

## I said well who said *well*?

### The attribution of discourse marker *well* in quoted speech

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This study regards the use of discourse marker *well* as a preface of quoted speech, examining its attribution and possible linguistic and extra-linguistic conditioning factors on its appearance. Quoted speech (henceforth synonymous with direct reported speech: see Coulmas 1986) is often prefaced with discourse markers. Discourse markers are thought to contribute more so to the interaction between the speaker and listener than to the conveyance of information. That is, they relate to the speech *context*, as opposed to its *content* (Hölker 1991). Trester (2009), for example, discusses the use of *oh* in quoted dialogues, concluding that it not only offsets the quotation but also signals the speaker's stance toward the quoted material. Analyses of *well* often include quoted speech as a frequent environment, with various opinions regarding its meaning there: e.g., as a quotation signpost (Svartvik 1980), as an approximator of the quotation (James 1983).

However, in quoted speech there are inherently *two* relevant contexts: the matrix context in which the current interlocution is taking place, and the embedded context associated with the quotation. While many analyses mainly attribute the discourse marker to the matrix speaker, it is also possible that the matrix speaker is attributing it to the quoted speech regarding the embedded context. Sakita (2013) analyzes that *well* as a quotation preface signposts the quotee taking a stance in conflict with their interlocutor. This study variationistically examines the use of *well* as a preface to quoted speech to evaluate how often this may be attributed to the *quotee* in the embedded context vs. the *quoter*. The following example shows this potentially ambiguous attribution.

- (1) when my daughter was about five we got a hamster and I said well you make sure you give it food and water (speaker 7, Buckeye)

quoter: [... and I said well [you make sure ...]]

quotee: [... and I said [well you make sure ...]]

To assess potential attribution to the quotee, I will follow Jucker's (1993) theory of the meaning of *well* as a discourse marker. Jucker proposes and compellingly demonstrates a core theme behind the many uses of *well*: it functions as a signpost signaling that the impending utterance requires or suggests a shift in background assumptions regarding what is relevant to the content discussed (henceforth referred to as a RELEVANCE SHIFT). Regarding quotation prefacing, Jucker explains that *well* is signposting the quotation and, thus, a shift in background assumptions regarding the context of the following speech. However, Jucker's own analysis could be applied differently in that the quoter could be saying that the *quotee* is signposting a relevance shift within the embedded context. The following example will help demonstrate this.

- (2) my mother used to try to come to things at school when I would be in different things and, and I really did appreciate, but my father would not, he just wouldn't, she'd say well you know he just doesn't like that kind of thing (speaker 7, Buckeye)

In this example, it could be that the speaker is using *well* to signpost the shifting of the context from the current interlocution to that in the past between the speaker and her mother. However, *well* could also be signposting a relevance shift *within* the embedded context. The mother suggests that the father's support for her activities is not relevant to whether or not he attends them; instead, his disliking for those kinds of events is the relevant factor.

A variationist analysis was performed on tokens of quoted speech ( $n = 348$ ) extracted from 32 interviews within two pre-existing corpora, the Buckeye corpus of sociolinguistic interviews (Pitt et al. 2007) and the StoryCorps corpus of recorded and transcribed story telling (National Public Radio 2014). The dependent variable was whether tokens were prefaced by *well*. The main independent variable analyzed was whether the quoted material could be considered a relevance shift (following Jucker's analysis) within the quoted speech context, coded binarily. Another factor coded for was whether the token appeared within an argument narrative, a narrative describing an event of passionate or invested disagreement between two or more characters. This was considered an environment to which Sakita's stancetaking explanation could be considered especially applicable. Linguistic factors considered were verb person (both of the quotative and embedded verbs), verb, tense, and the presence/absence of intervening material between the quotative verb and quoted material. Corpus and gender were also considered as extralinguistic factors.

There is an overall rate of 12.9% *well*-prefacing in these data, a comparable result to Sakita's observed 14.6%. Contexts identified as relevance shifts make up 29.3% of the data. This context also shows a higher rate of 'well'-prefacing: 26.5%, as opposed to a rate of 7.3% in other cases. The results of a VARBRUL analysis identify significant effects ( $p = 0.044$ ) on the occurrence of *well*-prefacing of quoted speech. Only three factors are included in the final model chosen by a Step-Up-Step-Down analysis: corpus, relevance shift, and argument narrative. The effect of corpus is interpreted to result from the level of casualness of the interviews (subjects knowing StoryCorps interviews will be publicly broadcast), corroborating a similar conclusion by Sakita.

As predicted, relevance shifting within the quoted context favors *well*-prefacing. Quoted speech in argument narratives also is found to significantly favor *well*-prefacing. Both of these findings support the hypothesis that *well* as a preface to quoted speech may often be attributable to the quotee as a signpost of relevance shifting (à la Jucker) or stancetaking (à la Sakita). The fact that no linguistic factors were found to be significant is also interpreted as variationist support for the theory that discourse markers are exclusively context-related in meaning and function.

## References

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