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A corpus comparison of the use of *I don't know* by British and New Zealand speakers

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Abstract

This study outlines a corpus comparison of British and New Zealand speakers' use of the phrases *I don't know* and *I dunno*, along with their use in conjunction with discourse markers. It further investigates whether the phrase appears to be used as an epistemic device or an affective device, and the variety of pragmatic or semantic functions it fulfils in the discourse. With regard to both the full and the truncated phrase, British speakers use the phrase with different frequency and for different reasons than New Zealand speakers. Both phrases are used most often as a hedge or marker of uncertainty, and used predominantly in conversations, followed by meetings and oral history interviews. In addition, the phrase often occurs alone and mostly in the initial sentence position. And while native speakers used the phrases more as politeness devices, learners used them most to express hesitation or uncertainty. Further research could add to these findings by looking at all the meanings the phrases

have in conversation, their use in academic discourse, as well as use of the single variant, *â€ˆDunnoâ€™*. Learners would benefit by having some of this included in language learning materials.



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Keywords

Corpus; British; New Zealand; Epistemic or affective device; Discourse markers

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