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The teachability of communicative competence and the acquisition of pragmatic markers – a case study of some widely-used Business English coursebooks

Abstract

The appropriate use of pragmatic markers – non-propositional *well, you know, of course*, etc. – is necessary for successful business communication (which is, for the most part, cross-cultural communication), however, pragmatic markers take a back seat in TEFL, TESL, and most notably, in TESP contexts. In our paper we will, first of all, discuss the major issues related to the concept of communicative competence as well as the role of PMs in shaping EFL and ESL speakers' communicative competence. Next, some remarks will be made about the possible sources of the difficulties that may hinder the acquisition and/or learning of PMs, finally, the results of a case study will be presented, which aimed at mapping the functional spectrum of PMs as they are used in selected General Business English textbooks.

Keywords: communicative competence, pragmatic markers, General Business English, the role of input

1 Preliminaries, theoretical considerations

1.0 Introduction

Over the past few decades research on pragmatic markers (e.g. non-propositional uses of *you know, well, like, etc.*) has been rapidly expanding. The theoretical appeal is amply demonstrated by the number of frameworks that have been applied to the study of these items (Relevance Theory, Rhetorical Structure Theory, Construction Grammar, coherence-based studies, Interactional Sociolinguistics, Conversation Analysis, to mention but a few). At the same time, empirical research has yielded detailed analyses of a variety of items in a wide range of languages. Despite the importance of pragmatic markers (henceforth PMs) for improving the communicative competence of non-native speakers, most studies¹ deal with the use of PMs in native speakers' speech, moreover, the study of PMs has been, for the most part, a neglected area in the theory and practice of TESP.

The structure of the present paper is as follows: first, some issues related to the concept of communicative competence will be addressed, second, PMs' role in shaping EFL and ESL speakers' communicative competence will be discussed, next, some remarks will be made

¹ with some notable exceptions such as Nikula (1996), Siepmann (2005) and Müller (2004 and 2005).

about the possible sources of the difficulties that may hinder the acquisition and/or learning of PMs, finally, the results of a case study will be presented, which aimed at mapping the functional spectrum of PMs as they are used in selected General Business English textbooks.

1.1 Issues related to the concept and teachability of communicative competence

Developing communicative competence has been in the forefront of TEFL/TESL classes for decades. Since Hymes (1972) introduced the concept into the world of linguistics in his pioneering work, a vast number of attempts have been made by theoreticians and empirical researchers alike to create models and specify its components, some with the aim to provide theoretical bases for language teaching and testing practices.

In the following sections, we are going to review some models of communicative competence that have had a major impact on communicative classrooms. Since reviewing all the major ones would stretch the limits of the present paper, we will have a brief look at the ones only that have informed the research presented here.

1.1.1 Canale and Swain's model

One of the first, and up to the present day most influential models, proposed by Canale and Swain (1980), further refined by Canale (1983), explains the concept in terms of three component competencies, which are grammatical, sociolinguistic, and strategic. Grammatical competence is the mastery of the language code, that is, of the phonetic, morphological, syntactic, semantic and orthographic rules. Sociolinguistic competence is conceived of as comprising two sets of rules: sociocultural and discourse rules. Sociocultural rules specify ways of using language appropriately in a given social situation, as such, they are concerned with appropriate vocabulary, style, politeness, and register. Discourse rules, on the other hand, determine the ways that language structures are combined to produce unified, coherent texts in different modes in speaking and writing. Strategic competence in this model consists of verbal and non-verbal communication strategies which are called into action to compensate for breakdowns in communication, due to insufficient knowledge in one or another component of communicative competence. In other words, strategically competent language users are able to get their message across successfully in the face of difficulties.

1.1.2 Bachman and Palmer's model

A major contribution to the refinement of the construct was made by Bachman, and then Bachman and Palmer in the 90s. In their approach (Bachman & Palmer 1996), communicative competence, or to use their term, *communicative language ability*, consists of two broad areas: language knowledge and strategic competence. Language knowledge has two main components – organisational and pragmatic knowledge – which complement each other. Organisational knowledge consists of knowledge of linguistic units and the rules of joining them together on the sentence and text level. Pragmatic knowledge includes illocutionary and sociolinguistic competence, where illocutionary competence concerns the knowledge of communicative action and how to carry it out, while sociolinguistic competence equals the ability to use language appropriately to the social context.

As opposed to Canale and Swain's work, which had sociolinguistics and its interaction with the other components in its focus, Bachman and Palmer emphasise the central role of strategic competence, which they present as "...a set of metacognitive components, or strategies, which can be thought of as higher order executive processes that provide a cognitive management function in language use" (1996: 70).

Further, while the Canale and Swain model is relatively simple and accessible, therefore serves in many places even today as a frame of reference for TEFL/TESL classes, Bachman and Palmer's framework is multidisciplinary and rather complex in nature. On top of that, it sets communicative competence within the context of language assessment rather than instruction.

1.1.3 Celce-Murcia, Dörnyei and Thurrell's construct

Dissatisfied with this aspect of the Bachman and Palmer construct and recognising the shortcomings of earlier models and elaborating them, particularly Canale and Swain's, Celce-Murcia, Dörnyei and Thurrell (1995) introduced a new one. In this they place discourse competence in a position where the other elements of the construct: the lexico-grammatical building blocks (that is, linguistic competence), the actional organizing skills of communicative intent (actional competence), and the sociocultural context (sociocultural competence) come together and shape the discourse, which, in turn, shapes each of the other three components. With this the authors emphasise the dynamic nature of the construct and the centrality of discourse, to which all the other components are related. Strategic competence appears here as "a potentially usable inventory of skills that allows a strategically competent speaker to negotiate messages and resolve problems or to compensate for deficiencies in any of the other underlying competencies" (1995: 9).

1.1.4 The Common European Framework of Reference

The Common European Framework of Reference (CEFR for short), in pursuit of promoting harmonious relationships, communication and cooperation among the EU member states, provides a comprehensive basis for the elaboration and design of language learning, teaching and testing materials. In so doing, it describes a range of competences, among them communicative language competence. The model presented in the CEFR comprises three competences described in terms of knowledge and skills: linguistic, sociolinguistic and pragmatic. Linguistic competence refers to the dimensions of language as a system, for example: the use of lexical, syntactic, semantic resources, in order to form well structured messages. Sociolinguistic competence is concerned with the sociocultural conditions of language use in so much that it determines the rules of politeness, the norms governing linguistic behavior between different social groups (sexes, classes, etc.), and the differences in register and dialects. Pragmatic competence comprises the functional use of linguistic resources (production of language functions, speech acts), as well as the mastery of discourse, cohesion and coherence, and the identification of text types and forms, irony, and parody (p. 13).

Unlike all the other models reviewed above, the one in the CEFR does not present strategic competence as a component of communicative language competence. Instead, strategic competence is defined as strategy use in the broadest sense: the use of communication strategies not only to compensate for the lack of knowledge in a particular area of language, but the use of all types of communication strategies. Another novelty of the CEFR model is

the separation of sociolinguistic and pragmatic competences, and the designation of discourse competence as a part of pragmatic competence.

1.1.5 Need for and teachability of communicative competence

Whichever model we examine, we cannot but agree with Farhady (2005), who argues that communicative competence is so vast in domain and complex in nature that even native speakers may not achieve it. Nevertheless, as emphasised above, developing language learners' communicative competence has been the ultimate aim of FL/SL (L2) teaching for more than four decades, and the concept has served as the basis for working out communicative curricula. Consequently, some questions arise. In this section we are going to address two of these: Are the various components of communicative competence really teachable and do they need to be taught at all?

Nobody disputes that grammatical, or linguistic, competence (accuracy) is of utter importance and certainly teachable; of all the components, this one has been dominating communicative classrooms at the expense of the others. The reasons for this are obvious – L2 teaching approaches and methods as well as the content of coursebooks and the education of non-native teachers have designated this direction.

As regards strategic competence, viewpoints differ. One is that since communication difficulties will arise even when the mother tongue is used, communication strategies develop via L1 use, which are then transferable to L2 learning situations. If adult L2 learners enter into the L2 learning situation with a developed strategic competence, there is no need to develop it (Paribakht 1985). Others (Dörnyei & Thurell 1991, Mónos 2004, Wenden & Rubin 1987), however, argue for the inclusion of strategy training into the L2 classroom on the ground that if strategic competence exists independently of the other components, it should be possible to cultivate it separately. Furthermore, achievement or resource expansion strategies, for example, circumlocution or time-gaining devices, are very useful in everyday communication and enhance oral performance.

The real challenge seems to lie in the development of sociolinguistic / pragmatic (hereafter socio-pragmatic) competence. A vast number of studies have addressed the issues of dealing with it in L2 environments, having come to basically two very important conclusions. One is that acquiring and teaching socio-pragmatic competence is rather problematic when compared to the acquisition and teaching of the other two, linguistic and strategic, competences (cf. Bayley & Regan 2004 for a review). The other conclusion is that besides easily causing miscommunication, deficiencies in socio-pragmatic competence receive more negative judgement from native speakers than those in linguistic competence (cf. Bardovi-Harlig & Dörnyei 1998, Bardovi-Harlig & Taylor 2003, Svartvik 1980). The negative consequences on the L2 user are obvious.

One may find it a puzzle why it is so demanding a task to acquire socio-pragmatic competences, when “adult NNS do get a considerable amount of L2 pragmatic knowledge for free” (Kasper 1997). Indeed, some pragmatic knowledge is universal, there being turn taking conventions or conversational routines in all languages, while other aspects, directness, indirectness, expressions of politeness, to mention just a few, may be successfully transferred from the learners' L1. The latter is true particularly for languages where there is a correspondence between L1-L2 forms and functions, so positive transfer can work: forms ‘translated’ from L1 can be applied to L2 functions with corresponding effects. However, for

reasons beyond the scope of the present paper, learners do not always make use of the knowledge available ‘for free’. They do not always transfer their L1-based socio-pragmatic knowledge to L2 situations, not even to ones that work fairly similarly in their L1. Interestingly, this often applies to ESL learners, as well, who do not make use of the pragmatic information provided by the input in the surrounding target language environment (Bardovi-Harlig 2001, Cohen 1996).

Even worse is negative transfer, when learners automatically transfer the knowledge grounded in their L1 socio-pragmatic competence to the realization of their communicative intents in L2. Cohen (1996: 408) refers to a number of studies that found that L2 learners, even the ones studying in ESL environments, thus having a lot of exposure to the L2 outside the classroom, realized the speech acts under study by transferring strategies and linguistic realizations from their L1, rather than choosing ones appropriate to the L2 socio-cultural context.

The discussion of the consequences of this linguistic behavior leads us to the other problematic issue about socio-pragmatic competence, namely the judgement that negative transfer and other deficiencies in L2 users’ socio-pragmatic competence trigger. Bardovi-Harlig and Dörnyei (1998) found that native and non-native speakers evaluate deficiencies in linguistic and socio-pragmatic competence (that is, linguistic and socio-pragmatic errors) differently. While EFL learners and their nonnative teachers in their study identified and ranked grammatical errors as more serious than pragmatic ones, ESL learners and their native speaker teachers showed the opposite pattern.

More importantly, native speakers judge socio-pragmatic errors and the speakers who commit them rather negatively. Whereas they show acceptance and tolerance towards linguistic errors, regarding them as natural in L2 learners’ language use, they tend to interpret pragmatically inappropriate language on a social or personal level, taking it as a sign of the speaker being uncooperative, rude or insulting (cf. Bardovi-Harlig & Taylor 2003, Svartvik 1980).

The problems discussed above support the widely-held view that there is a need for explicit instruction in various aspects of socio-pragmatic competence; without pedagogic intervention one cannot expect it to develop as a beneficial side-effect of the growth of learners’ linguistic proficiency (Bardovi-Harlig 2001, Bardovi-Harlig et al. 1991, Bardovi-Harlig & Dörnyei 1998, Bardovi-Harlig & Taylor 2003, Kasper 1997). But can socio-pragmatic competence really be taught?

Findings from data-based research presented in Kasper (1997) and Kasper and Rose (1999) convincingly demonstrate that the answer to this question is positive. The studies reviewed in Kasper (1997), which had examined a range of features: various speech acts, discourse markers and strategies, implicature, etc., in a variety of L2 (ESL, EFL) contexts, and with students with diverse L1 backgrounds and proficiency levels, concordantly suggest that “pragmatic ability can indeed be systematically developed through planful classroom activities”. On the examination of the findings of a vast number of cross-sectional and longitudinal studies of interlanguage pragmatics, Kasper and Rose arrive at the same conclusion, stating that “most pragmatic features are indeed teachable” (1999: 96).

1.1.6 Developing sociopragmatic competence

This suggests the final questions to investigate: how to help learners acquire (elements of) socio-pragmatic competence; how to teach it? Bardovi-Harlig and Dörnyei (1998) posit that

informed, carefully planned instruction and input are the two most important factors to bring about development in socio-pragmatic competence. We are going to deal with the role of instruction and teachers' perceptions concerning the incorporation of explicit work on socio-pragmatic elements into classroom work in another paper. This time we will focus on input.

Studies in second language acquisition also emphasise the central role of input in the acquisition of linguistic or socio-pragmatic knowledge. L2 learners in any environment (ESL or EFL) need to be provided with ample, comprehensible input for them to acquire elements of communicative competence. Besides the availability of input, the salience of the relevant linguistic features in it is of paramount importance. Without input of the right quantity and quality, learners will not be able to notice the linguistic forms, functional meanings and the relevant contextual features that are necessary for socio-pragmatic learning to take place. And without noticing, which in this context means "registering the simple occurrence of some event" (Schmidt 1993: 26), input will not become intake for learning. Findings from empirical research also underline the importance of noticing, showing it as the key to beginning the cognitive processes that lead to L2 acquisition (Bardovi-Harlig & Griffin 2005, Koike & Pearson 2005).

The primary sources of input in EFL contexts are the classroom with the teacher as the ultimate source, and language teaching materials, mainly course books. Due to the specific nature of classroom discourse, L2 learners, particularly in EFL contexts, often do not get sufficient socio-pragmatic information, because the input they encounter in the classroom is impoverished in this respect, lacking in quantity and salience. What is more, even language teaching course books may prove unsatisfactory as regards the amount and salience of the socio-pragmatic input provided in them. In this paper, we attempt to investigate the input provided in a selection of Business English textbooks on certain PMs with the aim to see how facilitative this input is to the acquisition of the selected features of socio-pragmatic competence.

1.2 PMs' role in shaping learners' communicative competence

PMs are used by native speakers consistently and with great precision in order to achieve a wide range of functions. They are used as frames in the interaction, for example to make it easier for the hearer to understand how the different units of the discourse are related; PMs can serve to express solidarity between interlocutors and as such can function as positive politeness devices; PMs can increase or decrease the force of an utterance and, accordingly, can be used as hedges or boosters; they mark backgrounded / foregrounded information in the case of narratives, quotes or lists; alternatively, PMs can be used to simply signal that the speaker needs more time to formulate a response or to process the information that was recently made available. In sum, EFL learners' communicative competence² involves being aware of the textual and interpersonal effects that are achieved by the consistent (rather than sporadic) use of PMs and being able to use PMs according to native-like norms. The following is a list of some of the roles PMs play in utterance production and interpretation, the

² In the present paper we use the concept of sociopragmatic competence (which, in turn, can be further divided into sociolinguistic and pragmatic competence) as "knowledge of the relation of language use to its non-linguistic context", while discourse competence is "knowledge of factors governing the creation of cohesion and coherence" (Müller 2005:18), finally, strategic competence refers to strategies which learners can use "if communication threatens to break down" (ibid.).

individual items can also be interpreted as ways in which PMs contribute to the shaping of learner's communicative (sociolinguistic, pragmatic, etc.) skills.

- Sociolinguistic competence:
 - negotiation of the (power) relationship between speaker and hearer,
 - increasing / reducing social distance between interlocutors,
 - diminishing authority for solidarity (cf. Lin 2010: 1173),
 - setting the appropriate level of formality / informality.
- Pragmatic competence:
 - increasing or decreasing the force with which propositions are expressed,
 - selecting appropriate strategies to implement communicative acts (cf. Fraser 1990),
 - providing hearers with processing instructions / making appropriate inferences.
- Discourse competence:
 - marking relationships between units of discourse or making relationships more explicit,
 - signaling transitions e.g. from a main point to a supporting detail,
 - “orchestrating coherent discourse” (Lin 2010: 1173) by highlighting or backgrounding information,
 - “signposting key points” (Lin 2010: 1180).
- Strategic competence:
 - introducing the expression of communicative difficulties (finding the appropriate word/phrase),
 - appealing for the hearer's understanding,
 - paraphrasing, rephrasing, reformulation.

It also follows from the above that non-native speakers who use PMs inappropriately or do not use them at all are prone to being misunderstood and to having difficulty in getting the communicative message across.

However, being misunderstood is only one of the negative consequences of the absence or inappropriate use of PMs. Other side effects include a giveaway of the NNS's foreignness and his or her status as an outsider to the given speech community (cf. Boxer 1993) and, as was seen in section 1.1.5, negative judgments on the NNS's personality and character. Some consequences of the latter are summarized in the following quotation:

if a foreign learner says *five sheeps* or *he goed*, he can be corrected by practically every native speaker. If, on the other hand, he omits a *well*, the likely reaction will be that he is dogmatic, impolite, boring, awkward to talk to etc, but a native speaker cannot pinpoint an ‘error’ (Svartvik 1980: 171).

Thus, unlike grammatical mistakes, which reflect on the speaker's level of proficiency, the inappropriate use or absence of PMs reflects on the learner's personality, marking him/her as disfluent in the target language and out of place in the target culture in subtle ways, “ways that interlocutors (even students of language and linguistics) may not recognize” (Hellermann & Vergun 2007: 160). Consequently, even if it is unreasonable to expect students to attain native-like proficiency in all aspects of communication, ESL teachers should make every effort to help them avoid negative judgments concerning their social attributes such as politeness, likeability and friendliness.

1.3 The formal-functional characteristics of PMs as sources of learners' difficulties

The formal and functional characteristics of PMs are the very properties that make them difficult to describe, teach and practice in a classroom (i.e. non-natural) environment. These properties are the following (for a detailed description of each property see e.g. Schourup 1999, Brinton 1996 or Furkó 2007a):

PMs are, by definition,

1. devoid of semantic content,
2. dependent on the (local and global) context and the sequence of talk for their interpretation,
3. (in a purely syntactic sense) optional – omitting PMs does not change the propositional meaning of the utterance,
4. 'extremely' multifunctional – a given token may simultaneously display a variety of interpersonal and discourse functions,
5. characteristic of spoken (unplanned) discourse / oral style and, as a result, are usually stigmatized by laypeople.

As a result of the first four properties, native or proficient speakers of English have difficulties describing the use and functional spectrum of even the most frequently used PMs such as *well, you know, of course, right*, etc. In addition, even if NSs find ways to describe close-to-the-core meanings / functions of particular PMs, their intuitions about more opaque uses are a lot less reliable. As a consequence, teachers, irrespective of their level of proficiency or their status as native speakers, need to raise their meta-pragmatic awareness of the non-propositional lexical items under discussion, in other words, they need to obtain explicit instructions and explanations about the functions and uses of individual PMs in particular contexts.

As for the fifth property of PMs – i.e. the fact that they are primarily features of oral style and, as a result, are frequently stigmatized by laypeople – it is important to make a distinction between discourse-pragmatic and strategic uses of PMs, on the one hand, and between appropriate use and overuse, on the other. If PMs are used exclusively for strategic purposes, i.e. in order to try to fix or anticipate a (possible) breakdown in communication, they should, by all means, be avoided or complemented by a variety of other, more explicit meta-communicative strategies, such as asking interlocutors to provide more detail, to clarify or simply to repeat their previous utterance, as well as appealing to the hearer's understanding, sympathy, etc.

Although PMs are, for the most part, interchangeable when they are used for strategic functions, they are not interchangeable in their various discourse-pragmatic functions and are by no means sporadically sprinkled at various points in the discourse. As for the latter argument, it is easy to prove that even such highly stigmatized PMs as *you know* are not randomly distributed: the various functions they fulfil are determined by the host unit in which they appear as well as the discourse unit they take in their scope (cf. e.g. Fox Tree / Schrock [2002:731]).

2 Empirical research

2.0 Preliminaries, research process

After a brief overview of some of the theoretical challenges PMs pose as well as some of the misconceptions that exist about their presence and use in spoken discourse, let us now turn to the research that was aimed at finding out how PMs are perceived and dealt with in the context of teaching General Business English (henceforth, GBE) in Hungary.

The research was aimed at mapping the functional spectra of the PMs *well* and *of course* in a selection of GBE textbooks in order to find out if learners receive enough and adequate input concerning the use of these items. *Well* was selected because it appears to be the most widely investigated PM in the literature (cf. Schourup 2001) and, as a result, textbook writers have access to detailed descriptions of the various contexts of its use. The selection of the second item was motivated by the findings based on a contrastive study of English *of course* and Hungarian *persze* (Furkó 2011), which suggested that Hungarian learners of English might overuse *of course* as a result of negative pragmatic transfer.

After compiling the corpus that comprises ten GBE textbooks³, we made a concordance (Key Word in Context, henceforth KWIC) of *well* and *of course*, eliminated content words / non-PM uses, tagged the remaining tokens according to the functional categories that were described in previous accounts of the two PMs. Finally, the D-value⁴ of each item was calculated and the most commonly occurring clusters were extracted using *kfNgram* (Fletcher 2002).

2.1 The functional spectrum of well in naturally-occurring discourse

Most recent accounts (e.g. Schourup 2001, Fuller 2003) use Svartvik's (1980) description of *well* as a starting point. He distinguishes between two main functions of *well* and a variety of subfunctions. Accordingly, *well* as a qualifier indicates or marks agreement, positive reaction or attitude, signals reinforcement and precedes incomplete answers to wh-questions as well as non-direct or qualified answers. *Well* as a frame shifts the topic focus, introduces explanations, clarifications, etc., marks "the beginning of direct speech" and functions as "editing marker for self-correction" (1980: 173). To this list, Norrick (2001) added that *well* in oral narratives initiates and concludes narrative action, guides listeners "back to the main sequence of narrative elements following interruptions and digressions", and is invoked by listeners "to re-orient the primary teller to the expected order of narrative presentation" (2001: 849). In the course of his research Furkó (2007 a) used the above categories in the first stage of a two-stage indexing process, in the second stage, however, the following five superfunctions emerged as useful for tagging all 1839 tokens of *well* in a 549,254 word corpus that was based on televised interviews (The Larry King Corpus, henceforth LKC):

[1] Conversation management: topic shift / topic management / skip-connecting // turn-taking / turn management.

³ the reason we decided to select these items is simple: they have been or are still being used by our colleagues and one of the authors of the current paper for teaching GBE at the Institute of English and American Studies, University of Debrecen.

⁴ the categorial multifunctionality of DMs is described in terms of their "D-function ratio" or D-value (a term proposed by Stenström 1990), i.e. in terms of their discourse function in relation to grammatical function. The D-value of a given item is calculated as the number of tokens with discourse marking functions divided by the total number of occurrences.

- [2] Information management: quote / shift of perspective // contrast with previous statement or question / unexpected, dispreferred second.
- [3] *Well* in narratives: digressions, new developments, story preface, abstract, etc.
- [4] Interpersonal functions: mitigated disagreement / face management // “aggressive questions” (speaker is given no space by the question) // “considered questions”.
- [5] Miscellaneous strategic functions e.g. delay, lexical search, etc.

In order to compare the selected language teaching materials with naturally-occurring discourse, we used the LKC as a reference corpus and the above five super-functions as categories for tagging the individual tokens of *well* in the General Business English Corpus.

2.2 *The functional spectrum of of course in naturally-occurring discourse*

Of course has been described from a variety of perspectives: Holmes (1988) looks at the distribution of *of course* with respect to gender-preferential differentiation, Lewis (2006) takes a diachronic perspective and describes rhetorical motivations for the development of a variety of its discourse-pragmatic functions. While Simon-Vandenberg (1992) considers the interactional utility of *of course*, Simon-Vandenberg / Aijmer (2002/03 and 2004) look at *of course* from a cross-linguistic perspective as well as within the context of Bakhtin’s notion of heteroglossia.

What the above accounts (as well as other, less detailed descriptions) have in common is that they identify an invariant, context-independent ‘core’ meaning of *of course* and a variety of functions that can be related to its semantic core. This is reflected in the various names that are used with reference to *of course* as well as the definitions and / or summaries that are provided in terms of the discourse-pragmatic role *of course* plays in utterance interpretation. As for the former, *of course* has been variously named as an expectation marker / marker of expectation (Simon-Vandenberg / Aijmer 2002/03 and 2004, respectively), expectation evidential (Chafe 1986), marker of speaker commitment (Lewis 2006) and marker of shared knowledge (Holmes 1988). Some of the definitions include the following:

[*of course*] acts as an overt signal that the speaker is assuming that the hearer accepts or is already familiar with the propositional content of her or his utterance, and functions to emphasise the validity of that content (Holmes 1988: 53).

...*of course* combines the meanings of certainly (‘there is no doubt that...’), which expresses a probability judgement, and naturally (‘it was to be expected that’), which conveys a judgement on the extent to which something was expected (Simon-Vandenberg 1992: 215).

[*of course* has] three broad levels of meaning: (1) epistemic/ evidential – glossed as ‘naturally’, (2) interpersonal – glossed as ‘shared knowledge’, and (3) indeterminate (Wichmann et al. 2010: 118).

Another important contribution to the description of the basic functions of ‘of course’ comes from Lewis (2006: 54), who distinguishes between ‘emphatic yes’ and ‘naturally’ uses of *of course* as well as four additional contexts of use, namely those where *of course* marks concession, background in a narrative, topic shift and the end of a list.

Just as in the case of *well*, we used the super-functions that were introduced in the previous section for the purpose of tagging the individual tokens of *of course* in the GBE corpus. The

various subfunctions of *of course* that were identified in the literature were subsumed under the different superfunctions in the following way:

- [1] Conversation management: response marker, feedback signal, topic change signal.
- [2] Information management: lists / sequences, new information, shared background knowledge.
- [3] Story structure: mainly marks side sequences and new developments.
- [4] Interpersonal functions: personal-centre switches, persuasion, solidarity.
- [5] Miscellaneous strategic functions: self correction, lexical search, filler.

2.3 *The functional spectrum of well and of course in the GBE corpus*

The following textbooks comprise the GBE corpus that was used for mapping the functions of the two PMs under scrutiny. They are listed in the order that they appear in summary Table 1 below. Detailed information about the authors as well as the date and place of publication is given in the Sources section.

1. Viczena et al. 2003. *1000 Questions, 1000 Answers – Business English*.
2. Mascull 2005. *Advanced Business Vocabulary in Use*.
3. MacKenzie 2006. *Professional English in Use – Finance*.
4. Sweeney 2003. *English for Business Communication*.
5. Lees / Thorne 1994. *English On Business – Practical English for International Executives*.
6. Cotton / Robbins 1994. *Business Class: Student's Book*.
7. Ockenden 1987. *Situational Dialogues*.
8. Radványi / Görgényi 2003. *English for Business and Finance – Haladó üzleti és pénzügyi nyelvkönyv*.
9. Vándorné 1988. *Felsőfokú angol társalgási és külkereskedelmi nyelvkönyv*.
10. Powell 2003. *Presenting in English – How to give successful presentations*.

Table 1 below summarizes the results we gained after looking for explicit descriptions of PMs, indexing tokens of *well* and *of course* in terms of the 5 super-functions described above, tagging tokens of *of course* according to utterance position and calculating the D-value of *well* in the individual textbooks.

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
descriptions / tasks	no / no	yes / 3 tasks	no / no	no / no	no / 1 task	no / 1 task	no / no	no / no	no / 1 task	yes / 8 tasks
<i>well</i> as a lexical item	57	23	17	22	16	73	23	36	78	24
<i>well</i> as a PM	10	6	2	6	30	105	8	43	39	41
D-value of <i>well</i>	14.9%	20.7%	10.5%	21.4%	65.2%	58.9%	25.8%	54.4%	33.3%	63%

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super- function(s) of <i>well</i>	1, 2, 4	2,4	2	1,2,4,5	1,2,4,5	1,2,4,5	4	1,2,4,5	1,2,4,5	1,2,3,4,5
<i>of course</i> in initial position	8	21	0	1	3	13	10	5	4	7
<i>of course</i> in medial / final position	4	5	0	4	7	21	1	14	15	5
super- function(s) of <i>of course</i>	2,4	2	N.A.	1,2	1,4	2	1,4	2	2,4	1,2,3,4

Table 1: the use and functional spectrum of well and of course in the GBE corpus

As the second row of the table shows, only 2 of the 10 textbooks contain instructions about the use of either of the PMs, what is more, these instructions explain a single function of *of course* and *well*, respectively. A few textbooks contain gap-filling exercises where students are asked to complete extracts of conversations using a given list of words or expressions which include *well* and *of course*. It is interesting to consider, however, that the exercises are not preceded by instructions on how to use either of the PMs.

The table also shows that *well* is used as a lexical, propositional item in the majority of cases, thus, the resulting overall D-value of *well* in the GBE corpus (44%) is much lower than the values in corpora that are based on naturally-occurring discourse, for example, in the London-Lund Corpus (86%) or the LKC, which was used as a reference corpus (77.54%). The textbooks that come closest to these values are Lees / Thorne (1994) and Powell (2003).

We can also observe that the higher the occurrence of *well* as a PM the more likely it is used in three or more of its super-functions, however, super-function three (the use of *well* in narratives) is absent in all but one textbook (Powell 2003). In addition, *well* occurs as a PM altogether 290 times in the GBE corpus, which compares rather unfavourably to the LKC, which, although somewhat smaller in size⁵, contains 1426 PM uses of *well*.

In the case of *of course* it is utterance-initial position that serves as an indicator of spoken as opposed to written style: in the reference corpus *of course* is used utterance initially in over 90% of its occurrences, whereas in the GBE corpus *of course* is used in medial or final position 51% of the time, which indicates that *of course* is used more frequently in its more formal i.e. written functions. The functional distribution of *of course* confirms this finding: the most salient super-function of *of course* in the GBE corpus is in terms of backgrounding / foregrounding information, rather than marking interpersonal relations or managing conversation.

The results of the cluster analyses for the two PMs are given in Table 2 below:

Reference corpus	GBE corpus	Reference corpus	GBE corpus
well I 67	as well as 74	Of course I / I'm 40	and of course 12
well you 50	well i think 20	Of course not 24	of course it 12

⁵ the GBE corpus contains 640,319 words, the LGC 549,254 words

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well if	40	well as the	16	Of course it/it's	25	of course the	10
well then	34	you know well	8	Of course you / you're	17	Yes of course	10
well the	27	well if you	7	Of course he	10	of course is	7
well that's	26	well in advance	7	Of course the	6	of course you	7
might as well	24	well i	6	Well of course	6	but of course	6
well it	23	goes well with	6	No, of course	5	of course be	6
well it's	22	i see well	6	Yeah, of course	5	Of course we	6

Table 2: cluster analyses for well and of course in two corpora

As the table shows, clusters that include *well* in its discourse-pragmatic functions are more frequent in the reference corpus, whereas the most frequent clusters with *well* in the GBE corpus are those where *well* is used as a lexical item. *Of course* occurs utterance-initially in all of its clusters in the reference corpus, however, *of course* is used in medial or final position in the majority of the clusters that appear in the GBE corpus.

3 General conclusions, directions for further research

The following general conclusions emerge from the above discussion.

First of all, it appears that despite an increasing focus on naturally-occurring conversational data, GBE language learning materials still appear to be biased toward written language.

Secondly, since textbooks do not include an adequate number of contextualized examples, teachers' use of PMs is likely to serve as the primary model for EFL students. As we saw in section 1.1.6 above, the availability of input as well as the salience of the relevant linguistic features in the input are of paramount importance. Since GBE textbooks appear to be lacking on both counts, teachers need to compensate for the inadequate input that is provided by textbooks and they are also responsible for making the use of PMs salient.

Thirdly, incidental learning (i.e. repeated exposure to / rehearsal of PMs inside the classroom) might also need to be supplemented by explicit instructions. This observation is in line with previous research which found that discourse-pragmatic competence is teachable (cf. Kasper & Rose 2002).

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