

Univerzita Karlova  
Pedagogická fakulta  
Katedra anglického jazyka a literatury

## BAKALÁŘSKÁ PRÁCE

Vágní výrazy typu „placeholder“ v současné neformální mluvené angličtině

Placeholders in present-day informal spoken English

Nina Kuželková

Vedoucí práce: doc. PhDr. Markéta Malá, Ph.D.

Studijní program: Specializace v pedagogice

Studijní obor: B: Anglický jazyk – Matematika

Odevzdáním této bakalářské práce na téma *Placeholders in present-day informal spoken English* potvrzuji, že jsem ji vypracovala pod vedením vedoucího práce samostatně za použití v práci uvedených pramenů a literatury. Dále potvrzuji, že tato práce nebyla využita k získání jiného nebo stejného titulu.

Praha 11. 07. 2022

Chtěla bych poděkovat paní doc. PhDr. Markétě Malé, Ph.D. za velmi cenné rady, veškerou její pomoc a čas, který mi věnovala. Jsem neskonale vděčná.

## **ABSTRAKT**

Cílem této bakalářské práce je popsat jeden z rysů vágního jazyka, tzv. „placeholders“, jakých nabývají forem, jak často se vyskytují v běžném hovoru a v jakých kontextech se používá nejčastěji. Teoretický úvod obsahuje tři části. Nejdříve je popsán vztah mezi vágním jazykem a „placeholderem“. Poté je podrobněji definován vágní jazyk jako takový, stejně jako jeho rysy, typy a aspekty, jmenovitě gramatický, sémantický, pragmatický a sociolingvistický. Poslední část se pak zaměřuje na výplňková slova samotná. V praktické části jsou pak podrobně zkoumány dvě hlavní skupiny těchto výrazů, „*what*-placeholders“ a „*thing*-placeholders“, z morfologicko-syntaktického a pragmatického pohledu. Dále je rovněž diskutována jejich četnost a použití z pohledu genderu mluvčích. Všechny zkoumaný materiál byl excerpován z korpusu *Spoken British National Corpus 2014*.

## **KLÍČOVÁ SLOVA**

Vágní jazyk, „placeholder“, korpus mluveného jazyka, korpusová lingvistika

## **ABSTRACT**

The aim of the thesis is to describe one of the features of vague language called placeholders, the forms they are represented by, how frequently they occur in informal speech and in what contexts they are most likely to be used. The theoretical background comprises three parts. At first, the relationship between vague language and placeholders is discussed. Thereafter, vague language is defined itself and its features, types and aspects, namely grammatical, semantical, pragmatic and sociolinguistic, are explored in more detail. In the third part, the focus is then directed at placeholders themselves. In the analysis, two main groups of placeholders – *what*-placeholders and *thing*-placeholders – are further examined from both the morphologico-syntactical and pragmatic points of view. Furthermore, their frequency and gender-related use is also discussed. All the material analyzed in the thesis has been drawn from the *Spoken British National Corpus 2014*.

## **KEYWORDS**

Vague language, placeholder, spoken English corpus, corpus linguistics

## Table of Contents

Introduction .....	7
1 Theoretical background .....	8
1.1 The relationship between placeholder words and vague language.....	8
1.2 Vague language.....	8
1.2.1 Features of vague language .....	8
1.2.2 Types of vague language .....	10
1.2.3 Grammatical aspect of vague language .....	10
1.2.4 Semantical aspect of vague language .....	11
1.2.5 Pragmatic aspect of vague language.....	11
1.2.6 The sociolinguistic aspect of vague language .....	15
1.3 Placeholders .....	16
1.3.1 Placeholders in dictionaries .....	17
2 Methodology.....	20
3 Analysis .....	22
3.1 Placeholders found in corpus .....	22
3.2 Morphologico-syntactical analysis .....	24
3.2.1 <i>What</i> -placeholders .....	24
3.2.2 <i>Thing</i> -placeholders .....	39
3.3 Sociolinguistic analysis – placeholders and gender.....	47
3.4 Pragmatic analysis .....	49
Conclusion.....	52
References and sources.....	54

### **List of abbreviations and explanations**

CQP = Corpus Query Processor

Spoken BNC2014 = Spoken British National Corpus 2014

--ANONnameF = an anonymous female name

--ANONnameM = an anonymous male name

ANONplace = an anonymized place

--UNCLEARWORD = word that was not audible enough to be transcribed

>> = the beginning of an utterance overlaps in time with the end of the previous one

(.) = a pause, shorter than 5 seconds

(...) = a pause, longer than 5 seconds

SXXXX (e.g. S0255) = A unique number a speaker is assigned (according to the *Spoken BNC2014*) to determine an exact speaker in a corpus

[??] = the id of a speaker is uncertain

... = omission of a part of a dialogue

## Introduction

Vagueness constitutes a pervasive property of spoken language. “Being vague is an important feature of interpersonal meaning and is especially common in everyday conversation” (Carter & McCarthy 2006 :202). The present thesis focusses on “a relatively peripheral but communicatively relevant means of vague language manifestations” (Tárnyiková 2019: 202), namely placeholders, i.e. such expressions as *thingy*, *thingummy*, *whatsit* or *whatchamacallit*.

The aim of the thesis is to identify various forms of placeholders in present-day informal spoken British English, and describe the range of forms they may take as well as their reference. Apart from standing for common nouns, placeholders have also been described as substitutes for proper names or even verbs. We are therefore interested in their semantics and their behaviour in a sentence. The meaning of placeholders, however, is mostly pragmatic, “including the following possible propositions: speaker does not know/has forgotten name/noun, speaker does not wish to use name/noun” (Channell 1994: 162). We will try to identify whether their occurrence is intentional or completely random, resulting from the speaker’s not being able to remember the particular expression.

We will be focusing on placeholders that can be found in the *Spoken British National Corpus 2014* that is featured on the *CQP website*. This material will be explored to find out which placeholders are the most common nowadays and, especially, in what contexts they are used.

## 1 Theoretical background

### 1.1 The relationship between placeholder words and vague language

According to Channell (1994: 157), there are plenty of placeholder nouns in the English language, such as *whatsit* or *thingumajig*. These expressions are used in “informal situations of spoken language use, with written uses mainly being limited to writing which attempts to reproduce informal speech” (Ibid.: 164). They occur in situations when speakers cannot recall what people or things are called, but “also if the speaker wants to intentionally suppress particular naming units for various communicative reasons.” (Tárnyiková 2019: 202) They can be, therefore, considered devices of vague language.

### 1.2 Vague language

“Vague language is a central feature of daily language in use, both spoken and written.” (Cutting 2007: 3)

As pointed out by Channell (1994: 1), ‘good’ language usage is generally believed to involve “clarity and precision. Hence, it is believed that vagueness, ambiguity, imprecision, and general woolliness are to be avoided.” However, “precise language is not necessarily more efficient than vague language” (Jucker et al. 2003: 1738), and “vagueness is a desirable feature of natural languages. Vague words often suffice for the purpose in hand, and too much precision can lead to timewasting and inflexibility” (Williamson 1994: 4869, cited in Jucker et al. 2003: 1738)<sup>1</sup>. Vagueness actually contributes to “naturalness and the informal tenor of our everyday talks” (Tárnyiková 2019: 201).

#### 1.2.1 Features of vague language

What various definitions of vagueness in language share is that “vagueness is a form of unclarity – specifically, an unclarity about the boundaries of things” (Raffman 2014: 2). Using vague language, speakers may “produce utterances without having decided whether certain facts are ‘excluded or allowed by’ them” (Channell 1994: 7). McGee (2018: 48-49) lists the following common functions of vague language:

---

<sup>1</sup> Williamson, Timothy, 1994. Vagueness. In: Asher, R., Simpson, J. (Eds.), *The Encyclopedia of Language and Linguistics*. Pergamon Press, Oxford, pp. 4869–4871.

- “to serve as a focusing device, helping the addressee determine how much processing effort to devote to a given referent;
- to show looser assignment of a characteristic to a conceptual category;
- to express a speaker’s attitude towards a quantity, or take account of the speaker’s assumptions about the addressee’s beliefs;
- to express a speaker’s degree of commitment to a proposition;
- to engender camaraderie or soften implicit criticisms.”

Cutting (2007: 7) points out that “there are emotional reasons for non-processing” words properly and that “sometimes speakers are tired or in too much of a hurry to find the right word”, which then results in non-intentional usage of vague language. This can be summarized as a “social” feature of the vague language.

There is a tendency in taking the vagueness of language for granted during social interactions on the daily basis. It is suggested that expressions can sometimes carry different meaning for different people (Tárnyiková 2009: 115). The pattern of using “universal” vague expressions in spoken language has been discovered as the same vague expressions occur not only in British English but even in Canadian, Hong Kong, Irish and New Zealand accents (Cutting 2013: 190). Jucker et al. (2003: 1739) argue that “vagueness is not only an inherent feature of natural language but also – and crucially – it is an interactional strategy.” There appear to be numerous parts of the communicative situation which are vague purposefully according to the intention of the speaker. Generally, there are four levels of vagueness that the speaker may go through:

1. Mental process of choosing appropriate representations of what they want to transmit onto the listener, i.e. the correct vocabulary of the desired topic, which depends solely on the level of precision of the used expression,
2. Characterization of events and experiences and differentiation of them into their respective categories (e. g. “*I feel stupid.*”) as to aid the addressee with the intended interpretation,
3. Choosing correct quantifier while portraying the amount, frequency, probability, etc. in order to provide more exact description, despite the possibility of the addressee misunderstanding the speaker,

4. Expressing personal attitude towards the topic, e. g. the level of certainty, evaluation of the situation, etc. (Ibid.)

### 1.2.2 Types of vague language

Vagueness can be expressed by various types of devices, such as “dummy” nouns expressing “total vagueness” (Channell 1994: 9) (e.g. *thingy, whatsit*), some generic and collective nouns (e.g. *oodles, heaps of*), or number approximations (e.g. *about/around thirty*) (Ibid.).

### 1.2.3 Grammatical aspect of vague language

Vague language is manifested at various level of language representation, constituting

“a spectrum of heterogeneous items signalling vagueness of expression and vagueness of content, and ranging from the choice of words that are always vague (*thingy, whatsit*) to conceptual vagueness in which the scalarity of vague perception is the result of the interplay of linguistic, situational and pragmatic context” (Tárnyiková 2009: 120)

Tárnyiková (Ibid.) suggests “applying the scale of centre and periphery” as a means of organizing and classifying the various vague language devices. The ‘core’ vague language devices comprise lexical means, which are characterized “by high frequency of occurrence in everyday encounters and a detectable repertory of pragmatically shared communicative functions” (Ibid.) The core vague expressions can be illustrated by vague tags, such as *or something, and stuff*, approximators (*sort of, approximately*), or placeholders (*thingy, Whatnot*)

The ‘periphery’ of vague language representation includes means

“based on secondary functions of morphological categories (cf. plural used to approximate quantity, e.g. *She was years older than he was.*), combination of plural and repetition to achieve higher intensity in vague approximation (*No, it was days and days before that.*); word-formative processes (cf. *-ish*, as in *Let’s say it’s a fairly tallish one. [...]*)” (Ibid.)

or various syntactic deviations and other ‘ad hoc’ instances of vague language.

As illustrated by Tárnyiková (Ibid.: 121), “[c]onceptual vagueness can also emerge from the interplay of discontinuous sentences, false starts, inserted hedges, modals of uncertainty, pause fillers, and so on”, or from the overuse of indefinite quantifiers. Consequently, when analysing vague language, the interplay of “devices from various levels of language representation both segmental and supra-segmental” (Ibid.: 118, cf. also Carter & McCarthy 2006: 205) is to be taken into account. In other words, vague language means can be described both in terms of paradigmatic relations of alternations (*Thingy/Whatsisname/So and so*) but also from the point of view of syntagmatic relations of co-occurrence of various vague linguistic devices (Tárnyiková 2019: 201).

#### **1.2.4 Semantical aspect of vague language**

It is suggested by Cutting (2013: 190) that vague language is semantically expressed through empty nouns, vague modifiers and general extenders. Furthermore, empty nouns can be further distinguished into general nouns (i.e. *thing*), colloquial general nouns (i.e. *thingy*) and general nominal clusters (i.e. *what’s-her-face*).

#### **1.2.5 Pragmatic aspect of vague language**

Channell (1994: 170) suggests that “one use of vague language is to enable a speaker to talk about a subject he or she is not very knowledgeable about, or a subject where he or she does not know the necessary vocabulary.” These speakers then need to find some way how to transmit what they want to say using vocabulary similar in meaning, while staying as relevant as possible. Another use described in there is speaker wanting to be ironical (buying “ludicrous quantity” of souvenirs from Graceland is described using vague language as *a postcard or something*). (Ibid.: 171-172). Some other possible uses of vague language in conversation are listed below.

#### **Giving the right amount of information**

Grice<sup>2</sup> (1975: 45, cited in Channell 1994: 173) suggests that there are two scenarios, from which the speaker chooses one on purpose while wanting to pass on the right amount of information:

---

<sup>2</sup> Grice, H. P. (1975). *Logic and conversation*. In: Cole, P. and Morgan, J. L. (eds.) *Syntax and Semantics*. New York: Academic Press.

1. “Make your contribution as informative as required (for the current purposes of the exchange),
2. Do not make your contribution more informative than required.” (Ibid.)

It is shown on an example of telling the price of a product. On some occasions, an exact price is essential, but, on the other hand, we can say *eighty or so pence* when details are not significant for any of participants of the ongoing conversation. (Channell 1994: 174).

### **Deliberately withholding information**

Sometimes, vague language is used on purpose. Channell declares that some English speakers highlight the extent of the intentional usage of vagueness and that they “suggest that they often use it to withhold information which in some sense might be expected by their hearers in a given situation.” (1994: 178) She demonstrates this “withholding” phenomenon on an example, *three or four days*, where the placeholder is of no importance and kind of extraneous, therefore completely unnecessary to be mentioned in the first place:

*B: could you give me some idea of how long it would take*

*C: well the quote might be done within three or four days but the job won't be done for at least five weeks (Ibid.)*

Another example, *She's about 29 years old*, in this section portrays the intention of the speaker avoiding telling the exact age because “women do not like to be said to be thirty.” (Ibid.)

The last example of the speaker omitting some information, *...I'm not talking about the actor who plays him, Michael whatsisname. He's hardly in the movie anyway...*, tells us about the attitude of the speaker towards the mentioned actor. It can be noticed that all three examples represent “violations of the Quantity maxim, and trigger implicatures.” (Ibid.: 179)

### **Using language persuasively**

This kind of use occurs in a quite particular setting, when speakers “feel that they can be more persuasive by doing so.” (Channell 1994: 179) Supposedly, some economic writers tend to use persuasive language as to support the arguments needed for their analysis. One of the participants of the study done by Channell explains why, for example, *some 200 million tonnes* may be used. It is because the exact number may vary each year and an

estimated amount, therefore, serves sufficiently. They also point out that if they actually quoted a precise number, chosen from one of the years, some readers could be questioning whether they had picked the year on purpose as to fit their narrative. Generally, it can be said that persuasive use of vague language occurs while presenting some collected data. The key role is to remain truthful but, at the same time, support the statistical analysis. (Ibid.)

### **Lexical gaps**

Sometimes, speakers do not dispose the necessary vocabulary they need for carrying their point across to addressees. It does not mean that speakers cannot think about the concepts, though. Probably the most frequent issue is memory – speakers just cannot think of the proper word. It can be illustrated on following example:

*B: 'that it is very hard' is really interesting where you've got virtually every word you've got somebody stopping somewhere*

*E: cos it doesn't flow /B: yeah/ (.) it's difficult to sort of say it in sounds /A: uh hu/ it's sort of difficult to sort of*

*A: on the other hand it's still very few people*

Presumably, the word the speaker meant was *articulate*. There are two possible explanations why the speaker did not use it:

1. Speaker lacked the knowledge of the word,
2. Speaker could not recall the word. (Channell.: 181)

The lexical gap is not limited only to complete nescience but temporal as well. The most common representations of vague language which is used instead are either “a vague category identifier (as *and things*) or a dummy noun (*thingummy*, etc.)” (Ibid.: 182) Some of the respondents of Channell’s research suggest that vague tags are not used in writing due to the author having more time to carefully think about their use of words (Ibid.: 183).

### **Lacking specific information**

Vagueness is quite useful when a speaker lacks some specific knowledge about a particular topic. It can be either mentioned explicitly:

*I can't remember what the figures are but it's something around the twenty per cent mark and it's never changed*

At this point, the speaker is obliged to use vague language since they do not recall detailed information. Somewhat similar scenario in which vagueness is used occurs when the topic refers to a situation from long ago. Thus, the speaker usually confirms this fact. There is another possible context in which we cannot distinguish the precise information and, therefore, need to use vagueness. It happens when the speaker wants to emphasize the fact that they do not possess enough evidence for their statements, for example:

*The exporting tradition came to a sudden end in the early 1970s*

It is suggested that the historical context and occurrences make it difficult to state one distinct date and because of this, the speaker used more vague description (Ibid.: 184-185).

### **Displacement**

Some speakers, while speaking about the past or the future, use vagueness because they have some evidence, though incomplete. Quality newspapers and serious media, such as Guardian or the BBC's radio programme Money Box, according to Channell (Ibid. 186-187), supply some examples:

1. *[article in the Guardian about the death penalty in the 18th century]*

*The records, though far from complete, showed that about 61 people died on the block*

2. *[building societies propose abolishing stamp duty on house purchase]*

*Interviewer: Any idea how much that would cost*

*Spokesman: The cost in this year would be about two hundred and twenty million pounds*

### **Self-protection**

Vagueness can be also used when a speaker wants to protect themselves if they were later confronted about them being wrong, e.g. in this telephone call:

*B: How many houses are there in the street?*

*C: There are [reads from printed details] approximately four houses in the street (Ibid.: 188)*

### **Power and politeness**

During conversation, vague language can sometimes emphasize the politeness of a speaker. Besides some requests of critical remarks, it can also occur, for example, in this scenario:

*[A has given up alcohol, speaker B knows this]*

*B: Would you like a drink – an orange juice or something (Ibid.: 190)*

### **Informality and atmosphere**

Setting and the atmosphere, that goes hand in hand with informal conversations can vary according to who we are speaking to. In a hearty conversation with a close friend, speakers tend to use incomplete utterances, words like yeah and um are also quite common. Some vagueness can also occur in written context, as Channell (1994: 191-192) portrays on the title of a children's book *All about Cuckoos and Robins and Things*. She declares that while the title suggests that the book will cover the topic of birds to some extent, it does not necessarily say, which categories in particular. She also points out that it does seem like more of an attempt of an adult to use language more familiar to children, given the fact they are the intended audience. (Ibid.)

### **Women's language**

While Channell (1994: 192-193), herself, admits that she has zero evidence to confirm that women use vagueness more than men, Boakye (2007: 37) declares that women actually use more vague expressions than men, according to her research.

#### **1.2.6 The sociolinguistic aspect of vague language**

Amiridze et. al (2010: 122) declare that using vague language “is a conscious decision and for that matter, it is not a sloppy expression or a product of careless thinking.” The use of vague language depends on the social context as well as gender (Ibid.: 122-123). Boakye (2007: 69-70) concludes that, despite only a small representative group participating in her questionnaire, women tend to use vague expressions more than men do. However, according to her study, men can be more tentative in some contexts. For example, male respondents of her questionnaire would more likely be vague while being asked out for a dinner date from an acquaintance, while most female respondents would be strictly dismissive. She also argues

that “sex- or gender-specific interactional language is an embodiment of men’s and women’s different social experience.” (Ibid.).

### 1.3 Placeholders

Real-time conversation has been observed to display a tendency towards ‘progressivity’, i.e. “fluent production from one word to the next is massively more common than is delay” (Fox 2010: 5). If a speaker has difficulty in producing a particular lexical item, “they are likely to produce an overt filler [...] rather than just let silence grow.” (Ibid.). Although placeholders may be considered a type of fillers, they “are distinct from other uses of fillers (e.g. interjective hesitators) in that they fulfill the syntactic projection of the turn so far, rather than simply delaying the next word due, in many cases carrying appropriate nominal or verbal morphology.” (Fox 2010: 2) They resemble nouns and verbs in expressing the nominal or verbal grammatical categories (gender, case and number, or person, number and tense), and in occupying the syntactic position normally occupied by nouns and verbs. In addition, they can be used as adjectives or adverbs, albeit less frequently. In this way, the lexically vague placeholders play an important syntactic role in the development of the utterance:

“they display the speaker’s understanding that a lexical item of that category, and in that case, with that gender (or, if a verb, for example, with that argument, in that tense), is now due, given the projected trajectory of the utterance-so-far, and that the speaker thereby displays that although the due-ness is acknowledged, the promise of the projection cannot at this moment be entirely fulfilled, by reason of some difficulty in “finding” the relevant lexical item; and that upon finding the relevant lexical item, the speaker will continue with the utterance as projected.” (Fox 2010: 3)

One of the key features of placeholders is that their spelling is not fixed due to their not being a part of the standard written language.

Several categories of placeholders can be distinguished, based on their referent, namely placeholders replacing names (the whole name or its part, e.g. *Wotsisname called* or *Mavis wotsername called*, respectively), item names (e.g. *thingy*), and “those which perform both

functions” (e.g. *thingummy*) (Channell 1994: 157). Less frequently, they may also refer to “events (e.g. *They might just (pause) erm thingy it and change it to suit them.*), or locations (*the back of beyond; Nowheresville*)” (Tárnyiková 2019: 202).

### 1.3.1 Placeholders in dictionaries

Many examples of placeholders occur in dictionaries. In this thesis, the main focus would be on placeholder nouns that are based on the words *thing* and *what*. Several examples of these, as well as their etymology, meaning, etc., can be found in the online version of the Oxford English Dictionary<sup>3</sup> (n.d.: online):

#### ***Thingamabob, thingummy***

Presumably a form of *thing* or *thingum*, usually representing an affair, a business, a concern or a subject. Most commonly used when speakers cannot be specific (for whatever reason). It can be replaced with *jiggumbob* (an odd or fanciful thing), *jigamaree*, *thingum*, *thingamajig*, *thingummytite* and rarely *thingamerry* or *kickumbob*.

#### ***Thingy***

While Scottish speakers would use this word for the exact meaning of “a little thing”, *thingy* is used much more frequently interchangeably with *thingummy*. “*Thingy* can refer to a person or to an object” (Channell 1994: 158), its use as a reference to people is not generally accepted and may be considered incorrect. Nevertheless, *thingy* can be used when the speaker cannot recall somebody’s name or when it is not deemed as appropriate to say the name during the ongoing conversation. The reasons leading to the replacement of objects with *thingy* are that the word for the object itself does not exist or that the speaker does not know the proper phrase (Channell 1994: 158). Interestingly, speakers who actually know well what they should say properly, sometimes use a placeholder instead “in order not to sound pretentious” (Ibid.).

---

<sup>3</sup> The opening page through which all the words can be found using the section „Quick search“ is available at <https://www-oed-com.ezproxy.is.cuni.cz/>

### ***What-call-ye-him***

These expressions are simply substitutions for names or surnames, either when the speaker does not know the name or when they do not want to mention it. It can be also used when the speaker does not remember a word, however it is not as common. Other possible forms are *what-d'ye-call-'em*, *what-d'ye-call-her*, *what-d'ye-call-him* and *what-d'ye-call-it* and, probably the most frequently used, *whatchamacallit*.

### ***Whatnot, what-not***

The meaning of this expression may vary. It can mean “anything whatever”, “everything”, “anything and everything”, “all sorts of things” but also “anything else” or “various things besides”. Channell (1994: 160) doubts that *whatnot* can be generalized as a commonly used placeholder because of the lack of examples. It is mentioned that *whatnot* appeared in Nigel Watts’ novel, *Billy Bayswater*, twice but other proofs are, unfortunately, non-existent. It is, allegedly, often used only as a “vague tag.” (Ibid.)

### ***What's-her-face, what's-her-name***

Some other possible replacements for a name that a speaker has forgotten, does not want to mention, or does not know in the first place. Spellings containing other pronouns (such as *what's-his-name*), as well as variations of *whatsename* are also possible. Channell (1994: 160) also mentions that “[t]he form *whatsitsname* is used when we refer to something which is described by the pronoun “it”. Those things are usually objects and *whatsitsname* is used similarly as *thingummy* to euphemistically omit some possibly taboo topics like body parts etc.”

### ***Whatsit***

The placeholder *whatsit* is used when the speaker wants to omit an adjective. Usually, in order not to swear, for instance *No chance of it coming to Manchester (laughter) not a chance – not a snowball's chance in whatsit*. Other possible intents may be being hesitant about a foreign terminology, avoiding pretentiousness or distancing oneself from the knowledge. (Channell 1994: 160) According to the Oxford Dictionary, it can be used in the same contexts as e.g. *what's-his-name*.

***Whosit***

Being given the following context, *While we were munching on the eggs and discussing, naturally, the Reverend Whosit, the door burst open and the games master entered...* (Channell 1994: 160) it can be seen that *Whosit* stands for a name.

## 2 Methodology

All of the examples that are analyzed in the thesis have been drawn from the *Spoken BNC2014*. The main aim is to determine which placeholders occur in informal speech, how frequent they are, and what their grammatical categories and syntactical functions are. The placeholders we are concerned with must begin either with *what-* or *thing-* as they are, supposedly, most likely to occur. (Channell 1994: 157).

To find placeholders that contain the word *thing* at the beginning, the query mode was set to “CQP syntax”. The query was formulated as follows: [word="[t,T]hing.+" & word!="[t,T]hings"]. It makes it possible to search for words of any length starting with *thing* (with upper- and lower-case *T/t*), excluding the singular and plural forms of the noun *thing*. A frequency list of all potential placeholders starting with *thing* or *Thing* was compiled using the “Frequency breakdown” command.

Manually, all the occurrences were checked if they are indeed used as placeholders and those which were not suitable were excluded. The instances in which the meaning was similar to *whatnot*, were also excluded from the analysis. The words which were omitted from the analysis are thirteen examples of the word *thing-* and the words *things'* and *thingermes* (the speaker possibly had a slip of the tongue).

The process to find placeholders, which contain the word *what* at the beginning, is fairly similar to the previous one; however, a different query is needed: [word="[w,W]hat.+" & word!="[w,W]hatever|[w,W]hatsoever|[w,W]hats[a,A]pp"]. In this case, there were already three words excluded from the start. After the frequency breakdown is loaded, another manual sorting of words being placeholders or not is required. In the end, all the words, which contain *what* that have been excluded from the analysis were 57 occurrences of the word *whatnot*, all examples of *what-*, *whatev-*, *whate-*, *what-not*, *whatcha*, *whatevs*, *whatsapped*, *What'sh-*, *whateve-*, *whatnotty*, *whats* and *WhatsOn*, one example of each *whatsits* and *whatnotties*, 5 occurrences of the word *whatevers* and 4 instances of the word *whatnots*.

In the analysis, all the suitable examples were manually researched and carefully examined from the morphological, syntactical and pragmatic points of view according to their

respective categories listed in the section 1.2. Some placeholders that were similar in their pronunciation were assessed together. The most frequent placeholders, such as *thingy* with 256 instances, were also manually analyzed and if a pattern could be seen in some of the instances, one illustrative example was described instead of all of them.

### 3 Analysis

#### 3.1 Placeholders found in corpus

In the *Spoken BNC2014*, there are 23 types<sup>4</sup> of placeholders starting with *what-* and 25 types starting with *thing-*. The total numbers of occurrences of placeholders, given in Table 1 and 2, were checked manually to exclude instances where the expressions did not function as placeholders. For example, the query revealed 60 different tokens of *whatnot* but only 4 of them were used as placeholders. The total number of *what*-placeholders (tokens) was 91; with 341 tokens, the *thing*-placeholders were almost four times more frequent.

Placeholders containing <i>what-</i>		
query result	number of occurrences	percent
<i>whatsit</i>	45	49.45 %
<i>whatsits</i>	7	7.69 %
<i>whatnot</i>	4	4.40 %
<i>what's-her-name</i>	4	4.40 %
<i>what's-his-face</i>	3	3.30 %
<i>what's-his-name</i>	3	3.30 %
<i>whatchamacallit</i>	3	3.30 %
<i>whatevers</i>	2	2.20 %
<i>whatchamaflip</i>	2	2.20 %
<i>whatnots</i>	2	2.20 %
<i>what's-the-name</i>	2	2.20 %
<i>Whatsherface</i>	2	2.20 %
<i>whatsisname</i>	2	2.20 %
<i>whatnotties</i>	1	1.10 %
<i>what-do-you-me-call-it</i>	1	1.10 %
<i>what's-her-face</i>	1	1.10 %
<i>what's-its-face</i>	1	1.10 %
<i>what's-the-names</i>	1	1.10 %
<i>whatchacallit</i>	1	1.10 %
<i>whatchamacall</i>	1	1.10 %
<i>whatever-her-name-is</i>	1	1.10 %
<i>whating</i>	1	1.10 %
<i>whaty</i>	1	1.10 %
<b>total</b>	<b>91</b>	<b>100 %</b>

Table 1: The frequency of *what*-placeholders in the *Spoken BNC2014*

<sup>4</sup> In Tables 1 and 2, singular and plural forms of placeholders are listed separately, as individual types, and so are spelling varieties, such as *thingybob* and *thingy-bob*.

The *thing*-placeholders in particular display a surprising spelling and morphological variation. They are generally more frequent than *what*-placeholders; the placeholder *thingy* (with the plural forms *thingies* and *thingys*) is the most frequent placeholder attested in the data-set.

<b>Placeholders containing <i>thing</i>-</b>		
<b>query result</b>	<b>number of occurrences</b>	<b>percent</b>
<i>thingy</i>	256	75.07 %
<i>thingies</i>	39	11.44 %
<i>thingamajig</i>	16	4.69 %
<i>thingybob</i>	6	1.76 %
<i>thing-</i>	2	0.59 %
<i>thingy-bob</i>	2	0.59 %
<i>thingys</i>	2	0.59 %
<i>thingabob</i>	1	0.29 %
<i>thingamabob</i>	1	0.29 %
<i>thingamabobs</i>	1	0.29 %
<i>thingamajiggy</i>	1	0.29 %
<i>thingamidoodles</i>	1	0.29 %
<i>thingamy</i>	1	0.29 %
<i>thingamyjiggy</i>	1	0.29 %
<i>thingemy</i>	1	0.29 %
<i>thingemyjiggy</i>	1	0.29 %
<i>thingie</i>	1	0.29 %
<i>thingied</i>	1	0.29 %
<i>thingum</i>	1	0.29 %
<i>thingumajig</i>	1	0.29 %
<i>thingummy</i>	1	0.29 %
<i>thingymabob</i>	1	0.29 %
<i>thingymajig</i>	1	0.29 %
<i>thingymbobby</i>	1	0.29 %
<i>thingymijig</i>	1	0.29 %
<b>total</b>	<b>341</b>	<b>100 %</b>

Table 2: The frequency of *thing*-placeholders in the *Spoken BNC2014*

The placeholders can be distributed according to what parts they can be divided into. Actually, there are not that many varieties in comparison with the number of occurrences of placeholder words in the corpus. Table 3 and Table 4 below illustrate what parts are the placeholders formed of; the position of the components as well as what alternations occur in each position:

<b>What-placeholders</b>			
<i>what</i>	<i>s / 's</i>	<i>it</i>	
	<i>s / 's</i>	<i>her / his / the / its</i>	<i>name /face</i>
	<i>cha /do</i>	<i>(ma) / you me</i>	<i>flip /call (it)</i>
	<i>ever</i>		
	<i>not</i>		

Table 3: The components *what*-placeholders are formed of in the *Spoken BNC2014*

<b>Thing-placeholders</b>			
<i>thing</i>	<i>y / ie / a / e / u</i>	<i>ma /mi /my /me</i>	<i>jig(gy) / bob(by) / doodles</i>

Table 4: The components *thing*-placeholders are formed of in the *Spoken BNC2014*

## 3.2 Morphologico-syntactical analysis

In this section, we will analyze the sentences in which placeholders occur from the point of both syntax (Dušková et al. 2009: online) and morphology (Ibid.). Spelling variants of placeholders, such as *what's-her-face* and *Whatsherface* will be lumped together in the analysis. Placeholders, which differ merely in their grammatical categories, such as *thingy* and *thingies*, will also be discussed together.

### 3.2.1 What-placeholders

#### *Whatsit, whatsits*

*Whatsit* is the most frequent placeholder containing the prefix *what-*. If we combine both singular and plural, the total number of the examples is 52. It can serve either as a subject or object in a sentence.

The plural forms were used instead of a proper name – the title of a TV show *Double Your Money*, common nouns like “nails” or “fats”, a swear word and, as can be seen in the following dialogue, even some feature of a board game (actually three instances come from the same dialogue but elsewhere):

Example 1

- S0192: *right it can't produce any more raiders but you still got ta damage it twice more so you've got one more roll you've gotta get a (.) no didn't get it*
- S0227: *okay*

- S0192: *so you damaged it once okay? my go*
- S0189: *yeah*
- S0192: *I'm kinda limited as a sympathiser there's certain things that I can't really do  
I can draw*
- S0190: *but*
- S0192: *yeah?*
- S0190: *I haven't taken my whatsits*
- S0227: *I haven't taken a crisis card*
- S0192: *oh you haven't had your crisis card*

The singular forms were more than 6 times more frequent than the plural. Most frequently, they were used instead of some common nouns, e.g. autobiography, apple crumble, etc. A few times, they were used instead of swear words, such as in this scenario:

#### Example 2

- S0517: *>>and --ANONnameM was well he was just getting ready to go he was in  
and out putting stuff in his car so he came up he went well none of us saw that coming  
did we with --ANONnameF?*
- S0517: *and off he went*
- S0517: *cheeky whatsit*

In nine examples, the placeholder is used instead of an adjective, for instance in the following discussion about an eczema:

#### Example 3

- S0115: *no I think it can can do the job (.) it's not really suited for eczema is it but*
- S0037: *>>no*
- S0115: *for eczema g- I don't know hydro whatsit cream hydrocortisone*
- S0037: *>>I've bought you some (.) d'you want it?*

Seven times, *whatsit* replaces a proper name. Sometimes it replaces an anonymous name (both male and female), a film character (i.e. Oliver Stone), a celebrity (i.e. Fatboy Slim) or even a name of a book:

#### Example 4

- S0253: *yeah (...) I've desperately got to finish Jeffrey Eugenides I've got like thirty pages to go*
- S0254: *of whatsit?*
- S0253: *Middlesex*
- S0254: *yeah (.) have you enjoyed it?*

Surprisingly enough, there are two occurrences where *whatsit* represents an exclamation. In this case, it is neither an object nor a subject as it is a prepositional complement in this particular instance:

#### Example 5

- S0278: *mm but if you wanna put a copyright note on it you have to you have to log in print your stuff*
- S0012: *yeah*
- S0278: *er umpteen different places to make it work if you just put a C on the bottom and whatsit it's not worth anything*

To summarize, the frequency of *whatsit* highlights its ability to serve as different word categories as well as syntactical constituents. Besides common nouns, it can replace proper names and adjectives as well. According to what it replaces in a given context, it functions either as a subject, an object, a prepositional complement or a premodifier.

#### **Whatever**

While *whatever* in singular form has been excluded from the analysis due to its use in listing as a vague tag, the plural form *whatever*s seems to be used instead of common nouns, such as “ceremonies” or “shops” as illustrated by the following dialogue:

#### Example 6

- S0198: *oh right you don't know if you eh could do with looking them up and seeing is there anywhere to buy them in --ANONplace if there's any outlet save queueing tomorrow*
- S0230: *these ones online had to be done by*

- S0229: >>yeah
- S0198: *the thirteenth of August yeah I saw*
- S0230: >>mm could do could go into the information centre in --ANONplace?
- S0198: *yeah they might have they might be somewhere because they did say online that you can either buy them now or buy them from one of their nationwide whatevers you might think that somewhere in --ANONplace might sell them*
- S0230: *yeah*
- S0198: *but then sometimes these things aren't that logical and the seller's actually in --ANONplace or something*

In both instances, the placeholder functions as an object in a sentence.

### ***Whatnot, whatnots, whatnotties***

Two of these placeholders – *whatnots*, *whatnotties* – are plural, while the third one – *whatnot* – is a singular form of the former two. The singular form is more frequent in number in comparison with both the plural forms combined by one example. All of the examples represented objects in the sentences.

*Whatnot* occurred as a placeholder four times. It was once used as a replacement for a proper name, “International Women’s Day”, and in the rest of the examples it replaced common nouns, e.g. “results”. The third example, despite clearly being a common noun as well, is very unclear in meaning due to the dialogue being very confusing, as a result of the three speakers talking mostly at the same time:

### Example 7

- S0287: *a bit like Woolworths used to be*
- S0282: *mm*
- S0287: *apart from the sweets*
- S0288: *well twenty P the pick'n'mix was was they invented it didn't they?*
- S0282: >>mm (.) *they did invent pick'n'mix*
- S0288: *the Woolworths in --ANONplace was huge it had three entrances it had --ANONplace street --ANONplace street and whatever that street was called what was the other one was it was enormous*

- S0287: *I don't think you're talking loudly enough*
- S0282: *is it not setting off the whatnot?*
- S0287: *you're not registering very much*
- S0288: *well my voice doesn't work gone cold*

The intended meaning of *whatnotties* is also quite unclear, despite the rather long dialogue covering the topic of heritage. A few lines of the dialogue are omitted from the illustrative dialogue as they are not crucial for the meaning:

#### Example 8

*S0590: you I mean er what's the situation with dear uncle --ANONnameN at the minute? is I mean if*

- *S0589: he seems to rewrite wills quite frequently*
- ...
- *S0589: I thought you came across his will*
- ...
- *S0590: >>something like twenty 0 nine or even earlier than that which left the entire content quote entire contents of the flat to you*
- ...
- *S0589: well it means that he legally owns*
- *S0590: >>not that you're gon na argue about that and demand the entire contents of the flat but that is the stupidity of it*
- ...
- *S0590: >>I just he'd leave somebody now to to to I I take the view I mean when we gave you that money for your for the whatnotties that it's far more sensible for you to have it now and we receive grateful thanks and you get the use of it than after we're six foot under the soil*

*Whatnots* was used twice as a placeholder. Once instead of some common noun, possibly “news”, during a telephone conversation during a game of Scrabble:

#### Example 9

- S0590: *tell me how you spell adieu*
- S0589: *A D E I*
- S0590: *hello darling hi*
- S0589: *>>A D I E U*
- S0590: *we're playing a game of Scrabble so I can't dally too long actually darling but thanks for the message about the the whatnots and what does the letter actually say? (.) --ANONnameM?*
- S0589: *he's hung up*
- S0590: *--ANONnameM?*

The second instance of using *whatnots* occurred during a conversation about the change of the official name of a time zone:

#### Example 10

- S0520: *>>you're not allowed to say GMT*
- S0519: *flipping heck*
- S0521: *they're changing that*
- S0520: *you say*
- S0519: *--UNCLEARWORD vocab*
- S0520: *you say UTC universal coordinated time*
- S0519: *oh get lost*
- S0520: *no it's not get lost it's a it's a symbol of erm colonial*
- S0519: *colonial whatnots oh lord*
- S0520: *>>what do you call it oppression that we have to all measure ourselves according to British*

In this case, the placeholder was used at first because the speaker could not recall the word “oppression”.

#### ***What’s-her-name, what’s-his-name, what’s-the-name, what’s-the-names, whatsisname***

There are 12 examples of *what*-placeholders ending with *-name*. 11 of them are singular, only *what’s-the-names* is plural. The possessive pronoun changes according to the noun it is

meant to represent. *What's-her-name* is used when the unknown or forgotten personal name is female, e.g.:

#### Example 11

- S0320: >>erm so it's English UK is the accreditation body for English language schools (.) and then they have regional (.) erm
- S0443: >>oh that's right cos what's-her-name was gonna be original rep wasn't she?
- S0320: who's what's-her-name?
- S0443: --ANONnameF
- S0320: er no I don't think so

This dialogue covers two examples of the use of the same placeholder, although differently. While the first one functions as a subject in the sentence, the second one is a subject complement of a follow-up echo question. In another example, *what's-her-name* was used instead of a mother-in-law of a family friend of one of the speakers. The last example is very unclear in meaning:

#### Example 12

- S0624: >>--UNCLEARWORD I mean come on X Factor
- S0626: >>it's like er e- X Factor is not meritocratic
- S0624: >>if --UNCLEARWORD anything it's meritocratic
- S0626: it's not meritocratic
- S0624: anyone can have a part
- S0626: >>it's so engineered
- S0624: look at erm
- S0626: so it's so produced
- S0624: >>look at what's-her-name? er
- S0627: the G- sorry the Go- it's called the it's called
- S0626: >>Susan Boyle? that's Britain's Got Talent
- S0627: it's called the Go-
- S0624: >>--UNCLEARWORD
- S0627: it's called the Goliards

It seems that the true meaning of the placeholder is --UNCLEARWORD, which is very unfortunate. The placeholder serves as an object in the sentence.

Placeholder *what's-his-name* was used all three times instead of a proper name. Twice as a subject, once as an object. Also, two times instead of a different anonymous male name and in the third example, it represents the president of Syria, Bashar al-Assad:

#### Example 13

- S0511: >>the the S- S- Syrian
- S0514[??]: >>Syria yeah
- S0511: no right so neither erm er what's-his-name president Bashar or or the opposition forces are actually in the room

*What's-the-name* was used both instead of female and male proper names. The female name was anonymized, while the male represented a first name “Cameron”:

#### Example 14

- S0579: I was reading about er what's-the-name Cameron

Interestingly enough, the placeholder *whatsisname* was used in the same dialogue twice, both times as a premodifier of the substantive *bit*. Therefore, it replaces an adjective. In the dialogue, a mother is talking with her daughter about a bicycle and the placeholder is used instead of some part of it, possibly a front derailleur:

#### Example 15

- S0231: cos they'll just take the wheel off and take the frame
- S0198: >>and take the frame yeah
- S0229: >>--UNCLEARWORD wanna go through the whatsisname bit
- S0198: >>cos it's the frame that's worth the money I suppose
- S0229: >>put it through the whatsisname bit
- S0198: yeah
- S0229: where the pedals are in through the back wheels and the --UNCLEARWORD

The only occurrence of the plural form, *what's-the-names*, is, again, unclear. The placeholder serves as a prepositional complement of *of* but the exact meaning cannot be determined. The speakers are talking about a friend, who is living and working in Scotland:

#### Example 16

- S0579: *no no Scotland yeah cos Scotland's very much bigger than it looks on the map isn't it?*
- S0454: *yes that's right it's deceptive cos you start driving and you think oh that's not far*
- S0579: *>>just until you make it to the top then you find you've covered a hundred miles before you know where you are*
- S0454: *>>that's right and it is far*
- S0579: *yeah*
- S0454: *yes*
- S0579: *course --ANONnameM was he worked on some of the what's-the-names up there didn't he er?*
- S0454: *yes mm rigs*
- S0579: *>>oi- s- oil oil something*
- S0454: *yes*
- S0579: *yes*
- S0454: *yes in Aberdeen cos that's where they're all based*

#### ***What's-his-face, whatsherface, what's-her-face, what's-its-face***

All the seven instances of these placeholders are in singular form. Similarly to the placeholders, which end with *-name*, they also change the personal pronoun (or the definite article) according to the word they replace. If we ignore the spelling, both “her” and “his” variants were used 3 times, while “its” only once. The “his” variants were used instead of a name of a computer game character, an English composer Andrew Lloyd Webber and an anonymous male name, therefore, always instead of a proper name, for example:

#### Example 17

- S0189: *look at that realistic crow- crowd in the background*

- S0192: *oh she's Peanut (.) diddy Kong used to be quite good (.) donkey well in Donkey Kong (.) what? oh is this that thing you can steer?*
- S0189: *yeah*
- S0192: *wasn't it what's-his-face that had that? how do you get out of this?*
- S0192: *oh look at that rocket boosters (.) ah (.) wow that hurt (...) you just gonna keep doing that yeah?*

The “her” variants were actually used only in two contexts. In all instances they, again, replaced proper names – a Scottish author Muriel Gray (her first name was misspelled in the corpus transcription) and a female character from a film<sup>5</sup>, as can be seen in the following dialogue:

#### Example 18

- S0084: *yeah he was in the in the because that was when he saw the bullfighter that was when they met in the th- they were all there watching the ballet (.) and th- and Benigno was there as well cos then Benigno went away and told Alicia oh I went to see this amazing ballet like the women throw themselves around*
- S0041: *>> (.) ohhh (.) and he was already there*
- S0084: *he was there (.) and Mistress Whatsherface she was there*
- S0041: *mistress Whatsherface*
- S0084: *yeah*
- S0041: *yeah that's her name*
- S0084: *that's definitely her name (.) um but who was the one was it that when that black and white scene was happening that's when I woke up i- was that Benigno raping her?*

The only placeholder containing the possessive pronoun “its” was used as a replacement for some common noun, e.g. “hell”, in a conversation where two speakers are driving in a car and they decide which restaurant they want to stop by:

#### Example 19

---

<sup>5</sup> ALMODÓVAR, P. (Director). (2002). *Hable con ella*. [film] El Deseo S.A.

- S0607: *just park anywhere oh it's Sunday I wonder if it's even open?*
- S0644: *I think it's closed actually*
- S0607: *imagine they're both closed damn it in bloody what's-its-face we should have picked up loads of shit*

Thus, possessive pronouns that carry the information about gender – *his*, *her* – tend to be used instead of proper names, whereas more ambiguous – *its* – is more likely used instead of common nouns.

### ***Whatchamaflip***

These two placeholders can be found right after one another in the same example, where two speakers are planning a birthday meal:

#### Example 20

- S0255: *yeah rib-eye steak (.) crop- Cropwell Bishop Stilton*
- S0256: *that sounds posh*
- S0255: *>>that's probably something posh*
- S0256: *doesn't it*
- S0255: *yeah*
- S0256: *it's well it's just cheese really so you know*
- S0255: *yeah (.) it is (.) then the ultimate*
- S0256: *whatchamaflip*
- S0255: *whatcha-* (.) *maflip* (...) *right yeah and then*
- S0256: *uh*
- S0255: *mm (.) --ANONnameF*

Both represent the same proper name and function as objects. The short pause of one of the speakers, S0255, caused the splitting of the placeholder into two separate parts in the transcription, despite not changing the meaning. Because of the splitting, the corpus can find only the *whatcha-* and/or *maflip* separately.

### ***Whatchamacallit, whatchamacall, whatchacallit***

These three placeholders differ very slightly spelling-wise. Meaning-wise, they seem to be used in very similar manner with only slight differences that are caused by the lack of context, as there are many unclear words in the transcriptions. *Whatchacallit* represents a common noun of unclear meaning:

#### Example 21

- S0558: *she said oh --ANONnameF she said I've have an invite to --ANONnameF's on Friday for a*
- S0517: *>>mm*
- S0558: *you I think he said Pamper Shed thing for a whatchacallit are you going? and I went oh well I haven't had an invite yet but I don't do Facebook so mine generally come later by text erm and I said oh well I well I think so I can't see any I dunno I said I'll have to check forgetting we were going out*
- S0517: *>>right*

*Whatchamacall* is also used only once as a common noun; however, in this case, presumably, instead of the word “artist”:

#### Example 22

- S0589: *how are --ANONnameM and --ANONnameF?*
- S0590: *in good form we took them up a prezzie the other day actually which was a erm a Ravilious erm whatchamacall*
- S0589: *what's a Vermilious?*
- S0590: *a Ravilious Ravilious*
- S0589: *what's a Ravilious?*
- S0591: *a Ravilious*
- S0589: *what's a Ravilious?*
- S0591: *--UNCLEARWORD artist*
- S0589: *really? never heard of him (.) ...*

In contrast, *whatchamacallit* was used three times and it was always later explicitly stated, what word was originally intended. Surprisingly, all of the examples differ in the way the

placeholder was, at last, explained. In the first case, it is another speaker who discloses the common noun – a name of a mobile phone application, Snapchat:

#### Example 23

- S0344: --ANONnameF --ANONnameF will get upset if you erm
- S0345: you came to this she had this ME tea party
- S0344: >>do her erm fucking whatchamacallit her erm
- S0336: her Snapchat today wanted me
- S0344: don't
- S0336: made me want to throw my phone at --UNCLEARWORD
- S0345: oh –UNCLEARWORD

Although the situation in the second example is similar to the previous one – another speaker unveiling the proper word, this time it is actually an adjective that is replaced with a placeholder:

#### Example 24

- S0607: do you remember how cold sorry pardon me how cold it was in the in the erm?
- S0644: greasy spoon café
- S0607: actual spoon how cold it was in the erm whatchamacallit woods?
- S0644: what woods? in the in the red forest?
- S0607: the redwood oh it's difficult for me to say anything cos I was like coffee house greasy spoon safari ah

While there is, again, a common noun replaced with *whatchamacallit*, this time it is the same speaker that recalls the word. Interestingly enough immediately after pronouncing the placeholder:

#### Example 25

- S0274: that's it yeah so er but that's what I love off --ANONnameF because you know she's (.) things don't bother her in the same way it does me
- S0253: >>yeah yeah

- S0274: >>*and I think that goes well and (.) I think what again it's it's something (.) I think like with the master's erm cos you know for my erm whatchamacallit my dissertation I got a sixty-seven*
- S0253: *that's really good*

To conclude, the variants of *whatchamacallit* are mostly used instead of common nouns and it is not unusual not to be able to determine the intended meaning.

### ***What-do-you-me-call-it***

In the corpus, there is one occurrence of a placeholder *what-do-you-me-call-it* that represents a common noun – a kitchen utensil called whisk. Syntactically, the placeholder represents an object in the sentence. Another possible interpretation is that the placeholder represents an adjective, that further describes the whisk. If this was the case, it would syntactically function as a modifier of the object.

#### Example 26

- (...) S0520: *very nice dad*
- S0521: *what*
- S0520: *it's just very funny to see you with a kn- with doing anything culinary*
- S0521: *what? right*
- S0520: *cool*
- S0519: *we need the erm need the what-do-you-me-call-it whisk*

### ***Whatever-her-name-is***

While *whatever* by itself was excluded from the analysis, it appears in the following dialogue as a part of a placeholder which represents a proper name – a surname, to be more specific.

#### Example 27

- S0288: *yeah Something in the Air*
- S0282: >>*Thundercl- yeah Thunderclap Newm- Newman not Newton yeah Something in the Air can't remember how that goes (.) but anyway erm (.) very familiar voice and I looked at him he looked like a s- leprechaun with a great big ginger curly beard and and really ugly and small and jumping about with his with*

*his erm instrument and everything and er I thought j- that could be one of those scams where it really is a musician and they're seeing who notices them and who registers the fact that*

- *S0287: well I didn't Tamsin whatever-her-name-is the violinist*
- *S0287: she was busking outside Waterloo Station in that tunnel that goes from Waterloo Station to the bridge*
- *S0282: >>oh really?*

### ***Whating***

As illustrated in the following example, *whating* represents a verb in continuous form:

#### Example 28

- *S0654: well I'm looking as you've been bragging me about for a long time*
- *S0653: that I've been what whating you about? ragging you about?*
- *S0654: bragging*

Notably, *whating* being a verb is quite a rare occurrence, as placeholders in this section of analysis were, until this point, exclusively nouns or adjectives.

### ***Whaty***

The only occurrence of *whaty* represented a common noun “short form”:

#### Example 29

- *S0520: minutes or something of spoken conversation and it doesn't matter what you're talking about who you're talking about it they they you'll have to fill in a very short form later but erm*
- *S0519: a whaty?*
- *S0520: short form*

### 3.2.2 *Thing*-placeholders

#### *Thingy, thingys, thingie, thingies, thingum*

The placeholder *thingy* is the most frequent placeholder to occur in the corpus with 256 tokens. There are few other similar singular form variants, which differ in the suffix. While the plural should change the suffix *-y* to *-ies* regularly, in two instances, the spelling is actually *-ys*. If we combine all the singular forms, there are 258 instances. The plural forms have been noted 41 times. For the most part, all the placeholders tend to function as objects in the sentences. Few exceptions can be found in the examples below, such as one instance of *thingy* functioning as a subject complement. The placeholder *thingy* is most frequently used as a replacement for common nouns, more specifically, 193 times. Mostly, it replaced some kind of a device (or its component), an event (e.g. “party”), food (e.g. “fruit”), swear words or even a family member (e.g. “dad”). Once, it stood for “set” in this case:

#### Example 30

- (...) S0567: *do you remember being five?*
- S0622: *I can only remember one time when I was five or two (.) when I was five*
- S0567: *which time is that?*
- S0622: *when erm I only can remember it on my birthday when I was five*
- S0567: *what on your fifth birthday or on your sixth birthday?*
- S0622: *fifth (.) I think I remember --ANONnameM got me this Hello Kitty kind of thingy but now I've like (.) I've gave some of the beads to mummy and I don't know where the rest of the thingies are (.) or I've just lost everything and I remember I got that little Hello Kitty Hello Kitty set that I got from (.) somebody that Hello Kitty that I got for my birthday that we cleared out of my room*

43 times, the placeholder *thingy* was used instead of proper names, usually anonymous or some celebrity names, i.e. Snoop Dog, Andrew Garfield or Emma Stone. There were also a few occurrences where *thingy* replaced a country or a city. For example, it was used as a replacement of the capital city of Lithuania, Vilnius:

#### Example 31

- S0494: *hard lines (.) I'll lay a three red train please? keep it simple not over complicated*
- S0497: *>>Zagreb to (.) thingy*
- S0494: *Vilnius*
- S0497[??]: *oh (.) oh*

*Thingy* also replaced some adjectives, 14 times in total, such as “thin”, “automatic”, “prescription”, etc. In this dialogue, it replaced an adjective “projecting”:

Example 32

- S0073: *where are you going to project onto?*
- S0018: *there's a white wall right at the back outside*
- S0073: *ah*
- S0018: *so what I'll do is I'll paint over uh and if I can I may I may like buy a a thingy screen uh a proper projection screen or or maybe just a sheet that is like tensioned*
- S0073: *uh-huh*

Interestingly enough, there were two occurrences of *thingy* replacing adverbs. Both times, it replaced “like”:

Example 33

- S0653: *--ANONnameF you're not gonna eat those Go Ahead thingy snack things are you?*

*Thingy* was also used as a verb in 4 sentences. Once instead of “stop”, once instead of “rule” and twice instead of “died”; however, it was uttered in two very different scenarios. The first one is discussing the passing-away of an acquaintance:

Example 34

- S0081: *I think that's still there (.) but the wo- the woman who eh thingy she's sold it now the one who used to own it*
- S0090: *oh has she (.) cos it was family --UNCLEARWORD a family owned thing*
- S0081: *mm*
- S0090: *--UNCLEARWORD she died (.) she was very old*

Whereas the second time, in a conversation about a character from some series, it was either used instead of “died” as well, or as a replacement of a proper name – the surname of a girl named Nicola:

#### Example 35

- S0618: *I haven't yet erm because I've crammed all of River which I found on the USA Netflix*
- S0619: *River I feel like I've heard of it*
- S0618: *>>--UNCLEARWORD (.) yeah it was on BBC over Christmas*
- S0619: *is it (.) the one with? oh god (.) sort of*
- S0618: *your woman who was in Spooks?*
- S0619: *yeah the sort of plain looking woman with brown hair and er dead*
- S0618: *>>Nicola thingy (.) yeah and the gorgeous eyes*
- S0619: *either she's dead or he's dead*
- S0618: *she's dead*
- S0619: *she's dead*

The plural form, *thingies*, was almost always, 37 times to be exact, used instead of a common noun. Only twice it replaced a proper name, once an anonymous one, the second time a character from the *League of Legends*, “Nasus”:

#### Example 36

- (.) S0336: *that's he looks like one of them not a sphinx but Egyptian thingies*
- S0337: *Nasus?*
- S0336: *yeah*
- S0337: *yeah he's erm he's a dog*
- S0336: *yeah but he's one of them Egyptian ones*
- S0337: *yep exactly (.) he's exactly that*

Both *thingys* and *thingum* replaced common nouns. *Thingie*, on the other hand, replaced the proper name “Salvation Army”.

#### Example 37

- S0252: --ANONplace band
- S0369: >>we pass Salvation Army
- S0251: yeah
- S0369: >>on the way back don't we?
- S0251: yes
- S0369: mm
- S0251: so it's still quite popular round
- S0368: >>mm
- S0251: >>here
- S0369: >>mm
- S0368: does the thingie still have the fair? you know on the er (.) where we used to go?
- S0251: >>no

To conclude, thanks to the number of occurrences, *thingy* represents a variety of words, despite common nouns being by far the most common.

***Thingamajig, thingamajiggy, thingamyjiggy, thingemyjiggy, thingymijig, thingumajig, thingymajig***

*Thingamajig* has probably the most variable spelling to be found in the corpus. In the original spelling, there are 16 instances of use. If we add all the other variants, there are 24 examples in total. All the spelling variants are singular in number and syntactically represent mostly objects in a sentence. There were 10 examples of *thingamajig* replacing a common noun, such as a “jalfrezi” in this conversation about ordering an Indian food:

Example 38

- S0198: so maybe I'll get the tikka masala or a chicken balti
- S0230: oh I think I might have had the rogan josh last time when you had it didn't I?
- ...
- S0192: was it good? I'm definitely going for that then
- S0198: alright me too
- S0229: so we'll get three of them and a chicken thingamajig

- *S0230: a jalfrezi*

The rest of the examples, six in total, as well as the placeholders *thingymijig*, and *thingymajig* were replacements for proper names. *Thingymijig* was used instead of an anonymous place. *Thingamajig* once replaced “WhatsApp”, three times an anonymous name, once America and, finally, an unspecified country:

#### Example 39

- *S0530: games like that are it's pretty bad but yeah (...) oh I hope erm that guy replies to me tomorrow*
- *S0529: mm*
- *S0530: because he keeps*
- *S0529: >>I do*
- *S0530: >>coming online and coming offline but he doesn't actually see my thing so maybe*
- *S0529: >>no*
- *S0530: it's it's like three in the morning in erm thingamajig*

*Thingumajig*, *thingamajiggy*, *thingamyjiggy* were all used instead of common nouns and served as objects in their respective sentences. *Thingamajiggy* replaced “apple crumble” and *thingemyjiggy*, supposedly, replaced a “social welfare payment” as depicted in the following dialogue:

#### Example 40

- *S0229: that I mean when when --ANONnameN was at home with her (.) with her wage (.) --ANONnameM's money and the money she's getting off the*
- *S0198: yeah*
- *S0229: single parent thingamyjiggy*

The last placeholder in this section, *thingemyjiggy*, is the sole replacement of an adjective, which functions as a subject complement:

#### Example 41

- *S0167: I'd rather be in prison than er be on the battlefields*

- S0104: (...) well I don't think that's very (.) erm (.) I keep forgetting words thingemyjiggy of you
- S0167: erm I know what you mean patriotic
- S0104: patriotic that's the word

### ***Thingybob, thingy-bob, thingabob***

Another three placeholders that differ very slightly are, again, all singular. Most frequently, the spelling *thingybob* is used. In the corpus, there were found 6 examples. Three of them represented proper names (e.g. “Boleg”) and two represented common nouns (e.g. “pigeon”). An anonymous name functioned as a subject, the rest of them were objects. The last example was a replacement of an adjective and functioned as a part of a subject:

#### Example 42

- S0115: >>you can die of you can die of being off it as well cos the body the body uh is used to it and um
- S0037: >>the shock? What's it called again? Thingybob tremens
- S0115: so it gets all and delirium tremens is the is the shakes
- S0037: that's right yeah

*Thingy-bob* occurred twice, while *thingabob* only once. Two of the examples were representations of common nouns functioning as objects, e.g. “tenancy agreement” as can be seen in the following example:

#### Example 43

- S0015: no you haven't but if you're staying with family you don't need a
- S0281: >>oh ri- oh really?
- S0015: a a thingabob
- S0281: okay
- S0015: so you know (.) we we don't have a a or or --UNCLEARWORD er most people don't have a tenancy agreement if they own it do they?

The last remaining example represents an adverb and replaced the word “aside”:

#### Example 44

- S0037: >>but then Mr Belding (.) but thingy-bob from that

***Thingamabob, thingamabobs, thingymabob, thingymeobobby***

All of these placeholders occurred only once in the corpus. They are only marginally different from each other spelling-wise. Also, three of them are singular forms, while *thingamabobs* being the only plural. All the times, the placeholder functioned as an object and represented common nouns such as some kind of a messaging app, “wind catcher”, “self-checkout machine” and a “squadron officer”.

Example 45

- S0255: yeah it's like you with the cadets wasn't it? you
- ...
- S0317: yeah but you're not gonna go back as a (.) officer are you? CO thingymeobobby are you?
- S0318: no
- S0317: squadron officer that's what I was looking for

***Thingamy, thingemy, thingummy, thingamidoodles***

Another placeholder that varies only in one vowel in intervocalic position (with the exception of *thingamidoodles*, which adds an extra root *-doodles*), was scarce as well. Each spelling has only one example in the whole corpus. *Thingemy* is the only one to represent a proper name, again anonymized while functioning as a subject. The other three examples represent some kind of breathing aid, “pounds” and, as the following dialogue suggests, a post office. All serve as objects in their respective sentences.

Example 46

- S0436: oh bother
- S0435: what?
- S0436: oh just speaking of me speaking of my going into town thingummy
- S0435: forgot to buy something?
- S0436: no I forgot to post a letter

### ***Thing-***

Two occurrences of the word are both replacements for a common noun that function as objects. One example replaced “pieces” and the other one “cover” as depicted in the example below.

#### Example 47

- S0198: (.) *ah you found my hot wat- it's a puppet (.) it's also a hot water bottle holder (.) mm --UNCLEARWORD*
- S0199: >>*have you got blankets and things?*
- S0198: *yeah we do have some blankets we've got a couple of the ones that are in the sofa I've got a couple more of those and*
- S0199: >>*yeah*
- S0198: *I've got some extra duvets thing- er duvet covers*

### ***Thingied***

The placeholder *thingied* functions in a sentence as a predicate. The meaning would be probably something along “saved”.

#### Example 48

- S0208: *can I have a crust that you leave please?*
- S0211: *you can have the next one*
- S0208: *okay*
- S0202: *after --ANONnameF*
- S0211: *no you can have the next one and I'll have the one after because I've already had a slice*
- S0208: *oh okay thanks cool cool thanks whose go is it?*
- S0202: *--UNCLEARWORD*
- S0208: *anyone? I feel like it should be you*
- S0221: *it's --ANONnameF's go I --UNCLEARWORD it I thingied it for her*
- S0222: *oh yeah*
- S0208: *thank you*

### 3.3 Sociolinguistic analysis – placeholders and gender

The corpus collects quite a lot of data about each speaker. In our case, we are interested only in the gender of the speakers to be able to verify if, or to what extent, it constitutes a factor relevant for the use of placeholders, as suggested in the theoretical background Section.

#### **What-placeholders**

The number of placeholders used by female speakers is more than three times higher than that used by male speakers. More precisely, male speakers uttered 24.18 per cent of what-placeholders, whereas female speakers uttered 75.82 per cent. Interestingly enough, the men did not utter any *what*-placeholder containing the possessive pronouns *her* or *its*. The distribution is summarized in the following table:

<b>The distribution of <i>what</i>-placeholders</b>		
<b>placeholder</b>	<b>number of occurrences according to gender</b>	
	<b>male</b>	<b>female</b>
<i>whatsit</i>	8	37
<i>whatsits</i>	5	2
<i>whatnot</i>	0	4
<i>whatevers</i>	0	2
<i>whatnots</i>	0	2
<i>what's-her-name</i>	0	4
<i>what's-his-face</i>	1	2
<i>what's-his-name</i>	2	1
<i>whatchamacallit</i>	1	2
<i>what's-the-name</i>	2	0
<i>Whatsherface</i>	0	2
<i>whatsisname</i>	2	0
<i>whatnotties</i>	0	1
<i>what-do-you-me-call-it</i>	0	1
<i>what's-her-face</i>	0	1
<i>what's-its-face</i>	0	1
<i>what's-the-names</i>	1	0
<i>whatchacallit</i>	0	1
<i>whatchamacall</i>	0	1
<i>whatchamaflip</i>	0	2
<i>whatever-her-name-is</i>	0	1
<i>whating</i>	0	1
<i>whaty</i>	0	1

<b>total</b>	<b>22</b>	<b>69</b>
--------------	-----------	-----------

Table 5: The distribution of *what*-placeholders according to gender occurring in the *Spoken BNC2014*

### **Thing-placeholders**

In the case of *thing*-placeholders, the difference in number was not as big as in *what*-placeholders. The number of placeholders used by female speakers was slightly more over twice as much as the number spoken by male speakers. Even in this case, there can be seen a pattern in the placeholders spoken by men. Aside from *thingy* and *thingies*, they seem to tend to use placeholders containing *-a* or, in two instances, *-u* after *thing-* rather than other vowels as illustrated in the table below:

<b>The distribution of <i>thing</i>-placeholders</b>		
<b>placeholder</b>	<b>number of occurrences according to gender</b>	
	<b>male</b>	<b>female</b>
<i>thingy</i>	81	175
<i>thingies</i>	11	28
<i>thingamajig</i>	4	12
<i>thingybob</i>	0	6
<i>thing-</i>	0	2
<i>thingy-bob</i>	0	2
<i>thingys</i>	0	2
<i>thingabob</i>	0	1
<i>thingamabob</i>	1	0
<i>thingamabobs</i>	0	1
<i>thingamajiggy</i>	0	1
<i>thingamidoodles</i>	0	1
<i>thingamy</i>	1	0
<i>thingamyjiggy</i>	1	0
<i>thingemy</i>	0	1
<i>thingemyjiggy</i>	0	1
<i>thingie</i>	0	1
<i>thingied</i>	1	0
<i>thingum</i>	1	0
<i>thingumajig</i>	1	0
<i>thingummy</i>	0	1
<i>thingymabob</i>	1	0
<i>thingymajig</i>	0	1
<i>thingymeobobby</i>	0	1

<i>thingymijig</i>	0	1
<b>total</b>	<b>103</b>	<b>238</b>

Table 6: The distribution of *thing*-placeholders according to gender occurring in the *Spoken BNC2014*

### 3.4 Pragmatic analysis

In this part of the analysis, we will determine the contexts of use of the placeholders according to their pragmatic functions as was discussed in more detail in the theoretical part (in Section 1.2.5).

#### **Givng the right amount of information**

There were some occurrences of using placeholders intentionally. In these situations, there was no need to use the precise words and vague expressions were sufficient. One of the examples of such use can be noted in the discussion while playing a board game below:

Example 49

- *S0190: I gave you that*
- *S0227: oh yeah yeah that's right yeah*
- *S0190: right we'll discard that one and we'll use the foo- food shortage we choose either to minus two food or minus one food and then discard two skill cards and I'm the president and the player so what do I do? I have to do five?*
- *S0192: sorry I missed you there yeah if you're the player president and the player you have to discard five*
- *S0227: there's a there's a raptor at the bottom of that what does that mean?*
- *S0190: and a whatsit thing to go up the ladder*

#### **Deliberately withholding information**

This category was also noted. For instance in Example 18 above, the placeholder clearly illustrates the attitude of the speaker towards the film character. While we do not know which female character is the topic of the conversation, the other speaker undoubtedly knows exactly which one.

### **Using language persuasively**

This particular category did not occur in the corpus. As suggested in Section 1.2.5, it is, supposedly, due to the informality of the corpus used in the thesis and also due to the focus on two particular groups of placeholder words.

### **Lexical gaps**

The vast majority of the examples by far can be classified in this category. Since the corpus used for the analysis consists of mostly native British speakers, the main reasoning behind using the placeholder was not recalling the right vocabulary as is illustrated, for instance, in Example 42. In such cases, the placeholder was usually used instead of a word of foreign origin (Latin in ex. 42).

### **Lacking specific information**

This category was not so common; however, in this conversation about an anonymous woman, the speaker who used a placeholder at first instead of her name used a question tag to indicate their lack of confidence whether they are right or not. The second speaker did not even know whom the first speaker had been talking about at the beginning:

#### **Example 50**

- S0320: >>erm so it's English UK is the accreditation body for English language schools (.) and then they have regional (.) erm
- S0443: >>oh that's right cos what's-her-name was gonna be original rep wasn't she?
- S0320: who's what's-her-name?
- S0443: --ANONnameF
- S0320: er no I don't think so
- S0443: oh right
- ...
- S0320: no she hasn't organised the conference for twenty years
- S0443: >>oh right S0320: she's organised (.) she's been working in TEFL for twenty years
- S0443: oh right

### **Displacement**

One of the very scarce instances, where this category can even be considered occurs in Example 38. It requires looking at more context, especially the whole beginning of the process of ordering, when the family talked about the meals for the first time. It can be noted, that one of the speakers does not know, what exact meals they had been ordering and therefore has some troubles recalling the foreign term “jalfrezi”.

### **Self-protection**

There were not noted any occurrences that implied a speakers attitude to be self-preserving in order not to be confronted as there were, for instance, no arguments occurring in any of the analyzed dialogues.

### **Power and politeness**

As illustrated in Example 35, the placeholder *thingy* was used instead of “died” to be more subtle and not to belittle the seriousness of the fact.

### **Informality and atmosphere**

The corpus itself being rather informal puts many examples in this category. Especially in the conversation where different speakers use the same placeholders without the need to use the precise word (e.g. Example 7). Furthermore, the informal use of placeholders can be illustrated by some conversations, such as hearty discussion during a board game (e.g. Example 49) or a conversation about a computer game, which is illustrated in Example 36.

## Conclusion

The first part of the analysis has shown that there are more variants of placeholders occurring in the corpus than the theoretical background expected. It is because of the slight inconsistency in spelling, which is typical of transcriptions of speech, that there are more variants of placeholders, which function similarly. The most frequent placeholder was *thingy* with 256 occurrences from the total number of 432 occurrences of any placeholder words in the whole corpus. As shown in the analysis, the more frequent placeholders were, the more variety of use they tended to display. For instance, *whatsit*, with its 45 occurrences replaced subjects, objects, a prepositional complement and a modifier. It represented proper names, common nouns, adjectives and even an exclamation once. Also, while mostly a representation of common nouns, *thingy* was used as a replacement for verbs in multiple examples, which, again, proves that the frequency is a crucial aspect of the analysis.

All the placeholders were mostly representations of common nouns. Proper name replacements were also rather common. There were only a few instances of placeholders representing adjectives and even fewer instances of them being verbs or exclamations. The number of plural forms of placeholder words occurring in the corpus was 56, whereas there were 376 singular forms. This means that the singular form is more than 6 times more likely to be used.

Syntactically, placeholders functioned most frequently as objects. However, they also represented other syntactic constituents, such as subjects, predicates, modifiers, subject complements or a prepositional complement.

The pragmatic analysis revealed that the context of use and pragmatic functions of placeholders goes hand in hand with the choice of corpus. In the thesis, all the material was drawn from the *Spoken BNC2014*. The fact that the corpus consists of transcriptions of speech means that the variety of spelling of placeholders is caused, presumably, by the transcription process. Also, the focus on two larger groups of placeholder words and omission of any possible ones that carry the meaning “whatnot” or serve only as vague tags has caused that not all pragmatic categories were represented.

The distribution of placeholders according to the gender of the speakers brought interesting results. It was confirmed that women, indeed, used more placeholders than men. Women uttered 71.06 per cent of placeholder words in total; men used 28.94 per cent. Men tend to use only placeholders which contain the definite article *the* or the possessive pronoun *his*. As for *thing*-placeholders, men tend to use abbreviations of *thingy*, or placeholders that contain *thinga*-. Women showed much more variety without any particular pattern.

The most frequent pragmatic function of a placeholder word was filling “Lexical gaps” (the speaker was unable to recall a word or, less frequently, did not know the proper word in the first place). Other categories with multiple examples were “Giving the right amount of information” and “Informality and atmosphere”. “Deliberately withholding information” and “Lacking specific information” were also represented by a few examples.

In conclusion, the thesis evaluates placeholders, which can be found in the *Spoken BNC2014*, from the point of view of grammar, syntax and pragmatics. Most commonly, placeholders replace common nouns and function as objects in sentences. According to the pragmatic insight, placeholders are used most frequently when speakers cannot recall a word. The majority of speakers who use placeholders are female.

## References and sources

### References

Alkhatnai, Mubarak (2017). Vague Language and Its Social Role. In: *Theory and Practice in Language Studies*, Vol. 7, No. 2. United Kingdom: Academy Publisher: 122–127.

Amiridze, Nino, Davis, Boyd H., and Maclagan, Margaret (eds.) (2010). *Fillers, Pauses and Placeholders*. Typological Studies in Language Vol. 93. Amsterdam and Philadelphia: John Benjamins Publishing House. 122–123.

Biber, Douglas et al. (1999). *Longman Grammar of Spoken and Written English*. Harlow, England: Longman. 233–234.

Boakye, Naomi A. (2007). *Gender Aspects of Vague Language Use: Formal and Informal Contexts*. (thesis) University of South Africa. 69–70.

Carter, R. and McCarthy, M.. (2006). *Cambridge Grammar of English. A Comprehensive Guide*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. 202, 205.

Channell, Joanna (1994). *Vague Language*. Oxford: Oxford University Press. 1, 7, 9, 157–158, 160–162, 164, 170–174, 178–179, 181–188, 190–192.

Cutting, Joan (ed.) (2007). *Vague Language Explored*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan. 3, 7.

Cutting, Joan (2013). ‘Thingmy an aa the rest o it’: Vague Language in Spoken Scottish English. In: Anderson, Wendy (editor) *Language in Scotland: Corpus-based studies*. Volume 19. Amsterdam: Rodopi. 189–214.

Dušková, L. et al. (2009). *Mluvnice současné angličtiny na pozadí češtiny*. Electronic edition. Ústav anglického jazyka a didaktiky, FF UK.

Available at <http://www.mluvniceanglictiny.cz> [Last accessed 11<sup>th</sup> July 2022]

Jucker, Andreas H., Smith, Sara W., and Lüdge, Tanja (2003). Interactive aspects of vagueness in conversation. *Journal of Pragmatics* 35, 1737–1769.

McCarthy, Michael (2020). Vague language in business and academic contexts. *Language Teaching*, 53(2), 203–214. doi:10.1017/S0261444819000107

McGee, Peter (2018). Vague language as a means of avoiding controversy. *Training, Language and Culture*, 2(2), 40–54. doi: 10.29366/2018tlc.2.2.3

Oxford University Press. (n.d.). *Oxford English Dictionary*. Available at <https://www-oed-com.ezproxy.is.cuni.cz/> [Last accessed on 11<sup>th</sup> July 2022]

Tárnyiková, Jarmila (2009). Vague Reference to Notional Categories (English – Czech Interface). In: Tárnyiková, Jarmila and Markéta Janebová (eds.) *Acta Universitatis Palackianae Olomucensis. Anglica III, Linguistica*. Olomouc: Vydavatelství Univerzity Palackého v Olomouci, 115–132.

Tárnyiková, Jarmila (2019). English Placeholders as Manifestations of Vague Language: Their Role in Social Interaction. *Brno Studies in English* 45: 2, 201–216.

### **Sources**

The corpus *Spoken BNC2014* was accessed at <https://cqpweb.lancs.ac.uk/> [Last accessed on 11<sup>th</sup> July 2022]