THE INDEX OF PRAGMATIC USES AND FUNCTIONS OF *WELL* IN UNIVERSITY EFL CLASSROOM DISCOURSE: A CASE STUDY IN IRAN

Ali Mohammad Mohammadi,[1] Dariush Nejadansari,[2] & Manijeh Youhanaee[3]

ABSTRACT

Discourse markers (DMs) assist and persuade EFL classroom interlocutors to monitor their discourse production and comprehension process. This exploratory research investigated the index of pragmatic use (IPU), rate of use, frequency, and the pragmatic functions of *well* in Iranian university EFL teachers' and learners' classroom interactions. The researchers applied Jucker's (1997) inventory to explore the pragmatic functions of *well*. The data was collected from four university EFL classes. The results revealed that the IPU was 72%, rate of use was 9.7%, and frequency of distribution was 0.98%. Compared with the London Lund corpus, the IPU and the rate of use were very low, but the frequency of occurrence was very high. The findings indicate the improper and unnatural pragmatic input offered in this EFL context. Also, the instances of *well* applied by the interactants in the monitoring of discourse comply with Jucker's index of functions in 90% of the cases by the teachers and in 65% by the students. They overused *well* as a face-threat mitigator, underused it as a frame, and the teachers' gender played no significant part. The insufficiency in IPU, rate of use, extra and excessive frequency, and imbalanced approach in pragmatic functions of *well* provide the evidence for reformulation in EFL education. Classroom discourse variables, i.e. teacher training, material production procedures, and classroom strategies and teaching methodology need to be directed in a way to provide chances for the teachers and the students to observe how native speakers apply *well* in authentic situations, underline its instances of use, and discuss its pragmatic functions in texts.

Key Words: *well*, classroom discourse, pragmatic use, functions, DMs

[1] PhD candidate, University of Isfahan, Isfahan, Iran
[2] Assistant Professor, University of Isfahan, Isfahan, Iran
[3] Assistant Professor, University of Isfahan, Isfahan, Iran

INTRODUCTION

DMs join units of talk, show discourse segments, facilitate discourse interpretation, and help interlocutors monitor discourse (Aijmer, 2002; Fraser, 1999; Schiffrin, 1987). Moreover, people employ DMs to communicate their feelings in the discourse and generate more cohesive and relevant discourse within the confinements of the roles of the interlocutors (Fuller, 2003; Marcus, 2009). As one of the most applied and investigated DMs, *well* is a multi-functional DM (Schiffrin, 1987; Schourup, 2001). It can contribute to, influence, and restrict the way discourse is interpreted and coherence relations are created (Jucker, 1993).

In spite of the key role played by DMs in signifying on what to concentrate in discourse and how to infer and interpret messages, their uses and functions have not been fully described in previous studies and in formal language education (Trillo, 2002; Yang, 2011). As a result, learners themselves have to understand the basics of DMs and master their pragmatic value and significance. But it is not feasible, especially for EFL learners, to acquire them outside the learning environment. Due to the critical and crucial pragmatic functions of *well* in EFL educational discourse, this research broadens the picture by exploring the patterns of the uses of *well* in Iranian university EFL teachers' and students' classroom discourse in terms of index of pragmatic use, rate of use, frequency of distribution, and functions in four samples of spoken texts including more than 13,000 words selected from a corpus of-over 30,000 words in an Iranian university EFL situation. Moreover, the research purpose is to verify the conformity of functions of *well* in this context with the index introduced by Jucker (1997). This exploratory investigation addresses the following questions:

1. What is the index of the pragmatic use of *well* in Iranian University classroom discourse?
2. What is the rate of use of *well* per 1000 words in Iranian university EFL classroom interactions?
3. What is the frequency of the distribution of *well* in Iranian EFL teachers' and students' conversations?
4. In which positions of the utterances does *well* occur in teachers' and the students' interactions?
5. What are the differences between the teachers' and the students' use of *well* as a DM?

LITERATURE REVIEW

Well has attracted a large number of scholarly discussions and academic investigations during the last few decades (Fuller, 2003; Schourup 2001). To substantiate the scientific foundations and illustrate the relevance of the study, the DM *well* is investigated from two theoretical and practical perspectives in this review. During the last twenty years, Schiffrin's (1987) coherence-oriented view, Bolinger's (1989) norm-epistemic outlook, and Jucker's (1993) relevance-based perspective, have inspired and shaped the study of *well*.

Viewing *well* as a marker of response, Schiffrin (1987) maintains that it is a device used to construct coherence in the face of multiple options, i.e. it links the speaker into the discourse process at the points where it lacks coherence. In her view, *well* is employed in cases of coherence choices suggested by one element of talk that varies from those of the others and as a result, *well* puts a speaker in the position of a respondent to one part of discourse and releases him from attention to others. Also Schiffrin (1985) maintains that a speaker's awareness of discourse requirements for interactions makes *well* function both as a response and as a referent. This flexibility is due to a respondent's manipulation of options provided by a former utterance. This flexibility is based on three conditions: inadequate information, incorrect hypothesis by the questioner, and the complexity of the condition questioned. When a respondent violates all the options offered by the former utterance, he employs *well* to preface his response, i.e. answering a yes-no question without approval or denial.

The second approach is Bolinger's epistemic outlook based on norm comparison. Bolinger (1989), as cited in Schourup (2001), believes that *well* is applied to raise a norm and shows a comparison and contrast with another norm. Consequently, *well* in his view is epistemic, i.e. its locutionary meaning has been shifted to the illocutionary sense for the purpose of critical, creative, and constructive communication.

The third line of research on *well* is Jucker's (1993) relevance-based outlook. According to Jucker, *well* shows that the discourse receiver should recreate the background through which he can process a forthcoming utterance. So according to him, context is a dynamic phenomenon requiring a critical control on the part of the interlocutors. So, these theoretical outlooks have shaped the foundations of the applied investigations during the last three decades (1985-2015). And the researchers have applied them as frameworks to carry out their

explorative investigations.

From a practical point of view, the use and functions of *well* have been researched by their use in courtrooms (Innes, 2010), in Old English (Marcus, 2009), by non-native speakers of Xhosa English (Klerk, 2005), by differences between native and non-native speaker use (Hellermann & Vergun, 2007), in the native speakers' perception in a family gathering (Watts, 1989), in polite disagreements (Finell, 1989), in Iraqi EFL situation (Hassan & Muhsin, 2011), its various functions in practical instances of use (Jucker, 1993, 1997), in the negotiation of meaning (Schiffrin, 1985), and the impact of the speaker (Fuller, 2003).

Considering examination of *well* in small and friendly encounters as simplistic and applying Schiffrin's (1987) model, Innes (2010) studied the use of *well* as a DM in cooperative and adversarial situations such as courtrooms. He obtained the data through audio recording and observation. His data included 309 instances of *well* as a DM based on a corpus of over 90,000 words and all people used *well* in their interactions. The results revealed that *well* appeared to operate multi-functionally and proactively in courtroom adversarial situations.

Criticizing synchronic perspectives on the study of *well* as limited in scope and ignoring important contextual factors, Marcus (2009) tried to pursue it diachronically. His findings revealed that numerous functions of *well* took place much earlier in the English system and the former reports disregarded vital contextual issues in the texts. So, the study implied that *well* is a creative element in monitoring discourse and it deserves more meticulous and thorough explorations. In view of the fact that, according to the Encarta online dictionary, *well* consists of twenty-seven different meanings requiring an in-depth reading of the surrounding context to arrive at its precise semantic functions in the utterance. That is to say, depending on the context, it can possess various functions such as a noun, verb, adjective, or adverb.

Also, Klerk (2005) intended to provide a picture of the patterns of use of *well* by non-native speakers of Xhosa English. The researcher analyzed all cases of *well* in a context of 20 words in a text. The results revealed a much lower frequency of distribution for *well* in Xhosa English, and the researcher inferred that it was due to the educational system's inadequacies. In terms of functions, he came to the conclusion that *well* was used to indicate the need for more time to think, to make the hearer reassess his assumption, to show a turn change, and to mark the coherence of the discourse. Therefore, due to the low frequency and

ignoring other functions of *well*, this study indicated the need for some sort of modification in the educational system

And Watts (1989) investigated the native speakers' perception of DMs in a family gathering involved in a discussion on DMs. He terms the initial uses of *well* as left hand markers and the final uses as right hand markers. The greatest active participation occurred on topic sequences where DMs were used for comment and discussion. The participants perceived the use of DMs as negative, which is odd and surprising. His data supported the hypothesis that the perceptual salience of a DM was associated with its use as a right hand DM. Also, the more a DM was related to an information status, the greater its salience was. Thus, the study denotes the creative, manipulative, and critical art played by *well* in managing human interactions.

Discussing the rationale behind using *well* in responses from a historical perspective, Finell (1989) maintains that prefacing an utterance with *well* signals a kind and polite way of disagreeing with the addressee, looking at the matter differently, and implying being on friendly terms with the addressee. She concluded that the polysemic use of *well* was present in Old English. Then, according to this research, applying *well* can reveal a politeness strategy in an individual's interactions.

Hellermann and Vergun (2007) investigated the differences between native and non-native speaker use of DMs use. Analyzing former studies, these researchers came up with quantitative and qualitative differences between natives and nonnative speakers. Quantitatively, the rate of natives' use was 43.2 words per 1,000 words, but it was 28.5 words for non-natives. Qualitatively, non-natives were not able to distinguish between the contexts of speech in the way natives did. According to these researchers, the influencing variables included proficiency level, time spent in the target country, using the target language, outside-the-classroom reading practices, and teachers' use of DMs. So, they provided a technique for other researchers for the comparative analysis of the functions of DMs in educational investigations.

Taking Relevance Theory as the general theory of human communication and a basis for analyzing the functions of *well* and viewing the most immediate context as irrelevant for the interpretation of the forthcoming utterance, Jucker (1993, 1997) maintains that this cognitive oriented theory presents an amalgamated explanation of its functions through a wide range of instances. With such a theoretical standpoint, his analysis of the uses of *well* made him appreciate four

basic uses: a marker of insufficiency, a face-threat mitigator, a frame, and a delay device. Therefore, his study offers a comprehensive model for analyzing the functions of *well* in modern English (Fuller, 2003).

According to Schiffrin (1985), there is an interaction between the roles and relationships of the interlocutors and the application of *well* in discourse. She states that "there is a joint endeavor in which speakers and hearers mutually negotiate (a) a focus of attention—a referent—and (b) a response which further selects what aspect(s) of that referent will be attended to" (1985: 640). So, the use of *well* helps the speakers negotiate the meaning when the choices of the former utterance can not be attended to completely. The use of *well* indicates sensitivity to the information system of questions, answers, and responses in the analysis of the interlocutors participation structure in discourse construction. Thus, her point of view indicated a comprehensive analysis of the context in which it is used.

Hassan and Muhsin (2011) studied the uses and the functions of *well* in Iraqi university EFL students' conversations by applying Müller's (2004) classification of its functions. The results of their study revealed that Iraqi EFL learners displayed a low degree of information about *well* in their classroom discussions. They concluded the usage and functions of this DM were ignored in Iraqi EFL education; in this context the learners' inadequacy in using *well* was attributed to problems in Iraqi EFL education. Müller (2005) compared the application of *well* as a DM between nonnative German speakers and American natives and found that nonnative speakers used *well* two times more often than the American speakers. So, he came up with such a result because of the features of the German EFL textbooks. Also, Fuller (2003) investigated the interaction between the speaker role using DMs and came to the conclusion that DMs are indeed used in different ways depending on the roles and relationships of the interlocutors.

The above studies on *well* covered its application in the courtroom, in Old English, by non-native speakers, in comparison of its use by native and non-native speaker, in native speakers' reaction, in EFL learners discourse, and in polite disagreements. Of these studies only two were carried out in educational situations, and no attention was given to both the EFL learners and teacher's interactions. The current research tried to fill these gaps through a comparative and comprehensive study of four groups of teachers'/learners' performances, and the examination of the application of *well* in their interactions.

Ali Mohammad Mohammadi, Dariush Nejadansari, & Manijeh Youhanaee

METHODOLOGY

Participants

Four groups of adult male and female EFL students participated in this study, including two male and two female teachers. Each group consisted of about twenty sophomore B.A. students studying English translation and English literature. Their ages ranged between 19 and 21. Their L1 was Persian. The teachers' ages ranged between 27 and 38. The teacher in group A (female) held an MA in linguistics and possessed three years of teaching experience at Arak University, Arak, a city in the western half of Iran. The instructor in group B (female) possessed an MA in translation studies with four years of teaching experience at Arak University. Also, the lecturer in group C possessed an MA in TEFL. He taught English for five years at Arak University. And in group D the teacher (male) held an MA in translation studies. He had six years of teaching experience at Arak University.

Data Collection Procedures

The data were audio-recorded from four conversation classes in 2013. They discussed short stories and politics. Three sessions were recorded from each class. Each session lasted for about 90 minutes and consisted of more than 9000 words. The tasks contained reading and speaking activities. Then, the data were transcribed. Subsequently, 30 minutes of conversation was selected randomly as the main source of information from each group for the analysis. It consisted of more than 3,000 words.

Data Analysis

The researchers applied both quantitative and qualitative analyses in their study of Iranian EFL teachers' and learners' classroom discourse. For quantitative analysis, simple descriptive statistics were employed to explore the rate of use of *well* as a DM in their interactions in order to show the frequency of occurrence of *well* in the teachers' and the students' classroom discourse.

The qualitative aspect dealt with the identification and the classification of the pragmatic functions of *well* in its local context of the use by the Iranian EFL teachers and students through applying Jucker's (1997) model. According to Schiffrin (1985), *well* is devoid of any

92

semantic or syntactic value. As a result, its meaning is derived out of the context of use. By "context" she means the meaning which is provided by any clue apart from the semantic value of the word. On the basis of such a perspective, a simple prosody can be taken as an attribute of the context for the DM *well*.

In this analysis, the researchers identified the overall and the pragmatic use of *well* in the interactions first. Then they calculated the index of pragmatic use (IPU), as Trillo (2002) calls it. To calculate the index, the pragmatic realizations of *well* are divided by the overall presence of this element. The IPU illustrates the pragmatic applications of an element by the interactants. It can also be used to display the probability of an element functioning as a pragmatic marker.

Jucker's model

Jucker (1993) offers a rectangular model for the analysis of the functions of *well* in the English language. This is a comprehensive model because it shows all of the subcategories of its functions that constrain the interpretation of the next utterance (Fuller, 2003). Jucker (1993) maintains that *well* possesses four different functions and categories in modern English: as a frame, qualifier, face-threat mitigator, and pause filler. Figure 1 represents Jucker's (1993) model.
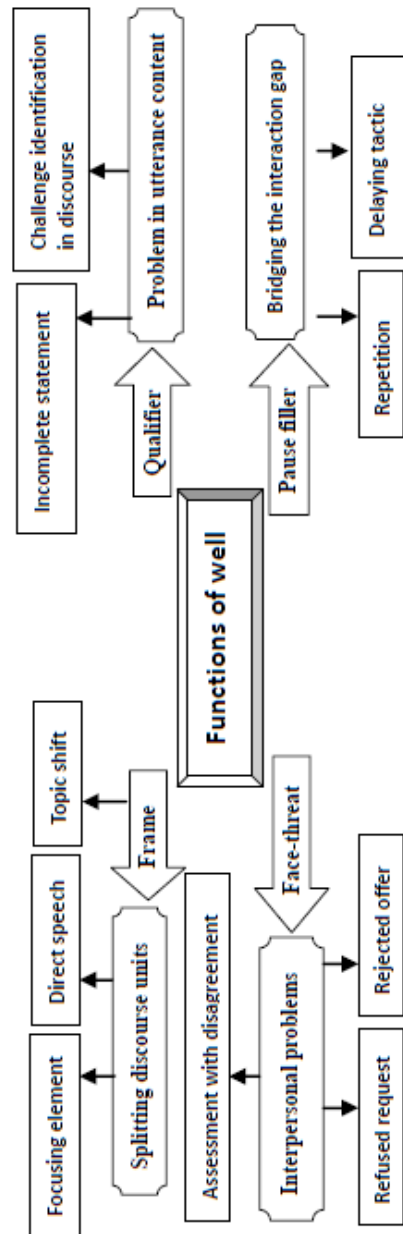
Ali Mohammad Mohammadi, Dariush Nejadansari, & Manijeh Youhanaee

Figure 1. The system and features of Jucker's model representing the functions of *well*

In its function as a frame, *well* is viewed as a linguistic element used to separate discourse units. Within this function, it possesses subtypes such as a focusing element, a device to indicate a partial topic shift, and as a component which introduces direct speech. That is to say, the speaker prefaces his/her statement with *well* to focus on something, to reveal that he tries to change the topic in the conversation, and to indicate a reported speech.

As a qualifier, the DM *well* denotes some problematic issues about the content of the present or previous utterance. In this function the interlocutors do not provide the information directly; they identify some sort of challenge in the discourse and they leave it to the addressee to fill in some details. In this context, the speaker prefaces his or her statement with *well*, suggesting that the statement is not complete because of the presence of different circumstances. That is, the speaker leaves the grounds for various interpretations.

Thirdly, well can function as a face-threat mitigator, revealing interpersonal problems and confrontations. Here either the speaker or the hearer is threatened by conflicts such as an assessment with a disagreement, a refused request, or a rejected offer. In all these cases the speaker attempts to alleviate the burden of some unfavorable consequences of the course of interaction.

Finally, when it is used as a pause-filler, *well* specifies the speaker's hesitation and his willingness to bridge interaction silence. Here the speaker actually needs time to think about the discourse he/she is going to produce. Sometimes he or she repeats a word or phrase indicating that the speaker has something to say and does not like to give up the floor. In this context it is used as a temporizing or delaying tactic (Svartvik, 1980 cited in Jucker, 1993).

Table 1 represents the above mentioned functions through instances cited and quoted by Jucker (1993) from Svartvik (1980).

Table 1

Instances Representing Jucker's Model for the Analysis of Well

1	I would be very happy to stay that we have arranged for you to stay, **well** let's take the interview first.
2	And I said **well** I don't really think I could write - and this sort of ninety-six page booklet you know how big that might be.

Table 1

Instances Representing Jucker's Model for the Analysis of Well (continued)

3	A: That man speaks extremely good English. B: **Well**, he is American.
4	A: They must worry about you though Eddie, don't they? B: er **well** they always come to all the shows.
5	A: Can I just see them. B: um **well** I'm not allowed to do that.
6	A: What about coming here on the way? B: **Well** no I'm supervising here.
7	A: …on the floor... B: on on **well** on you know on ….

In extracts [1] and [2] DM *well* functions as a frame. By using *well* in [1], the speaker changes the topic. But in [2] *well* reveals an instance of reported speech. In extract [3], well has the role of a qualifier, i.e. the speaker prefaces his statement by *well,* to signify that it is something natural and not an outstanding or remarkable qualification. So, the addressee has to fill in the unarticulated details here.

Extracts [4], [5], and [6] reveal the functions of *well* as face threat-mitigator. In extract [4B], speaker B applies *well* to disagree with speaker A's assessment. Speaker B uses *well* in order not to comply with speaker A's request in extract [5]. And speaker B rejects the offer by speaker A in extract [6]. In extract [7], speaker B needs more time to think. So he repeats the preposition "on". This indicates that he might have something more to say, may not like to give the floor up, or might be looking for the proper word etc.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Table 2 shows the results of the study in terms of the overall use, the pragmatic use, and the IPU of *well* in an Iranian university EFL situation. The overall IPU is 72%.

Table 2

Lexical Size, Occurrence, Rate of Use, Overall Use, Pragmatic Use, and IPU of Well *in the Teachers' and the Students' Interactions*

	Group A	Group B	Group C	Group D	Total
Lexical Size	3638	3400	3287	3333	13658
Occurrence (pragmatic)	Total:44 1.2% T:28 63.6% S:16 36.3%	Total: 33 0.9% T:13 39.3% S: 20 60.6%	Total:24 1% T:14 58.3% S:10 41.6%	Total:34 0.9% T:25 75.7% S:8 24.2%	Total:134 0.98% T:80 59.7% S:54 40.2%
Rate of use	Total: 12 T:7.6 S: 4.4	Total: 9.7 T: 3.8 S: 5.8	Total: 7.3 T: 4.2 S: 3	Total: 9.9 T: 7.5 S: 2.4	Total:9.8 T: 5.8 S: 3.95
Overall use	60	41	30	54	185
Pragmatic use	44	33	24	34	134
IPU	73%	80%	80%	61%	72%

Compared with the results of the London-Lund Corpus in which the overall IPU is 87.4% (Trillo, 2002), the Iranian teachers and students' IPU is low. Also, the IPU in Trillo's own non-native corpora is 97.4% which is higher than the native speakers' IPU. Trillo believes that this overuse is due to the unnatural pragmatic input those EFL learners are exposed to in school.

Regarding the second research question, concerning the rate of use of *well* per 1000 words, Table 2 reveals that the rate of use of *well* is 12 per 1,000 in group A, 9.7 in group B, 7.3 in group C, and 9.9 in group D. Compared with the rates in Fuller (2003) and Hellermann and Vergun (2007), quantitatively the rate of the use of *well* in this study is very low. In Fuller's (2003) investigation the rate is 43.2 per 1,000 words and in Müller's (2005) study it is 28.5. But the mean of the rate in these four groups is only 9.8, requiring further study, attention, and reorientation in the Iranian EFL curriculum.

Also, in terms of frequency of distribution of *well*- the subject of the

third question- 44 instances of *well* were applied in group A, accounting for 1.2% of the total (3638) distribution in group A. The teacher used 28 cases and the students applied 16 instances, explaining over 63% of distribution for the teacher and above 36% for the students. And 33 instances of this DM were employed by the participants in group B with the teacher using 13 cases (39.3%) and the students applying 20 examples (60.6%). In group C *well* occurred 24 times accounting only for 1% of the distribution in which the teacher employed 58.3% and the students 44.6% of the cases of *well*. Group D used *well* 33 times. Out of 33 instances 25 cases were employed by the teacher (75.7%) and eight examples by the learners (24.2%). Then, totally 134 instances of *well* are applied by the four groups explaining 0.98% of the distribution and the teachers utilized 80 instances (59.7%) while the students employed 54 cases (40.2%). Generally the frequency of the distribution of *well* is about 1% in these groups. Compared with Turkish EFL learners in Asık & Cephe's (2013) study, this distribution is very high. In their study it was 0.01%. They maintained that the cause may be due to the fact that they lack the knowledge about its functions in spoken English.

In addition, the distribution in this study is higher than the native speaker data in the Michigan Corpus of Academic Spoken English (MICASE). The distribution of *well* in MICASE is 0.20% (Asık & Cephe 2013). This result is in line with Müller (2005). In her study, German EFL learners applied *well* as a DM more than native speakers. According to Müller (2005) the attempt in German textbooks to avoid the German 'so' might be the potential cause. But the case in the Iranian EFL situation might be due to the interlocutors' incompetence in creative, critical, and innovative resourcefulness in discourse. There might be different causes for this incompetence. Firstly, it might be due to the inadequacy in the Iranian EFL curriculum. That is, in this curriculum only two courses are offered for English grammar education at university level. As a result, the instructors and students do not enjoy the possibility, faculty, and skill to experience functional, practical, pragmatic, and discoursal details of a linguistic element such as *well* and manage their interactions. Secondly, this incompetency might be the result of severe problems in the Iranian EFL teacher education; the instructors themselves have proceeded through this channel of education and suffer from insufficient, deficient, and artificial input, thereby lacking the features of creative input in the native environment. Consequently, these EFL teachers' syllabi would lack the necessary potential to apply these

discourse monitoring linguistic techniques in classroom interactions. As they are not trained to be sensitive to these apparently meaningless lexical elements, this system may not be able to prepare the students to monitor their interactions and discourse applying DMs such as *well*. Finally, this inadequate and imbalanced use of this DM and its relevant functions present the support for the typical neglect of the education, knowledge, and practice of this discourse managing and regulating instrument in this EFL educational situation (Nejadansari & Mohammadi, 2014).

In view of this, *well* helps them to bridge the gap and solve their problems in the process of discourse production and to sound natural in spite of the weaknesses from which they suffer. Moreover, Hellermann and Vergun (2007) maintain that the improper use of *well*, is non-target-like and indicates the speakers' disfluency in subtle ways. Also, Watts (1989) believed that the overuse of *well* makes discourse go dry.

Moreover, the results in the Iranian EFL context are not in line with Hellermann and Vergun's (2007) study in Spain. In Spanish teachers' interactions *well* occurred only five times, but these Iranian EFL teachers used it four times more. No instances of *well* were observed in Spanish students' interactions. But the Iranian students applied 54 instances of *well*. The cause might be the fact that the teachers' speech was viewed as a model and they followed their teachers in these two contexts. Therefore, an unnatural pragmatic input resulted in an artificial pragmatic output. Table 3 represents the occurrences of *well* in the initial, medial, and final position in the teachers' and the students' utterances.

Table 3

Frequency of Well *in Initial, Medial, and Final Position by the Teachers and the Students*

	Initial		Medial		Final
Group A	T:18	40%	T:12	27%	T: 0
	S:5	11.3%	S:14	31.8%	S:12.2%
Group B	T:3	9%	T:11	33.3%	T: 0
	S:6	18%	S:14	42.4%	S:13%
Group C	T:9	37.5%	T:5	20.8%	T: 0
	S:4	16.6%	S:6	25%	S: 0
Group D	T:14	42.4%	T:12	36.3%	T: 0
	S:5	15.5%	S:3	9%	S: 0

Generally, 47.7% of the distribution occurred initially, 57% medially, and 1% in the final position. In the teacher's interaction in group A, 18 instances occurred initially and 12 cases medially. Also, in student interactions, five cases occurred in the initial position, 14 in the medial position, and one instance in the end of the utterance. There were three examples of *well* at the beginning and 11 cases at the end of the utterance by the teacher in group B. Moreover, there occurred six instances initially, 14 medially, and one in final position by the students in this group. In the third group, the teacher put nine instances of this DM initially and five cases medially. The learners in this group placed four instances in the initial position and six examples in the middle. Finally, in group D the teacher put 14 cases at the beginning and 12 instances in the middle. In addition, the students used five cases initially and three examples medially.

Watts (1989) studied the position of *well* in the utterance and termed those occurring initially as left hand DMs and the ones non-initially as right hand. Left hand DMs preface the utterance and right hand DMs conclude it. But his viewpoint is not substantiated here, since in these positions the DM fulfills a large number of functions. The use of a *well* in the final position was similar in the two studies: two instances of *well* appeared in the Iranian interactants' speech and one in Watts's study. As extracts [12] and [19] demonstrate, students apply *well* at the end of the utterance. And the following example appears in Watt's study: "I'll tell you something about being new *well*" (1989: 209). But the Iranian

teacher does not use *well* in this position. This is somehow odd and calls for further analysis through observation or interview, because there is no such instance in the teacher's speech and neither does their textbook provide any instance of *well* in such a position.

In terms of the teacher's and the students' use of *well* as a DM, Table 3 shows that generally teachers outperform students except for group B with an opposite result. In group A the teacher used *well* in more than 63% of the distribution and 7.6 words per 1000 words regarding the rate of use, but the learners used the DM in 36.3% of the distribution and 4.4 words per 1000 words in terms of the rate of use. In group C more than 58% of the frequency of occurrence of *well* belongs to the teacher and his rate of use is 4.2 words per 1000; his students' distribution is 41.6% and their rate of use is three words per 1000. In addition, above 75% of the distribution goes with the teacher and his rate of use of *well* is 7.5 words per 1000. But his students applied *well* in 24.2% of the cases and their rate of use is 2.4 words per 1000.

However, it is not the case in group B. Here the students used *well* more than their teacher. Less than 40% of the distribution was produced by the teacher and her rate of use is 3.8 words per 1000. But her students applied above 60% of the distribution of the DM in their interactions, and their proportion of the use was 5.8 per 1000. The cause, as the recorded data indicate, was the student centered approach encouraged by her; since mostly students held the floor and she tried her best to help them take turns in discourse.

In this section the researchers tried to apply Jucker's framework for the analysis of the functions of *well* in the initial, medial and final positions in an Iranian university EFL context. As Tables 4, 5, 6, and 7 display, utterance-initial/medial *well* can have a range of functions which are mostly in conformity with the inventory and index of functions proposed by Jucker (1997). Table 4 reveals one instance of *well* is used as a frame to change the topic in initial position and three instances in the medial position by the teacher in group A (extracts 1 and 2).

[1] We have repetition of adjectives in the text on the one hand and the pauses on the other hand. **Well** what about their role and function?

[2] You mean they tried to ….. , **well** she has got another suggestion about our work, yes please go on.

Also, the teacher used *well* to indicate the reported speech initially and medially as in extracts 3 and 4:

[3] **Well** then he said goodbye my friend, goodbye my mate.

[4] And I think that **well** the writer stated he wanted to get it from the very beginning of the story.

In the third function, *well* is used as a qualifier revealing the speaker's concerns about the content of the utterance. That is to say, here she may not know the proper answer and wants to get the answer from students. As is evident, she is hesitant and in three out of four instances, is asking questions to structure her interaction with the students. The teacher applied four instances of *well* as qualifiers initially, and in five cases medially as in extracts 5 and 6:

[5] **Well** let's say what he thinks is true and it means imagination.

[6] Well so you can …. **well** ah **well** can it mean a friend? Is it okay?

Also, the students applied an instance of *well* initially and in four cases medially:

[7] **Well**, you know the tone is angry and he doesn't know what to do, isn't he hesitant and unfriendly?

[8] I think this is an evidence **well** for support of imagination, isn't it?

Face-threat mitigator is the fourth function of *well* in these interlocutors' interactions. Three instances are applied by the teacher's utterance medially:

[9] I think **well** this is your interpretation and it may be wrong.

Besides, the students used four instances of *well*, as face-threat mittigator, initially, four cases medially, and one example at the end of the utterance:

[10] **Well** I think it is not the concept expressed by the text**.**

[11] I wonder if it can **well** convey negative impression.

[12] But I suppose it is a sign for revenge **well**.

The fifth function of *well* is as pause filler. *Well* is used as pause filler four times initially and seven times medially by the teacher:

[13] Do you eh **well** how do you think of fancy meaning as love?

[14] So eh **well** what ….. **well** will you continue?

Table 4

Functions of Well *in Initial, Medial, and Final Position by the Teacher and the Students in Group A*

Functions	Initial position	Medial position	Final position
Frame: topic change	T:1	T:3	T:
	S:	S:	S:
Frame: direct reported speech	T:1	T:2	T:
	S:	S:	S:
Qualifier	T:4	T:5	T:
	S:1	S:4	S:
Face-threat mitigator	T:	T:3	T:
	S:4	S:4	S:1
Pause filler	T:4	T:7	T:
	S:	S:	S:

Table 5 represents the teacher's and the students' performances in group B. She used an instance of *well* as a topic changing device utterance initially and a medial utterance in two cases:

[15] So it reveals that you didn't get what I told last session. **Well**, what does this sentence imply? Egypt doesn't like to weaken its ties with Arabs in the expense of establishing political ties with Iran. It provides some evidence, doesn't it?

The process of discourse production is directed to another issue by the teacher in three cases utterance medially. In extract [16] the process of

103

Ali Mohammad Mohammadi, Dariush Nejadansari, & Manijeh Youhanaee

topic change becomes a substantiated medial utterance by changing the discussion from the writer's style to the isolation of their country to motivate the students to speak:

[16] The writer is speaking indirectly, **well** in this paragraph we have the word isolation, what is it? You didn't notice it why?

Reported speech is another function of *well* applied to indicate by the interlocutors in this group. One instance of *well* is a utilized medial utterance by the teacher:

[17] T: Yeah, when talking about Ahmad Jamaleddin, **well** you said he is…..
S: An Egyptian deputy.

In two cases *well* is applied by the students medially and in final position to imply reported speech:

[18] You mean **well** it says …..

[19] It said that there has been a secret meeting **well**.

As a qualifier, *well* is used initially and medially in three situations by the teacher and in five cases by the students. The teacher is not able to provide enough information to answer the question in [20]:

[20] Student: What does the report say about Iran-Egypt relationship?
Teacher: **Well** there seems to be some concerns in their negotiations.

In [21] the teacher is hesitant to express her viewpoint directly or does not like to elaborate the issue and uses 'eh' as a pause filler. Then she resorts to implications by using *well* utterance medially:

[21] These opposite ideas imply that **well** there have been some eh talks between Iranian and US diplomats.

One instance of *well* is applied by the students utterance initially and four examples medially. In [22] the student prefaces his idea with *well* to indicate his indecision and uncertainty toward the issue in context of classroom. The same function is substantiated in [23] by applying *well*

104

medially.

[22] **Well** I guess there are some instability in Iran- Egypt negotiations to start relationship.

[23] I think that the writer believes starting relation with Iran **well** may result in receiving economic helps.

The confrontations such as an assessment with disagreement, a refused request, and a rejected offer are the manifestations of another function of *well* as face-threat mitigator. The teacher uses one example initially and two medially. In [24] she prefaces her statement with *well* to assess the student's statement and in [25] the teacher expresses her disagreement with one of the students using a *well* utterance medially:

[24] Student: On the other hand, well in the second paragraph it says Iran has started out a lot of efforts to start political ties with this important Arab nation.
Teacher: **Well** it is not the proper and the only evidence.

[25] Student 1: What is the meaning of the word authorities?
Student 2: The Iranian leader.
Teacher: I think the writer is talking about **well** all Iranian rulers not just the leader.

The students applied more instances of *well* as face-threat mitigators: two instances in the initial position (26B) and six in the medial position (27B).

[26] A: It seems that the writer believes starting relation with Iran may result in receiving more economic helps.
B: **Well** do you mean that Egypt will receive economic supports from the West and Arabs as a result of establishing relationship with Iran?   They are against Iran, aren't they?

[27] A: ah in this paragraph we have the concept of isolation, well what is it? You didn't notice it why?
B: I didn't notice it because it was about economics, **well** not politics.

The last but not the least function, this DM is used as a pause filler. In

105

this function *well* specifies the speaker's uncertainty and his readiness to bridge interaction silence. The teacher applies two instances in the medial position of the utterance.

[28] Student: The text states that well Velayati is going to enroll as a presidential nominee.
Teacher: First it….   was eh …..**well** declared by a former Iranian diplomat.

Here the teacher tries to hold the floor by uttering a single word along with a pause in order to find the proper idea or a word. However, the students applied eight instances of *well* as a pause filler utterance medially.

[29] The text tells … eh em …..**well** something about Iran-US diplomats meetings. But Americans deny it. Why?

[30] I could not get eh the meaning of…. **well** the cost of starting relationship with Iran for Egypt. Does it mean cutting relation with others?

Table 5

Functions of Well *in Initial, Medial, and Final Position by the Teachers and the Students in Group B*

Functions	Initial position	Medial position	Final position
Frame: topic change	T:1 S:	T:2 S:	T: S:
Frame: direct reported speech	T: S:	T:1 S:1	T: S:1
Qualifier	T:1 S:1	T:2 S:4	T: S:
Face-threat mitigator	T:1 S:2	T:2 S:6	T: S:
Pause filler	T: S:	T:2 S:8	T: S:

Table 6 represents the functions of *well* in group C. It is applied in 24 situations during a 30 minute conversation in this EFL classroom discourse. First, it is used as a frame to indicate a change in the topic by the teacher's utterance medially in three cases. *Well* in extract [31] introduces a new topic.

> [31] There are some differences and similarities between languages, **well** what you said about symbolic use of birds' song is true and there is no question about it.

One of the students uses it utterance initially and directs the discussion to another issue in extract [32].

> [32] Teacher: What else about the main character? Student: **Well** I think the important point is the birds' song, they are singing in a special way and it is a symbol for ....

No instance of *well* as a frame signifying reported speech was found by the teacher in this group. The teacher utilizes *well* as a qualifier in seven situations in this group utterance initially and medially. In the extract [33] the teacher leaves the details to the students to be filled in. In extract [34] he identifies insufficiency in the reply and tries to make others provide enough information.

> [33] **Well** first you should trace the theme; then you can see what the sentence expresses.

> [34] Ok in terms of primary meaning of the word what you said is right, **well** what does it show in this short story?

The students also applied *well* as a qualifier in two situations initially and medially. In extract [35] the student prefaces his reply with *well* to acknowledge insufficiency in his answer. In [36] the student has some concerns regarding the nature of the ongoing discourse.

> [35] **Well** I don't know how to say it in English.

> [36] Of course the character here well has got a monologue which is informal, **well** how is the other part?

Difficulties regarding the relationship between people in which either speaker's or hearer is threatened by arguments such as a judgment with disagreement, a refused demand, and a rejected offer form another function substantiated which is known as face-threat mitigator. As Table 6 represents the teacher applied *well* in three situations and the students used it in five contexts initially and medially.

Table 6

Functions of Well *in Initial, Medial, and Final Position by the Teachers and the Students in Group C*

Functions	Initial position	Medial position	Final position
Frame: topic change	T:	T:3	T:
	S: 1	S:	S:
Frame: direct reported speech	T:	T:	T:
	S:	S:	S:
Qualifier	T:4	T:3	T:
	S: 1	S:1	S:
Face-threat mitigator	T:2	T:1	T:
	S:1	S:4	S:
Pause filler	T:1	T:1	T:
	S:	S:2	S:

In extract [37] the teacher criticizes the student for ignoring the issue and in [38] he is rejecting an offer.

[37] **Well** move on to the next section and see the problem you didn't notice.

[38] Of course we can say that **well** it is impossible.

In extract [39] the student argued with a disagreement and rejected an offer and presented another solution and the same thing happened in extract [40].

[39] **Well** sir we can put it another way which is easier to understand.

108

[40] But this is somehow odd, **well** I don't see that, why you say so?

The teacher applied *well* as pause filler in two situations initially and medially. In extract [41] the teacher tries to stop interaction silence by prefacing his question with *well*. But in extract [42] he uses *well* in order not to lose the floor and find a proper word or idea in his discourse creation. *Eh* plus *well* are used, specifying the speaker's hesitation and his willingness to bridge interaction silence; here the speaker tries to keep the floor by uttering a single word along with a pause in order to find the proper idea. It is used commonly when the speaker intends to hold the conversational floor or when the listener attempts to take over the turn from the current speaker.

[41] (a period of silence) Eh **well** what else? Any other argument?

[42] Generally there are eh **well** interesting structures and phrases in literary texts.

But the students used two instances of *well* as a pause filler utterance medially. In extract [43] the student tries to possess the conversational floor and gain time in his search for the right phrase.

[43] I think his shirt was eh **well** wet with sweat and it made him feel hot.

Table 7 represents the teacher's and the students' performances in group D. Thirty-four instances of *well* were identified in this group. One instance was applied by one of the students in the beginning of the utterance as a frame to change the topic.

Table 7

Functions of Well *in Initial, Medial, and Final Position by the Teachers and the Students in Group D*

Functions	Initial position	Medial position	Final position
Frame: topic change	T:	T:	T:
	S:1	S:	S:
Frame: direct reported speech	T:3	T:	T:
	S:	S:	S:
Qualifier	T:3	T:3	T:
	S:1	S:1	S:
Face-threat mitigator	T:5	T:7	T:
	S:1	S:3	S:
Pause filler	T:2	T:4	T:
	S:	S:	S:

Well in extract [44] shifts attention from the characters' appearance to the culture-bound word 'country', a new topic. No instance of *well* was applied by the teacher.

[44] I also think that they apparently were humble. **Well** what does country mean here? Village?

Three utterances were prefaced by *well* to indicate reported speech by the teacher. Extract [45] presents reported speech. Students did not use *well* to indicate reported speech in their interactions. Extract [46] shows an instance of *well* was used by the students to indicate reported speech.

[45] Student: I think though the two characters in the story had humble faces, they were nervous and worried.
Teacher: **Well** she said they were humble. What do you think about her view?

[46] In this part of the story they come closer and **well** at the end the narrator says they followed him doubtfully.

In nine cases, the interlocutors utilized *well* as a qualifier to address some problematic issues about the message content. In [47] the teacher expresses his communication problems and in [48] the insufficiency of

the information in his discourse is indicated by the use of *well*.

[47] **Well** I could not, since I didn't have access to internet to see your mail.

[48] Now let's **well** continue our discussion and **well** see what the answer is.

In extracts [49] and [50] the students applied it initially and medially to express their concerns about the content of the utterances.

[49] **Well** the main character doesn't seem to be going to shake hands or introduce his friend?

[50] About their dress she didn't say ……, **well** it seems to be a special suit, a serge.

Using *well* to signify disagreement is another category of the functions labelled by Jucker (1997) as a face-threat mitigator. Applying *well* to indicate the opinion differences in discourse has the highest frequency in the teacher's and the students' interactions. As Table 6 reveals, the teacher used it twelve times initially and medially and the students applied it in four situations. In extracts [51] and [52] the teacher applies *well* in his discourse to assess with disagreement and to reject an offer. Also the students applied *well* in one case initially and in two instances medially to disagree in discourse production (extracts 53 and 54).

[51] Student: What does country mean here? Village?
Teacher: **Well** country here is a cultural word. In English language, in some contexts such as here, well it refers to the rich. So it doesn't mean village, it refers to a place rich people live.

[52] This is not the case? Friday is not a holiday **well** in western society.

[53] **Well** I think here it has another meaning, civilian.

[54] But I feel the word **well** expensive here means strict or lifeless.

The fifth role played by *well* in discourse monitoring is pause filler. In such a context *well* is applied to symbolize hesitation or willingness to

bridge the gap in classroom interaction. Six instances of *well* were used as pause fillers by the teacher in this group. In extracts [55] and [56] he tries to fill the interaction gap by *well* plus *eh* in order to keep the floor. No instances were identified for the students.

[55] Student: What is the meaning of half-seen in this sentence? Teacher: The writer means part of their … **well** faces was unseen.

[56] Well of course we should try our best to use words which are **well** eh more general and audience knows them.

The most frequent functions of *well* include pause fillers in groups A and B, qualifier in group C, and face-threat mitigator in group D. The most common function across the groups is face-threat mitigator (25 instances by the students and 21 by the teachers) specifying that the following utterance is in some way at odds with the former or that the idea is irrelevant. This result is in line with Fuller (2003) and Schiffrin (1985). As a qualifier it is used in 39 instances marking reduced commitment, uncertainty and insecurity, as pause filler in 31 cases, and as a frame in 18 examples occurring less frequently among the others, indicating compliance with Fuller (2003). Also, the analysis reveals that the instances of *well* applied by the interactants in the Iranian EFL situation conform to the outline of functions provided by Jucker (1997) in 90% of the cases by the teachers and in 65% of the instances by the students. This statistical result displays the EFL teachers' use of *well* in various situations and within a range of functions and the students' shortcomings in prefacing their utterances with *well* flexibly.

Another interesting issue worth noting in group D is that only two functions are not observed in the teachers' and students' discourse: topic change and reported speech which is in keeping with Fuller (2003), marking and negotiating pragmatic weakness or unnatural input and output that is also substantiated by Trillo (2002) and Zhao (2013). More use of *well* in this EFL context portrays an authority figure as indicated by Fuller (2003). Low conformity in the students' interactions reveals the influence of the insufficient and unnatural pragmatic input with which this EFL situation is endowed, because in Iranian EFL education only two courses are offered for teaching grammar in the B.A. program. Moreover, in most situations, the grammar teaching system is detached from the context and the classes are boring for the students (Mirhasani, 1989).

112

CONCLUSION

The low degree of IPU and rate of use, excessively high frequency of distribution, and imbalanced pragmatic functional use of *well* work as an awareness raiser concerning the improper and unnatural pragmatic input offered in the Iranian EFL context. As *well* is one of the most often applied pragmatic markers, it not only indicates the speakers' specific objectives concerning discourse, but also shows the addressee's view of the discourse in progress (Müller, 2005). As the teachers, learners, textbook variables, and curriculum planning exert a great deal of effect on discourse monitoring, organization, pattern, and instruction, the findings put forth some pedagogical implications in these areas.

With reference to EFL pedagogy, this explorative study suggests that teacher education, materials development, and curriculum planning can be directed in a way to offer the EFL teachers and students chances to examine and explore the native speakers' system of using *well* in authentic spoken situations. Materials might be compiled from dialogues in films, TV shows and so on, to offer such authentic discourse. Curriculum development can be designed to include more courses on interactions based on native speaker data. Also, teacher education needs to engage EFL teachers deeply in pragmatic functions of linguistic elements and some workshops could be offered by native professors to raise the teachers' awareness of this DMs' salient functions through group discussions to develop their pragmatic competence and performance. In the classroom interactions and discussions, the teachers can activate the students' awareness in such a way to underline or highlight the pragmatic uses of this DM, hold group discussions about its functions, and follow the native speakers' system of monitoring their discourse through the application of *well* as a DM. Moreover, some contexts or situations can be given to some students to help them practice and apply this DM in their interactions, and the other students can observe and report their performance, pinpoint their strengths and weaknesses, and offer solutions under their teachers' guidance.

REFERENCES

Aijmer, K. (2002). *English discourse particles.* Amsterdam: John Benjamins.

Asık, A., & Cephe, T. (2013). Discourse markers and spoken English: Nonnative use in the Turkish EFL setting. *English Language Teaching, 9*(12), 34-56.

Bolinger, D. (1989). *Intonation and its uses: Melody and grammar in discourse.* Stanford: Stanford University Press.

Finell, A. (1989). Well now and then. *Journal of Pragmatics, 13*, 653-665.

Fraser, B. (1999). What are discourse markers? *Journal of Pragmatics*, *31*, 931-952.

Fraser, B. (2009). An account of discourse markers. *International Review of Pragmatics*, *14*(2), 1-28.

Fuller, J. M. (2003). The influence of speaker roles on discourse marker use. *Journal of Pragmatics, 35*(1), 23-45.

Hassan, K., & Muhsin, J. M. (2011). The Uses of "Well" by advanced Iraqi EFL Learner. *AL Basrah Studies Journal*, *7*(12), 23-38.

Hellermann, J., & Vergun, H. (2007). Language which is not taught: The discourse marker use of beginning adult learners of English. *Journal of Pragmatics, 39*(1), 157–179.

Innes, B. (2010). "*Well*, that's why I asked the question sir": *Well* as a discourse marker in court. *Language in Society*, *39*(1) 95-117.

Jucker, A. H. (1993). The discourse marker *well*: A relevance-theoretical account. *Journal of Pragmatics, 19*, 435-452.

Jucker, A. H. (1997). The discourse marker *well* in the history of English. *English Language and Linguistics, 1*(1), 91-110.

Klerk, V. (2005). Procedural meanings of *well* in a corpus of Xhosa English. *Journal of Pragmatics*, *37*, 1183-1205.

Marcus, N. E. (2009). Continuous semantic development of the discourse marker *well. English Studies, 90*, 214-242.

Mirhasani, H. (1989). Teaching grammar. *Roshd*, *14*(4), 34-46.

Müller, S. (2004). Well you know that type of person: functions of well in the speech of American and German students. *Journal of Pragmatics, 36*, 1157-1182.

Müller, S. (2005). *Discourse markers in native and non-native English discourse.* Amsterdam: John Benjamins Publishing Company.

Nejadansari, D., & Mohammadi, A. M. (2014). The frequencies and functions of discourse markers in the Iranian University EFL classroom discourse. *International Journal of Research Studies in Language Learning, 4*(2), 1-18.

Schiffrin, D. (1985). Conversational coherence: the role of well. *Language*, *61*, 640-667.

Schiffrin, D. (1987). *Discourse markers.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Schourup, L. (2001). Rethinking well. *Journal of Pragmatics*, *33*, 1025-1060.

Svartvik, J. (1980). Well in conversation. In S. Greenbaum, G. Leech, & J. Svartvik (Eds.), *Studies in English linguistics for Randolph Quirk* (pp. 167-177). London:

Longman.

Trillo, R. (2002). The pragmatic fossilization of discourse markers in non-native speakers of English. *Journal of Pragmatics, 34*, 769-784.

Watts, R. (1989). Taking the pitcher to the' well :'Native speakers 'perception of their use of discourse markers in conversation. *Journal of Pragmatics, 13*, 203-237.

Yang, S. (2011). Investigating discourse markers in educational settings: a literature review. *ARECLS*, *8*, 95-108.

Zhao, H. (2013). A study on the pragmatic fossilization of discourse markers among Chinese English learners. *Journal of Language Teaching and Research, 4*, 707-714.

CORRESPONDENCE

Ali Mohammad Mohammadi, Department of English Language and Literature,
University of Isfahan, Isfahan, Iran
E-mail address: ali63sh@gmail.com

Dariush Nejadansar, Department of English Language and Literature, University of
Isfahan, Isfahan, Iran
E-mail address: nejadansari@gmail.com

Manijeh Youhanaee, Department of English Language and Literature, University of
Isfahan, Isfahan, Iran
Email:Youhanaee_m@hotmail.com

Ali Mohammad Mohammadi, Dariush Nejadansari, & Manijeh Youhanaee

以英語為外語的大學課堂言談中 *Well* 的語用指數及功能：
伊朗的個案研究

Ali Mohammad Mohammadi
Dariush Nejadansari
Manijeh Youhanaee
伊朗伊斯法罕大學

言談標記協助促進了對話者在以學習英語為外語的課堂中有效檢視自己的言談表現與理解過程。此探索性的研究，乃針對某伊朗大學以學習英文為外語課堂中的師生對話，探討 well 的語用指數、使用比率和頻率及其功能。研究者採用了賈克 (Jucker) 在 1997 年提出的諸項論點，用以探索 well 的語用功能。研究語料源自四個以學習英語為外語的大學課堂，結果顯示語用指數為 72%、使用比率為 9.7%，以及頻率為 0.98%；相較於龍德語料庫來說，語用指數與使用比率非常低，但是使用頻率相對較高。研究也發現此以英語為外語的環境，提供了不適切也不自然的語用資源。同時，在九成教師與六成五學生各別對談的情況中，他們在言談檢視所使用到的 well，與賈克所提出的功能指數相互呼應。研究對象們過度使用 well 來減緩有損顏面的語言行為，卻未能實際運用其語句上的框架功能；就教師性別而言，亦無造成顯著差異。在 well 的使用上，不足的語用指數跟比率、過度的使用頻率、以及其語用功能上的不協調，在在說明了以學習英語為外語教學上重整的必需性。課堂言談要項（如：教師訓練、教材出版過程、課堂策略、以及教學方法）必須引導師生們能夠觀察以英語為母語者是如何實際使用 well、強調其特點及在教材中的語用功能。

關鍵詞：well、課堂言談、語用、功能、言談標記