

Introduction

When paralinguistic elements are analysed, they are often only considered from a phonetic perspective. This study focuses on other aspects of their use, in particular on the discourse-pragmatic functions and the social meanings of click sounds. Data come from sociolinguistic interviews with speakers of Irish English.

The analysis in the present study is primarily qualitative and considers the positions of clicks within the individual utterance, their relation to the content of the utterance, and social aspects of the speaker and the communicative situation. It thus blends pragmatic and sociolinguistic questions and methodologies in a way that is quite established for the analysis of discourse markers (e.g. Migge, 2015; Murphy, 2015; Schulte, 2019). In particular, this study addresses the following research questions: **In which positions do clicks occur? Do different speakers use clicks in similar contexts and with similar frequency? Which discourse-pragmatic functions do clicks have in Irish English? Which social meanings are indexed by the use of clicks?**

Background: Sociolinguistics & paralinguistics

Sociolinguistic investigations of paralinguistic elements are rare, and existing studies largely focus on voice quality. Even within that area, most studies concentrate on the social meanings of creaky voice (e.g. Podesva & Callier 2015). Some scholars speculate that paralinguistic aspects of language use might be particularly interesting for sociolinguists, as at least some of these aspects are more difficult to consciously control than linguistic constructions like, for example, lexis and grammar (Saville-Troike 2003).

Data & Method

The data come from audio-recorded sociolinguistic interviews with 10 speakers of Irish English, which were conducted between 2015 and 2019 as part of a larger study (Schulte 2019). Participants in this study are teenagers and young adults, some of whom were friends or acquaintances of the researcher, while some volunteered after hearing about the study in class or lectures. The interviews were recorded on a H4 zoom recorder in a place chosen by the interviewee, including empty classrooms, private living rooms or relatively quiet cafés. The interviews are semi-guided and while certain topics were raised by the researcher, they are not controlled questionnaires but rather open regarding both topic and length.

The differences between the individual interviews in terms of length and recording context lead to challenges for the analysis. Especially click sounds produced by participants playing with pens occurred frequently and had to be distinguished from clicks produced as part of their vocal utterances. This is usually not difficult for an observer, even on the basis of a recording, but if in doubt about the origin of a click, the token was excluded from the analysis. Some participants produce a very large number of clicks while others produce them only rarely. Only the first 20 tokens per speaker are analysed here in order not to overrepresent possible idiosyncratic uses in such a small sample.

The analysis is auditory and relies on the researcher's perception of the audio signal with the help of visual inspection in Praat (Boersma & Weenink, 2018).

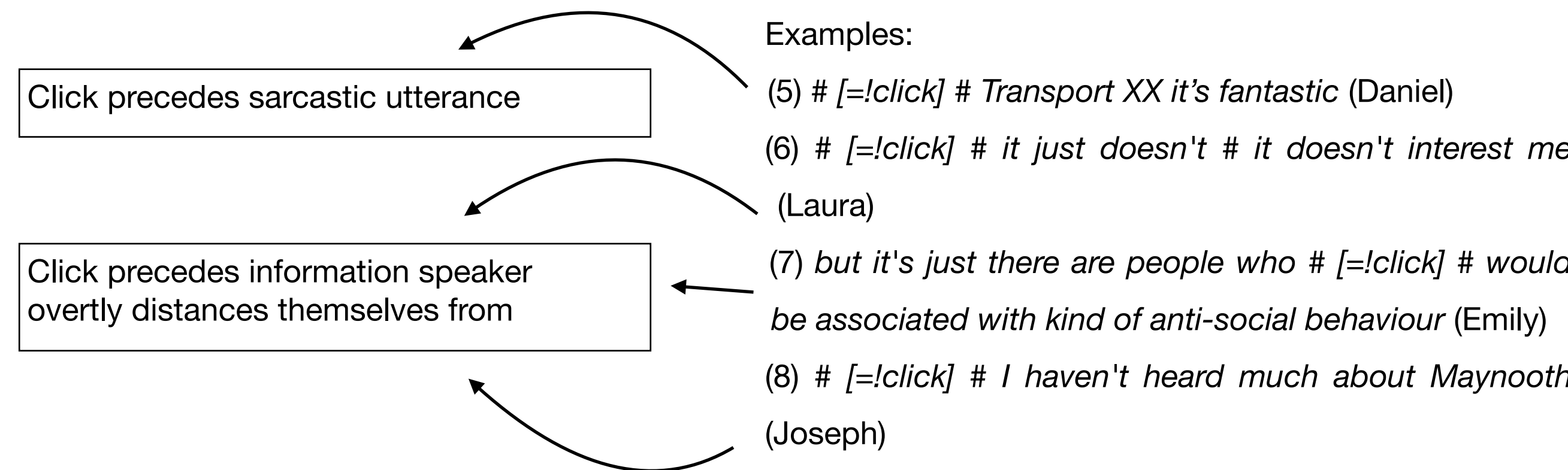
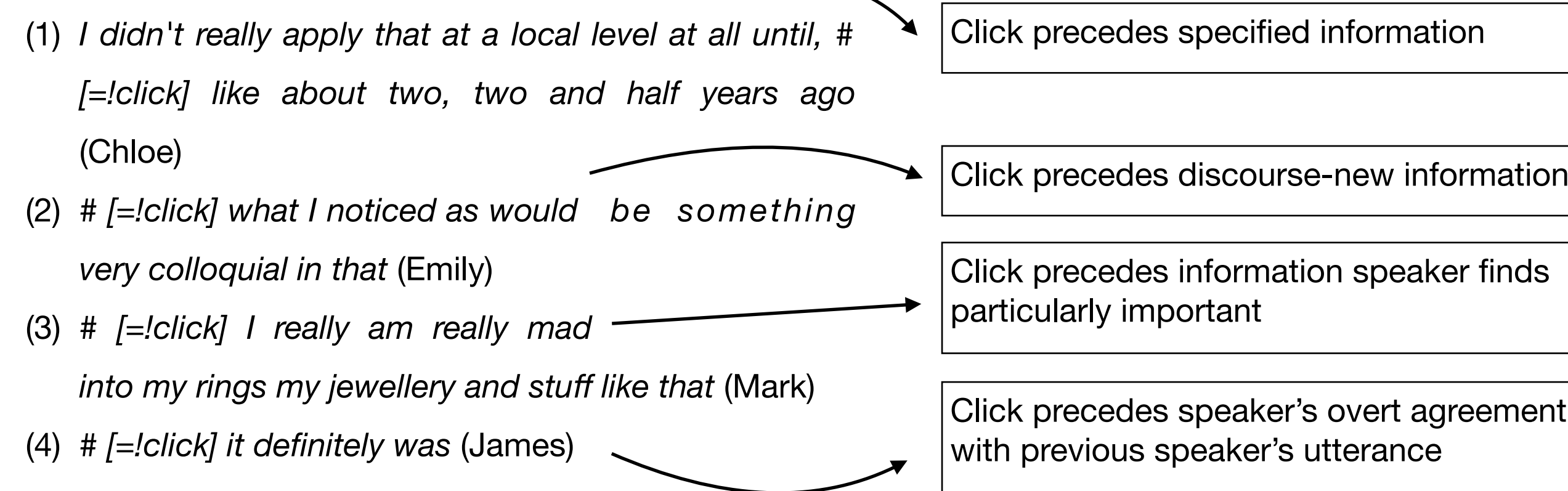
Results

All speakers in this sample produce clicks. Two types of clicks can be distinguished based on the environment following the click, and these types are connected with different functions.

Type A Clicks	Type B Clicks
Preceded by a pause	Preceded by a pause
Followed immediately by speech	Followed by a pause
Precede new or important information	
Often open a speaker's turn	
Specify information given previously or introduce an example when used in the middle of a longer turn	
Some speakers use these clicks to precede utterances that overtly express agreement with another speakers point	Precede information that expresses speaker's disagreement
	Precede information that speaker wants to distance themselves from
	Precede a sarcastic utterance

- ➔ Type A clicks have a signalling function
- ➔ All functions are **primarily discursive** (i.e. structure the discourse, e.g. by highlighting certain parts of an utterance) and closely related
- ➔ Type B clicks have a distancing function
- ➔ All functions are **primarily pragmatic** (i.e. express the speaker's positioning with regard to the utterance and interlocutors) and closely related

Examples:



Discussion & Conclusion

Two different types of clicks can be distinguished by their environment: Type A clicks are preceded by a pause but followed immediately by speech, while Type B clicks are preceded and followed by a pause. These two types seem to have different functions. Type A clicks mainly structure discourse by highlighting important, new, or specific information. They may also be used to express agreement or positive evaluation, but this is comparatively rare in the data. These discursive functions are **similar to the functions of linguistic discourse markers**. Type B clicks, on the other hand, have mainly pragmatic functions and are **similar to linguistic pragmatic markers**. They express a speaker's positioning with regard to a previous utterance, the topic of conversation, or an interlocutor. Type B clicks are used when speakers distance themselves from something they talk about or disagree with another statement. This distancing function is also used in sarcastic comments.

The multifunctionality is also reminiscent of linguistic discourse-pragmatic markers. Both formal and functional aspects of the clicks investigated here fit the descriptions of linguistic discourse-pragmatic markers (e.g. Aijmer 2013: 16-17), and it therefore seems **appropriate to consider them paralinguistic discourse-pragmatic markers**.

As in linguistic discourse-pragmatic markers, the use of both types of clicks has a sociolinguistic dimension as well. While all speakers produce clicks, they do this to varying extents. Type A markers are more common, but Type B markers are only produced by a small number of speakers. In the 10 speaker sample analysed here, the use of clicks seems to be related to the use of fricative /t/, which can convey stances such as authoritativeness or expert knowledge in Dublin (O'Dwyer 2020; Schulte 2019). A study that extends the dataset used here to include 19 speakers reaches a somewhat more complex conclusion than the present study, however, as a connection between frequent use of fricative /t/ and clicks cannot be established for all speakers (Schulte fc.). The distancing function of Type B clicks is not found in fricative /t/, and

such differences in pragmatic meaning could account for the different distribution of these elements. This would call for more fine-grained investigations of sociolinguistic and pragmatic meaning and the connection to particular linguistic and paralinguistic variants in the speech community. (Schulte fc.: 15)

Schulte (fc.) also points out that the social evaluations connected with fricative /t/ and click sounds might be different and that they may thus be available to different speakers in different contexts.

This study has shown that click sounds in Irish English can be compared to linguistic discourse-pragmatic markers and that **their use has a sociolinguistic dimension** as well. More research on this topic is certainly necessary to find out exactly how they contribute to (social) meaning-making in this and other varieties of English.

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