
COLLOCATIONS OF DISCOURSE MARKER *I MEAN* IN BRITISH NATIONAL CORPUS

Rika Mutiara¹⁾, Safi Aini²⁾

¹Faculty of Education and Teacher Training, Universitas Esa Unggul
email: rika.mutiara@esaunggul.ac.id, safi.aini@esaunggul.ac.id

Abstract

The study aims at exploring functions, meaning, and pragmatic effects of co-occurrences of *I mean* and conjunctions in British National Corpus. The study applied some principles of a corpus study. The data were analysed using Relevance theory. *I mean* collocates with 5 conjunctions namely *because*, *but*, *coz*, *when*, and *if*. The collocations function to make the ideas clear in order to make the hearers understand them easily and avoid misunderstanding. They, moreover, are used when the speakers give corrections. They are uttered to emphasize arguments and give information as detailed as possible. These collocations in discourse make the hearers aware of information given and finally they pay special attention to the message.

Keywords: *discourse marker, I mean, collocate, corpus*

Abstrak

Kajian ini bertujuan untuk menemukan fungsi, makna, dan efek pragmatik dari kolokasi *I mean* dengan kata sambung dalam British National Corpus. Kajian ini menerapkan beberapa prinsip analisis korpus. Data dalam penelitian ini dianalisis menggunakan teori Relevance. *I mean* membentuk kolokasi dengan 5 konjungsi yaitu *because*, *but*, *coz*, *when*, dan *if*. Melalui kolokasi ini, penutur membuat idenya menjadi jelas sehingga mudah dimengerti. Tujuan lainnya adalah untuk menghindari terjadinya kesalahpahaman. Kolokasi juga muncul ketika penutur membuat koreksi terhadap ucapannya. Kolokasi memberi nuansa makna penekanan argument dan pemberian informasi serinci mungkin. Dalam wacana, kemunculan ini membuat pendengar menjadi sadar akan informasi baru yang diberikan dan memberi perhatian khusus untuk pesan tersebut.

Kata kunci : *discourse marker, I mean, collocation, corpus*

1. INTRODUCTION

The study focuses on an analysis of the characteristics of spoken language to give contribution to English language learning especially as an insight to develop a course related to spoken English. It is necessary for the learners of English to be aware of this issue. To make them recognize it, characteristics of spoken language must be included as a part of English language learning (Mahlberg, 2009). Doing so will be useful to build communicative competencies (Bagarić & Djigunović, 2007). Communicative competencies consist of grammatical, strategic, sociolinguistic, and discourse competencies. Grammatical competency concerns on phonology, morphology, syntax, and semantics. Strategic competency focuses on language learners' strategies on achieving the goals of communication. Speakers use a language in a way that can be understood by the hearers. They consider to whom they speak.

Sociolinguistics competency focuses on sociocultural aspects. Therefore, the language use is in line with social norms. Discourse competency gives emphasize on what language users do to understand and convey meanings to achieve the level of cohesive and coherence in communication.

Spoken language has its own characteristics that make it different from written language. Some features are distinguished ones. They are remarkable in spoken language. One of them is a discourse marker. The function of discourse markers is to connect one part with another one in a discourse. They play a role to monitor, organize, and manage discourse. All participants understand all utterances by doing so. Discourse markers help the speakers to deliver the message to the hearers. Therefore, the hearers can give appropriate responses. This action supports the continuity of communication. One of the discourse markers is *I mean*. Previous studies have been conducted to examine *I mean*. The speakers used *I mean* to reformulate their ideas by giving implicit comments when the speakers give their ideas (Carter & McCarthy, 2006). Due to the nature of spontaneity of spoken language, the hearers hear several times the speakers reformulate their ideas. This is a common phenomenon in spoken discourse. English language learning should accommodate such issues to give the learners the learning process that is closer to the language use. To achieve this goal, *I mean* should be analyzed first to get an understanding of its characteristics. A discourse study should be conducted by examining structural environment surrounding the discourse marker (Aijmer, 2015). The discourse marker might create a pragmatic effect. This pragmatic effect is necessary to be studied.

Discourse markers are common in colloquial language. In some English grammar book, *I mean* occurs in conversation. The conversation tends to be casual. When the speakers produce utterances with *I mean*, they focus on their own ideas. They do efforts to make their ideas clear. The speakers do not focus on understanding other participants. *I mean* becomes a sign of some transition such as wrong utterances, correction of the utterances, or explanation. The speakers give more illustration in their utterances to make their ideas understandable (Brinton, 2007).

The main functions of *I mean* are modification and adaptation done by the speakers towards their utterances (Tree & Schrock, 2002). The functions of *I mean* are divided into interpersonal, correction, observation, and management. The speakers make adaptation to their utterances to express their ideas more accurately. The speakers also monitor hearers' understanding after they give adaptation. The speakers organize their talk by giving comments, adaptation, modification, and topic changing.

I mean is also related to politeness theory. The theory discusses two ideas namely saving and threatening faces (Brown & Levinson, 1987). When the speakers' faces are threatened, they save their faces by adapting their utterances by saying *I mean*. *I mean* could occur in the initial, middle, or final parts of the utterances. Uttering *I mean* repeatedly indicates that they focus on themselves. This action will be considered as impoliteness. *I mean* functions to encourage the hearers to rethink whether their understanding towards the utterances are correct. By uttering *I mean*, the speakers direct the hearers to give attention to specific information without asking feedback explicitly (Schiffrin, 2012). *I mean* also can be used to indicate speakers' decisions to change their minds and the speakers are making their utterances clear through the utterances that they are going to produce (Altenberg, 2001). The speakers create borders. They emphasize which one that they mean. Furthermore, they mention what they feel. In addition, *I mean* is applied to attract hearers' attention.

Studying structural environment of discourse markers can be done by applying phraseology principles. Interactive, interpersonal, and textual functions can be found in a frame. One of the frame markers in phraseology is *I mean*. *I mean* usually occurs in a fixed arrangement. The occurrences form phraseological units such as *well I mean*, *I mean you know*, *because I mean*, and *but I mean*.

Discourse is built by phraseological units. The relation between a unit to another unit is connected by phraseological unit. It creates pattern. The patterns have different frequencies. The pattern shows what possible combinations of words. These patterns have their own characteristics that are realized in particular meaning and structure (Naciscione, 2010). These patterns are analyzed to identify the structural environment of *I mean*.

The present study is a discourse analysis that focuses on meaning and intention of the speakers in conversation. Hearers' responses in terms of meanings and functions are analyzed to achieve the purpose of communication. Analyzing language patterns in discourse gives understanding of the use of language. Based on initial observation of the data on British National Corpus (BNC), *I mean* tend to form collocation with the following conjunctions: *if*, *but*, *coz*, *as*, *because*, *or*, *than*, *when*, *that* and *and*.

Picture 1. Collocations of *I mean* and conjunctions in BNC

No.	Word	Total No. in spoken texts	Expected collocate frequency	Observed collocate frequency
1	if	48,318	37,769	121
2	but	65,839	51,465	131
3	coz	15,876	12,410	22
4	as	27,150	21,223	29
5	because	22,532	17,613	20
6	or	34,827	27,224	28
7	than	9,253	7,253	7
8	when	23,464	18,341	16
9	that	77,820	60,831	52
10	and	261,324	204,273	186

Conjunctions are used to connect phrases with another phrase and clause with another clause (Biber et al., 2007). There are two types of conjunctions namely coordinator and subordinator. Some examples of coordinators are *and*, *but*, and *nevertheless*. *But* is the most frequent conjunction in conversation. Subordinator conjunctions connect adverbial, comparative, and complement clauses. Adverbial clauses are marked with *after*, *as*, *because*, *if*, and *since*. Comparative clauses are signed with *as* and *than*. Complement clauses are connected with *if*, *that*, and *whether*.

Relevance theory is used to analyze how hearers interpret speakers' utterances. The speakers create utterances that are very relevant to make the hearers understand the meanings. The speakers give input from which the hearers make conclusions. The hearers connect some information to conclude what the speakers mean. The speakers support this process by attracting hearers' attention and give input that is easily understood. The speakers create meaningful utterances to be heard by the hearers. The purpose is to make the hearers identify all information

given. When the speakers give all information needed, the speakers and the hearers will stop giving any other information (Blackmore, 2003; Rühlemann, 2006; Wilson & Sperber, 2008). It makes the speakers achieve the optimal relevancy. To be able to be in this level, context, participants, and culture play important roles (Piskorska, 2017). It supports the continuity of communication. Another study used Relevance theory to analyze utterances produced by the teachers. It is found that the teachers expand students' cognitive environment to give communication benefits for the teachers and the students. The students can understand the teachers easier. The teachers do not spend more time to make the students understand. The teachers direct the students to use the context. By doing so, they can spend less time to process teachers' utterances (Xu, 2010). Using Relevance theory means we involve two parties namely the speakers and the hearers.

This study discusses discourse marker *I mean* in British National Corpus. This corpus represent how *I mean* is used by the English speakers in the United Kingdom. The present study focuses on structural environment of *I mean* particularly the patterns of conjunctions that occur near to *I mean*. It can be said that the present study analyzes collocates of *I mean* in the form of conjunctions. Pragmatic effect is studied by analyzing the responses of the hearers when they hear utterances *I mean*. Based on the discussion above, the study sought to answer the following questions: 1) What are the functions of collocations of *I mean* and the conjunctions? 2) What are the nuances of meanings given by the collocations of *I mean* and the conjunctions? 3) What pragmatic effects do occur because of the occurrence of *I mean* in utterances?

2. RESEARCH METHOD

The present study is a linguistic descriptive research that used statistical information available in the corpus. The data were taken from British National Corpus (BNC) provided by Lancaster University at <http://bncweb.lancs.ac.uk/>. The data were gathered by searching collocations of *I mean* and conjunctions. The span of the collocations is four words to the left and right. The collocations are limited only those appear in spoken texts. When the list of the conjunctions obtained, each concordance line was examined to make sure that the occurrence of *I mean* is as a discourse marker. *I mean* as a non-discourse marker will not be counted. To identify the pragmatic effect, hearers' responses were analyzed. The data were examined by using Relevance theory. Utterances in which the discourse markers and the conjunctions occur were analyzed to answer the research questions.

3. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

This section discusses some conjunctions that collocate with *I mean* and their functions in discourse. Then, it is followed by a discussion of the meanings of the collocation. The last part of this section is about the pragmatic effect.

3.1 Conjunctions that collocate with *I mean* and their functions

There are five most frequent conjunctions that occur with *I mean* namely *because*, *but*, *coz*, *if*, and *when*.

3.1.1 *Because*

Because is the most frequent conjunction that collocate with *I mean*. *Because* can occur in declarative and the positions can be in the left and right sides of *I mean*. Speaker B makes the utterance by giving a reason (*I think tonight will be slower, because I mean, it's this Bird's Eye thing, and we all start*). The function of *I mean* here is to manage the discourse (Tree & Schrock, 2002). The speakers manage the discourse in such as way in order to give relevant information to the hearers.

A: *A pleasant evening in the hotel if there is a problem tonight with er.*

B: *The food.*

A: *The food taking too long, we'll ring them up tomorrow, but historically, we've found that by tonight, they've usually sorted the problem out.*

B: *I think tonight will be slower, because I mean, it's the Bird's eye thing, and we all start.*

A: *Oh, it's the Bird's Eye thing as well.*

In the next extract, *I mean* occurs when speaker D gave a response to the question. The speaker gave answer by giving a reason. In this reason, the speaker made his idea clear (*I mean you don't stay young forever*). *I mean* was used to make the hearers give attention to his information by giving implicit comments (Altenberg, 2001). Carter & McCarthy

C: *Feel that's that's maybe a good thing?*

D: *Oh aye, had to be because I mean you don't stay young forever*

E: *Mhm.*

In the extract below, speaker F gave a long explanation. The hearer uttered *hmm* indicated she was listening to. Next, speaker F continued to give his opinion. In this utterance, the speaker said *I mean* and then it is followed by *because (...because I mean you still the situation ...)*. It is done to make the hearers get better understanding to his long explanation. Speaker F made sure that his detailed explanation is clear for the hearers. A lot of information given makes it possible for the hearer to misunderstand. Thus, the speaker clarified by saying *I mean*. The function of *I mean* is to give clarity to speaker's intention (Altenberg, 2001). Brinton

F: *I have a certain degree of sympathy for men because I think you have to take into consideration that men aren't given enough opportunity to feel, se ... , er sympathetic, maybe again is the wrong word.*

G: *Mhm.*

F: *But to feel sorry for women and put their view forward because, I mean, you still the situation of a Friday, when men go down to the pub and you know they're all Jack the Lad!*

In the next extract, H only listened and uttered *mm*. Speaker G responded by continuing the conversation. A question with *I mean* was produced. Speaker H made his question clear by giving a reason (*because I mean it is, it, it, people for whatever ...*). It is done to give more accurate information. The function of *I mean* as a way to give correction can be seen here Brinton (Tree & Schrock, 2002).

G: *But beauty isn't, they say beauty is only skin deep, but what about the million people live in this country who are dealing with sariasis, for whom, that they'll, they'll live their life with no cure, no prospect of cure and er those are people who we only wish, I'm one of them, er, I also run a self-help group in Ayrshire and there are a great many of us who would like to, I think extend a more, more of an understanding to general public, because it's not how we regard ourselves.*

H: *Mmm.*

G: *Unfortunately it's a revulsion by the other members of the public, they think it looks, and we often say we feel like lepers so.*

H: *Well, how do you change that attitude because I mean it is, it, it, people for whatever reason are are drawn to, to admire and and like people who look conventionally attractive?*

G: *I agree with what that lady said down there, I think it's very much erm an inner confidence.*

I mean can be applied when the speaker made clarification. In the extract bellow, the speaker said *I mean I payed it obviously* and then he gave a reason about the thing that he clarified (*because if you live you live in er you live in the land you've got to pl-go by the law*). *I mean* is used to make a correction Brinton (Tree & Schrock, 2002)

I: *But surely if if every pensioner said that it's we can't afford to pay this and didn't pay. I wonder what would happen, they couldn't put everybody it prison for non payment could they?*

J: *I don't know, they couldn't. I thought that about the pool tax anyhow. I mean I payed it obviously because if you live you live in er you live in the land you've got to pl-go by the law.*

Speaker K elaborated her ideas by giving an example. She clarified her explanation by saying *I mean like this last week because of playing golf mainly, and putting weedkiller down, the grass is this high ...*. To make her explanation easier to be understood, she gave an example. The example begins with *I mean like this ...*. In that example, the speaker gave a reason begins with *because*. When the hearer gave a response *mm*, she modified the ideas that she was delivering Carter & McCarthy (Tree & Schrock, 2002).

K: *Not when you you've got. It's different when you have the time though. It's a dif-different thing altogether when you've got time to do that really. Then you can do it when you like.*

L: *Mmm.*

K: *When you're working and you're busy and you've got to do it I mean like this last week because of playing golf mainly, and putting weedkiller down, the grass is this high, and ...*

L: *Mhm.*

3.1.2 *But*

But might occur on the left side of *I mean*. In the following extract, it occurs because speaker N gave detailed information. He gave his opinion. The hearer gave a response by asking a question. Speaker N gave response *yeah*. It indicates that he understands the importance of the question. Then, he continued by saying *but I mean we also, we, I mean we're providing a*

service He realized there is a misunderstanding. The hearer did not catch what he meant. Speaker N made it clear what belongs to his message and which one does not.

N: *You know, young homeless people we pick up on this bus and er we have, we we've sort of ended up pursuing their cases with the housing department and getting temporary accommodation.*

O: *And do you ask there opinions about what they want?*

N: *Eh, yeah.*

O: *Yeah.*

N: *Continually. Continually. But I mean we also, we, I mean we're providing a service for them to allow them to come on off the street, use the bus, right, but at the same time were trying to provide service for them because one of the things that came out in a consultation was, young people didn't feel that there was enough information for them in the town.*

O: *Mmm.*

Speaker O explained in detail. She said *but I mean I'm just speculating ...* . This utterance is spoken at the end of his detailed explanation. It indicated that what she explained is not a real condition. His explanation is a speculation. He contrasted facts and speculation. The purpose is to avoid misunderstanding (Altenberg, 2001). Brinton

O: *And er to what extend your fixed costs are inevitably going to continue increasing.*

P: *Yes.*

O: *And somewhere in there (pause) it may be that's something got to give perhaps. Erm and I don't know whether that's the case either but I think all those factors are rolled in together in terms of future strategy. And er (pause) those are the terms I'm thinking. But I mean I'm just speculating here at the moment.*

P: *Yes.*

In the extract below, speaker Q used *I mean* to contrast what becomes his message. He said *but I mean it was things ...* . He gave detailed elaboration. The function of *I mean* is as a mean to do correction Brinton (Tree & Schrock, 2002). One of the speakers dominated the talk and the other one only gave a short response.

Q: *Yeah, the sort of thing Lucy and I were talking about earlier is, it was just before I went on holiday so my memory is a kind of hazy, it's one where I was going to see the Arts Council and see if they were interested in the idea if they work.*

R: *Mhm.*

Q: *You know this is the initial chat if they're interested, you know, you suddenly put paper and go back to Lucy and say okay, let's write this down.*

R: *Right, right.*

Q: *But I mean it was things like doing questionnaires maybe telephone question phoning people up you know that your three and a half, well not all of them but an example.*

R: *Mhm.*

In the following extract, speaker S talked more than the other. The speaker gave opinion. The hearer responded by saying *mm*. Speaker S continued talking by explaining the background. The

hearer responded by uttering *mm*. He gave clarification by saying *but I mean, if you look at ...*. He also gave an example to make the hearers fully understand what he meant. He also added his opinion to make it more relevant. He uttered *I mean* before giving clarity Brinton (Altenberg, 2001).

S: *I think, I think you do need to look at power, I think that's quite a crucial er.*

T: *Mm.*

S: *Area that we need to think about. A lot of women here have said it's up to women, it's up to mothers.*

T: *Mm.*

S: *But I mean, if you look at where cultural power is who has control over images that we see, books that we read, films that we go and see? I think it's very interesting, the film Cape Fear, that's out at the moment, which says, is the scariest film you'll ever see.*

3.1.3 Coz

The positions of *coz* in an utterance is similar to *because*. *Coz* might occur on the right and left sides. In the following extract, *coz* is followed by *I mean*. Speaker W asked a question and then she clarified what she meant. She corrected her utterances and made her utterance easier to understand (Altenberg, 2001; Tree & Schrock, 2002). Speaker V uttered *mm* that indicates she gave attention. Speaker W continued to give additional information.

U: *But we're gonna have to have somebody.*

V: *Just to programme it.*

U: *Because already it's going on, you can see that.*

V: *Well.*

W: *Do we want somebody who will just do, coz I've got, I mean I can get somebody just to do that if that's all you want done, that could be done easily.*

V: *Mm.*

W: *In braille or print or braille and print or anything you like, put all the lists together.*

V: *Mm.*

The extract below shows how the speaker revised her idea. Speaker X said *he's always happy*. She continued by giving more information. Speaker Y responded by giving his opinion *he is a nice man*. Speaker Y changed the idea that she mentioned by giving information of cause and effect (*Cos he's so happy I mean. He greets you.*). By uttering *I mean*, speaker X revised her idea. She created a new idea of cause and effect relationship (Altenberg, 2001).

X: *He's always happy. He's the best one they've got.*

Y: *He is a nice man.*

X: *Cos he's so happy I mean. He greets you.*

The following extract shows that speaker A used *I mean* to clarify suggestion that he gave before (Altenberg, 2001). A suggested B to be careful. B answered A *yeah*. It indicates she gave

attention to what A said. Speaker A gave reason beyond her message and made sure B understand it.

A: *Mm. Well, just be careful when you go out.*

B: *Yeah.*

A: *Cos I mean it's it's not the bikers. It's the other vehicle that's on the road. Alright?*

A: *Not more than two minutes. John will verify this.*

3.1.4 If

In the next extract, we can see that C and D agree that it is not a maths question. C emphasized that it is an English question. D responded by saying *yeah*. C continued by clarifying his previous utterance. To give more detailed information, C said *I mean if you I don't know ...*. C added more information by saying *I mean* after hearing D's response.

C: *Now I think that's not a maths question.*

D: *No. No.*

C: *That's an English question.*

D: *Yeah.*

C: *I mean if you I don't know if you know of anyone whose standard of English is quite poor.*

D: *No.*

C: *But their maths are okay.*

D: *Mm.*

In the next extract, *I mean* and *if* occur in a question. Speaker E asked a question to speaker F. F gave a response but for E it is not clear. It makes E asked another clarification. F responded again but it is still not clear. To get more accurate information, E asked with *if* clause by saying *but if you I mean if you ...*.

E: *How are you managing er things when you get up tight?*

F: *Well, I'm doing things, you know (unclear). I'm not ...*

E: *Yeah. So, you're keeping yourself occupied?*

F: *Avoiding th ... I've never had I mean (unclear) me I'm (unclear)*

E: *But if you I mean if you ... do get very anxious what do you do?*

F: *I just carry on.*

3.1.5 When

The extract below shows how a speaker gave another example to make her idea clear. Speaker H asked a question *so do you budget quite tightly then?* Speaker G answered *mhm* and then she gave an example in the case of smoking. By giving information of *when you were younger too ...*, speaker I gave a specific illustration. G made a correction towards the idea that she gave before.

G: *Just go out on a Monday with her, cos she doesn't have nursery on a Monday, Tiffany. So we go out and have a meal out. I mean I can have, even afford meals out.*

H: *So do you budget quite tightly then?*

G: *Mhm. I mean even when I smoked I did. I mean I, I could, I could still get what I needed.*

The following extract shows collocation of *I mean* and *when* that indicates adverb of place mentioned by the speaker. *When* is used to deliver a specific information (*I mean nan put that in when you were younger too*). Speaker I gave a detailed information which one belongs to his idea (Altenberg, 2001).

I: *You can't have a cash card with a post office account anyway.*

J: *No.*

K: *No with the Alliance though.*

I: *Yeah but what do you wanna cash card for?*

K: *So I can get money out if I ever need it.*

I: *Yeah but that money is, you've saved and I mean Nan put that in when you were younger too, a lot of it. So I mean it's for when you're older. When you're desperate, you need it, not to just draw out and spend.*

K: *I know. I won't just draw out and spend.*

The extract below shows *when* is used to clarify a particular time. L mentioned a part of a movie that seems nonsense for him. Then, M responded by saying *mm*. L clarified his idea by telling *I mean er when they told* L made it clear what he meant in the previous utterance (Altenberg, 2001).

L: *I've never seen the film.*

M: *It's very good, the film is.*

L: *But I mean round there it's absolutely steeped in history. I couldn't believe it.*

M: *Mm.*

L: *I mean (pause) er when they told (pause) the tales of the (pause) of the seven winds and the (pause) was it seven winds?*

N: *Yeah.*

3.2 The meanings of the collocations

Based on the data on BNC, four conjunctions that tend to occur with *I mean* are *because*, *but*, *coz*, *if*, and *when*. They are used to create clauses. *Because* and *coz* are parts of clauses that show reasons. *But* is a conjunction to show contrast. *If* is a conjunction that work to support the hearers to imagine something and *when* functions to show information of time.

In all clauses, the speakers try to give more information when they make clarification towards an issue. Giving reasons make the clarification sounds stronger. The reasons strengthen the arguments. Clarification accompanied by *if* clause functions to make the topic more detailed by giving particular case. The speakers do these strategies to make the hearers give more attention to the topics. Uttering *when* makes the speakers told specific examples based on information of time of the particular event. All strategies are done to give clear information in

order to make the hearers understand fully what they said. It supports the principles of relevance theory.

3.3 Pragmatic effect of collocations

When the speakers uttered *I mean*, they make the hearers aware that there are some parts that need clarification or revision. It makes the hearers give more attention. The hearers can give agreement by saying *exactly*, *I agree*, *yes*, and *yeah*. The hearers are in line with the speakers. They also might disagree by saying *no*. Other responses are *hm* and *mm*. The responses indicate that the hearers are thinking what the speakers said. They have not decided whether they agree or disagree. Furthermore, in the collocations of *I mean* and conjunctions in the questions, the hearers gave responses by answering the questions.

4. CONCLUSION

The most frequent conjunctions that collocate with *I mean* are *because*, *but*, *coz*, and *when*. Conjunctions are produced to give more information when the speakers clarify their ideas. The speakers make the information as detailed as possible to help the hearers catch their ideas and avoid misunderstanding. Based on the Relevance theory, the speakers try to provide relevant information as much as possible to achieve the purpose of communication. The hearers give various responses. Responses *mm* and *hm* are commonly found. It indicates the hearers pay attention to what the speaker said. Those responses are salient features in spoken discourse. The findings of this research can be applied for the syllabus development in the topic of grammar in spoken discourse. The findings give ideas what responses given to utterances with *I mean* and how the patterns of interaction are conducted. Such findings will make the language learned represent the characteristics of spoken language in communication.

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