

between work activities' which 'oils the social wheels' and is 'flexible, adaptable, compressible and expandable' (2000: 57). This is borne out in the context of this next extract, from a casual conversation between friends. Here we see how small talk is seamlessly interwoven as part of the ongoing business of talk. It is indexical of how the participants orient towards each other relationally as close friends or, as noted by McCarthy (2000) and Tracy and Naughton (2000), how small talk gives voice to social identities and relationships:

(8.13)

S1: That taxi driver was always telling me how his wife was a TEFL teacher.

S2: No way.

S1: And she was also a real= she worked for the county council but she also had a degree from like Trinity.

S3: Does TEFL mean anything?

S4: Teaching English as a foreign language.

S2: **That's a gorgeous top where did you get that?**

S1: **You got it in Gas didn't you cos you showed it to me the last time. I saw a lovely kind of army top in Gas it was a shirt right but it was a bit revealing it was crissy crossy from here to there but it was lovely on but it was about eighty euro and I was like it's going into the summer.**

S2: **And for a top as well you know jeans yeah definitely but.**

S1: **Yeah well I would have worn it if= I probably would have bought it if it was the start of the whole craze maybe if it had been winter you probably would have gotten more wear out of it cos of you know the whole army thing.**

S4: *I'll bet you there is no tea left and Ethel is the one who wanted tea.*

S1: *No it's a big teapot and they're small cups.*

S4: *We hope.*

S1: *Yeah there's tea and it's grand strong tea.*

ongoing narrative

small talk topic 1

small talk topic 2

(LCIE)

Part of the relational value of small talk is linked to topics that recur such as weather talk, which is seen as 'safe'. Coupland and Ylänne-McEwen (2000) look at weather talk in two corpora collected in travel agencies in the Welsh city of Cardiff (in differing time periods). The weather, they propose, is a neutral topic, accessible to all participants, non-person-focused and uncontroversial. Or, as Robinson (1972, 1985) notes, the weather is well suited to filling out moments in social interaction when speakers are avoiding other problems, merely

maintaining a conversational flow (see Coupland and Ylänne-McEwen 2000). Romaine (1994: 23) sees talk about the weather as more a British phenomenon, where the weather is a safe impersonal topic that can be discussed between two strangers who 'want to be friendly but not too friendly'. Kuiper and Flindall (2000), however, found that the weather was the most frequently raised topic in their study of New Zealand check-out interactions. Coupland and Ylänne-McEwen (2000) point out that, especially in Britain, weather is unpredictable and often does not live up to our expectation and so its constant state-of-change makes it ideal for comment, as this extract from a hairdressing salon shows:

(8.14)

Hairdresser: It's a lovely day isn't it. Mm.

Customer: It's lovely.

Speaker 3: [unintelligible]

Hairdresser: Too nice to be inside.

Customer: I know. [unintelligible]

Hairdresser: Yeah. [laughs] It's it's nice enough really isn't it to sit in the garden.

Customer: It is.

Hairdresser: Mm.

Customer: Yeah. Mind you. It were my day off yesterday. And it was lovely yesterday.

Hairdresser: It was. Yeah.

Customer: So that's all right.

[nine turns later]

Hairdresser: Thing is you it's hard to think about it coming snow again isn't it+

Customer: Yeah.

(CANCODE)

McCarthy (2000), using data from CANCODE, looked at small talk episodes in the context of two extended service encounter (the hairdresser's and a driving lesson), where participants were forced into a physically close and mutually captive encounter. He shows how phatic, relational and evaluative episodes were an indispensable aspect of two types of encounters. Even though the hairdresser and driving lesson encounters differ, he notes the similarity in patterns of non-transactional talk and this leads him to conclude that the small talk episodes are something participants worked hard at, and are not something just tossed in for good measure. He confirms their relational role in the construction and consolidation of ongoing commercial relationships and their contribution to the mutual assurance that service was being delivered appropriately.

8.4 Discourse markers

Discourse markers are considered part of a broader class of pragmatic markers within the grammar of spoken English (Östman 1981; Owen 1981; Erman 1987; Schiffrin 1987, 2000; 2001; Fraser 1988, 1990, 1998, 1999; Finell 1989; Redeker 1990, 1991; Jucker 1993; Aijmer 1996, 1997; Brinton 1996; Lenk 1998; Andersen 2000, 2001; Norrick 2001; Macaulay 2002; Carter and