

# DOKTORI ÉRTEKEZÉS TÉZISEI

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**The pragmatic marker - discourse marker dichotomy  
reconsidered - the case of *well* and *of course***

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## 1. Objectives, previous research

There is a rapidly growing body of research on linguistic expressions referred to as discourse markers (henceforth DMs), discourse connectives, discourse operators, discourse particles, cue phrases, pragmatic markers, framing devices; the list could go on as the function of the number of theoretical frameworks that have been applied to the study of these items (Relevance Theory, coherence-based studies, sentence grammar, interactional sociolinguistics, to mention but a few). It is widely agreed that such expressions play a vital role in utterance interpretation. There is, however, disagreement on the type of meaning they express and the criteria one can use to delimit this class of linguistic items.

DMs are intriguing objects of study for several reasons: they promise the researcher ready access to the very fabric of talk-in progress (Redeker 2005), this class of linguistic items also brings up many of the questions concerning the pragmatics/semantics boundary (cf. for example Andersen 2001: 45 or Aijmer 2002: 56); the differences between speech and writing (or rather, between planned and unplanned discourse / syntactic vs pragmatic modes of discourse) and the relationship between cohesion and coherence (cf. Halliday and Hasan 1976); gender-preferential differentiation (Holmes 1995); grammaticalisation (cf. Hopper and Traugott 1994) and a variety of other phenomena that have long fascinated and puzzled linguists (and will most probably continue to do so).

Despite such a rapidly growing body of research on DMs (which has expanded both from an empirical point of view with an increasing number of in-depth analyses of particular items and theoretically, e.g. studies on tendencies in meaning developments, Relevance Theory approaches, etc.), many experts in the field of DM studies (e.g. Schourup:1999, Fraser:1999 or Aijmer and Simon-Vandenberg:2004) have observed that there are still a number of fundamental questions that need to be answered. Some of the issues include the lack of generally accepted terminologies and classifications, uncertainty regarding essential formal, semantic, and pragmatic characteristics, as well as the absence of a model in which DMs can be related to general linguistic categories in an integrated way. One of the symptoms of these problems is the above mentioned fact: there are almost as many expressions denoting linguistic units that belong to this category as there are approaches to pragmatic, interpersonal, attitudinal, etc. uses of language.

The aim of Part I of the dissertation is, therefore, to formulate a coherent approach to the description of the class of expressions I refer to (contra e.g. Fischer 2000, Hansen 1998, etc.) as Discourse Markers. The aim of the second part of my dissertation is twofold: by feretting out the functional spectrum of *well* and *of course* I argue that the pragmatic marker - discourse marker dichotomy is empirically unjustifiable on the one hand; on the other, I provide empirical evidence in favour of putting *well* and *of course* in their respective places in the network model I propose in Part I.

## **2. Methods used**

### ***2.1. Methods, hypotheses made in Part I (Theory) of the dissertation***

A central thesis in my dissertation is the claim that DMs do not display taxonomic relations and cannot be modelled along the lines of semantic-functional "straitjackets". Instead we need a theoretical framework (or rather, a combination of theoretical frameworks) that accounts for the dynamic nature of the class and describes its distinguishing features in terms of *continua*, rather than *dichotomies* (along the lines of propositional - non-propositional / conceptual - procedural / inherent - context-dependent meaning *continua*, and, of course in terms of the distinction between the discourse markers - pragmatic markers referred to in the title, which, similarly should be viewed as a *continuum* rather than a *dichotomy*).

Accordingly, I use cognitive semantics and grammaticalization theory as appropriate complementary frameworks for my analysis. With regard to the grammaticalization - pragmaticalization of DMs the following hypotheses are made:

- it is assumed that DMs have undergone or are in the process of undergoing pragmaticalization;
- core members of the fuzzy category of DMs are in a more advanced stage of pragmaticalization than peripheral ones;

- pragmaticalization can be viewed as an early stage, or sub-process of grammaticalization (cf. Traugott 1995);
- the motivation behind the pragmaticalization of DMs is the fact that interactants (frequently) use them for metacommunicative purposes.

## ***2.2. Data and methodology used in Part II (Case studies) of the dissertation***

The corpus I compiled for the purpose of empirical research is a collection of transcripts taken from Larry King Live, the popular TV show broadcast on CNN. The corpus consists of 549,254 words, which is comparable in size to the London Lund Corpus (435,000 words) and to most of the corpora that have been used in connection with DMs (cf. Aijmer 1996 and 2002, Müller 2004, etc.). Throughout my analysis I used the Sisyphus Concordancer, created and developed by Ágoston Tóth, to whom many thanks are due.

Following Müller's (2004) research method, I performed a two-stage categorisation / indexing process. First, I looked for patterns in the usage of *well* in a test corpus consisting of one hundred randomly selected instances of *well*. The categories I used in the first, preliminary stage were based on the functions of *well* identified in previous research, thus serving as input for the categorisation system, which I then developed based on the patterns found in the test corpus. In the second stage, this categorisation system was applied to all instances of *well*.

With regard to *of course* I used qualitative methods of approaching DMs as described in Schiffrin (1987).

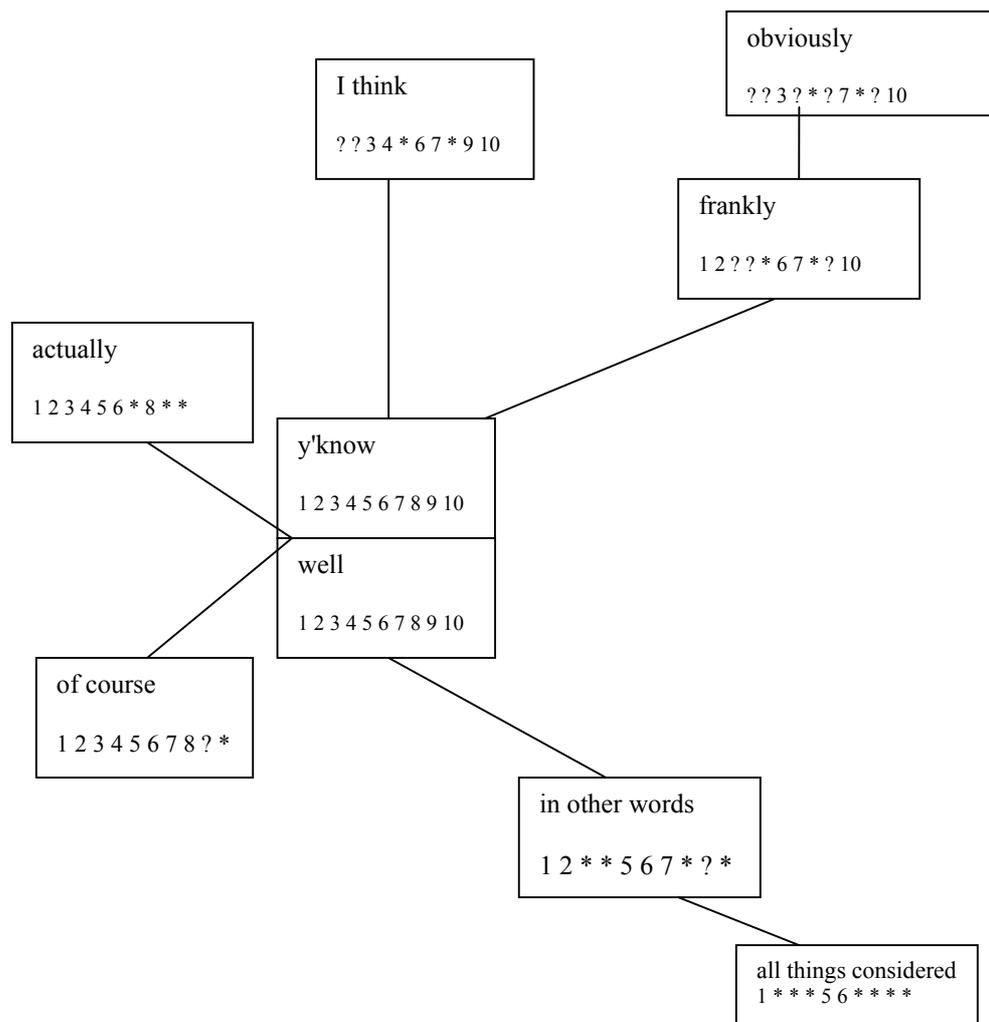
## **3. Findings, conclusions**

### ***3.1. Findings, conclusions of Part I (Theory) of the dissertation***

In Part I. I present a model of the functional class of DMs that represents them as a *radial category*. The following characteristics are identified as properties that hold individual members within the category:

1. non-propositionality
2. optionality
3. context-dependence
4. multifunctionality
5. sequentiality
6. weak clause association
7. variable scope
8. procedural meaning - non-compositionality
9. high frequency
10. orality

On the basis of a number of formal-functional tests described in chapter two, as well as the findings of grammaticalization theory, I argue that the DMs *you know*, *well*, *of course*, *etc.* (I selected some of the most controversial items with regard to their DM status) yield the following network model with respect to the above properties:



As the model illustrated, DMs as disparate as *in other words* and *well, you know*, etc. can be related to each other as examples of core and peripheral members of the category based on formal, functional and stylistic properties that individual members display to *varying degrees*. Thus the model accounts for diachronic grammaticalization processes, the syntactic heterogeneity of the class as well as the semantic-functional elusiveness of individual items.

### 3.2. Findings, conclusions of Part II (Case studies) of the dissertation

Table 1. below gives an overview of the categorisation system resulting from stage 1 of the indexing process. The individual columns include the numbers, the abbreviations of the categories used for indexing, and a short explanation of each function, respectively.

[1]	TM	topic shift/ topic management/ skip-connecting, story preface, abstract, etc.
[2]	FTA	mitigated disagreement / face management
[3]	INSUFF	contrast with previous statement/ question, unexpected, dispreferred second
[4]	NOSP	"aggressive question", speaker is given no space by question
[5]	DLS	delay, lexical search
[6]	QSP	quote / shift of perspective
[0]	NDM	non-DM use, adverbial or in "as well as"
[?]	RB	does not fit into any of the categories ("ragbag" category)

Table 1. categories for stage 2 of indexing

The correlations between individual occurrences of *well* and the contextual cues of the six categories used in the course of stage 2 are summarized in tables 2 and 3 below:

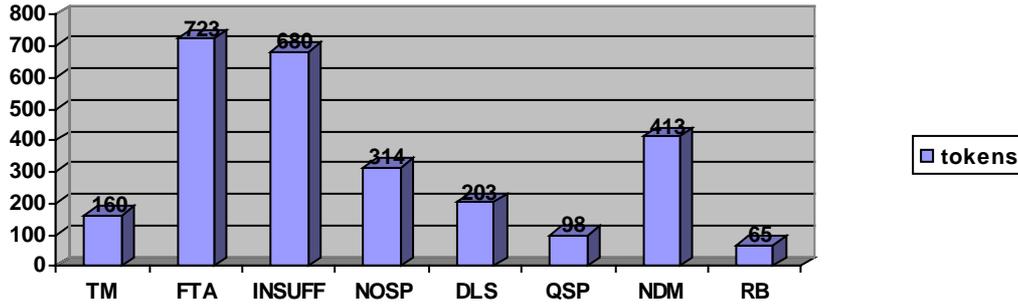


Table 2. Categorization of tokens of *well* in full corpus, total number of occurrences: 1839

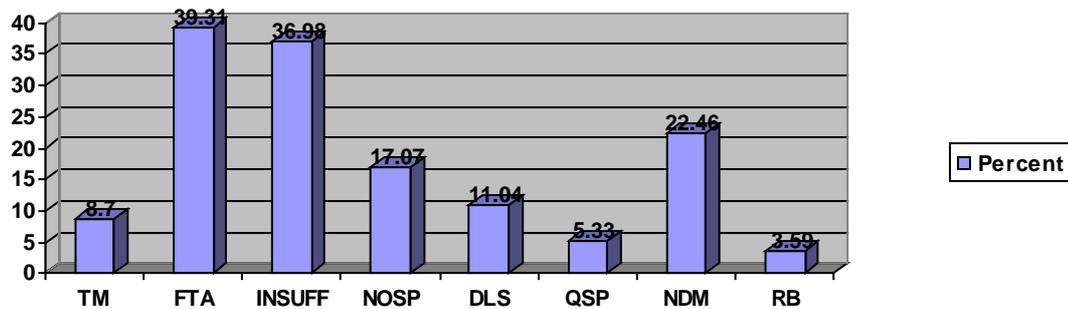


Table 3. Results shown in percentages

In addition to the findings summarized in the tables above I propose the following:

- when approaching DMs from an empirical perspective it is important to account for their multifunctionality (contra Fuller:2003a), the fact that “markers may work at more than one structural level [of discourse] at once” (Schiffrin 1987:320) as well as at a cognitive level, thus there is a need to account for individual occurrences of DMs that cut across functional categories;
- the high ratio of turn-initial DMs in second pair parts of adjacency pairs (1044 tokens of *well*, i.e. 73.21% of all D-items occurred in this position) suggests that *well* functions primarily at the level of the exchange structure (interactional level), which is also born out by Schiffrin's research, who calls 'well' a response marker used "when

the options offered through a prior utterance for the coherence of the upcoming response are not precisely followed" (Schiffrin 1987:127);

- parallel to Stenström's notion of D-value, I suggest the term I-value or interactional value in terms of which a particular DM's function at the level of the exchange structure can be described.

With regard to the status of *of course* as a DM, I conclude that, despite the fact that the non-saliency and peripheral status of *of course* as a discourse marker is frequently observed in the literature, *of course* displays a whole range of the (formal and functional) properties of the category of DMs (also represented in the network model presented in the previous section), such as:

- non-propositionality (contra Bach 1999);
- variable scope (cf. co-occurrence with *and* as coordinator as opposed to co-occurrence with *and* as discourse marker);
- multifunctionality (it simultaneously marks new information and illocutionary force mitigation);
- context- and genre-dependence (*of course* recurrently appears at certain narrative segments similarly to oral narrative markers [cf. González 2004:339]; its dominant use depends on the text type e.g. in argumentative discourse it is primarily associated with personal centre-switches used for rhetorical reasons);
- procedural meaning (on grounds of the unreliability of native speakers' intuitions about its use in Bársony:1997 and Holmes:1990 as well as its non-compositionality);
- weak clause association;
- connectivity / textuality (contra Andersen:2001); evidentiality as the core meaning of *of course* (marking that the utterance in its focus is in line with expectations) ensures that *of course* contributes to argument- and narrative structure as well as coherence in general.

On the basis of empirical research on *well* and *of course* in Part II of the dissertation I also argue that the pragmatic marker - discourse marker dichotomy is empirically unjustifiable, since individual occurrences *simultaneously* mark textual and interpersonal relations and cut across the DM - PM distinction.

#### 4. Author's previous work in the field of DM studies

The Language of Conrad. HUSSE 4, Budapest, 1999. (co-author: Tóth Ágoston)

Good Will Hunting - A Smorgasbord of Strategies Used to Teach Pragmatics to Hungarian University Students. HAAS, Debrecen, 2000.

The Use of Made-up Texts in Discourse Analysis. HUSSE 5, Eger, 2001.

The pragmatic functions of discourse markers and the discourse functions of pragmatic markers – a corpus-based study. HUSSE 7, 2005.

To appear soon:

*Discourse Markers - a radial category.* In: In M. Fabian (ed.), *Sučasni doslidženná z inozemnoï filologii. Volume 3.* Uzhhorod: Department of Foreign languages, Uzhhorod National University, to appear in January 2006.

*"Of course" - marker of new information.* In M. Fabian (ed.), *Sučasni doslidženná z inozemnoï filologii. Volume 3.* Uzhhorod: Department of Foreign languages, Uzhhorod National University, to appear in January 2006.

Review of González, Monserrat. 2004. *Pragmatic markers in oral narrative - the case of English and Catalan.* John Benjamins Publishing Company, Amsterdam/Philadelphia. to appear in December 2005 - January 2006.