Pragmatic functions: expressing disagreement

At Trinity College London, we have studied the scripts from hundreds of our speaking and listening exams. This data shows us the range of language that test takers use for different pragmatic functions.

Activity 1

Read this exam extract of a discussion between a test taker <TT> and an examiner <E> about the social implications of prolonging life expectancy.
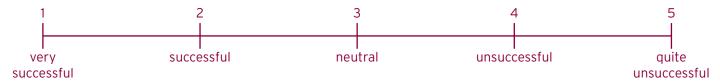
Corpus extract

<E> Scientists say that they will soon be able to prolong general life expectancy to well over the age of a hundred. I'm not at all convinced of the desirability of this development

<TT> Erm...I'm not really sure why aren't you really keen on the fact that they can pull human age over a hundred?

<E> Well because first of all er when you look at people who are a hundred years old they're not exactly in excellent physical condition

<TT> Well I agree but...medicines and scientific res... research has been progressing maybe there are some kind of medicines in the future which can really help in er maybe maintaining the physique the h...the health of human beings

<E> Mm

<TT> And

<E> Yes but if er...if people are going to live over a hundred and they're going probably going to retire later then it's not gonna help your generation of people who are looking for work because they're gonna be working longer

<TT> Well I agree but maybe we can develop more jobs

Underline all expressions the test taker <TT> uses to express their position in the debate.
Does the test taker <TT> agree or disagree with the examiner <E>?

Activity 2

Read the extracts below aloud. How successfully (or unsuccessfully) does each express disagreement? Use the following scale:

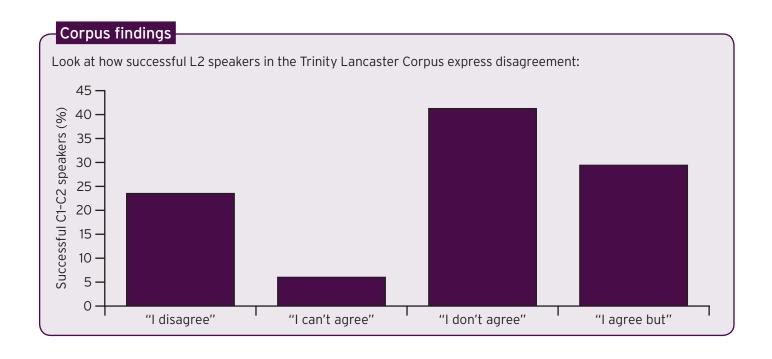| 1	2	3	4	5
very successful	successful	neutral	unsuccessful	quite unsuccessful

a) I completely disagree with this because er I I repeat as I said...

b) I agree with this point but don't you think maybe the fact that times are changing is a good thing?

c) But I personally would disagree that that money would necessarily be spent on that

d) Erm no no it's not so

e) Well I'm not totally convinced but er you know I live in a really traditional family

f) Mm I can understand your opinion erm but I was still wondering...

g) I can't agree with you

h) Er er I I think erm I I think they I I think they are wrong

i) I think they're completely wrong

j) No way

k) I think he's stupid

l) I I I can understand what you're saying but I'm not I don't agree with that

Activity 3

Discuss the questions below with a partner, using some of the successful strategies of expressing disagreement from activity 2.

a) Is money important in life?

b) Is change a good thing?

c) Should people spend less time on the internet?

Corpus findings

Look at how successful L2 speakers in the Trinity Lancaster Corpus express disagreement:

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A partnership between Trinity College London and the Centre for Corpus Approaches to Social Science (CASS) at Lancaster University