ORIGINAL PAPER

"I Thought you had Forgotten me": A Corpus-Pragmatic Examination of the Mental Verb *Think* in Irish Emigrants' Letters

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Abstract

This paper sets out to explore the interface between migration experiences and epistolary discourse in CORIECOR, the *Corpus of Irish English Correspondence* (McCafferty and Amador-Moreno in preparation). Using corpus and computational methods, this investigation aims to empirically explore language usage in the letters exchanged between the Irish in the United States of America, Australia and New Zealand and their loved ones back in Ireland. Specifically, the study proposes a corpus-pragmatic examination of the mental verb *think* in an attempt to explain the function of such verb in the negotiation of epistolary relationships, that is, how it helps to reinforce and maintain crucial emotional and physical links between emigrants and their families in Ireland. The material will be searched using Sketch Engine (Kilgarriff et al. 2004). In the quantitative stage, corpus tools such as the Corpus Query Language (CQL) function will be utilised to identify and collect the linguistic patterns that characterise the epistolary discourse under analysis. Qualitatively, a detailed inspection of such patterns will be conducted in order to provide access to historical forms of communication in the context of nineteenth- and twentieth-century Irish emigration as well as the use of involvement-marking strategies in private letters.

Keywords Irish emigrants' letters · Epistolary relationships · Corpus pragmatics · Think

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Introduction

In her introduction to the monograph *Families, Lovers and their Letter*s, Cancian
(2010: 10) summarises the historical value of emigrants' personal correspondence
arguing that:

> [L]etters are a time capsule through which a plethora of themes, ideas, ideolo-
> gies, norms, advice, dreams, plans and hopes were articulated in the language
> of their writers' everyday lives. They mirror the individual writers' interior psy-
> chological and emotional spaces and their views of the outside world. More-
> over, they bring to light a multiplicity and heterogeneity of voices as change
> and migration were catapulting them to new life possibilities.

Over the last decades, the study of emigrants' private correspondence has enjoyed an
upsurge of academic interest, especially among historians and social sciences schol-
ars interested in the examination of the internal dynamics of migration processes.
Regarded as "the document that could provide the basis for the reconstruction of both
the sociological and historical disciplines" (Gerber, 2006: 33), emigrants' letters have
been extensively used in the field of migration history to investigate a wide variety of
topics ranging from the causes and consequences of mass movements to the construc-
tion of identities and (re)negotiation of personal relationships. In the Irish context,
for example, Miller's (1985) *Emigrants and Exiles* and Fitzpatrick's (1994) *Oceans
of Consolation* set the benchmark for scholarship and remain two of the most influ-
ential volumes on Irish emigration. Schrier (1997) also provides qualitative, first-
hand reflections of the motives for and attitudes towards nineteenth-century Irish
emigration to North America. More recently, Murray (2006) and Miller (2008) have
demonstrated the value of using emigrants' letters to gain deeper, multi-perspectival
understanding of push and pull factors, the role of diasporic communities as well as
the lives and conditions of the Irish in the New World.

The study of emigrants' correspondence has also attracted scholarly attention in
the field of linguistics where, as van der Wal and Rutten (2013: 15) highlight, schol-
ars "have benefited from the technical progress made in the field of corpus linguis-
tics" and have also dealt "with phenomena at all linguistic levels, from phonology
and orthography through morphosyntax to discourse phenomena" (cf. e.g. Elspaß et
al., 2007; Nevalainen & Tanskanen, 2007; Dossena and Tieken-Boon van Ostade,
2008; Dossena and Del Lungo Camiciotti, 2012). In the context of Irish migrations,
the time capsule effect of emigrants' letters (Hickey, 2019: 20) has provided linguists
with new research material to trace the emergence and development of distinctive
features. That is, for example, the case of McCafferty and Amador-Moreno (2012,
2014, 2019) who have examined *shall*/*will* variation, the spread of first-person future
will and the use of discourse-pragmatic markers in Irish English using CORIECOR,
the *Corpus of Irish English Correspondence* (Amador-Moreno, 2022). The use of
involvement-marking strategies such as discourse-pragmatic markers is further dis-
cussed in Amador-Moreno (2019) who shows the validity of emigrants' letters for the
study of linguistic involvement and orality in written texts.

Previous studies that discuss linguistic involvement in personal letters include Sairio (2005: 24–25) who argues that "the more involved the communication situation is, the more such markers as evidential verbs, degree adverbs and first and second person singular pronouns will be used". This hypothesis is further supported by Palander-Collin (2009: 280) who claims that personal letters "seem to have become more subjective and involved from the sixteenth to the eighteenth century, as the frequency of *I* increased and self-referential stance expressions conveying the writer's personal feelings and assessments with mental verbs became more prominent". The use of first/second person pronouns and evidential verbs in Irish emigrants' letters is also discussed in Moreton (2015) who examines their wider phraseological context, paying close attention to their use within what Halliday and Matthiessen (2004) describe as projection structures.

Using corpus and computational methods, this investigation aims to empirically explore language usage in the letters exchanged between the Irish in diasporic spaces and their loved ones back in Ireland. Specifically, the study proposes a corpus-pragmatic examination of the mental verb *think* in an attempt to explain the function of such verb in the negotiation of epistolary relationships, that is, how it helps to reinforce and maintain crucial emotional and physical links between emigrants and their families in Ireland. In doing so, this paper will look at the occurrence of projection clauses in the sense described in Halliday and Matthiessen (2004) and Moreton (2015). In this regard, the examination of mental verbs in projection structures will be crucial to understand and explain emigrants' views, motivations and experiences. Here, it is important to mention that, although the long-term aim of this investigation is to provide a detailed study of the most salient mental verbs in CORIECOR, the results described in this paper represent just an initial, small-scale study that will set the scene for future analyses.

The paper, then, proceeds as follows. Section 2 looks at the language of personal letters and the use of involvement-marking strategies in historical data. The third section is concerned with the data and methodology that will be used in the analysis. In Sect. 4, the quantitative findings of the study will be presented and discussed. In the next section, a qualitative examination of the mental verb of cognition *think* will be provided paying special attention to the main topics addressed in the letters. Finally, Sect. 6 presents the conclusions and future research avenues.

Epistolary Communication and Linguistic Involvement

According to Dossena and Del Lungo Camiciotti (2012: 4) "epistolary discourse is distinguishable from other types of discourse by certain basic pronominal and predicative traits that, taken together, constitute what is unique to its language". Among those traits, the *I/You* relationship and the temporal relativity of the epistolary discourse stand as the most distinctive features of epistolary communication. In the particular case of the *I/You* relationship, as Dossena (2012: 49) points out, even though epistolary communication is "an *in absentia* dialogue that is in fact a monologue on the part of the encoder", meaning is constructed by means of interpersonal connections. In other words, the epistolary voice is shaped and "defined in relation to the

You whom he/she addresses" (Dossena and Del Lungo Camiciotti, 2012: 4). Such *in absentia* dialogue is, therefore, achieved through linguistic strategies that simulate spoken interaction and create a sense of involvement and present-consciousness. The latter is especially significant when we talk about the temporal relativity of the epistolary genre. According to Dossena and Del Lungo Camiciotti (2012: 5), in epistolary discourse, "both past and future are always relative to the discourse present of epistolary communication". This has also been examined in Fitzpatrick (2006) who refers to the "paradox of temporal polyvalence", an expression coined by Altman (1982 quoted in Fitzpatrick, 2006: 102), to describe the use of "elaborate devices for simulating immediacy when both parties know that the letter was written days, weeks, or months before receipt". As Amador-Moreno (2019: 71) asserts, part of that simulation of immediacy is realised through communicative strategies that signal identity as well as emotional and physical closeness. In this regard, "private correspondence belongs to the category of *Nähesprache* (the language of immediacy), where familiarity, emotions and private topics dominate" (Amador-Moreno, 2019: 72).[1]

Among the different communicative strategies used to signal closeness and involvement in correspondence, mental verbs are identified both by Quirk et al. (1985) and Palander-Collin (2009: 277) as "a prominent cluster type". The role such type of verbs plays within the epistolary discourse has been highlighted in Moreton (2012: 634) who concludes that:

> The high frequency of these mental verbs of cognition, perception and desire is interesting for two main reasons. The first is that these verbs, as explained by Michael Halliday and Christian Matthiessen, 'relate to inner experience' […] and usually describe emotions, thoughts or perceptions, thereby providing insight into the psychological worldview of the author. The second is that these verbs are special because they have the ability to project: that is they have the 'ability to set up another clause "outside" the "mental" clause as the representation of the "content" of consciousness' (Halliday & Matthiessen, 2004: 206).

Projection structures have been extensively described in Halliday and Matthiessen (2004: 443) who explain that "there are in fact three systems involved in the differentiation of different kinds of projection: (i) the level of projection (idea vs. locution), (ii) the mode of projection (reporting vs. quoting) and (iii) the speech function (projected proposition vs. projected proposal)". For the purpose of this paper, the study will exclusively focus on the speech function of projection and will thus discern between mental verbs triggering proposals and propositions.

On one hand, proposals have been defined as "exchanges of goods and services, projected mentally by processes of desire – hoping, wishing" (Halliday & Matthiessen, 2004: 461). In general terms, they do not require a verbal response. Instead, the projected proposal tends to include "desired (ideas of) states of affair" (p. 458) that often function as (indirect) commands and invite the addressee to act in some way as

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[1] For more information on the distinction between what Koch and Österreicher (1990: 8–12) termed *Nähesprache* (the language of immediacy) and *Distanzsprache* (the language of distance) see Amador-Moreno (2019: 71–72).

in (a) below. Here, the request to do all in the addressee's power to help is presented in a rather explicit way, only "softened by the command to act being formulated as hope" (Del Lungo Camiciotti, 2008: 127). The use of the projecting clause *I hope* in requests, apologies and reproaches in the CORIECOR letters has been investigated by Sotoca-Fernández and Ávila-Ledesma (in press). As example (b) illustrates, the mental clause plays a pivotal role in the conceptualisation of speech acts where it is used to minimise the impact of what is being said by relocating the focus on the writer's hopes, wishes and expectations.

a. ***I hope you***'ll do all in your power for my dear Mother as far as she will require you.
b. And now, my beloved Margaret, I shall bid you adieu! having told you everything I could think of, and ***I hope I*** may soon receive a letter from you, as long as this is.

On the other hand, propositions have been defined as "exchanges of information projected mentally by processes of cognition – thinking, knowing, understanding, etc.," (Halliday & Matthiessen, 2004: 461). Unlike proposals, propositions require a verbal response from the addressee therefore placing, as Moreton (2012: 642) rightly points out, "a mild obligation on the recipient to verbally acknowledge and address the points being raised". In the structure *I thought you had forgotten me*, included in the title of this paper, the primary, projecting clause *I thought* sets up the secondary, projected clause *you had forgotten me* which articulates the writer's beliefs. Here, the proposition contributes to the interactive nature of the letter in that it requires the addressee to not only confirm or deny the statement, but also to elaborate on the reasons for the lack of correspondence. Additionally, propositions can be used to perform what Moreton (2016: 16) describes as "awareness of the recipient's world rather than the author's". This has been particularly noticed in projection structures containing the mental verb *suppose* which are used to "construct an imagined homeland based on past, shared experiences" (p. 18).

Studies over the past two decades have provided important information on the use of mental verbs and projection structures in the epistolary discourse. The present study, then, aims to contribute to this growing area of research by examining the role that the mental verb of cognition *think* plays in the letters exchanged between the Irish in the United States of America, Australia and New Zealand and their families in Ireland. In the following section, the corpus and the methodology employed in the analysis will be presented and discussed.

Corpus Data and Method

The empirical data for this corpus-pragmatic investigation is provided by the *Corpus of Irish English Correspondence* (CORIECOR), which currently contains over 3.5 million words and about 6,500 private letters, dating from the late seventeenth to the early twentieth century. In terms of composition, most of the letters (approx. 4,800) in CORIECOR come from the *Irish Emigration Database* at the Mellon Cen-

tre for Migration Studies in Omagh, Co. Tyrone in Northern Ireland. More recently, other published and unpublished collections from the diaspora in Argentina, Canada, the United States, Great Britain, Australia and New Zealand have also been added in order to balance out the material in terms of geographical spread and fill the gaps in the time-span of the corpus (de Rijke, 2016: 45).[2]

The usefulness of CORIECOR for linguistic research has been highlighted in Amador-Moreno (2019: 14) who points out that such database "allows researchers to trace the emergence and development of features of Irish English and study morphological, syntactic, stylistic, regional and social variation". Over the past years, CORIECOR letters have provided data for studies of Irish English which have focused on grammar, discourse markers, phonology, etc., (see Amador-Moreno & McCafferty, 2012; Bonness, 2016; de Rijke, 2016; McCafferty, 2017, 2019). Coupled with vernacularity, the detailed writer and family information in CORIECOR has also provided a good starting point for the sociolinguistic and pragmatic examination of Irishness, emotions and migration experiences (Amador-Moreno, 2019; Ávila-Ledesma, 2019a).

In the analysis of mental verbs, two sets of letters: the Australia/New Zealand and the United States (US) collections, have been studied using Sketch Engine (Kilgarriff et al., 2004). The rationale behind the selection of these two datasets was to compare and contrast involvement strategies in different diasporic settings. Generally speaking, both sub-corpora are comparable with 306 Irish-Australian documents (c. 213,751 words) and 342 Irish-American missives (approx. 284,520 words), mostly written by the Irish in the diaspora between 1840 and 1930. Regarding gender, while women are balanced with 18 and 19 female letter writers in the Australia/New Zealand and the US respectively, men are slightly overrepresented in the US data with 40 male authors as opposed to 25 in Australia/New Zealand. In a previous study, such collections were also used to examine statistically-significant terms like *land* and *situation* in order to elucidate the various ways in which the concepts of migration, enhancement of social standing and belonging were linguistically and pragmatically constructed (Ávila-Ledesma, 2019b). The analysis offered interesting insights not only into the uses of such terms but also into the occurrence of mental verbs. The results reported in this paper, then, are part of this investigation which adopts a corpus pragmatic approach (Romero-Trillo, 2008) to the analysis of the epistolary discourse.

As far as methodology is concerned, the study takes a form-to-function approach and was conducted in two phases. Following the research procedures discussed in Moreton (2015: 281–2), the initial phase involved an in-depth, quantitative analysis based on the identification and compilation of the most salient linguistic patterns in both datasets, using the Corpus Query Language (CQL) function on Sketch Engine (Kilgarriff et al., 2004). Often referred to as one of the most powerful corpus tool on Sketch Engine, CQL allows researchers to look for more complex grammatical or lexical constructions or to use search criteria which cannot be set using standard

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[2] For a more detailed description of CORIECOR, see McCafferty and Amador-Moreno (2012) and Amador-Moreno (2022).

user interface.[3] The former is, indeed, the main reason why I have chosen to use CQL for the present analysis. Having examined the keyword and wordlists extracted from Ávila-Ledesma (2019b), it was now time to take a closer look at the recurrent and statistically significant patterns in the Australia/New Zealand and the US material and search for those structures used to reinforce and maintain crucial emotional and physical links between the emigrants and their families. In doing so, the study relied on the search queries proposed by Moreton (2015) which have been organised and listed as follows:

CQL 1. [tag="PP|PP$|NP"]
CQL 2. [tag="PP|PP$|NP"][tag="V.*"].
CQL 3. [tag="PP|PP$|NP"][tag="V.*"][tag="PP|PP$|NP"].
CQL 4. [tag="PP|PP$|NP"][tag="RB"][tag="V.*"][tag="PP|PP$|NP"].
CQL 5. [tag="PP|PP$|NP"][tag="MD|V.*"][tag="V.*"][tag="PP|PP$|NP"].
CQL 6. [tag="PP|PP$|NP"][tag="MD|V.*"][word="not"][tag="V.*"] [tag="PP|PP$|NP"].

As the queries above show, the analysis adopted a general-to-specific approach to data. That is, while CQL1 opened up with a broad search for personal and possessive pronouns and singular proper nouns (*I, My, Sally, Patrick*), CQL2 explored the most frequent and salient verbs collocating with these subjects in both sub-corpora. Taking it a step further, CQL3 also brought to light the pronouns and nouns occurring in object position (as in *I hope you*, *I think you*). This pattern was interesting for several reasons, the first one, and perhaps the most important one, being the fact that it introduced projection clauses. The next three search queries, then, expanded the scope of such projection structures by looking at adverbs (as in *I always thought you*) and modal/auxiliary constructions in affirmative and negative sentences in CQL4, CQL5 and CQL6, respectively.

Once the quantitative analysis concluded, the second phase involved a qualitative examination of the verb of cognition *think* which stood as the most salient verb favouring projection in both datasets. Using CQL, the study concentrated on the projected clause this time in order to identify and extrapolate the main topics and ideas as well as the ways writers reformulate relationships in the letters.

A CQL Analysis of Irish Emigrants' Correspondence

Table 1 below shows the most frequently occurring constructions in each search query as well as raw and normalised frequencies for both sub-corpora.[4] The results obtained from CQL1 showed that the frequency of pronouns and proper nouns was considerably high in both datasets, with *I* standing as the most numerous term with

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[3] See, for example, Kilgarriff and Tugwell (2002) for a detailed account of Sketch Engine. Similarly, more information on CQL is available at https://www.sketchengine.eu/corpus-querying/.

[4] *RF (raw)* and *NF (normalised) frequencies.* The normalised frequency in the study was calculated by per one hundred thousand words.

Table 1 Frequencies for CQL searches in the two sub-corpora

CQL	Example	Australia / New Zealand		US	
		RF	NF	RF	NF
1	*I*	39,368	1,841.76	50,796	1,785.32
2	*I be*	13,359	624.97	19,451	683.64
3	*I hope you*	1,929	90.24	2,691	94.58
4	*I often wish you*	147	6.87	165	5.79
5	*I will send you*	745	34.85	993	34.90
6	*I do not think it*	131	6.12	243	8.54

Table 2 The ten most frequent patterns for CQL 2

Australia/New Zealand			US		
	RF	NF		RF	NF
I be	1130	52.86	*I be*	1410	49.55
I have	875	40.93	*it be*	1189	41.78
it be	786	36.77	*I have*	1145	40.24
he be	489	22.87	*he be*	653	22.95
we have	336	15.71	***I think***	540	18.97
we be	304	14.22	*we have*	494	17.36
I think	292	13.66	*I do*	451	15.85
I do	284	13.28	*he have*	396	13.91
I hope	271	12.67	*I hope*	390	13.70
they be	261	12.21	*she be*	365	12.82

7174 instances in the Australia/New Zealand letters and 9674 examples in the US data. It was then followed by *you* which ranked second in the Irish-Australian and third in the Irish-American missives. Regarding overall usage, there were no significant differences, with 3174 examples in the former and 3743 in the latter. As mentioned earlier, the predominance of the first- and second-person pronouns "characterises personal correspondence as a text type" (Quirk et al., 1985: 1180–1182, quoted in Nurmi & Palander-Collin, 2008: 38) and was, therefore, a rather expected result. Looking at the top ten words in both sets, what seemed to be very interesting was the occurrence of the pronouns *we* and *they* because of the role such pronouns might play in the construction of Irishness and otherness in diasporic spaces. As Dossena (2019: 111) points out:

> the first-person plural pronoun is a valuable resource in emigrants' correspondence in that it can be used to refer to a discourse community comprising the recipients or excluding them, depending on whether the writers wish to stress what is shared (as in the case of mutual memories) or what is significantly different in the new country.

The occurrence of the pronouns *them* and *us* also reinforced the dichotomy *we* vs. *they* identified in the datasets. In this regard, it is important to highlight that even though *them* and *us* were not consistently part of the top ten, such terms ranked 9th and 11th in the Australia/New Zealand and 11th and 12th in the US materials. Scor-

ing high in the US set, the study also identified the pronoun *thee* which revealed interesting insights into the religious and social composition of the Irish emigration to America. Regarding proper nouns, and perhaps unsurprisingly, the most frequently occurring ones were those naming family members such as *Mother, Father, Brother* and places like *Melbourne*, *Sydney, Adelaide, Pittsburgh, America, Boston* – which, at first glance, seemed to indicate the preferred locations for the Irish diaspora in the New World.

Turning now to CQL2 – *Pronouns/Nouns + Verb*, the findings in Table 2 highlighted, as expected, the extreme dominance in terms of usage and frequency of the verbs *to be*, *to have* and *to do*, with *I be* standing as the most recurrent combination in both collections due to the habituality which it is expressing each time. The most striking result to emerge from the data was, however, the occurrence of *I think* and *I hope* amongst the ten most common patterns in the sub-corpora. Such findings are in consonance with Moreton (2015) and Amador-Moreno (2016) who found that self-referential, stance expressions conveying feelings through *think* and *hope* were used frequently in the letters penned by emigrants in North America and Argentina, respectively. The fact that *I think* and *I hope* ranked higher in the US letters in the present study was interesting and revealed further insights into the level of involvement and social interaction between the Irish at home and abroad, but I will return to this issue in the discussion section below.

The results obtained from CQL3 – *Pronoun/Nouns + Verb + Pronoun/Nouns*, provided a more accurate picture of the verbs favouring projection structures as well as the most frequently occurring patterns in the sub-corpora. Looking at Table 3, there are two major observations that stand out. On one hand, the relatively high frequency of mental verbs of desire, cognition and perception appearing in both datasets, where *I hope you* stood as the most recurrent linguistic pattern with 69 instances in the Australia/New Zealand and 97 examples in the US material. On the other hand, the consistent use of the mental verb of cognition *to think* which appeared in four of the ten most frequent linguistic patterns identified in the analysis. Interestingly enough, the four constructions were identical in both lists, with *I think I* and *I think it* ranking higher than *I think you* in the two collections. Another interesting observation here was the occurrence of *I send you* as in *I send you thirty pounds as a token of*

Table 3 The ten most frequent patterns for CQL3

Australia / NZ				US	
	RF	NF		RF	NF
I hope you	69	3.22	*I hope you*	97	3.40
I think I	54	2.52	***I think it***	72	2.53
I send you	37	1.73	***I think I***	72	2.53
I think it	34	1.59	*I wish you*	35	1.23
He tell me	23	1.07	*He say he*	32	1.12
I think he	23	1.07	***I think you***	28	0.98
I tell you	22	1.02	*I suppose you*	28	0.98
I think you	20	0.93	*I hope he*	27	0.94
I suppose you	20	0.93	*He tell me*	26	0.91
I hope I	20	0.93	***I think he***	26	0.91

gratitude in the Australia/New Zealand dataset as opposed to *I wish you* (*I wish you could be here*) in the US missives. This finding validates Ávila-Ledesma (2019b) who observed that unlike their Irish-American peers who usually focused on home-sickness, life in the Australian colonies often revolved around economic achievement and restoration of social status.

Having analysed the most salient patterns favouring projection structures, it is now time to examine those adverbs collocating with them. Looking at CQL 4 – *Pr/ Nouns+Adv+Verb+Pr/Nouns*, the findings showed that *often* (as in, *I often wish you*, *we often want Father*) was the most frequent adverb with 12 occurrences in the Australia/New Zealand data and 11 instances in the US letters. Similarly, the study also identified *always* (as in, *I always think he*) with a total of 12 examples in the Irish-Australian missives and 8 in the Irish-American correspondence. Emphatic adverbs such as *certainly, really, hardly, never*, attitude adverbs like *kindly, humbly, sincerely* and the temporal adverb *sometimes* were also attested in the documents under analysis.

Finally, the examination of CQL5 and CQL6 – *Pr/Nouns+Mod/Aux (+not)+Verb+Pr/Nouns*, added more significance to the existing findings. In this regard, it is important to mention that the search queries not only identified modal or auxiliary verbs co-occurring in projection structures, but they also extracted structures like *I will send you* as in *I will send you some little presents* and *I will give you* as in *I will give you a detailed account of our adventure* which were not functioning as projection but rather simple *Subject/Verb/Object* constructions as also noted in Moreton (2015: 9). The results reported in this section, then, refer to the general use of modal and auxiliary verbs both in affirmative and negative sentences in the data. Here, the findings revealed that *will* was the most frequent modal verb with 190 examples in Australia/New Zealand and 268 in the US letters.[5] It was followed by *would*, which had a higher frequency in the US set with 159 occurrences as opposed to 82 in the Irish-Australian material. The modal verb *can* was also more salient in the US correspondence with 92 instances and 57 in the Australia/New Zealand sub-corpus.

When comparing the results obtained in this phase to those of Moreton's (2015), there are indeed a number of similarities that stand out, the first one – and perhaps the most important one – being the high frequency of mental verbs of cognition and desire in both historical materials. More specifically, the findings obtained from the six search queries were very interesting for what they revealed about the colloca-tional behaviour of the mental verb *think*. However, they should be treated cautiously and require further analysis to understand and explain the function of such verb in the negotiation of epistolary relationships. In order to provide a horizontal reading of the findings, the next section will focus on the qualitative examination of the pro-jecting structures containing the verb *think*. The importance of combining vertical reading (corpus methods) with horizontal reading (pragmatics) has been highlighted in Romero-Trillo (2017) and Rühlemann (2019: 8) who argue that "corpus pragmat-ics does cut new paths into the jungle of human communication, illuminating some

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[5] For more information on the use of *will* and *shall* see McCafferty and Amador-Moreno (2012).

of the complex ways in which we, as speakers, entangle the said with the unsaid and how we, as listeners, disentangle the two".

Projecting *I Think* and the use of Propositions in the Letters

The qualitative phase of the study, then, involved the detailed inspection of the examples of *think* retrieved in the previous phase. At this stage, all instances were manually examined and those following the projection pattern described in Sect. 2, that is, consisting of a self-referential stance expression setting up a projected clause (*I thought you had forgotten me*) were selected for further analysis.

Overall, a total of 138 examples of *I think* appearing in projecting structures were identified in Australia/New Zealand and 172 instances in the US letters. At this stage, all examples were once again reviewed and instances such as *their second son Malcom, I think I mentioned, was at Newtown School* were excluded from the study. Building on Moreton (2015), the remaining 137 occurrences in the Australia/New Zealand data and 169 in the US material were subsequently organised into five main categories which have been summarised and presented in the following table:

The results, as shown in Table 4, revealed that projecting *I think* was fundamentally used to make general comments and observations in both sub-corpora. In the particular case of the Australia/New Zealand letters, a closer look at the concordance lines showed that *I think I* and *I think it* were the most frequent patterns used to project such comments and observations with 18 and 14 occurrences, respectively. Regarding topics addressed in the projected clauses, while most letter writers expressed opinions and reactions to the same topics, i.e., life and politics in Ireland and the Australian colonies, family news especially relating to health, sickness and death, some others also addressed the issue of religion and marriage. Such comments and observations were generally accompanied by expressions of sympathy and sorrow or identity reaffirmations as in examples (1) and (2) below. In the US data, the patterns of collocation of projecting *think* were very similar to the Irish-Australian ones, with *I think I* and *I think it* standing as the most salient constructions with 16 and 15 instances respectively. Apart from these two, the study also identified *I don't think I, I think you* and *I think he* with 7 occurrences each. In terms of content, the examination of the concordance lines showed that even though commenting on family news

Table 4 The most frequent uses of *I think* in projecting structures

	Australia/NZ		US	
	RF	NF	RF	NF
Making comments & observations	76	3.55	106	3.72
Passing comments on friends & family	41	1.91	42	1.47
Defending oneself or justifying actions	8	0.37	6	0.21
Projecting thoughts	8	0.37	5	0.17
Conveying reassurance and encouragement	4	0.18	10	0.35
Total	**137**	**6.40**	**169**	**5.93**

and life in the receiving country was highly frequent, other topics such as emigration and education started to appear in the Irish-American data as example (3) illustrates:

(1) I was sorry to hear your dear Mother was not so well. **I think** it is well for her She has you with her. (Isabella Wyly, Adelaide, South Australia, 19 October 1858).
(2) You cannot send me too much news from home & **I think** I get all the papers you send me. (Patrick McMahon Glynn, Kapunda, South Australia, 31 October 1885).
(3) I stad at school on my way back – **I think** it is the best school that we ever had hear: he has so menny different ways of reaching than I ever seen. I should like to go to school this winter. (Thomas Emlyn O'Brien, Collins, Lake Erie, NY, USA, 25 November 1842).

In addition, projecting *I think* was also used to pass comments on family and friends in Ireland and the host country in both datasets. As Table 4 illustrates, such usage was slightly more frequent in the Australia/New Zealand letters, with 41 instances. Perhaps unsurprisingly, passing comments on family and friends was realised through the structure *I think I* which again stood as the most recurrent pattern with 11 (out of the 41) instances. Interestingly, *I think he* and *I do not think he* also ranked relatively high with 10 occurrences in total. The content of the projected clauses here was generally the same in the two sub-corpora, with letter authors either commenting on the lives of family members and friends in the receiving countries (4) or complaining about a misbehaviour or lack of communication between the writer and a loved one (5). In both cases, the projecting structure is surrounded by expressions of gratitude, appreciation, surprise, etc., or expressions of irritation and anger conceptualised via attitude-related adjectives (*glad, thankful, mean*) and verbs (*feel, care*):

(4) You may tell my Father if he is still alive that I felt very glad indeed and very very thankful to see a letter as it was from his own hand and **I think** he said that Widow Matthews was dead about a week before he wrote. (John McCance, Victoria, Australia, 23 August 1862).
(5) **I think** that they acted very mean in telling us they were coming when they did not have the slightest idea of coming, but we don't care and we can exist without them. (Mary Coogan, Lincoln, Illinois, July 1884).

Although the overall frequency was relatively low compared to the previous uses, it was also interesting to find projecting *I think* in contexts where writers were defending themselves or were justifying actions that generally had to do with the act of receiving, writing or sending letters to their loved ones. As examples (6) and (7) demonstrate, letter authors not only resort to the use of propositions to convey information and elicit a response from the recipient. The use of *I think* together with attitude clusters such as *I am very sorry* and *I am quite surprised* seem to be important in interpersonal terms since they also help to negotiate and preserve epistolary relationships. While the former expresses the writer's feelings towards a potential misunderstanding (6), the latter shows the importance of the acknowledgement of receipt between frequent correspondents (7). Reference to previous letters written by the cur-

rent recipient, as in Annie O'Donnell's example, also acted as indirect confirmation of receipt and had a strategic application, that of involvement and closeness marking.

(6) I think it very strange he should have left Belfast without leaving an address to forward his letters to as **I think** he expected me to write to him. I am very sorry he did not get the letter as he will think I have been careless about writing to him. (Hamilton McIlrath, New Zealand, 22 October 1906).

(7) You don't know how homesick your last letter made me and how I would have enjoyed the trip to Connors. You know, I am quite surprised at you not getting my letters. **I think** it is so queer as I got every one of yours. (Annie O'Donnell, Florida, USA, 28 February 1904).

The next usage, i.e., projecting thoughts, turned out to be less frequent than expected with only 8 instances in the Australia/New Zealand letters and 5 in the US data. Here, all examples occurred in the past tense and were in the simple aspect except for (8), which appeared in the progressive form. In the case of the projected clause, it generally referred to a state of uncertainty which had a limited duration and seemed to be triggered by the absence of news or letters from families or friends, as in (9).

(8) Why should old acquaintance be forgotten. **I was thinking** it was the case until receiving by this mornings post the Sydney Herald and Freeman which I feel much obliged to you. (William Dalton, Co. Tipperary, Ireland to former servant Ned Hogan, New South Wales, Australia, 17 August 1858).

(9) You will never know the agony I suffered since last Saturday evening when your uncle called me up and asked where Jim was. **I thought** he was joking and passed it off, but when you didn't meet me on Saturday night at church, I became anxious and went to see you aunt. (Annie O'Donnell, Penn., USA, 7 June 1904).

Lastly, the study also identified examples of projecting *I think* where the pattern was used to reassure the recipient that the effort in answering letters was appreciated and encourage them to keep on writing (11). Here, it is worth noticing that such usage was more frequent in the US data with 10 examples as opposed to 4 in Australia/New Zealand. As a matter of fact, of those retrieved from the Australia/New Zealand collection, only 2 examples referred to letter writing, while the other 2 centred on encouraging emigration to the new country. That is the case of Patrick McMahon Glynn's letters to his siblings in Ireland. Glynn believes there is more scope in Australia for a surgeon than at home and, therefore, encourages his brother James to persuade their brother Eugene to consider this option, as in (10).

(10) **I think** Eugene had better come out here. If so, I will find the means. (Patrick McMahon Glynn, Adelaide, Australia, 30 April 1888).

(11) […] and if you knew how I appreciated your effort in answering my last letter soon as I had asked you. **I think** you were pretty nice. You know I look forward to a few lines from you […] (Annie O'Donnell, New Jersey, USA, 24 June 1902).

Discussion and Conclusion

In the present investigation, I have explored the use of involvement-marking strategies in epistolary discourse in the context of the Irish emigration to Australia/New Zealand and the United States of America. Using corpus-pragmatic methods, this study focused on the examination of the mental verb *think* in an attempt to explain the function of such verb of cognition in the (re)negotiation of epistolary relationships and how it may help to reinforce and maintain crucial emotional and physical links between emigrants and those remaining behind.

Based on corpus evidence, there are a number of observations that should be discussed. First, the results of the quantitative analysis show that mental verbs of cognition, perception and desire such as *think*, *know*, *suppose*, *hope* and *wish* co-occurring with the first-person singular pronoun *I* were, indeed, remarkably frequent in the sub-corpora under study, with *I think* being the most recurrent combination. Such findings highlight the value of personal letters in general – and the CORIECOR material in particular – which, as Cancian (2010: 8) puts it, "bring to light the voices of women, men, and children who at various stages in their lives penned their daily thoughts, concerns, worries, satisfactions, dreams, and hopes to their loved ones through correspondence". The fact that *I think* and its variants stand as the most frequent and statistically significant patterns in CQL3, which explored projection in the study, shows an increased interactional involvement in the two sub-corpora under analysis. Here, as the examples in the qualitative section illustrate, the use of *I think* to project comments, observations, opinions, reassurance, etc., serves a particular purpose, that of reinforcing ties and signalling psychological proximity through letter writing. In other words, the use of the propositions seems to suggest an acute need to stay in touch with their significant others and, in the case of the emigrants, also with Ireland.

Moving now to the qualitative analysis, no significant differences between the datasets have been found in the overall frequencies and uses of projecting *think*. The fact that the study only identified few examples of *I think* referring to a mental state, i.e., projecting thoughts, highlights the function such verb of cognition, and in particular the pattern *I think*, displays as a stance marker. These findings are consonant with Dossena (2012) and Moreton (2012: 641) who found that *I think* was being used "as subjective modality marker, rather than true mental projection verbs" which seemed to be used when expressing sympathy, or as a way of showing solidarity in private correspondence. The occurrence of projecting *I think* reassuring and encouraging those back at home is, in fact, a good example of showing solidarity.

All in all, the present study represents just an initial step towards an empirically-based examination of language and migration experiences in Irish emigrants' letters. As stated in the introduction, the main aim of the paper has been to examine the potentials of a corpus-pragmatic methodology to explore epistolary communication and linguistic involvement in CORIECOR. The results of the study also highlight new research avenues that may enrich the existing findings and offer deeper insights into the psychological worlds of Irish emigrants. In this regard, possible research avenues to be addressed in the future are the occurrence of mental verbs of perception and desire as well as the examination of such verbs from a gender-based perspective.

Data Availability The datasets analysed during the current study are not publicly available yet, but are available from the corresponding author on reasonable request and with permission of the principal investigator and members of the research project 'CORIECOR visualized. Irish English in writing across time (a longitudinal historical perspective)'. Similar data can be found on the *Mellon Centre for Migration Studies* website which can be accessed at https://mellonmigrationcentre.com/about-us/irish-emigration-database-ied/.

Declarations

Ethical Approval Permissions to reproduce the material (including the personal information in it, full names, etc.,) were requested and obtained at the beginning of the compilation process. Such permissions have been extended to all researchers in our research project and their corresponding works.

Consent for Publication Not applicable.

Conflict of interest The corresponding author states that there is no conflict of interest.

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