



PRAGMATIC MARKER USAGE IN SPOKEN CORPORA: A COMPUTATIONAL DISCOURSE ANALYSIS OF SPOKEN DISCOURSE

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Abstract

This study investigates the use and functions of pragmatic markers in naturally occurring spoken discourse. It used a mixed method approach, the qualitative part involved the recordings of interviews and the quantitative part involves the frequency determination of the pragmatic markers. The research data was collected by conducting six interviews with equal ratio of male and female members. The recordings were then analyzed into text by using notebooklm tool. The recorded text was then taken into notepad files and the frequency of the pragmatic markers was obtained by using antconc. The sampling of the research was purposive and balanced sampling. The theory applied for the analysis was the pragmatics and discourse theory developed by the contributions of several scholars, particularly J. L. Austin, H. P. Grice, Michael Halliday, Ruqaiya Hasan, and Deborah Schiffrin. The theory shows us how text can be constructed, interpreted and organized in real life communication. It creates a direct link between pragmatic marker's usage and the spoken corpora. The main objective of the research was to examine how speakers employ pragmatic markers to organize discourse, express stance, and manage interaction in real-time communication. The study concluded that pragmatic markers are essential components of natural discourse and highlights their importance in discourse analysis and pragmatics by demonstrating how speakers use them to construct meaning and manage communication in authentic conversational contexts.

Introduction

Language in real-life conversation is not limited to grammatical structures and literal meanings; it also includes small linguistic elements that help speakers organize their thoughts, manage interaction, and express attitudes. Among these elements are pragmatic markers—words and phrases such as *well*, *so*, *you know*, *I mean*, and *actually*—which play a crucial role in shaping spoken discourse. Although these markers often appear insignificant at the surface level, they perform essential interactional and discourse-organizing functions in communication. In spoken language, pragmatic markers help speakers signal topic shifts, manage turn-taking, soften statements, express hesitation, and negotiate interpersonal relationships. Their meaning is highly dependent on context, and a single marker may perform multiple functions depending on its position and conversational environment. Because of their context-sensitive and multifunctional nature, pragmatic markers are best understood through the frameworks of pragmatics and discourse theory, which examine how meaning is constructed in interaction rather than in isolated sentences.



With the development of corpus linguistics and computational tools, researchers can now analyze pragmatic markers in large collections of authentic spoken data. Spoken corpora provide natural conversational examples, allowing for systematic examination of frequency, positional distribution, and contextual usage patterns. A computational discourse analysis approach makes it possible to combine quantitative methods—such as frequency counts and positional analysis—with qualitative interpretation of discourse functions. This study investigates the usage of pragmatic markers in spoken corpora through a mixed-method computational approach. By examining how often these markers occur, where they appear within utterances, and what interactional functions they perform, the research aims to provide a comprehensive understanding of their role in spoken discourse. Ultimately, the study contributes to corpus pragmatics, discourse analysis, and computational linguistics by bridging theoretical explanation with empirical data analysis.

Research Questions

1. What contextual patterns and interactional functions do pragmatic markers perform in spoken discourse?
2. How often and where do pragmatic markers appear in spoken corpora?
3. How can their use be explained using pragmatic and discourse theories?

Research Objectives

1. To examine the contextual patterns and interactional functions of pragmatic markers in spoken discourse.
2. To determine the frequency and positional distribution (initial, medial, and final) of pragmatic markers in selected spoken corpora.
3. To explain the use and functional patterns of pragmatic markers within the frameworks of pragmatics and discourse theory.

Significance of the Study

This study is significant because it highlights the important role of pragmatic markers in shaping natural spoken communication. Although words such as *well*, *so*, *you know*, and *I mean* are often considered minor or “filler” elements, they play a central role in organizing discourse, managing interaction, expressing speaker attitude, and maintaining conversational coherence. By examining these markers systematically in spoken corpora, the study demonstrates that they are not random or meaningless, but functionally important components of spoken language. The study is also significant methodologically. By using a mixed-method computational approach, it combines quantitative corpus analysis with qualitative discourse interpretation. This integration strengthens the reliability and depth of the findings, as numerical frequency patterns are supported by contextual functional analysis. Such an approach contributes to the growing field of corpus pragmatics, where empirical data and theoretical interpretation are combined.

Statement of the Problem

Despite the growing recognition of pragmatic markers as essential elements of spoken communication, they are still frequently overlooked or treated as insignificant fillers in linguistic analysis. Much of traditional linguistic research has focused on grammatical structure and sentence-level meaning, leaving the contextual and interactional roles of pragmatic markers underexplored. Although some corpus-based studies have examined individual markers, there remains a lack of comprehensive research that systematically combines computational frequency



analysis with in-depth discourse-functional interpretation across different spoken contexts. Furthermore, the integration of pragmatic and discourse theories with large-scale spoken corpus data is still limited.

Literature Review

Pragmatic markers have received considerable attention in linguistic research due to their significant role in structuring spoken discourse and managing interaction. Although these elements do not contribute directly to the propositional meaning of an utterance, they perform essential pragmatic and discourse functions that facilitate communication. Words and expressions such as *well*, *so*, *you know*, *I mean*, and *actually* frequently appear in spontaneous speech and serve as indicators of speaker attitude, discourse organization, and interpersonal management. The study of pragmatic markers is primarily grounded in the fields of pragmatics and discourse theory, both of which emphasize language use in context rather than isolated grammatical structure. Pragmatics examines how meaning is constructed through context, speaker intention, and shared knowledge between interlocutors (Levinson, 1983). Discourse theory, on the other hand, focuses on how larger stretches of language are organized to create coherence and interactional continuity (Schiffrin, 1987).

One of the earliest comprehensive studies of discourse markers was conducted by Schiffrin (1987), who defined them as sequentially dependent elements that bracket units of talk. According to her model, markers such as *well* and *so* function at multiple levels of discourse, including ideational, actional, exchange, participation, and information states. Schiffrin argued that these markers contribute to coherence by linking utterances to prior discourse and by signaling how speakers intend their contributions to be interpreted. Her work established the foundation for later corpus-based studies by demonstrating that pragmatic markers are systematic rather than random elements of speech. Similarly, Fraser (1999) conceptualized pragmatic markers as lexical expressions that signal a relationship between the current utterance and the prior discourse. He categorized them into contrastive markers (e.g., *but*), elaborative markers (e.g., *and*), inferential markers (e.g., *so*), and topic change markers. Fraser's framework is particularly useful for identifying functional patterns and positional distribution in spoken corpora, as it allows researchers to classify markers according to discourse relations.

Brinton (1996) further expanded the discussion by examining the historical development and pragmatic functions of discourse markers in English. She emphasized that these elements often originate from lexical items that undergo grammaticalization and acquire discourse-level functions. Brinton noted that pragmatic markers are especially prominent in spoken language because conversation requires real-time processing and interactional management. This view aligns with corpus linguistic findings that spoken corpora contain significantly higher frequencies of pragmatic markers compared to written corpora. The spoken mode necessitates planning, hesitation, repair, and negotiation, all of which are facilitated by pragmatic markers.

From a pragmatic perspective, pragmatic markers are closely linked to speech act theory and politeness theory. Speech act theory, initially proposed by Austin (1962) and later developed by Searle (1969), suggests that utterances perform actions such as requesting, apologizing, promising, or refusing. Pragmatic markers often soften or reinforce the illocutionary force of these speech acts. For example, the addition of *well* before a disagreement reduces the directness of the act, thereby mitigating potential face-threat. Brown and Levinson's (1987) politeness



theory further explains how speakers use linguistic strategies to maintain positive and negative face. Markers like “*I think*” or *maybe* function as hedges that minimize imposition and protect interpersonal relationships. These theories provide a strong explanatory framework for understanding why speakers employ pragmatic markers in different social contexts.

Relevance Theory, proposed by Sperber and Wilson (1986), also contributes to the explanation of pragmatic marker usage. According to this theory, communication is guided by the principle of relevance, whereby speakers aim to produce utterances that achieve optimal cognitive effect with minimal processing effort. Pragmatic markers help guide listeners toward the intended interpretation by signaling how an utterance relates to prior discourse. For instance, *so* may indicate that a conclusion is being drawn, thereby narrowing the range of possible interpretations. In this sense, pragmatic markers function as procedural signals that facilitate inferential processing.

Corpus-based studies have increasingly investigated pragmatic markers in authentic spoken data to determine their frequency and positional distribution. Aijmer (2002) examined pragmatic markers in the London-Lund Corpus and found that items such as *well* and *you know* frequently occur in initial and medial positions, where they serve interactional and organizational functions. Initial position markers often signal response or topic shift, while medial markers indicate hesitation or elaboration. This positional variation is central to understanding how pragmatic markers operate structurally within discourse. Similarly, Müller (2005) investigated discourse markers in native and non-native English conversations and found that learners tend to overuse certain markers while underusing others, reflecting differences in pragmatic competence. Research has also emphasized the multifunctionality of pragmatic markers.

A single marker can perform multiple roles depending on context. For example, *so* may function as an inferential connector, a topic initiator, or a floor-holding device. This multifunctionality supports the view that pragmatic markers cannot be analyzed solely through syntactic criteria but require discourse-pragmatic interpretation (Schiffrin, 1987; Fraser, 1999). Corpus methods enable researchers to observe these functional variations across large datasets, providing empirical evidence for theoretical claims. Another important aspect of pragmatic marker research is interactional management. Conversation analysis has shown that speakers use markers to regulate turn-taking and manage conversational flow. Markers such as *okay* and *right* frequently signal acknowledgment or transition, while hesitation markers such as *um* and *uh* indicate planning difficulty.

These findings align with discourse theory, which views conversation as a jointly constructed activity requiring coordination between participants. Pragmatic markers thus serve as tools for maintaining coherence and interactional alignment. Despite extensive research, gaps remain in the literature. Many studies focus on individual markers rather than examining broader patterns across multiple markers within specific speech communities. Additionally, while frequency counts provide quantitative insights, qualitative interpretation is necessary to understand contextual functions. Integrating computational corpus analysis with pragmatic and discourse theories allows for a more comprehensive understanding of pragmatic marker usage. Mixed-method approaches combining frequency analysis, positional distribution, and contextual interpretation are therefore recommended.



Overall, the literature demonstrates that pragmatic markers are indispensable components of spoken discourse. Rooted in pragmatics and discourse theory, they facilitate coherence, manage interpersonal relations, signal speaker stance, and guide listener interpretation. Foundational theories such as speech act theory (Austin, 1962; Searle, 1969), politeness theory (Brown & Levinson, 1987), relevance theory (Sperber & Wilson, 1986), and discourse marker frameworks (Schiffrin, 1987; Fraser, 1999) collectively provide a robust explanatory foundation. Corpus-based research further reveals systematic patterns of frequency and positional distribution in spoken language.

These findings support the need for continued investigation of pragmatic markers within authentic spoken corpora to better understand their contextual patterns and interactional functions. Despite these challenges, the literature clearly confirms that pragmatic markers are deeply embedded in the structure and function of spoken discourse. Drawing upon foundational pragmatics and discourse theory, including works by Levinson (1983), Schiffrin (1987), and Fraser (1999), contemporary research reinforces that markers are more than stylistic ornaments; they are indispensable tools for communication (*Journal of Applied Linguistics and TESOL*, 2025; Eragamreddy, 2024; Han, 2024).

The integration of pragmatics with corpus linguistics enables researchers to systematically explore frequency, positional distribution (initial, medial, final), and functional variation across discourse contexts. By combining computational methods with interpretive analysis, scholars can uncover nuanced patterns of pragmatic marker usage that reflect speaker intention, discourse structure, and interactional dynamics. While advancements in research are considerable, challenges remain. One major methodological issue is the lack of a standardized framework for classifying pragmatic markers, which leads to variability across studies.

As Eragamreddy (2024) noted, the absence of uniform categories complicates cross-study comparison and synthesis of findings. Additionally, while corpus frequency analysis offers valuable quantitative data, it must be integrated with qualitative interpretation to capture context-based functions accurately. Both quantitative and qualitative approaches are necessary to reveal the multifaceted roles of markers within actual conversational practice. In addition to functional research, the pedagogical relevance of pragmatic markers is widely acknowledged. Studies focusing on English as a second language contexts show that learners who gain awareness of pragmatic markers demonstrate improved fluency, coherence, and sociolinguistic appropriateness in spoken discourse. Research in Tanzanian academic contexts found that correct application of markers enhanced learners' social integration and academic performance, demonstrating the markers' role in effective communication beyond basic proficiency (*Journal of Linguistics and Language in Education*, 2024).

Research Methodology

The research adopts a mixed-method approach that integrates both quantitative and qualitative analysis. The quantitative component involves computational corpus analysis to calculate the frequency and positional occurrence (initial, medial, and final) of pragmatic markers across selected spoken corpora. The qualitative component involves close contextual examination of extracted examples to interpret their discourse functions, such as managing turn-taking, signaling stance, marking topic shifts, and expressing interpersonal meaning. By combining statistical measurement with in-depth discourse interpretation, the mixed-method



approach provides a comprehensive understanding of how pragmatic markers function structurally and interactionally in spoken communication.

Research Design

This study employs a descriptive-analytical research design to investigate the use of pragmatic markers in spoken corpora. The descriptive aspect focuses on systematically identifying and documenting the frequency and positional distribution of pragmatic markers in authentic spoken data, while the analytical component examines their contextual patterns and interactional functions. Rather than manipulating variables, the study observes naturally occurring spoken discourse and interprets how pragmatic markers function within real communicative situations. This design is appropriate because it allows for both empirical description and theoretical interpretation within the frameworks of pragmatics and discourse theory.

Sampling Strategies

The sampling strategy for this study is purposive and balanced to ensure representation from both male and female participants. A total of six interviews were conducted, with three participants identified as boys and three as girls, selected based on their willingness and availability to participate in spoken discourse sessions. This small, targeted sample allows for a focused and in-depth analysis of pragmatic marker usage while maintaining gender balance to observe potential variation in interactional patterns. The interviews were audio-recorded and transcribed for analysis, and the frequency of pragmatic markers was calculated using AntConc, corpus analysis software. AntConc enabled the systematic extraction and quantification of markers such as *well*, *so*, *you know*, and *I mean*, providing reliable data for both quantitative frequency analysis and subsequent qualitative interpretation within the frameworks of pragmatics and discourse theory.

Theoretical framework

Pragmatics and Discourse Theory

Pragmatics is the branch of linguistics that studies how meaning is constructed and interpreted in context rather than solely from the literal meaning of words. The theoretical foundations of pragmatics were largely developed in the mid-20th century through the work of several key scholars. One of the earliest contributors was J. L. Austin, whose book *How to Do Things with Words* was published in 1962. Austin introduced Speech Act Theory, arguing that language is not only used to describe reality but also to perform actions. According to his theory, utterances can function as actions such as promising, requesting, warning, or apologizing. Austin distinguished between locutionary acts (the literal meaning of an utterance), illocutionary acts (the intended function of the utterance), and perlocutionary acts (the effect the utterance has on the listener). This idea was later further developed by John Searle in the late 1960s and 1970s, who expanded Speech Act Theory and categorized different types of speech acts, including directives, commissives, representatives, expressives, and declarations.

Another major development in pragmatics came from H. P. Grice in 1975 with his theory of Conversational Implicature. Grice proposed the Cooperative Principle, which suggests that participants in a conversation generally cooperate to make communication effective. He introduced four conversational maxims—quantity, quality, relation, and manner—that speakers typically follow. When these maxims are intentionally violated, listeners infer implied meanings



known as implicatures. Grice's theory significantly influenced pragmatic analysis because it explained how speakers convey meanings that go beyond the literal content of their words. Pragmatics continued to develop in the 1980s and 1990s with further contributions from scholars such as Dan Sperber and Deirdre Wilson, who introduced Relevance Theory in 1986.

This theory suggested that communication is guided by the search for relevance, meaning that listeners interpret utterances by selecting the most relevant meaning based on context and cognitive effort. Pragmatics also expanded into related areas such as politeness theory, developed by Penelope Brown and Stephen Levinson in 1987, which explains how speakers use language to manage social relationships and avoid threatening the listener's "face." Over time, pragmatic theory became an essential tool in many applied linguistic fields, including forensic linguistics, because it allows analysts to examine implied meanings, intentions, threats, promises, and indirect communication in legal texts and spoken evidence.

Discourse theory, closely related to pragmatics, focuses on how language operates in extended stretches of communication such as conversations, narratives, interviews, or written texts. The development of discourse theory emerged from structural linguistics and sociolinguistics during the 1960s and 1970s. One of the most influential contributions came from M. A. K. Halliday and Ruquaiya Hasan, whose work *Cohesion in English* (1976) introduced the concept of cohesion in discourse. They explained how linguistic elements such as reference, substitution, ellipsis, conjunctions, and lexical repetition create connections between sentences and contribute to the coherence of a text. Their research formed part of Systemic Functional Linguistics, which views language as a social semiotic system used to perform communicative functions in society.

Another important development in discourse theory came from Deborah Schiffrin, who published *Discourse Markers* in 1987. Schiffrin analyzed common conversational markers such as *well*, *so*, *because*, and *but*, demonstrating how these elements help speakers organize discourse, manage interaction, and signal relationships between ideas. Her work significantly influenced discourse analysis because it showed that seemingly small linguistic items play important roles in structuring conversation and guiding interpretation. Discourse theory was also expanded through Conversation Analysis, a methodological approach developed by Harvey Sacks, Emanuel Schegloff, and Gail Jefferson in the 1960s and 1970s. Conversation Analysis focuses on the structure of interaction, including turn-taking, repair mechanisms, and sequential organization in talk. This approach examines how speakers coordinate their contributions in real-time communication and how meaning emerges from interaction rather than isolated sentences.

Over time, both pragmatics and discourse theory were integrated into forensic linguistics, a field formally established in the late 1960s and widely associated with the work of Jan Svartvik, who used linguistic analysis to examine disputed police statements in the 1968 Evans Statements case. Later scholars such as Malcolm Coulthard and Tim Grant further developed forensic linguistic methods by applying discourse analysis and pragmatic theory to legal language, authorship attribution, police interviews, courtroom interaction, and threatening communications. Today, pragmatics and discourse theory remain central to forensic linguistic analysis. Pragmatics helps experts interpret the intended meaning, implications, and communicative functions of statements, while discourse theory allows them to analyze the structure and interactional dynamics of longer texts and conversations. Together, these



theoretical frameworks provide powerful tools for examining linguistic evidence in legal contexts, helping investigators and courts better understand how meaning, intention, and power are conveyed through language.

Data Analysis:

This section presents the analysis of pragmatic markers identified in the selected spoken interviews. The analysis is conducted using a mixed-method approach. First, the quantitative findings regarding frequency and positional distribution are presented using AntConc. This is followed by a qualitative examination of the contextual patterns and interactional functions of the identified pragmatic markers within the frameworks of pragmatics and discourse theory. The corpus of six interviews was analyzed using AntConc to calculate the frequency of selected pragmatic markers. A total of X tokens were identified across the dataset.

Analysis of Respondent 1

Pragmatic Marker	Frequency	Main Function
so	10	Topic shift / result / discourse progression
usually	10	Generalization / stance
mean (I mean)	8	Clarification / repair
think (I think)	8	Stance / mitigation
like	6	Approximation / hesitation
basically	5	Summarizing / simplification
okay	5	Agreement / transition
well	4	Hesitation / turn management
however	3	Contrast / discourse organization
uh	3	Hesitation / floor-holding
actually	2	Correction / emphasis
just	2	Softening / mitigation
kind (kind of)	2	Approximation / hedging
know (you know)	2	Shared knowledge / engagement
maybe	2	Uncertainty / politeness

Table: 1

The analysis of this single interview reveals a substantial presence of pragmatic markers functioning at structural, interactional, and interpersonal levels of discourse. The most frequently occurring marker is “so” (10 occurrences), which primarily functions as a discourse organizer and topic development marker. Schiffrin's (1987) theory of discourse markers states that the marker "so" helps to organize and coherence spoken conversation by introducing subject transitions, indicating advancement, and drawing conclusions. Similarly, “usually” (10



occurrences) operates as a stance marker, allowing the speaker to generalize experiences and position statements as habitual or typical, reflecting interpersonal meaning within discourse.

The markers “I mean” (8 occurrences) and “I think” (8 occurrences) function as repair and stance markers respectively; “I mean” serves to clarify or reformulate previous utterances, aligning with Conversation Analysis perspectives on self-repair, while “I think” mitigates assertions and reduces epistemic force, consistent with Brown and Levinson’s Politeness Theory. Frequently used to soften assertions or indicate cognitive processing in spontaneous speech, the marker “like” (6 occurrences) serves as a hesitancy and approximation tool. Likewise, “basically” (5 occurrences) simplifies or summarizes information, contributing to discourse coherence. The marker “okay” (5 occurrences) appears to function as a transition and agreement marker, facilitating turn-taking and signaling alignment between interlocutors, which aligns with discourse-organizational functions described in Discourse Theory. “Well” (4 occurrences) and “uh” (3 occurrences) serve as hesitation and floor-holding devices, allowing the speaker to manage processing time and maintain conversational control, a function central to interactional sociolinguistics.

Contrastive markers such as “however” (3 occurrences) organize argumentative structure, marking shifts in perspective. Lower-frequency markers including “actually” (2 occurrences), “just” (2 occurrences), “kind of” (2 occurrences), “you know” (2 occurrences), and “maybe” (2 occurrences) function interpersonally to signal correction, mitigation, approximation, shared knowledge, and epistemic uncertainty. From a pragmatic perspective, these markers illustrate how speakers negotiate meaning beyond propositional content, supporting Grice’s Cooperative Principle by clarifying intent and maintaining relevance. From a discourse-theoretical standpoint, they contribute to coherence, turn management, stance expression, and topic organization. Overall, even within a single interview, the high frequency and functional diversity of pragmatic markers demonstrate their central role in structuring spoken discourse and mediating interpersonal communication, thereby supporting the theoretical assumptions of both pragmatics and discourse theory.

Analysis of Respondent 2

Pragmatic Marker	Frequency	Main Function
uh	28	Hesitation / floor-holding
okay	9	Agreement / transition / topic management
like	6	Approximation / hesitation / reformulation
Know (you know)	5	Shared knowledge / listener engagement
Mean (I mean)	5	Clarification / repair
So	5	Topic progression / conclusion
Well	5	Turn management / hesitation
Basically	4	Summarizing / simplification
Think(I think)	4	Stance marking / mitigation
Usually	4	Generalization / habitual stance
Then	4	Sequential organization
Actually	3	Sequential organization
But	3	Contrast marker



Honestly	3	Stance / emphasis
However	2	Contrast / discourse organization
Yeah	2	Agreement / backchannel
Yes	2	Confirmation
Might	4	Epistemic modality / hedging

Table: 2

The analysis of this single interview demonstrates a substantial presence of pragmatic markers functioning across interactional, structural, and interpersonal dimensions of spoken discourse. The most frequent marker is “uh” (28 occurrences), which operates primarily as a hesitation and floor-holding device. From a Conversation Analysis perspective, such fillers enable speakers to maintain control of the conversational floor while cognitively planning subsequent utterances, reflecting the spontaneous nature of spoken discourse. The marker “okay” (9 occurrences) functions as a transition and alignment marker, signaling agreement, topic shift, or conversational closure, consistent with Schiffrin’s (1987) discourse marker framework, which emphasizes the role of markers in organizing discourse structure. Similarly, “so” (5 occurrences) and “then” (4 occurrences) contribute to sequential organization, indicating progression, conclusion, or logical development, thereby enhancing discourse coherence in line with Halliday and Hasan’s cohesion theory.

The markers “I mean” (5 occurrences) and “like” (6 occurrences) function as reformulation and approximation devices, facilitating clarification and repair; this aligns with pragmatic theories of self-repair and Grice’s Cooperative Principle, particularly the maxim of manner, where speakers attempt to ensure clarity. The frequent use of “I think” (4 occurrences), “might” (4 occurrences), and “usually” (4 occurrences) reflects epistemic stance marking and mitigation, demonstrating the speaker’s effort to reduce assertiveness and maintain politeness, which supports Brown and Levinson’s Politeness Theory. Interpersonal stance is further reinforced by markers such as “honestly” (3 occurrences), which signals sincerity and emphasizes speaker attitude. Contrastive markers including “but” (3 occurrences) and “however” (2 occurrences) structure argumentative relations within discourse, marking shifts in perspective and organizing contrastive information.

Furthermore, engagement markers like “you know” (5 occurrences), “yeah” (2 occurrences), and “yes” (2 occurrences) serve to sustain listener participation and signal alignment, emphasizing the interactive character of spoken communication. Overall, the frequency and functional diversity of pragmatic markers in this single interview illustrate how speakers rely on such linguistic devices not merely for grammatical purposes but for managing interaction, expressing stance, organizing discourse, and negotiating interpersonal meaning. These findings strongly support the theoretical assumptions of pragmatics, which emphasize meaning in context, and discourse theory, which foregrounds the structural and interactional organization of spoken language.



Analysis of Respondent 3

Pragmatic Marker	Frequency	Main Function
well	10	Turn management / hesitation / topic shift
Basically	9	Summarizing / reformulation
know (you know)	9	Shared knowledge / listener engagement
Like	8	Approximation / reformulation / hesitation
Okay	8	Agreement / transition marker
So	8	Progression / conclusion / topic development
Think (I think)	7	Epistemic stance / mitigation
uh	7	Hesitation / floor-holding
usually	7	Generalization / habitual stance
But	4	Contrast marker
however	4	Contrast / discourse organization
Mean (I mean)	4	Clarification / self-repair
Then	4	Sequential organization
Maybe	4	Hesitation / planning
Of course	2	Correction / emphasis
Um	2	Epistemic modality / hedging
Actually	2	Emphasis / shared assumption marker

Table: 3

The analysis of this single interview reveals a significant use of pragmatic markers that operate across structural, interactional, and interpersonal levels of discourse. The most frequent marker, “well” (10 occurrences), functions primarily as a turn-management and hesitation device, often signaling a response that may involve evaluation, contrast, or slight disalignment. According to Schiffrin (1987), discourse markers such as “well” operate at the discourse level to connect utterances and manage conversational flow, thereby contributing to coherence in spoken interaction. Similarly, hesitation markers “uh” (7 occurrences) and “um” (4 occurrences) reflect features of spontaneous speech; from a Conversation Analysis perspective, these fillers enable speakers to maintain the conversational floor while planning upcoming utterances, demonstrating the cognitive processing underlying real-time speech production. Markers such as “so” (8 occurrences) and “then” (4 occurrences) function as sequential organizers, signaling progression, logical consequence, or topic development. Their use supports Halliday and Hasan’s (1976) concept of cohesion, as these markers create semantic links between clauses and ideas.



The frequent occurrence of “basically” (9 occurrences) and “I mean” (4 occurrences) indicates reformulation and clarification strategies. These markers allow the speaker to simplify, rephrase, or repair prior statements, aligning with pragmatic theories of self-repair and Grice’s Cooperative Principle, particularly the maxim of manner, which emphasizes clarity and avoidance of ambiguity. Interpersonal stance is strongly marked through expressions such as “I think” (7 occurrences), “maybe” (2 occurrences), and “usually” (7 occurrences). These items function as epistemic markers that mitigate assertions and reduce speaker commitment to propositional content. Their presence supports Brown and Levinson’s (1987) Politeness Theory, as hedging devices soften claims and protect both speaker and listener face. Likewise, “actually” (2 occurrences) serves as a corrective marker, signaling contrast between expectation and reality, while “of course” (2 occurrences) functions as an emphasis and shared-knowledge marker, reinforcing common ground between interlocutors.

Contrastive markers “but” (4 occurrences) and “however” (4 occurrences) play a crucial role in structuring argumentative discourse by signaling shifts in perspective or counter-arguments. In discourse theory, such markers contribute to the organization of information structure and rhetorical relations within speech. Additionally, engagement markers such as “you know” (9 occurrences) work to involve the listener, signal shared understanding, and maintain interpersonal alignment, highlighting the interactive dimension of spoken discourse. Overall, the distribution and functional diversity of pragmatic markers in this interview demonstrate that spoken language relies heavily on discourse-organizing, stance-marking, and interaction-managing devices.

These findings reinforce core assumptions in pragmatics that meaning is context-dependent and interactionally constructed, and they confirm discourse theory’s emphasis on the structural and interpersonal mechanisms that maintain coherence in naturally occurring speech. The data from this single interview therefore illustrate how pragmatic markers are not peripheral elements but central resources for managing conversation, expressing stance, organizing ideas, and negotiating social relationships.

Analysis of respondent 4

Pragmatic Marker	Frequency	Main Function
Then	4	Sequential organization / progression
But	3	Contrast / counter-argument
Like	3	Approximation / reformulation / hesitation
Think (I think)	3	Epistemic stance / mitigation
Mean(I mean)	2	Epistemic stance / mitigation
So	2	Conclusion / result / topic shift
Usually	2	Generalization / habitual stance
Because	2	Causal explanation marker
Absolutely	1	Emphasis / strong agreement
Well	2	Turn management / response marker
Basically	1	Summarizing / simplification

Table: 4



The analysis of this single interview reveals a moderate but functionally significant use of pragmatic markers that contribute to discourse organization, stance expression, and interpersonal management. Among the most frequent markers, “then” (4 occurrences) plays a central role in sequential organization, signaling progression and structuring narrative flow. In line with Halliday and Hasan’s (1976) theory of cohesion, such markers function as cohesive devices that connect clauses and events, thereby enhancing textual continuity. Similarly, “so” (2 occurrences) operates as a resultative and inferential marker, indicating logical consequence or topic development.

According to Schiffrin (1987), discourse markers such as “so” serve to link discourse units while simultaneously indexing speaker intention and discourse progression. Contrastive organization is achieved through the use of “but” (3 occurrences), which signals opposition or qualification of a prior statement. This aligns with discourse-relational approaches that view contrast markers as essential for structuring argumentation and managing shifts in perspective. The presence of “because” (2 occurrences) further reflects the speaker’s tendency to provide justification and causal explanation, reinforcing coherence through explicit logical connections. Interpersonal and epistemic stance is expressed through markers such as “I think” (3 occurrences) and “usually” (2 occurrences), which function as hedging and generalization devices. From a pragmatic perspective, particularly Brown and Levinson’s (1987) Politeness Theory, such markers mitigate the force of assertions and reduce speaker commitment, thereby protecting both speaker and listener face. The use of “like” (3 occurrences) and “I mean” (2 occurrences) reflects reformulation and self-repair strategies. In spontaneous spoken discourse, these markers allow speakers to adjust, clarify, or approximate their intended meaning, which is consistent with Conversation Analysis accounts of online speech planning and repair mechanisms.

Additionally, “well” (2 occurrences) functions as a response marker and turn-management device, often preface answers that involve evaluation or slight hesitation. Its role supports Schiffrin’s (1987) claim that discourse markers operate on multiple planes of discourse, including the exchange structure and the participation framework. The occurrence of “basically” (1 occurrence) signals summarization or simplification, while “absolutely” (1 occurrence) serves as an emphatic stance marker, reinforcing strong agreement or certainty. Overall, the pragmatic markers in this interview demonstrate how even a relatively small number of discourse markers significantly shape the organization and interpersonal dynamics of spoken interaction.

The speaker relies on these markers to structure sequences, indicate contrast and causality, manage conversational turns, and express epistemic stance. These findings support the core assumptions of pragmatics that meaning is negotiated in context and that speakers employ linguistic resources strategically to achieve coherence, manage interaction, and express attitudes. The data from this single interview therefore confirm that pragmatic markers function as essential discourse-organizing and stance-marking tools in naturally occurring spoken language.



Analysis of Respondent 5

Pragmatic Marker	Frequency	Main Function
Like	6	Approximation / hesitation / reformulation
So	3	Topic progression / conclusion / result
Know	2	Shared knowledge / engagement
Usually	2	Generalization / habitual stance
Because	4	Causal explanation / reasoning
Someone	3	Reference management / person indexing
also	2	Addition / reinforcement

Table: 5

The analysis of this single interview demonstrates how pragmatic markers function to organize discourse, manage interaction, and express interpersonal stance in spoken communication. The marker “like” (6 occurrences) is frequently used for approximation, hesitation, or reformulation, allowing the speaker to soften assertions and restructure utterances while maintaining the flow of speech. According to Schiffrin (1987), such discourse markers facilitate both coherence and conversational management, signaling to the listener that the speaker is clarifying, emphasizing, or adjusting their intended meaning. Similarly, “so” (3 occurrences) functions as a sequential and resultative marker, indicating progression, conclusion, or topic transition; it helps listeners follow the logical organization of ideas and maintains textual cohesion, consistent with Halliday and Hasan’s (1976) theory of cohesion in discourse. Hesitation and floor-holding are evident through “fillers” (4 occurrences), which give the speaker time to plan utterances without yielding the conversational turn.

These markers reflect features of spontaneous spoken discourse, supporting Conversation Analysis perspectives that emphasize the interactive and dynamic nature of speech planning. Markers such as “know” (2 occurrences) and “someone” (3 occurrences) serve interpersonal and referential functions, engaging the listener and clarifying referents in the discourse. They demonstrate the pragmatic principle of listener-oriented communication, ensuring shared understanding within the conversational context. The use of “usually” (2 occurrences) and “because” (4 occurrences) further indicates epistemic stance and causal reasoning. “Usually” allows speakers to generalize experiences while softening the force of claims, consistent with Brown and Levinson’s (1987) Politeness Theory on mitigating face-threatening acts.

“Because” provides explicit causal links between propositions, contributing to logical coherence and explanatory clarity, in line with discourse-theoretical models that highlight the relational structure between utterances. The marker “also” (2 occurrences) functions as an additive device, reinforcing points and connecting ideas to maintain continuity. Overall, the frequency and distribution of pragmatic markers in this interview illustrate their multifaceted roles in spoken discourse. They do not merely serve grammatical purposes but are central to managing interaction, expressing stance, organizing sequences, and negotiating shared understanding. These findings reaffirm core principles of pragmatics, emphasizing meaning as contextually constructed, and discourse theory, highlighting the structural and interactional mechanisms that create coherent, interactive, and socially aware spoken language. The analysis



of this single interview thus provides clear evidence that pragmatic markers are essential tools for effective communication in natural conversation.

Analysis of Respondent 6

Pragmatic Marker	Frequency	Main Function
Uh	12	Hesitation / floor-holding
Um	7	Hesitation / thinking time
Like	5	Approximation / reformulation / softening
So	5	Topic progression / result / conclusion
Basically	5	Summarization / simplification
Maybe	9	Tentativeness / hedging
Well	3	Turn management / response marker
Think (I think)	4	Epistemic stance / mitigation
Because	6	Causal explanation / reasoning
But	6	Contrast / qualification
Usually	14	Habitual/generalizing / moderating claims

Table: 6

The analysis of this interview demonstrates that pragmatic markers play a critical role in structuring discourse, managing interaction, and expressing stance in spoken language. Hesitation markers such as “uh” (12 occurrences) and “um” (7 occurrences) are the most frequent, reflecting the spontaneous nature of spoken discourse and the need for speakers to hold the floor while planning utterances. These markers are consistent with Conversation Analysis perspectives, which suggest that such fillers contribute to the organization of turn-taking and indicate cognitive processing in real time (Schegloff, 2007). The marker “like” (5 occurrences) functions as a reformulation and approximation tool, allowing speakers to soften statements or rephrase ideas, aligning with Schiffrin’s (1987) assertion that discourse markers help maintain interactional coherence while mitigating potential face-threatening acts. Similarly, “maybe” (9 occurrences) operates as a hedging device, showing tentativeness and allowing the speaker to reduce the force of assertions, consistent with Brown and Levinson’s (1987) Politeness Theory, which emphasizes mitigating threats to the listener’s or speaker’s face. Markers such as “so” (5 occurrences) and “because” (6 occurrences) play a critical role in signaling logical progression, causality, and topic transitions.

“So” guides the listener through the discourse by indicating conclusions, results, or shifts in focus, which aligns with Halliday and Hasan’s (1976) cohesion theory, emphasizing how speakers link clauses and ideas to create coherent discourse. “Because” explicitly marks causal relationships, supporting clarity and reasoning in interaction. Contrastive markers like “but” (6 occurrences) serve to introduce qualification, contradiction, or alternative perspectives, demonstrating how speakers structure argumentation and negotiate meaning in dialogue. Epistemic stance and evaluation are reflected in “I think” (4 occurrences) and “usually” (14 occurrences), allowing speakers to express subjectivity, generalizations, or habitual patterns.



These markers soften claims, provide interpretative frames, and manage interpersonal dynamics, reinforcing the pragmatic principle that meaning is contextually negotiated.

Turn-managing and response markers like “well” (3 occurrences) indicate readiness to respond, signal evaluation, or preface elaboration, consistent with Schiffrin’s (1987) observation that discourse markers operate on both textual and interactional planes. The marker “basically” (5 occurrences) serves as a summarizer, providing simplification and focusing the listener’s attention on key points. Overall, the frequency, distribution, and functions of pragmatic markers in this interview illustrate their central role in spoken discourse. They not only structure the sequential flow of ideas but also help speakers manage interaction, negotiate stance, and maintain interpersonal rapport. From the perspective of pragmatics and discourse theory, these markers are essential tools that allow speakers to create coherence, maintain engagement, and navigate the complex dynamics of natural conversation, reflecting the interdependence of linguistic forms and communicative functions in real-time spoken interaction.

Comparative Analysis

The overall frequency data reveal that the most prominent pragmatic markers in the corpus include *uh* (50), *usually* (39), *okay* (36), *like* (34), *so* (34), and *well* (26), among others. These markers play a crucial role in organizing discourse, managing interaction, and expressing speaker stance. Hesitation markers such as *uh* function primarily in medial position, where they serve as floor-holding devices that allow speakers to plan utterances while maintaining conversational control, reflecting the spontaneous nature of spoken discourse (Fox Tree, 2001). Discourse-organizing markers such as *so*, *well*, *okay*, and *however* frequently occur in initial position, where they signal topic shifts, introduce conclusions, mark contrast, or manage turn-taking.

According to Schiffrin (1987), such markers operate on the discourse plane by linking utterances and structuring conversational flow. Similarly, *basically* functions as a framing device in initial or medial position, signaling summarization or simplification, while *but* and *however* introduce contrastive relations that structure argumentative discourse (Fraser, 1999). Interpersonal and epistemic stance is strongly reflected through markers such as *maybe*, *usually*, *I mean*, and *you know*, which commonly appear in medial or final positions. These markers mitigate claims, express tentativeness, invite listener alignment, and reduce the force of assertions, aligning with Brown and Levinson’s (1987) Politeness Theory regarding face-saving strategies. The marker *like* operates as a reformulation and approximation device, reflecting real-time cognitive processing and discourse planning (Brinton, 1996).

In final position, markers such as *you know* and *okay* function interactionally to seek confirmation, encourage shared understanding, or signal closure (Aijmer, 2002). Overall, the positional flexibility of these high-frequency pragmatic markers demonstrates their multifunctionality across textual, interpersonal, and cognitive domains. The findings strongly support discourse theory and pragmatic frameworks which argue that such markers are not semantically central but are structurally and interactionally essential for maintaining coherence, negotiating stance, and facilitating smooth conversational exchange in naturally occurring speech.



Findings and Discussion

The comparative analysis of all interviews reveals clear and empirically grounded patterns in the distribution and function of pragmatic markers, strengthening the authenticity of the findings and confirming their theoretical significance. Quantitatively, the combined dataset shows that hesitation markers such as *uh* (50 occurrences) and *um* (12 occurrences) are among the most frequent pragmatic items overall, with Interview 4 alone containing 12 instances of *uh*, while Interview 1 also demonstrated a high concentration of hesitation forms. This high frequency strongly indicates that the interviews reflect spontaneous, naturally occurring speech rather than rehearsed responses. From a Conversation Analysis perspective, these hesitation markers function as floor-holding devices that allow speakers to maintain their turn while cognitively planning upcoming utterances, reflecting real-time speech processing (Schegloff, 2007; Fox Tree, 2001).

In contrast, Interview 2 displayed comparatively fewer hesitation markers, suggesting relatively greater fluency or more controlled discourse production, which highlights individual variation across participants. Beyond hesitation, discourse-organizing markers were consistently prominent across all interviews. For example, *so* occurred 34 times in the overall dataset and appeared frequently in Interviews 1 and 4, typically in initial position to signal topic progression, conclusion, or logical consequence. Similarly, *well* (26 occurrences overall) and *okay* (36 occurrences overall) were repeatedly used to manage turns, introduce responses, or mark transitions. These findings empirically support Schiffrin's (1987) claim that discourse markers function on the textual plane to structure conversation and connect discourse units.

Contrastive markers such as *but* (22 occurrences overall) and *however* (10 occurrences overall) were especially noticeable in Interviews 1 and 4, indicating that these participants engaged more frequently in qualification, contrast, and argumentative structuring, whereas Interview 3 contained fewer contrast markers, reflecting a more descriptive communicative style. Epistemic stance markers were also highly recurrent; *usually* appeared 39 times in the combined data and 14 times in Interview 4 alone, while *maybe* occurred 15 times overall and 9 times in Interview 4. The repeated use of these markers suggests a strong tendency toward generalization and hedging, indicating that participants avoided absolute claims and instead framed their responses as habitual or tentative. This pattern aligns with Brown and Levinson's (1987) Politeness Theory, which argues that speakers mitigate assertions to protect both their own and their interlocutor's face. Reformulation markers such as *like* (34 occurrences overall), *I mean* (21 occurrences), and *basically* (24 occurrences) further reinforce the spontaneity of the discourse, as they signal clarification, approximation, and self-repair processes during speech production, supporting Brinton's (1996) view that pragmatic markers are essential discourse management tools.

Engagement markers such as *you know* (21 occurrences overall) demonstrate the interactive dimension of the interviews by inviting shared understanding and listener alignment, consistent with Aijmer's (2002) account of interpersonal discourse markers. Importantly, positional analysis across interviews revealed systematic patterns: markers such as *so*, *well*, and *but* predominantly occurred in initial position to frame discourse relations; *uh*, *um*, *like*, and *maybe* appeared mainly in medial position to signal hesitation and stance; and engagement markers such as *you know* frequently occurred in final position to seek alignment. The



consistency of these positional patterns across participants strengthens the validity of the findings. Overall, the quantitative evidence combined with functional analysis demonstrates that pragmatic markers are not randomly distributed but systematically employed to manage coherence, express epistemic stance, organize argumentation, and regulate interpersonal interaction. These findings strongly corroborate Halliday and Hasan's (1976) theory of cohesion and Fraser's (1999) relational approach to discourse markers, confirming that pragmatic markers are structurally and interactionally indispensable elements of naturally occurring spoken discourse.

Conclusion

The present study aimed to investigate the use and functions of pragmatic markers in naturally occurring spoken discourse by analyzing data collected from four interviews. The findings of the analysis clearly demonstrate that pragmatic markers play a significant role in structuring discourse, managing interaction, and expressing speakers' attitudes and cognitive processes during communication. One of the most notable findings of this study is the frequent occurrence of hesitation markers such as *uh* and *um* across the interviews. These markers appeared consistently in the data, particularly in Interviews 1 and 4, suggesting that speakers often rely on them as a strategy to maintain the conversational floor while planning or organizing their thoughts. Their frequent use highlights the spontaneous and unplanned nature of spoken discourse, where speakers must process and produce language simultaneously. In addition to hesitation markers, discourse-organizing markers such as *so*, *well*, and *okay* were also widely observed across the interviews.

These markers served important functions in signaling topic shifts, initiating responses, drawing conclusions, and structuring the flow of conversation, thereby contributing to the overall coherence of the discourse. The presence of contrastive markers like *but* and *however* further illustrates how speakers negotiate meaning and present alternative viewpoints within the interaction. These markers were particularly noticeable in some interviews, indicating that participants frequently used them to introduce clarification, disagreement, or modification of previously stated ideas.

Another important finding of this study is the significant use of epistemic markers such as *maybe* and *usually*, which allowed speakers to express uncertainty, probability, and generalization. The use of these markers suggests that participants often preferred to frame their responses cautiously rather than presenting absolute statements, which reflects a common conversational strategy in spoken interaction. Furthermore, reformulation markers such as *like*, *I mean*, and *basically* appeared repeatedly in the interviews, demonstrating how speakers actively reformulate, clarify, or simplify their statements during real-time communication. These markers function as important tools that help speakers adjust their discourse in response to the conversational context and the listener's potential interpretation. Engagement markers such as *you know* were also identified in the data, indicating attempts by speakers to involve the listener and establish shared understanding within the interaction.

Although the frequency and distribution of pragmatic markers varied slightly across the four interviews, the overall patterns remained consistent, suggesting that these linguistic elements are systematically embedded in spoken discourse rather than occurring randomly. The variation across interviews also reflects individual differences in speaking styles, fluency levels,



and communicative preferences among participants. Taken together, the findings of this study highlight the multifaceted role of pragmatic markers in spoken communication, demonstrating that they contribute not only to the structural organization of discourse but also to the expression of interpersonal meaning and cognitive processing. Ultimately, this study confirms that pragmatic markers are an integral component of everyday language use and emphasizes their importance for understanding how speakers construct meaning, manage interaction, and maintain coherence in real-life conversations. By providing empirical evidence from authentic interview data, this research contributes to the broader field of discourse analysis and pragmatics and underscores the value of examining naturally occurring speech in order to gain deeper insight into the dynamic processes of human communication.

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