on the way they are speaking' and
appear in the form of non-finite clauses. Accordingly, it is possible to distinguish
six syntactic types of CCs:
   (1) like the matrix clause of a main clause, e.g. *I believe*;
   (2) like an adverbial finite clause (introduced by *as*), e.g. *as you know*;

(3) like a nominal relative clause, e.g. *what's more surprising*;
(4) *to*-infinitive clause as style disjunct, e.g. *to be fair*;
(5) *-ing* clause as style disjunct, e.g. *speaking frankly*;
(6) *-ed* clause as style disjunct, e.g. *stated simply*.

As stated above, *I mean* corresponds to the type (1) CCs and, moreoever, it shares with them all their main characteristics as suggested by Stenström (1995: 1185):

- they contain a transitive verb;
- they resemble matrix clauses but lack complementation;
- they are generally syntactically dependent;
- they tend to be stereotyped,
- they have a number of 'semantic' functions.

As for Quirk and Greenbaum (1973: 335–337), they do not explicitly mention *I mean* in connection with CCs at all. They maintain that CCs are somewhat loosely related to a superordinate clause, and may be classed as disjuncts or conjuncts. In general, they may occur initially, finally or medially, and have a separate tone unit. However, the occurrence of a CC in a separate tone unit (TU) is not valid for *I mean*, which hardly ever occurs in a separate TU, as will be shown in Table 4 below.

When discussing the grammar in spoken and written English, Leech and Svartvik (1994: 10–19) list several features typical of informal talk. They maintain that 'when we speak we often fill in gaps with '**fillers**' (like *you know*, *you see*, *I mean*, *kind of*, *sort of*) to allow us to think of what next to say, or just to indicate that we intended to go on talking'. Fillers, also called discourse items by the authors, are put under three headings, indicating a scale from 'purely interactive' functions (which are above all characteristic of conversation) to 'also interactive' functions (which are more grammatical and frequently used also in public speaking and writing). Some CCs including *I mean* are somewhere in the middle on the scale and are considered to be '**mainly interactive' discourse items**. Two tokens of *I mean* with a 'mainly interactive' function taken from the material analysed follow:

Example 2
A   ^\ah# – [e:] you ^mean that [i: i:] {the !p\apers} '\are# ^more or less :set ad !h\ominem# ^/are _they# -
B   [e:h] – – they ^sh\ouldn't b/e# – – ^but [eh] – *I* ^mean Λone# ^sets – -\one _question# ^now *I !mean* :this fellow's doing <<the>> language of :\advertising# * . * <<so ^very>> w\ell#
A   *^y/eah#*   (S.1.1.21–30)

Biber et al. (1999: 197) state that CCs 'are similar in structure to reporting clauses: they are loosely connected to the main clause, they normally lack an explicit link, and they are usually short and can appear in a variety of positions.

They differ from reporting clauses by being more formulaic'. Of several examples presented in the above grammar to illustrate CCs, the following one shows several tokens of *I mean*:

> *I mean it's, it's general I suppose I mean if it would be better to switch it on and off which you can do and er, you know, I mean we can't sit here continually talking.*

Later in their grammar, Biber et al. choose to regard CCs, notably *you know* and *I mean* as **inserts**. They say that CCs are usually in the present rather than past tense, first or second rather than third person, and comment on a thought rather than the delivery of wording, which corresponds to Quirk et al.'s first three syntactic types of CCs, mentioned above, among which *I mean* can be included.

What is also worth noting is Biber et al.'s statement that CCs are closely related to discourse markers, which, while being particularly characteristic of spoken dialogue, are 'inserts which tend to occur at the beginning of a turn or utterance, and to combine two roles: (a) to signal a transition in the evolving process of the conversation, and (b) to signal an interactive relationship between speaker, hearer, and message' (Biber et al. 1999: 1086ff), i.e. the two roles to which the present investigation tries to draw attention. However, based on the results presented below, it is not possible to say that *I mean* tends to occur at the beginning of a turn or utterance in spite of the fact that several tokens have been found (see Table 3, and for the illustration of *I mean* in turn initial position, see Example 5 below).

CCs including *I mean* are often mentioned in works dealing with spoken language, notably face-to-face conversation. For example, Crystal and Davy (1969: 48) in their chapter on the language of conversation mention the high proportion of **parenthetic clauses** such as *you know* and *I mean*, 'which may be embedded in the main clause, or may occur in sequence with it' and offer the example *you know that's my sort of knitting*, which is, by the way, an example taken from one of the texts analysed in the present investigation, namely text S.1.3 (TUs 60–61).

When discussing the most important characteristics of conversational English, Crystal (1975: 85ff) speaks about fluency as a 'highly complex notion', which also includes a 'consideration of how sentences are connected'. He distinguishes three main functions of connectives:

> (1) connectives that are interpreted as reinforcing, or specifically supplementing, the whole or part of the meaning of what has immediately preceded. Although examples of this type of connectives do not include *I mean*, some other CCs, such as *I must say, as I say*, are listed.
>
> (2) **connectives** that may be interpreted as **diminishing**, or retracting the whole or part of the meaning of what has preceded. *I mean* is mentioned as a possible device with a diminishing force.

(3) connectives from the third group are different from the first two groups. They not only maintain the continuity of discourse, but they also seem to be used 'to alter the stylistic force of a sentence, so as to express the attitude of the speaker to his listener, or to express his assessment of the conversational situation as informal. Crystal labels this kind of **connectives** as **softening** or **softeners** and adds some examples, such as *you know, I mean, you see*. However, he stresses that they 'express a wide range of nuances' and that it 'seems impossible to make any satisfactory generalizations to cover all of them'.

Let me now show some examples of *I mean* illustrating the above-mentioned connectives, the former showing *I mean* as a connective with what can be labelled according to Crystal as a diminishing force, the latter offering *I mean* as a softening connective:

Example 3

A   *and ^I thought . I would just !d\ie in this s/et-up# – – – ^you kn\ow# . I mean I'd ^r\eached the _point# ^where I thought <<well>> if they :\offered me this _thing# – – ^obviously what I'd do is :t\ake it# * – <<you kn/ow#>>** (S.1.3.867–872)

Example 4

A   *– – '^well# . ^let's take the interview f\irst# the [w] ^purpose of going \up _there# . [i] it's ^quite \obvious# it was ^quite obvious :very early \on [^r\eally#]# that . ^I was n\ever# . I'd I mean I ^haven't h\ad any . res/ults# or <<I syll you know>> I haven't ^h\eard from them# but [] – I think I was :never at :\all# – in the ^r\unning#* (S.1.3.244–253)

The speaker in Example 3 uses *I mean* in order to diminish the force of her statement *I would just die in this set-up*. It is preceded by the CC *you know*, which asks for the hearer's understanding. As will be shown below, co-occurrences of *I mean* with some other CCs, especially *you know* and *you see*, either preceding or following, are quite common in the language of authentic face-to-face conversation (for more details, see Table 6 below).

Example 4 shows *I mean* as a softener. This type of connective combines with some hesitation, notably a short pause indicated by a dot in the above example and a false start *I'd I mean I haven't* etc. Similarly to Example 3, Example 4 comprises *you know* in the neighbouring co-text of *I mean*, notably in the following TU.

According to Edmondson (1981: 153–156) both false starts and other hesitation phenomena are similar to **fumbles**, which function 'to plug speaking-turn-internal conversational gaps—i.e. they are used by a speaker (in part) in order to gain time'. The author says that 'in performing communicative acts speakers hesitate, pause, cannot find the right word, and so on'. He holds that 'fumbles

are conventionalized ways of plugging such potential gaps, such that in fact no gap is perceived by the interlocutor' and recognizes five classes of fumbles, namely starters, **let-me-explains**, underscores, cajolers, and asides. According to Edmondson the most commonly occurring token of a let-me-explain is *I mean*. It tends to be used 'to communicate the fact that I'm trying to communicate'. Thus, it is speaker-oriented and precedes the performance of a communicative act. The author stresses that an utterance of the form *I mean* cannot be said to *mean* 'I mean' if it is to be understood as an instance of a let-me-explain. Several instances of *I mean* that can be considered let-me-explains follow:

Example 5

>A   *there is ^infinite* var\iety in the 'language# and ^th\erefore#*
      ^trying to 'tie it d\own# ^it is . :simply . a pe:dantic :/exercise# . I
      mean one's ^n\ever# . I mean you're ^making – concl\usions#
      which you can ^never v\erify# because <<^you can>> .
B   *by the ^time you've f\inished# it will have ^changed !\anyway# – – –*
A   *I mean ^language is :always :d\ating#*
B   *^y\es#**
A   **if* you ^try and 'take it 'out of c\ontext#*   (S.1.5.650–663)

Example 5, namely the third occurrence of *I mean* shows one of the rare cases in which *I mean* occurs at the beginning of a turn (for more details on the position of *I mean* within the turn, see Table 5 below).

According to Swan (1995: 329) *I mean* is used as a DM 'to introduce explanations or additional details'. The author lists *I mean* among other **correcting and softening DMs** (1995: 156–7), such as *I think*, *I feel*, *I suppose*, *I guess*, *so to speak*, i.e. the clausal forms that can be considered CCs, and some other forms, such as *or rather*, *more or less*, *apparently*, and offers the following illustrations of *I mean*:

> *Let's meet next Monday—I mean Tuesday.*
> *She is not very nice. I mean, I know some people like her, but…*

The former example corresponds to Quirk et al.'s 'mistake editing', the latter is similar to Crystal's softening connective (see above) and can be exemplified by the following example taken from the data analysed:

Example 6

A   *I ^only _paint _what's _th\ere# you ^kn/ow# if it's ^p/ink# I ^paint*
      it p/ink# and ^if it's gr/een# I ^paint it gr/een# – – ^and of :course
      I 'have !n\o [e]# com'"^m/\and# I mean I ^don't know 'how to paint
      a "!m\/outh or 'anything# so there's ^always something ":t\/errible#
      – in a ^picture I d/o but# . I I ^\/ove it#   (S.1.8.841–852)

In the above example the speaker clarifies what she means by saying *I have no*

command. What comes after *I mean* has a softening effect because by saying *I don't know how to paint a mouth or anything* etc., the speaker makes her previous statement sound less strong. Similarly to Examples 3 and 4 presented above, *you know* used to ask for the hearer's attention and understanding is present in the neighbouring co-text.

Leech et al. (1992: 136–140) in connection with linguistic characteristics of speech and writing mention monitoring features as features present in 'typical' speech and say that **monitoring features** 'indicate the speaker's awareness of the addressee's presence and reactions, and include adverbs and adverbials such as *well, I mean, sort of, you know*'.

The term **monitor** is used in connection with *I mean* also by Stenström (1994: 131–132), who states that 'sometimes the speaker needs to make a new start or rephrase what s/he was going to say in the middle of a turn, often because the listener shows that s/he cannot follow or is not convinced'. Stenström holds that in such situations '*I mean* comes in handy' and further stresses the tendency of *I mean* to co-occur with *well* and sometimes even with *you know* or *you see*. Similar cases found in the material analysed will also be included in the present paper (see Table 6 below).

As for the investigation of CCs themselves, there are several works dealing with CCs, discussing either the most frequent ones or just one of them. The former group is represented, for instance, by the work done by Erman (1987), who concentrates on *you know*, *you see* and *I mean*, or Stenström (1995), who adds still another CC, namely *I think* to her analysis. The latter group can be represented by the work of Östman (1981), who concentrates only on *you know* in his study. There are also works dealing with broader categories, such as **discourse particles** (Schourup 1985), **discourse markers** (Schiffrin 1987), **discourse signals** (Stenström 1989), or **pragmatic markers** (Brinton 1996, Andersen 2001), among which *I mean* is included. Some of the authors named here have already been mentioned or will be referred to below if relevant for the present analysis.

When considering the use of *I mean* in a given speech situation, the present inquiry takes into account the following factors: syntactic type, orientation, position within the turn, tone unit position including the prosody, the use and position in the information structure, and above all the entire situational context which also includes the speakers themselves, their mutual relationship, etc.

As far as the syntactic type is concerned, it has already been stated that *I mean* can be considered as a type (1) CC (see above).

Table 1 Orientation of comment clauses

Orientation	Texts										Total	
of CCs	S.1.1		S.1.3		S.1.5		S.1.6		S.1.8			
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
I-oriented	43	45%	27	26%	41	57%	46	56%	27	27%	184	41%
you-oriented	52	55%	77	74%	31	43%	36	44%	72	73%	268	59%
Total	95	100%	104	100%	72	100%	82	100%	99	100%	452	100%

As for orientation, the overwhelming majority of CCs when used in face-to-face conversation tend to be either speaker- or hearer-oriented. *I*-oriented CCs, such as *I think, I suppose*, can emphasize that what is being uttered at a particular moment in a conversation is just the speaker's opinion or tentative suggestion. On the other hand, *you*-oriented CCs, such as *you see, you know*, can draw the hearer's attention to what is being uttered or can appeal to the hearer to produce some kind of response. As for impersonal CCs, expressed in the majority of cases by the (4), (5) and (6) syntactic types of CCs (see above), they are not included in the present analysis owing to their very low frequency in the material analysed. Such a result can hardly be surprising when one realizes which genre of spoken language is under investigation. CCs expressed by non-finite verb forms are not typical of the language of face-to-face conversation (for more details, see Povolná 2002).

Table 1 indicates that there are differences between the texts analysed with regard to the orientation of CCs. Texts S.1.3 and S.1.8 tend to be more hearer-oriented, each having about 73 per cent of *you*-oriented CCs. Although they also prevail in text S.1.1 (55 per cent), the frequency of *I*-oriented CCs is relatively high (45 per cent), too. By contrast, texts S.1.5 and S.1.6 have the highest percentage of speaker-oriented CCs (about 56 per cent). It becomes evident that such differences in the orientation of CCs are connected with participants in individual conversational texts, their relative social status, their attitudes towards each other, the history of their acquaintance, the amount of shared knowledge, and above all the topics they discuss in a given speech situation.

Let me now briefly describe the individual texts under investigation. Text S.1.1 is a discussion between two male colleagues about problems connected with their work at university, for instance, papers to be written by their students, requirements for some courses, their departmental meetings, or interviews for new academic posts. The relatively high proportion of *I*-oriented CCs, such as *I think, I suppose* (each having 9 occurrences) or *I mean* (17 occurrences) is connected with the frequent necessity to indicate that what is being uttered is just the speaker's opinion or tentative suggestion or perhaps the speaker's interpretation of what might happen. Apart from *I*-oriented CCs, *you see* (32 cases) tends to be frequently used to ask for the hearer's attention and understanding.

In text S.1.3 one of the speakers dominates the whole flow of conversation, the topic of which is her taking part in an interview and her staying for a short time at a certain university college. Consequently, it comprises many interesting insights into the atmosphere of the college, for instance, common room life and ironic comments on some members of the college, i.e. topics that frequently require the use of *you know*, which can ask for the hearer's attention and understanding and which is the most typical CC in this text (see Examples 3 and 4 above).

Text S.1.5, being a chat between three secretaries and one female academic, concerns mostly administrative matters, such as replacement of secretaries, their working conditions, experience from previous jobs, but also personal relationships between members of the academic staff. Since one of the speakers is a new

member of staff, she and the other speakers do not have much past experience in common. So it can be claimed that the high proportion of *I*-oriented CCs in this text is closely related to the status and mutual relationship of the speakers. They mostly express their beliefs and certainty or lack of it using *I*-oriented CCs such as *I think*, *I suppose* and *I don't know*, or they feel the need to clarify what they have said by using *I mean* as a monitor due to the lack of shared knowledge. Several tokens of *I*-oriented CCs are shown in Example 1 above. Monitoring features and the term monitor have been mentioned above in connection with Leech et al. (1992) and Stenström (1994), respectively.

As for text S.1.6, it is a conversation between two academics, one male and one female, comprising mainly gossip about their colleagues and some people from other departments. Their studies and previous job exprerience as well as several current problems concerning their departments are being discussed, too. Similarly to text S.1.5, the interlocutors mostly express their opinions, beliefs and certainty or lack of it, using *I*-oriented CCs, such as *I think* (15 cases), *I suppose* and *I don't know*. Since they know each other quite well, they do not tend to use *I mean* for clarification of their thoughts so frequently (only 7 cases) as the interlocutors in text S.1.5 (19 cases), as can be seen from Table 2 below.

Text S.1.8 is a private chat between three female academics mainly about several pictures that are displayed in the room in which their conversation takes place. It concerns some painters and their paintings, including some remarks on one of the speakers' former painting career. Since it is a talk between women, it also includes such topics as the speakers' housekeepers and shopping. The high proportion of *you*-oriented CCs, above all *you know* (60 cases) and *you see*, in the text can be accounted for by their main function, to ask for the hearer's attention and understanding (see Example 6 above, which also comprises *I mean* used as a softener).

Table 2 Proportions within *I*-oriented CCs

I-oriented	Texts										Total	
CCs	S.1.1		S.1.3		S.1.5		S.1.6		S.1.8			
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
I mean	17	39.5%	16	59%	19	46%	7	15%	12	44.5%	71	38.6%
other CCs	26	60.5%	11	41%	22	54%	39	85%	15	55.5%	113	61.4%
Total	43	100%	27	100%	41	100%	46	100%	27	100%	184	100%

Table 2 indicates the proportions between *I mean* and the other *I*-oriented CCs in each text analysed. It is evident that *I mean* tends to be quite common, amounting to the average of 39 per cent of all speaker-oriented CCs in each text. The only text in which the frequency of *I mean* is quite low is text S.1.6 (seven occurrences only), the reasons being stated above. If this text is excluded, then the proportion between the occurrences of *I mean* and the other CCs will be 64 versus 74, which means that about 46 per cent of all *I*-oriented CCs will be rep-

resented by *I mean*. Consequently, it can be concluded that speakers frequently use *I mean* to modify what they want to say either because they are not sure that what they have just said is quite clear to their hearers or because they want to specify it, either narrowing (see the diminishing force of *I mean* mentioned above) or softening the propositional content of what they have just said while indicating that the whole conversational situation is to be considered informal (compare with Crystal 1975 discussed above).

The relatively highest proportion of *I mean* in text S.1.3 (16 cases representing 59 per cent of all *I*-oriented CCs in the given text) is probably connected with the fact that there is only one main speaker in the text who dominates the whole flow of conversation. She frequently expresses her opinions and attitudes towards the propositional content of what she is trying to communicate. When she has some problems in finding appropriate words or wants to clarify something, she often uses *I mean*, as illustrated below:

Example 7

>A   – – – *I mean* ^being [?] – – *you ^kn/ow#* a ^bit less !s√avage about
       the _whole [^th/ing #]# . [?] ^if one were in:v\olved in it#
       ^obviously there would be just a few people one would :Ñike# . ^one
       would enjoy t\alking *to#* . *I mean I I* . the ^very "!f\irst

c   *[m]*

>A   _person I _met# be^fore !Ñunch# ^was [i em] – – !h\istory _don# –
       – who was just sw\eet# . ^you kn/ow# she was <<a sort of>>
       ^colourless m\ouse [of a ^w\oman#]# but she was – ^very sw\eet and
       k\ind# and pl\easant# and ^interesting to :t\alk to#   **(S.1.3.954–969)**

The above example shows a typical use of *I mean* in spoken language. The speaker does not know exactly how to express her ideas, which is evidenced also by the co-occurrence of *I mean* with a pause (indicated either by a dash or a dot) and repetition: *I mean I I* etc. Example 7 also includes two tokens of *you know*, the most typical CC of the text, used mostly to ask for the hearer's attention and understanding and occurring frequently in the neighbouring co-text of *I mean*, as already mentioned.

The other *I*-oriented CCs in the material are mostly represented by CCs showing that what is being uttered at a particular moment in a given conversational situation is just the speaker's opinion or tentative suggestion (*I think, I suppose*), or the speaker's certainty over the propositional content of a particular utterance or lack of it (*I know, I don't know*, the latter shown in Example 1 above). All the other *I*-oriented CCs in the data examined are rather rare, not having more than two occurrences in each text.

Table 3 Position of *I mean* within the turn

Texts	Turn position			Total
	I	M	F	No.
S.1.1	1	16	0	17
S.1.3	0	16	0	16
S.1.5	2	17	0	19
S.1.6	0	6	0	6
S.1.8	2	11	0	13
Total (No.)	5	66	0	71
Total (%)	7.04%	92.96%	0%	100.0%

As for the turn position of *I mean*, in accordance with, for example, Stenström (1995) and Erman (1986), three positions within the turn are distinguished in the analysis: at the very beginning of a turn, within the turn, and at the very end of a turn. By the turn everything a particular speaker says before the next speaker takes over is understood. As can be seen from Table 3, the overwhelming majority of occurrences of *I mean* in the data tend to occur in medial (M) position within the turn (93 per cent). The preference to be placed in M position within the turn has also been proved by Erman (1986). Both his and present results indicate that apart from the M position *I mean* tends to be placed in initial (I) position. It has, however, been found in this position only in five cases (for the illustration of *I mean* in turn initial position, see Example 5 above). According to Erman (1986: 132), 'when *I mean* occurs in final (F) position, it is always because of interruption on the part of a new speaker'. However, not a single occurrence of *I mean* in F position has been found in the data analysed, so the present results can neither prove nor oppose the above-mentioned statement.

In connection with the turn position, it must be stressed that in agreement with Stenström it is assumed that 'turntaking presupposes a shift of speakers. An utterance produced while the other party goes on speaking can consequently not be regarded as a turn' (Stenström 1994: 35). This is shown in Example 8, in which *[m]* does not represent a turn, but is merely a backchannel item. Therefore *I mean* in Example 8 appears in Table 3 above as used in medial, not in initial, position within the turn. A similar approach has been adopted by Erman, who maintains that he does not 'regard exclamatory supports etc., so-called backchannel-items, as turns, if they occur in the middle of the ongoing speaker's TU without interrupting it' (Erman 1986: 132).

Example 8

A . and ^I'm ast\ounded# ^how 'na:\ive 'they 'are# ^r\/eally# ^how !easily 'taken /in#

c ^[\m]#

>A I ^m/ean# . to have a 'student 'come to you and [s] – <<oh>> ^I !read a b\ook# and it's "^moved me so 'much I can't t\alk a'bout it# ^[?]you kn/ow#   (S.1.6.353–361)

Table 4 Position of *I mean* within the tone unit

Texts	Tone unit position			Separate
	I	**M**	**F**	**tone unit**
S.1.1	7	5	2	3
S.1.3	14	2	0	0
S.1.5	13	6	0	0
S.1.6	3	1	1	2
S.1.8	8	4	0	0
Total (No.)	45	18	3	5
Total (%)	63.4%	25.4%	4.2%	7.0%

As for the position of *I mean* within the TU, Table 4 makes it clear that *I mean* occurs mostly at the beginning of a TU (63 per cent) and that it is relatively frequent also in M position (25 per cent). Moreover, based on the above results, it can be concluded that *I mean* hardly ever occurs in a separate TU, having only 5 occurrences in the data. One such rare case can be seen in Example 9 below. (The end of every TU is indicated by the sign # in all the examples included in the present inquiry.)

Example 9

B   ^*and of course they "Nall _want# this ^Niterature _stuff# I ^m_ean#* .
the "^language paper has "!grown up under the con!tr\ol (of these
*^Niterary *_wallahs#)#* *   (S.1.1.862–865)

It must be stressed that with regard to the occurrence in a separate TU *I mean* differs from the other CCs, both *I-* and *you*-oriented CCs, the former illustrated in a separate TU by *I imagine* in Example 1 above and the latter by *you know* in Examples 3 and 6 above. The overwhelming majority of the other CCs tend to occur in separate tone units. A similar result has been proved by Stenström (1995: 292), who states that the occurrence of CCs in a separate TU is 'undoubtedly true for the large majority of CCs but not for *I think* and *I mean*, which often have no tone at all'. Moreover, there seems to be a clear difference between *I*-oriented and *you*-oriented CCs with regard to tonicity (for more details, see Povolná 2002). In agreement with Stenström it is assumed that this difference not only reflects 'a tendency on the part of the speaker to minimise attention to the self in favour of the listener, but is also the direct result of the diverse discourse roles of these CCs', as evidenced by all the above examples (see also Quirk et al. 1985: 1481).

Table 5 Position of *I mean* within the turn and its prosody (presence/absence of nuclear tone, separate TU)

Texts	No tone			Nuclear tone			Nuclear tone & separate TU			Total
	I	**M**	**F**	**I**	**M**	**F**	**I**	**M**	**F**	**No.**
S.1.1	1	12	0	0	1	0	0	3	0	17
S.1.3	0	16	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	16
S.1.5	2	16	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	19
S.1.6	0	3	0	0	2	0	0	2	0	7
S.1.8	2	10	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	12
Total	5	57	0	0	4	0	0	5	0	71

Table 5 offers more details about the position of *I mean* within the turn including its prosody (compare with Table 3 above). As already stated, *I mean* tends to occur in M position within the turn (altogether 66 cases). Moreover, it hardly ever carries a nuclear tone (62 cases, five of which have been found in I position). Of the total nine cases in which *I mean* carries a nuclear tone, always being placed on the verb *to mean*, only five cases also have a separate TU. The results presented in the table prove the speaker's frequent tendency to minimise attention to the self, as mentioned immediately above, and indicate completely different functions of *I mean* from those performed by the other CCs, especially hearer-oriented CCs (for more details, see Povolná 2002).

In connection with prosody and information structure, it is important to state that in the majority of cases propositions which follow *I mean* convey some new information. This finding can be further strengthened by the fact that the word carrying the tonal focus in these propositions nearly always has a falling, or 'proclaiming' tone (48 cases, one of them illustrated by Example 10 below), which typically marks 'the matter as new' (Brazil et al. 1980: 15). The number is in fact even higher (at least by 10 occurrences) because, although in some instances *I mean* is followed immediately by a TU with a rising tone (/) indicating that there is still something else to follow, there then comes the expected falling or 'proclaiming' tone (\) indicating new information, as in Example 11:

Example 10

C   *– – I ^think if I :just sort of – :take you r\ound# and ^sh\ow you where [i:] * – * ^[central s\ervices] **and** so on :\are# because ^H\art [as you ^kn\ow#]#*

A   **^y\eah#* **^y\es#***

>C   *^is a ^man who . 'knows !\everything# I mean – – he's ^certainly not the . :usual 'woolly-'minded prof\essor# who ^doesn't 'even 'know 'where his !\iling 'system 'is#*   (S.1.5.1131–1138)

Example 11

B   *^n\o# ^that's tr√ue#* . ^no !that's tr√ue# . ^y\es# that's ^tr\ue# .
        but ^it's [em] – <u>I mean</u> it's ^got sh/ape# and it's ^<<cool>> at the
        !same +t\ime#+   **(S.1.8.653–659)**

Thus, it is possible to sum up in agreement with Erman (1986: 140) that
I mean is 'essentially connected with new information and consequently not pri-
marily used in the thematic structure', by which he understands the differentia-
tion between old and new information. However, unlike the present study, which
takes into account all the occurrences of *I mean* that can be considered CCs, Er-
man studies *I mean, you know,* and *you see* only as connective elements, i.e.
when placed between clauses, and not as intrusive elements, i.e. when placed
between or within clause constituents. To draw such a differentiation is, unfortu-
nately, beyond the scope of the present study.

Let me conclude the analysis with some findings on possible recurrent word
combinations comprising *I mean.* The following examples show two different
positional variants of co-occurring forms. The former illustrates two forms co-
occurring within the same TU (*I mean* and *as you know* in Example 12), whereas
the latter offers two forms co-occurring within two neighbouring TUs, while
being adjacent (*you see* and *I mean* in Example 13):

Example 12

B   and they ^got what they . and they ^got what they !w\anted# wheras
        ^H√art# <u>I ^mean</u> <u>as you kno\w#</u> sort of – –   **(S.1.5.621–624)**

Example 13

A   *<<trouble is>>* I ^couldn't 'do anything like :th√at <u>you see#</u> <u>I</u>
        <u>mean</u> I ^[ke] I ^couldn't 'paint an – – an ^ordinary 'sort of
        p/ortrait# – .   **(S.1.8.862–863)**

The above examples represent typical combinations with *I mean* found in the
data examined. As can be seen from Table 6, the most frequent type comprises
you know and *I mean* (7 occurrences), i.e. the combination suggested also by
Stenström (1994: 131–132). Some other combinations comprising, for instance,
as you know or *you see*, have been found, too. Worth mentioning are also com-
binations with DMs such as *now* or *well* (4 occurrences), and some conjunctions
typical especially of the language of conversation such as *and* or *but* (6 occur-
rences).

Table 6 Word combinations with *I mean*

Formal realization of word combinations	Adjacent within the same TU	Adjacent in neighbouring TUs
I mean you know	2	0
I mean you see	1	0
I mean as you know	1	0
you know I mean	1	4
you see I mean	0	1
but I don't know I mean	0	1
well I mean	3	1
now I mean	1	0
but I mean	6	0
and I mean	1	0
because I mean	1	0

As for the most frequent combination, i.e. *I mean* preceding or following *you know*, its occurrence can be explained in agreement with Östman in the following way: *I mean* is close in function to *you know* because, on the one hand, it is 'speaker-oriented in the sense that, by using it the speaker self-corrects, or clarifies his own views. On the other hand, he does this clarification for the benefit of the addressee' (Östman 1981: 35). Therefore, it can easily co-occur with *you know*, as in:

Example 14

A   *"^I haven't heard a w/\ord# – I mean ^I [0]^you kn/ow# <<I say>> "^I think they :made up their minds before they !s\tarted#* (**S.1.3.989–991**)

Combinations of adjacent *I mean* and *you know* tend to be quite frequent, not to mention cases in which they occur in neighbouring co-text, as in Examples 4, 6, and 7 above. Schiffrin (1987: 309) states that *I mean* and *y'know* 'are complementary: whereas *I mean* focuses on the speaker's own adjustments in the production of his/her own talk, *y'know* proposes that a hearer adjust his/her orientation (specifically knowledge and attention) toward the reception of another's talk'.

The present inquiry surveys different opinions and interpretations of the use of *I mean* in authentic spoken English. While commenting on the work of some linguists, the author applies several different criteria to her data and tries to contribute to the understanding of the use of *I mean* in face-to-face conversation.

Based on the present results and in agreement with some of the above-mentioned works, the following functions of *I mean* can be drawn:

(1) it marks the speaker's orientation towards one's own talk, i.e. it indicates modifications of the speaker's own ideas and intentions;

(2) it maintains attention on the current speaker;

(3) it serves as an insert indicating ongoing planning;

(4) it acts as a connective thus adding to text cohesion.

For further research it would seem useful to carry on a similar investigation in another genre of spoken English, notably, telephone conversation. Only then might it be possible to draw some generalizations about the use of *I mean* in authentic English conversation.

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