

ANALYSIS OF “SURE” IN “THE BLACKWATER LIGHTSHIP” FROM THE PERSPECTIVE OF HALLIDAY’S SYSTEMIC FUNCTIONAL LINGUISTICS

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Abstract:

This paper explores the role of the word “Sure” in the characters’ dialogues in Colm Tóibín’s Irish Novel *The Blackwater Lightship*. The dialogue in the novel serves as a trace of the language within the literary context. This study applies the framework of Halliday’s SFL to analyze the “Sure” into two levels in the methods of discourse and comparative analysis: (1) On the micro level, “Sure” is analyzed as a discourse marker and an adjunct mood within the dialogue. The study compares its usage in Irish English with other English varieties, particularly American English, using concordances from the Corpus of Contemporary American English to highlight differences. (2) On the macro level, the research is framed within Halliday’s “Beyond the Clause,” exploring the multifunctional role of “Sure” in Irish English. The findings show that “Sure” can simultaneously serve both functions as a marker of agreement or emphasis and the adjunct modal for its headed clause. “Sure” was intentionally employed by authors in dialogue to enhance interpersonal meaning, supporting character interactions, and influencing the narrative’s overall coherence. This study contributes to the distinct linguistic feature of Irish English and its significance in interaction, which represents the entire society.

Keywords: Discourse Marker; Irish Novel; *The Blackwater Lightship*; “Sure”; Systemic Functional Linguistics

INTRODUCTION

The Blackwater Lightship by Colm Tóibín is a beautifully written masterpiece on how the family relatives and the flow of personal history. The story takes place in 1990s Ireland, portraying the emotional path of three generations of women - Helen, her mother, Lily, and grandmother Dora - who gather to look after Helen’s brother Declan, who is dying from AIDS. This novel, which was shortlisted for the Booker Prize, is, of course, a depiction of the influence of storytelling in people’s lives, something that is evident by the way it illustrates the nuances of family members torn apart by conflict. Tóibín’s minimalist and evocative

writing style has constantly been acclaimed as a “genuine work of art” (Chicago Tribune) by critics, which makes it all the more satisfying and captivating for readers to plunge deeper into the profound thoughts on love, mourning, and the curative powers of stories.

In this study, I will analyze the word “sure” in the dialogues of the Irish novel *BWL* from the perspective of Halliday SFL. Systemic-functional linguistics (SFL) sees language as part of the broader socio-cultural context and aims “to look into language from the outside and specifically to interpret linguistic processes from the standpoint of the social order”

(Halliday 1978: 3), as cited in (Davies & Elder, 2005). Halliday and Matthiessen (2014) suggest that explanation involves more than merely describing the structure of something. Instead, it requires demonstrating how it is connected to other elements, focusing on its pattern of systemic relationships, also known as agnateness or agnation. He highlighted the importance of function within word classes, noting that the class label alone does not reveal an item's role within a given structure. To fully understand this role, it is necessary to consider the item's function. Functional categories, therefore, offer a way to interpret grammatical structures about the broader meaning potential of the language.

In my analysis of the novel, I will apply the theory and concept of Halliday SFL, and it can be divided into two levels:

Micro Analysis

The word "Sure" is selected to analyze from the perspectives of discourse marker and adjunct mood. In Irish English, "Sure" simultaneously functions as an adjunct mood which functionally focus its headed clause and as a discourse marker that naturally flows and supports to the preceding clause within the dialogue discourse. I will demonstrate the differences in its use between Irish English and other English varieties through comparative analysis, particularly with American English. I will use COCA concordances as references.

Macro Analysis

Within the framework of Halliday's "Beyond the Clause," I will examine the word "Sure" as it serves multiple functions in Irish English and is intentionally chosen by the author for use in the dialogue. I will explore how it contributes to the interpersonal meaning and function, supporting the characters' discourse and the overall narrative of the novel.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Review of the Literary Studies in The Blackwater Lightship

Hendricks (1973) posits that the structural representation of a text implicitly contains elements or terms that are not explicitly manifested on the textual surface. He also discusses the concept of narrative point of view and its influence on the reader's perception of story events. He suggests that the narrative point of view is typically "unmarked," meaning it subtly guides the reader's interpretation of events without explicitly stating a perspective. According to Hendricks, this underlying structure is abstracted from the narrative point of view and plays a key role in storytelling. Examining all literary elements that structure the story of *The BWL* reveals that this subject has been studied from different perspectives and a wide range of content that covers various issues. To varying degrees, the studies of a huge range of subjects have probed into some very intriguing psychological aspects of the experience of homosexuality in Ireland.

In contrast, other studies have centered on the profound influence that specific locations can have on people. In another line, they have extensively covered and emphasized the concrete connection between society-related problems and physical illnesses. The perspective through the lens of feminism is also applied in the previous study of the novel to analyze the representation of women and society in the story. However, the impact of modern society on the character and their connection is another form of studies that vary in both discussions and valuation. Several other studies, for example, those focusing on the emotional burden associated with caregiving for individuals with HIV alongside those connecting the concepts of AIDS and environmental destruction, have become themes for researchers involved in the academic discussion of *The Blackwater Lightship*.

Yebra (2014) offers a reflective look at the life of Declan, who had to fulfill his wishes from the grave as the person handling the AIDS case of his family and further becoming a unifying force for the shattered family. This ritual can be viewed as a symbolic sacrifice, a mental and spiritual process, to be insisted on by both the family and the nation of Ireland. Yebra, on the other hand, uses the traditions of Julia Kristeva for an analysis of this self-sacrifice and puts it into a comparison with the closeted homosexuality of the fictional character Henry James, who was an Irish-American, and the publically gay Irish Oscar Wilde. These multi-layered narratives make his sacrifice more understandable and meaningful.

However, Yebra asserts that the changing times in Ireland are outside the scope of the paper, which focuses primarily on the problematic representation of gay eros and thanatos in contemporary Ireland. Murphy (2020) parallels the AIDS crisis and the current environmental crisis. Moreover, Severiche (2017) compares *The BWL* with another novel, which states that presenting an experience of illness functions as an allegory of transience. That analysis shows the connections between private grief and social problems in the novels, underlining the realistic depiction. Such a study investigates the political and physical components of these novels that accentuate the body's inclusion as a political tool in literature.

Matthews (2018) is another researcher who used both medical and Socio-cultural perspectives to explore how the bedside could symbolically represent a journey to health recovery. His exploration probed the emotional struggle caregivers caring for HIV/AIDS patients had to endure, the symbolic representation that the bedside had, and whether the illnesses were a threat to society.

As Easterlin (2017) dedicates her writing to the text and affect, the topic that is coherent to each other, it is one of the main concerns in literature that adopts a psychological approach, incorporating body feelings. Kim (2022) contested the hypothesis made by Cararegal-Romero (2012) by presenting an opposite stance. The primary focus was on Helen, Lily's daughter, and her intent to revive an Irish model family through marriage, which restored the traditional role of motherhood and revived its lost glory in the age of the growth of the Celtic Tiger. Scholars primarily analyze the novel from the perspectives of mental health/psychology, HIV/AIDS, and socio-cultural context..

This suggests that the Irish Novel is worth deeper research. Simultaneously, very few studies have focused on the differences in language use in this authentic literary work, which is rich in Irish flavor.

Discourse markers in the English language

English language studies, along with the many intellectuals' contributions in this area (DMs), find themselves on an intellectual journey of in-depth studies. The intensive techniques employed by these researchers include, inter alia, looking into the contentious passages from different sources, namely, dialogues and other documents, carefully scrutinized. In addition, in-depth local interviews were conducted to find out how DMs were practically used in speech practice and other aspects of daily conversation.

Furthermore, a cross-sectional analysis of DMs in different corpora collected in various languages is another component of the researchers' study. For instance, the researchers investigated the Corpus of Scottish English and the comparison languages such as French and Bantu. The research involving these linguistic items has become the subject of much discussion, and the central concern

of these studies is the inclusion of “like,” “well,” and “you know” expressions.

These influential linguists have taken a close look at the DMs, critically looked into the types of relationships they refer to, and made careful articulations between DMs. They propose that the main way in which DMs are meaningfully represented is by taking into account the protocol and state of how they are used. Switches or other transition language frequently serve as cue phrases or markers, and they contribute to discourse coherence and flow, which are essential in research on language and interaction.

Fraser (1999) examined 40 conversations and was the first to propose five or four classes of DMs that either initiated or connected various discourse segments. He provided the details of each class, noting that the DMs that start with signs of a connection between the sentence before and the one being introduced are drawn from conjunctions, adverbials, and prepositional phrases. He stressed that the crux significance of DMs is around the procedure, and their precise connotation is the case in the context. The double-barreled data collection approach Fuller (2003) used consisted of a macro and micro analysis. His study focused on the participants, native to Southern Illinois and students of Southern Illinois University, aged between 20 and 35, who engaged and recorded conversations with their close acquaintances and family.

Through Fuller’s study, it was shown that speaker roles and their interrelations greatly influenced the frequency of specific discourse markers like “well,” “oh,” and “you know.” This study highlighted that these DMs are no longer frequently used by interviewees but are used less by the interviewers, who primarily played the part of listeners. Therefore, Fuller (2003), as an example, proved that the pattern of DMs’ usage is not the same for all speech contexts.

Romaine and Lange (1991) conducted an in-depth analysis of dialogue collections and compared the usage of discourse markers across several languages, including French and Bantu. The study analyzed 65 dialogues and posits that women tend to use the discourse marker “like” more frequently. He identified two key functions of “like”: on the one hand, to mark the limits of utterances, and on the other, to make the role of the speaker recognizable. Miller and Weinert (1995) elaborate on Schourup’s concept of “evincives” and draw upon data from spontaneous conversations extracted from a corpus of Scottish English conversations. They suggest that the recognition of three properties is required in focus constructions within map task dialogues and spontaneous conversations: opposing use of the word versus its contrasting forms, such as non-introducing versus introducing, contrastive versus non-contrastive, and those that relate to new versus given elements. The result proved to be that the two “Like” types differ in their functions, mostly in discourse chaining, where they act at the beginning and the end of clauses, respectively.

Here, we can see that the study of DMs in the English language is essential and has maintained an important role from the 90s to the present. Based on the data I reviewed, studies of discourse markers have primarily focused on verbal communication. In later periods, studies have been conducted using corpus tools. However, there is minimal research compared with other English varieties, especially discourse in literary work.

Discourse markers in Irish English contexts

Discourse markers, considered an important attribute of either language or communication with a specific focus on Irish English, have motivated several scholars and researchers to come up with

books or articles on this matter. They have been working with several tools, sources, and methods to conduct their study and consequently have achieved a comprehensive and in-depth analysis. The primary resources that have played a key role during the research process are well-established databases like the International Corpus of English (ICE) Ireland, the Limerick Corpus of Irish English (LCIE), and the Corpus of Irish English Correspondence (CORIECOR). In such a way, the database has become an indispensable data source for linguistic analysis and comparison.

Concerning methodology, those studies have immersed the field in both quantitative and qualitative research techniques, resulting in ultimate research and facts. It should be noticed that these tools are improved by adding parallelization to them, with the comparison of similar corpora. They are comprised of a couple of resources, such as the Corpus of Contemporary American English (COCA), the British National Corpus (BNC), and the Scottish Corpus of Texts and Speech (SCOTS). The purpose of including these resources in addition to the case studies has enabled us to carry out comparative and more extensive research, hence comprehensive yet detailed studies.

Those studies focus on those DMs, especially those “like” and “sure.” These DMs were selected out of several words because they show a high frequency of usage and have a notable contribution to the Irish English dialect. However, this does not mean online social research has only dealt with DMs; social linguistics has also given other interesting sociolinguistic insights. To illustrate, research that focused on Polish and Chinese immigrants to Ireland who communicate via the DMs produced interesting findings worth considering. Muller (2005) synthesizes the overall research structure and its significant contribution to the analysis of

the DM as an Irish English dialect, demonstrating how this method reveals the linguistic intricacies of this specific type of English. It assists researchers in figuring out particular Irish English words and helps increase the sociolinguistic research area as a whole.

According to Schiffin (1987), DMs include a variety of word classes. These include conjunctions (like “and,” “but,” “or”), interjections (such as “oh”), adverbs (for instance, “now,” “then”), and lexicalized phrases (e.g., “y’know,” “I mean”). According to Labov (1973), examining dialects in literature can tremendously broaden the understanding gained through real speech data. This is especially helpful when both are analyzed and evaluated by one another, demonstrating the value of literary data as a credible source of linguistic evidence. Features like these often contribute more to stereotypes about regional and social speech that writers use than differences in pronunciation or grammar. Their representation in fiction can provide as much, if not more, information about a character, setting, and regional culture compared to traditionally studied dialect respellings and nonstandard grammatical usage.

Morneo (2005) underlines the importance of analyzing the IrE discourse markers in Patrick MacGill's novels, namely those of *Children of the Dead End* and *The Rat Pit*. They contend that the study of DMs in Irish English might also be helpful to the investigation of this variation of English, as it has mostly focused on other linguistic aspects superimposed on the discourse markers. It could also enrich the analysis of dialect in literature and DMs in general. However, she contends that the investigation in this area is still limited.

Clancy and Vaughan (2012) referred to diverse linguistic tools and corpora in their research. WordSmith Tools were

used comprehensively on the Limerick Corpus of Irish English, a one-million-word corpus that provides naturally spoken Irish written representation. This can be regarded as a shot fired in the direction of the ongoing study of an Irish English Multifunctional Marker.

In her study, Amador-Moreno (2015) used the Wordlist Tool to explore quotative structures, including “be + like,” “go,” and “be + there” in the works of Irish author Paul Howard. Aiming to return the language of contemporary Dublin English to its proper context was the primary purpose of her effort. She mentioned that DMs present in non-fiction and fiction storytelling come with options of advancing narration and describing the social context in which these words are embedded. Nestor *et al.* (2012) employed quantitative and qualitative research methodologies to study the positional distribution of the discourse marker “like” within a corpus featuring Polish People in Ireland. Their research highlighted that, similar to other L2 studies, there is a significant degree of interspeaker variation within the group compared to L1 communities.

Diskin (2017) conducted a study on “like” as a discourse-pragmatic marker among newly immigrated native Polish and Chinese speakers in Dublin, Ireland. Diskin’s analysis showed that the use of “like” among non-native speakers became similar to native speakers after living in Ireland for three years. Kallen (2006) addresses the use of particular expressions, such as “Faith,” “Arrah,” “At all at all,” “Yerra,” and “Ould/oul Sure,” within the context of the ICE for Ireland. They argue that some historical representations of Irish English are based predominantly on the English lexicon. Such linguistic depictions are very close to other varieties of English; nevertheless, they have been branded as unique Irish English.

McCafferty and Amador-Moreno (2019) also extensively surveyed historical literature on IrE. They presented a diachronic analysis of the DM “sure,” utilizing data from the Corpus of Irish English Correspondence. According to her study, the DM “sure” has been a distinctive aspect of Irish English for centuries. The evidence drawn from the CORIECOR emphasizes notable differences between using the DM “sure” in IrE and other linguistic varieties. As of her writing in January 2018, CORIECOR contained 1,347 instances of “sure,” among which only 64 (or 5%) were used as DMs.

Nicora (2022) introduces the Corpus of Irish English Speech, a platform developed with several objectives: compiling spoken Irish English recordings across contemporary Ireland under a unified protocol, ensuring comparability among different datasets, and establishing an initial phonological inventory for each variety of Irish English examined. The IES corpus responds to a research gap in the study of Irish English prosody. It aims to provide a more extensive overview of the prosodic features of Irish English varieties spoken in present-day Ireland.

Although a wealth of literary studies focuses on Irish novels, including those penned by Colm Tóibín, it is surprising that comprehensive studies specifically targeting *The BWL* are remarkably few and far between, particularly from both literary and linguistic viewpoints. Many scholars are more concerned about DMs in the English language varieties, as the corpus-based analysis of Irish English usually serves as the backbone of their research. This being said, the field becomes much narrower regarding scholarly research focused particularly on Irish novels. I noticed that the DMs in the field of the studies of Irish literature have been carried out mainly for works authored by people like Patrick Mac Gill and Paul Howard,

leaving a great gap in the studies of other significant Irish literature.

Morneo (2005) proposes that DMs in the works of contemporary authors such as Roddy Doyle or Brian Friel could offer valuable insights into their significance in literary contexts. Such an analysis could also be a practical approach to understanding the reliability of literary sources when analyzing spoken speech. From a stylistic perspective, frequent phrases and their collocates in fictional discourse are considered significant. In this context, she argued that such usage contributes to the narrative's meaning, which is constructed as spontaneous discourse.

As Quirk mentioned in their seminal work of 1972, “surely” is caught by the term attitudinal disjunct. For the grammar aspect, it is commonly employed in the start position within an entire sentence. This rhetorical system aims to seek assent from the one being addressed in person or several of those people. This linguistic tool involves the audience in expressing and conveying an idea; therefore, within education, this is an effective communication tool. An Irish English feature is “utterance-initial sure” as discussed by Large (1987). This trait is now accepted as being specific to Irish English and so characteristic of it. In his work, he provides examples such as: “Sure only for this same Dick, I’d never get Mary Finigan for a wife” and “Sure it knocked every idea of a message out of me head”. This very particular usage of the “sure” at the start of sentences is one of the features of divergence of Irish English, according to Large’s statement.

This rich work extends to literature and linguistics as it shows not only how the numerous linguistic elements within literature should be studied mindfully but also the extent to which they are significant. Specifically, researchers can uncover crucial aspects of the linguistic

manifestations in literary fiction by paying attention to the linguistic features present in the fictional discourse.

While previous studies have extensively explored discourse markers and mood adjuncts in the English language, there remains a significant gap in the specific examination of the “Sure” within the context of Irish English. Most existing research tends to focus on more widely spoken English varieties, such as American or British English, leaving Irish English comparatively underexplored.

Additionally, little attention has been given to how specific words like “sure” function within literary texts, especially in Halliday’s Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL) framework. In addition to raising our level of understanding of language, this strategy gives us a new angle to understand literature.

FINDINGS

Contextualizing “Sure” in The Blackwater Lightship

Today, Cambridge Dictionary defines the term “sure” as an adjective that can be either “certain” or “without any doubt” when being used. It reveals an inner assurance and firmness in the sense of knowledge, and it is often used when one is sure of a fact or of an event. For instance, if someone asks, “What’s wrong with him?” and you say, “I’m not really sure,” it means you’re not completely certain about what’s going on.

The word “sure” has different uses in English. This is just one of many applications of this flexible term in English language communication. “Sure” can be combined or collocated with various prepositions to convey different meanings. Three prepositions paired with “sure” are “for”, “of”, and “about”. When “sure” is used with “for” as in “for sure”, that means “something is definitely true.” This expression is usually what someone says to

affirm one's level of knowledge and skills. Take, for instance, "She's become much surer of herself since she started her job" to imply that someone has a better grasp of her role and associated skills at the workplace. Similarly, when someone says, "He admitted that he wasn't completely sure of his facts," it means that the person was not entirely confident in the accuracy of the information he possessed. Finally, when sure is combined with the word about, in "not entirely sure about", it shows a lack of confidence and uncertainty around this issue. Such can be seen through the following sentence, "We've only recently hired Henry, and we're not entirely sure about him yet, " which clearly demonstrates some uncertainty about the newly hired individual.

Instructional expressions frequently contain "be sure," "make sure," and a phrase that expresses causation, like the word "that." You would certainly know some of the phrases used in these kinds of sentences, for example, "be sure to" and "make sure (that)". The phrases "be sure to" and "make sure (that)" are undoubtedly examples of this type of calques. We will see "be sure to" and "make sure (that)" along with other phrases like them in this category. Calls to action mostly involve convincingly asking someone to do a certain thing or providing clarification about a particular result.

"Sure" can also mean "certainly" when expressing the same meaning. Likewise, in the answer to the question, "Would you like to come swimming with us?" it can be "Sure." Such a reply will help in ice-breaking. The student might reply to the question "Will you help me with this?" "Sure, I will." Generally, in speech the word "sure" can mean "agreed" and "definitely" or "of course" at the beginning of a sentence. When it is used at the start of the sentence, the subject usually goes before the helping verb, there is a comma after it.

Halliday and Matthiessen (2014) explain that "the system, as we have said, is the potential that lies behind the text. But 'text' is a complex notion. In the form in which we typically receive it, as spoken and written discourse, a text is the product of two processes combined: instantiation and realization. The defining criterion is instantiation: text as instance. But realization comes in because what becomes accessible to us is the text as realized in sound or writing."

In terms of the clause structure, he points out that the significance of any functional label lies in its relationship to the other functions with which it is structurally associated. According to Halliday (2004: 82), the word "Sure" belongs to the modal adjunct. The adverbial group serves as an adjunct in the modal structure of the clause, which is either a circumstantial adjunct or a modal adjunct (mood or comment). The adverbial group has an adverb as Head, which may or may not be accompanied by modifying elements.

"Sure" as another word class is the attributive adjective which reflects the cognition as the proposition of the clause. There are attributive clauses where the Carrier is realized by a nominal group denoting a person and the Attribute is a nominal group with an embedded fact clause, either 'possessive' with a noun as Head (e.g. idea, notion, inkling [[that . . .]]) or 'intensive' with an adjective as Head of the nominal group (e.g. sure, certain, aware, cognizant, oblivious (of the fact) [[that ...]]); for example: "However, I am not sure [[that what probabilists and what physicists mean here by "fields are quite synonymous]]". Halliday (2004:474)

For this definitive study, my major aim will be to explore a detailed evaluation of the occurrences of "sure", as an adverbial adjunct, located in the four examples of dialogue paragraphs, cited from the

famous Irish Novel, *The BWL* where sure is used for 64 times in total.

Analysis

Dialogue 1:

When Larry came back from Declan's bedroom Paul told him what had happened.

'I got one of those plates as part of a dinner service as a wedding present, nearly sixty years ago,' Mrs Devereux said.

'They're a bad business, cats,' Larry said.

'We'll drown them if we find them.'

'A little pup, that's the best description of you all day,' Mrs Devereux said.

'Sure you couldn't have two cats up on a dresser like that,' Larry said.

(Toibin, 1999; Chapter 7)

Analysis of the "Sure" in Dialogue 1 from the Perspective of Halliday's SFL

In this dialogue, the characters are talking about a thing that happened the day when Larry came from Declan's bedroom. The dialogue starts with the scene where Larry is back and Paul sees him and fills him in on what happened when Declan was in his room. Mrs. Devereux speaks about a platter which is a wedding gift from around six years back. This sentence may or may not be relevant to what is being discussed but it just adds the context or background information to the discussion. Larry expresses a rather negative opinion of cats which he claims stirs up trouble. This could be a humorous or exaggerated response that states that they would even drown the day they meet up. Larry goes on his concerns about the cat situation with the dresser, saying that the cats might be rowdy and mess the dresser up due to their behaviors. Mrs. Devereux humorously speculates on what the cats might think of the people in the conversation, suggesting

that the cats might disapprove of them. The conversation seems to be a combination of good-natured kidding, jesting, and an account of how this cattish catastrophe may have occurred.

Here "sure" usage serves as the variant adjunct of sure "Surely" to emphasis for the meaning of that having two cats sitting together on top of a dresser is unlikely or impractical. "Sure" in this dialogue serves as a mood adjunct, specifically functions as a concessive adverbial group. This usage demonstrates that the speaker is in a position to know something that everybody else knows or assumes to know. The second part of the sentence uses the word "Sure," which is an agreement with an opponent, and then there is "couldn't," which proves that the situation is impossible.

Analyzing in terms of interpersonal function is beneficial to maintain the polite and persuasive key. This makes the speaker seem to agree first with other opinions before he makes his stand; hence, he seems to be humbler. In this approach, the connectivity and integrity of the discourse being made are strengthened since the recipient goes through a logical course of acknowledgment and rejection. It also assists in cushioning some of the conflicts and making the statement more palatable by first validating the listener's point of view.

Comparison of the Function of "Sure" in Dialogue 1 across Different Varieties of English

I analyzed the usage of the "sure" in both American and British English corpora, specifically the COCA (Corpus of Contemporary American English) and the BNC (British National Corpus), to compare it with its use in an Irish novel. The data from COCA and BNC revealed that there is no equivalent function of "Sure" as an adjunct mood followed by a negative hypothetical conditional clause

that discusses an improbable or impossible scenario __ similar to the usage of “sure” in the dialogue above. However, the phrase “Sure you could” appears 18 times in COCA. (Davies, 2008-) Most of the time, express support or belief in what the speaker is suggesting. Examples of such concordances include:

“*Sure, you could* go to the subdomain search.yahoo.com, but very few people knew that, so more people ended up using the simpler homepage of Google.”

“*Sure, you could* go to the store and spend your CD dollars on yet another lame alterna-kit band, but don’t.”

In the first concordance, “Sure” functions to acknowledge a possible action (going to the subdomain ‘search.yahoo.com’) as a given or easily accepted idea as a concessive mood adjunct. It acknowledges the feasibility of an action but leads to advice or a suggestion against it.

In COCA, I found one concordance entry, “Sure you couldn’t,” as the adjunct mood, but which is used for the interrogative type.

“Hey, sorry the pro shop didn’t have one of these in your size. *Sure, you couldn’t* fit into a medium? Not since I was 11. You’re up. Why don’t you hit first, huh? You really wanna do this? Yeah. We’re tough.”

For other quires with the pronouns (Sure he/she/they/I), “sure” in all concordances are used as the adjectives either in attributive personal clauses such as

“Emily was sure she couldn’t have heard correctly.”

or as the instructional expression “make sure.”

“Are you sure you could’t move over an inch or two?”

Dialogue 2:

‘How long are we staying here?’

Cathal asked.

‘Just today.’

‘We’re not sleeping here, sure we’re not?’

‘No, we’re driving back later.’

The boys stood there, downcast and subdued.

‘Manus, I’ll give you a piggy-back if you come down now,’

Hugh said. ‘No, I want to sit on your shoulders.’

‘All right.’ ‘And I’m not swimming if it’s cold,’ Manus said.

Cathal shook his head at Helen, signalling that he did not want to go down the cliff.

(Toibin, 1999; Chapter 5)

Analysis of the “Sure” in Dialogue 2 from the Perspective of Halliday’s SFL

This discourse represents the characters conversing on the same day. The author introduced that Helen is aware that for the rest of the group, this sand in Donegal has become their second nature. Cathal directs his inquiry towards Helen as to how long they will stay, as she seems to be concerned about the night passing away. Helen reminded him they were only spending it for the day, and their car would be taking them back to their place later. The boys (Manus and Hugh) show signs of disappointment or a listless attitude, possibly, they wish for a longer stay in the place.

In the encounter “sure we’re not” of The Blackwater Lightship novel, the adverbial group element “Sure” usage serves as the adjunct mood. Here, “Sure” is used to seek confirmation or to confirm the listener’s understanding. Cathal is looking for assurance that they are indeed not going to sleep at their current location. It reflects a conversational strategy to verify information and ensure mutual understanding. It also emphasizes the expectation or assumption that they should not be staying overnight. It conveys that Cathal assumes they are not staying and is looking for confirmation of this assumption.

Comparison of the Function of “Sure” in Dialogue 2 across Different Varieties of English

If we consider “Sure” in the dialogue above is used as the negative tag, the first statement should be in a declarative clause as:

“He’s giving her the teapot, isn’t he?” Halliday (2004 :109)

But according to the data in COCA and BNC, there is no exact similar function for “Sure” as an adjunct mood head in the negative tag. Among the 18 entries of “Sure we aren’t” in COCA, none share the function and content found in dialogue. “Sure” is typically used in its usual roles as an adjective either in attributive personal clauses such as:

“Oh Allison, are you sure we aren’t related?”

or as the instructional expression “make sure.”

“No worries, boys. The big chief here, he’s just making sure we aren’t taking out anything that matters to the natives.”

However, this “sure” used is, in essence, representative of another characteristic of Irish English since it is differently occurred in the individual repeated rhetoric clause for the preceding statement.

Dialogue 3:

‘Did you hear about Kitty Walsh from The Ballagh and her poor mother hardly cold?’ Madge asked. She spoke quickly, breathlessly.

‘There should be a law, you know,’ Essie said. They were both excited at what they had just witnessed.

‘There is a law,’ Madge said, ‘but it’s the guards, they won’t stop her.’

‘Sure she’s too blind to see them. She wouldn’t stop for them,’ Essie said.

‘And now Dora is driving.’

(Toibin, 1999; Chapter 8)

Analysis of the “Sure” in Dialogue 3 from the Perspective of Halliday’s SFL

In this dialogue, the characters are discussing the issue of Mrs. Walsh and her daughter Kitty. Essie vocalizes an opinion that there is a need for law as it stands in the problem they are discussing. Madge keeps saying that according to a regulation, no one is allowed to do that, but guards do not care about it. According to Essie, the guards wouldn’t appear anywhere near Kitty Walsh as she was so busily unaware of her surrounding world that even if they tried to stop her, she probably wouldn’t have been worried. Lily adds a witty touch by conveying maybe it will take a while before Kitty starts driving. Helen points out that her mother is presently affected by her demeanor, and she is almost snobbish in her speech. The dialogue somehow suggests an all-out, dramatic, or perhaps disturbing scenario in which Kitty Walsh’s mother was involved. The characters talk about the necessity of the law, the role of the guards, and their unfrontable response to Katy’s case.

In the encounter, “Sure she’s too blind to see them. She wouldn’t stop for them, Essie said.” In the Blackwater Lightship novel, “Sure” usage serves as the adjunct mood in the adverbial group. However, this “sure” used is also in different representative of the characteristic of Irish English since it differently occurred in the individual declarative clause. If we consider the flow of the conversation, “Sure” is used as the affirmative discourse marker for the response of the previous character. But if we analyze the structure and function, the speakers may use it to assist on their first phrase as “Surely,” which is feasible. Here, “Sure” is her certainty and agreement with the idea that the guards won’t stop the person in question, at the same time, it shows the to convey the speaker’s conviction and agreement while also

adding a tone of familiarity or casualness to the conversation.

Comparison of the Function of “Sure” in Dialogue 3 across Different Varieties of English

Among the COCA concordances for the entry “Sure she is,” there is no equivalent statement with this usage. It is only used as the usual function as the adjective either in attributive personal clauses such as “We’re proud of her. I’m *sure she is* a good person.”

or as the instructional expression “make sure”.

“Make sure she is not eavesdropping on us.”

But we can see the use of “surely” for this function and circumstances such as

“Surely she is in need of some masculine companionship.”

“Surely she is wrong.”

Dialogue 4:

‘Did you let Granny know he was very sick a good length before that?’

‘Well, she knew he was sick.’

‘I mean that he was dying.’

‘Sure I didn’t know myself.’

I suppose I would have let her know the day I knew, or the day after.’

(Toibin, 1999; Chapter 8)

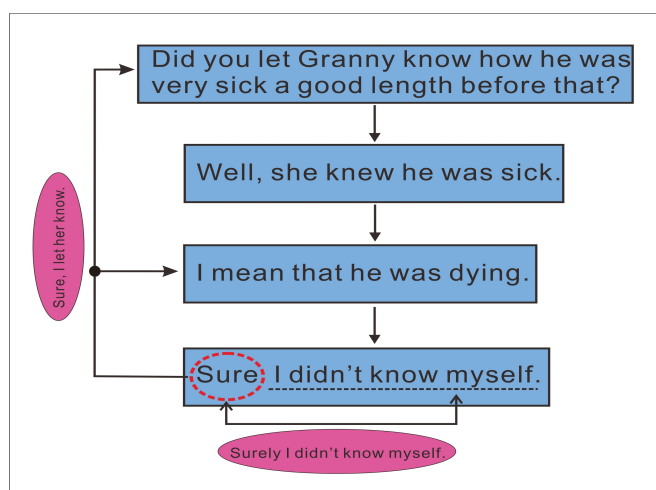
Analysis of “Sure” in Dialogue 4 from the Perspective of Halliday’s SFL

I have examined the different occurrences and uses of “Sure” in Irish English. (See the dialogues 1,2, and 3). Now I will examine another distinct occurrence as well as the main finding of this paper. In Dialogue 4, Lily clarifies that she is specifically asking whether Granny was informed about the impending death of Declan, not just that he was sick. In response, Helen firmly says she did not know how serious the disease was. But she talks about the point that she has alerted Granny. The only thing she mentions is

that she was not aware of the seriousness of the disease but suggests that maybe she could have told them about it earlier. Here, the flow of conversation may suggest “Sure” functions as the affirming and agreeing to the speaker, but the author chose this “Sure” for the adverbial modal adjunct, which supports the strength of the predicates “didn’t know myself.”

Comparison of the Function of “Sure” in Dialogue 4 across Different Varieties of English

Figure 1: The Bi-function of “Sure” in Irish English



In the encounter “Sure I didn’t know myself” of *The Blackwater Lightship* novel, “Sure” usage serves as the adjunct mood in the adverbial group and occurs differently in the individual negative declarative clause as the response for another speaker.

In the dialogue, the phrase “Sure I didn’t know myself” strengthens the speaker’s admission of unawareness as “Surely I didn’t know myself”. The use of “Sure” as an initial discourse marker in a response is common in various English dialects, especially when followed by a comma.

Given the flow of the conversation—“Did you let Granny know he was very sick a good length before that?” and followed

with “I mean that he was dying”— “Sure, I let her know” is very likely used to answer a specific question with certainty.

I analyzed this structure using COCA, which contains 279 entries of “Sure I didn’t.” However, none of these entries appeared at the beginning of a negative declarative statement. “Sure” is used in its usual function as an adjective in an attributive personal clause, such as “I was *sure* I *didn’t* want to know.”

Among the 25 entries of the full clause, “I didn’t know myself,” there is no occurrence of “Sure” at the beginning of those concordances. In American English, the use of “sure” at the beginning is typically found in its adverbial form “Surely” for the similar content in the novel. (Davies, 2008-)

For instance:

“*Surely* I *didn’t* flail for so long, work so hard,”

“*Surely* I *didn’t* marry Kenny so I wouldn’t have to work.”

CONCLUSION

To sum up, the word “sure” in *The Blackwater Lightship* assumes many roles that give the plot strong attributes. Here, we are not analyzing “sure,” which deals with verbal communication where the speaker’s speech is spoken explicitly. Consequently, the significance of the author applying this “Sure” is taking the role of a modal adjunct in the character’s dialogue.

After the microanalysis, the finding shows that “Sure” in Irish English has a different essence from standard English for its occurrence, and it can simultaneously serve two tasks: the adverbial modal adjunct according to its position in the clause as well as the discourse marker, which very likely to see the affirmative marker supporting the agreement and confirmation to another character in the flow of the dialogue (See Dialogue 4). This finding comes up with the assistance

of discourse analysis, where we consider the surrounding dialogues. (Schiffrin 1994: 20-43, Roy, 2000:11) as cited in (Arun, 2014) clarifies that discourse analysis can cover two areas: form and function. If it relates to structure, the discussion is to identify and analyze utterances.

The following stage is to find out the patterns before finding out the linguistic rule of the utterances being examined once they are evaluated. Meanwhile, if it is about the function of the utterances, the analyst must identify and study the linkages between the participants and their activities through the words that are stated depending on the set of purposes. Another link, which we may associate with the use of DM in their language, is that it can also help in establishing the existence of DM in their language.

Also, “Sure” shows how it is different playing for the interpersonal functions. Even though the discourse of the dialogue is not the real scene record, these are exactly the creations of the author who belongs to this language and society. A character’s language is not just a reflection of the environment where they live but also contributes significantly to the overall feel of the prose, giving it a unique style and the characteristic Irish flavor of the story plotting. The use of this figurative language device perfectly contributes to the overall cultural climate, and this is important because it grounds the reader and makes the narrative tangible for them.

This word is employed abundantly in the story to channel the quality that is specific to characters, the culture that surrounds each personage, and the relationship scenario that each individual is in. Through its complex usage, literature manages to touch a depth dimension in revealing the characters, thus adding tiers of complexity to their characters. Thus, it is obvious that “Sure” performs as a highly instrumental element in the storyline and characterization of *The Blackwater*

Lightship. It is the central means of holding the narrative together, giving the story more substance and resulting in an authentic representation of people, complex portrayal of characters, and rich language. It, at the same time, enriches the culture-related aspects as well as deepens the psychology of the story, therefore providing the readers with more immersion into the novel plot.

Finally, it dislocates the narrative from being just another storyline to discovering culture, characters, and relationships. In the story of this novel, the author honors his style by introducing the word ‘Sure’ as one of his linguistic choices. Contrary to other English varieties where “Sure” is typically used mostly as the affirmative DM, instruction phrase, or attributive adjective, in this book, it is frequently served to convey absolute conviction. Such uncertainty is made obvious in the sentence, “Sure I didn’t know myself.” This style stands out as it is not the usual practice of most English speakers for that content. The author, who uses the “Sure” adverb at this point of a discourse marker comparable to American English usage, has given the text a special energy. Such a choice of language is very important in creating the atmosphere of the book throughout the story, and it shows the details about the main characters as well as helps in communicating between different people. It is the way the narrator chooses to express such a complex thought in a simple form that adds a level of sophistication, as well as the element of intrigue, to make the story more vivid and lively.

Concerning Literary Stylistics, the researchers would be expected to investigate the importance of discourse markers such as “Sure” in creating a particular stylistic effect in the author’s writing and the role of these markers in defining the narrative voice and its influence on the development of the characters. Carrying out a closer look at

these research areas will ensure that we can develop a more detailed and better understanding of the role of “Sure” in Irish English, and it can also aid the further growth of the fields of sociolinguistics and literary studies.

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