The previous chapter compared two discourse particles that contrasted markedly in their patterns of use in SCO and BNC/C. This chapter looks at the items just and like. While these are also found used by themselves as discourse markers in both corpora, their high level of co-occurrence is a reason to discuss the two terms in the same chapter. Tagliamonte (2005) and other linguists have also highlighted further parallels between the words.

7.1 JUST – frequent with pronouns

Just, one of the most frequent words in both SCO and BNC/C, fits the description of a discourse particle. Tagliamonte (2005) opined that there has been a huge amount of both academic research and media attention focusing on like, yet just mostly appears to be sidelined. She finds reasons to look at just, however, in the number of its occurrences in the material she worked with: ‘[it] has apparently garnered the same type of stigma as like.’ Furthermore, one of the reasons for that (though Tagliamonte does not speculate) is that ‘just is one of the most frequent forms used among the young people’ (2005: 1904). This implies that just is associated with a certain youthfulness of language use, one where just is used frequently as a discourse particle.

This section compares occurrences of just in SCO with those in BNC/C. I look first at the way just collocates. Then I examine just and its most frequent clusters. Finally, I look at those collocates and clusters of just where the difference in occurrence in SCO and BNC/C is the most marked.

Aijmer (2002) says that just has three main functions:
1. ...*Just* is used as a restrictive adverb paraphrasable as ‘exactly’ or ‘only’ (i.e. *just beyond Swindon*) [...]

2. In addition, *just* has a temporal meaning (*just now*) (i.e. *I’ve only just discovered that...*) [...]

3. The discourse particle *just* differs from the restrictive adverb because it signals involvement in the discourse event (i.e. *You’ve got a cold – no. Just a bit sniffy.*)

   (Aijmer 2002: 155)

The difficulty here is that while the temporal meaning of *just* is fairly straightforward to discover, both *just a bit* and *just beyond* could be seen as *just* in an adverbial function.

It is relevant, however, as Aijmer points out, that the emphatic function accounts for two-thirds of the total occurrences of *just* – seven times more frequent than temporal uses of *just* (cf. 2002: 157).

As Table 7.1 below shows, *just* occurs in the SCO corpus about twice as often as *really* and about half as often as *like*. There are 546 occurrences of *just* (0.46% of the corpus total). The BNC/C proportional frequency is close to SCO’s – 0.49 per cent of the total corpus. For the purpose of the analysis that follows, it is, however, immaterial how we categorise *just*.

*Just*, though it can be used for a range of meanings, appears only to occur in its function of discourse marker in SCO. This could be down to the relatively small size of the corpus or to a colligational choice, indicating a stronger bleaching of the meaning of *just* amongst SCO speakers. In what follows, the focus of the comparison is on those clusters that appear in SCO which also fulfil the same function in the BNC/C.

### 7.1.1 Collocates of JUST in SCO and BNC/C

Unlike the other discourse markers discussed, the collocates of *just* in both SCO and BNC/C corpora do not differ to a great degree. The most prominent collocate (by a wide margin) of *just* in spoken English in both corpora is *I*. *I* collocates with *just* in nearly a third of all the occasions when *just* is uttered. Similarly, other high-frequency collocates of *just* differ very little when the corpora are compared. Divergences become apparent, however, in medium-high-frequency collocates of *just*.