

The Use of English Pragmatic Markers by Learners of English in Interlanguage Communication

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Abstract—This research examined two interpersonal-centered pragmatic markers, *well* and *you know*, used by Thai ESL learners at two levels of English proficiency. It used a quantitative approach to determine the difference in the use of the two pragmatic markers between the two proficiency levels, and it used a qualitative approach to identify each function of the two pragmatic markers. From an examination of the use of the two pragmatic markers by 60 Thai ESL learners, this research found a significant difference of using *well* between the two proficiency levels, while no significant difference of using *you know* between the two proficiency levels. This finding indicates a dissimilarity of the use of the English pragmatic markers by Thai ESL learners in interlanguage communication. The analysis of the pragmatic functions used by Thai ESL learners in this research suggested that a more limited range was used compared to previous research. Finally, this research found no significant difference in the use of each function of both pragmatic markers, which can be explained by the rare use of both pragmatic markers and their pragmatic functions by Thai ESL learners. Overall, the findings revealed that Thai ESL learners had a deficiency in the use of the pragmatic markers in interlanguage communication in English, which may lead to a lack of pragmatic competence among Thai ESL learners.

Index Terms—English pragmatic markers, Thai ESL learners, pragmatic functions, interlanguage, learner corpus research

I. INTRODUCTION

As a sub-field of the second language (L2) or interlanguage pragmatics, the study of the English pragmatic markers has been a trend in the recent two decades from their use by native English speakers (Aijmer, 2011, 2016, 2022; Buysse, 2018; Ferretti et al., 2021; Rubio-Fernandez, 2021) to learners of English as a second language (ESL; Alkhawaja et al., 2023; Pan & Aroonmanakun, 2022; Romero-Trillo, 2019; Santos, 2019). These studies primarily focus on two substantial issues: the existence of the pragmatic markers in the spoken form and their multi-functionality in communication (Pan & Aroonmanakun, 2022). In empirical studies based on spoken data produced by both native English speakers and ESL learners, pragmatic markers have been argued to be important to oral communication (Xiao et al., 2021) since their multi-functionality plays a major role in both revealing the relationships between discourses and maintaining the relationship between the interlocutors (Caprario et al., 2022).

Based on the arguments from previous research (Aijmer, 2016; Arya, 2020), as a focal component in interaction, the pragmatic markers support the pragmatic understanding between the interlocutors. Santos (2019) argued that using pragmatic markers appropriately in interaction reveals a high level of pragmatic competence. Conversely, not using them appropriately in oral communication may lead to a pragmatic misunderstanding, thereby resulting in “misunderstandings, difficulties in coherent interpretation, and impediments to interpersonal relations” in communication (Kusevska, 2019, p. 1675). Given this, it is worth examining how ESL learners use English pragmatic markers in interlanguage communication.

The present research focuses on the use of the two interpersonal-centered English pragmatic markers *well* and *you know* by Thai ESL learners at two English proficiency levels in interlanguage communication. It seeks to examine how Thai ESL learners at both English proficiency levels use the two pragmatic markers in English conversation from two aspects: frequency and pragmatic function. This research conducts a comparative study to determine whether a differentiation of the pragmatic competence exists between the two levels of Thai ESL learners.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

A. Pragmatic Markers

Recently, both terms “pragmatic markers” (for example, Vine & Holmes, 2023, p. 5) and “discourse markers” (for example, Ferrante, 2021, p. 7) have been used. Moreover, a novel term “discourse-pragmatic markers” was proposed to distinguish pragmatic markers and discourse markers (Crible & Blackwell, 2020, p. 24; Leuckert & Rüdiger, 2021, p. 482; Salas, 2022, p. 31). The main feature of this category is that they belong to the pragmatic class (Crible &

Blackwell, 2020). They are not only used to signal the relations between utterances, but also to signal the interpersonal relationships “to index social meaning” (Leuckert & Rüdiger, 2021, p. 482). It is therefore understandable why the pragmatic force they provide in a context is the core of the study of the pragmatic markers. For example, based on empirical study of the use of *well* by native English speakers, Brinton (2008) proposed a definition for this category by scrutinizing their main features, suggesting that they are phonologically short lexical items that primarily serve a pragmatic purpose in utterances. Crible and Blackwell (2020, p. 24) contended that discourse markers should be “a hyponym” of pragmatic markers, and the term “pragmatic markers” is an overarching umbrella to “cover all those non-propositional functions which linguistic items may fulfil in discourse”. In this light, the present research adopts the term “pragmatic markers” rather than “discourse markers,” as previous research (Aijmer, 2011; Crible & Blackwell, 2020) suggested that pragmatic markers have a pragmatic-marking rather than a discourse-marking function in communication.

In addition, the features of this entire category, concluded from different previous research (Aijmer, 2011; Brinton, 2008; Crible & Blackwell, 2020; Leuckert & Rüdiger, 2021), enable us to reach a further cognition of this category, as illustrated in Figure 1 below.

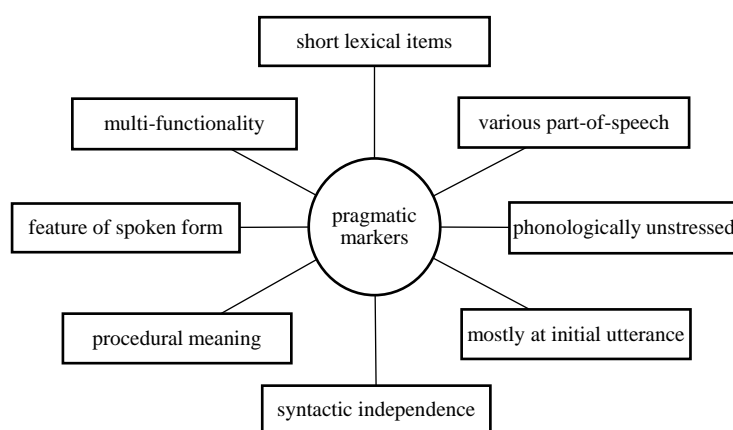


Figure 1. Features of Pragmatic Markers

Indeed, the pragmatic markers illustrated in Figure 1 are all recurrent short lexical items; for example, *well*, *you know* (Vine & Holmes, 2023). They are usually used at the beginning of an utterance, phonologically unstressed or reduced, to express procedural meanings in different contextual environments. One of the most significant features of this category is that the pragmatic markers can be deleted without affecting the grammatical structure or semantic meaning of the original utterance, suggesting syntactic independence. Ascertaining the definition and intrinsic features of pragmatic markers enables better understanding of the concept.

B. Theoretical Framework of Pragmatic Functions of Pragmatic Markers

The difficulty in finding an exclusively overarching theoretical framework for the analysis of the pragmatic functions of this category is understandable since each pragmatic marker has their unique pragmatic functions in different genres of spoken discourses accordingly (Ament et al., 2020). Although the pragmatic functions of a wide range of pragmatic markers have been discussed in previous research—*well* (Aijmer, 2011; Ament et al., 2020; Arya, 2020; Ferrante, 2021; Pan & Aroonmanakun, 2022; Romeo-Trillo, 2019; Traugott, 2020; Xiao et al., 2021) and *you know* (Alkhawaja et al., 2023; Ament et al., 2020; Ferrante, 2021; Kusevska, 2019; Pan & Aroonmanakun, 2022; Romeo-Trillo, 2019; Schleef, 2023; Vine & Holmes, 2023)—an all-embracing framework cannot be found for two reasons. First, most of the previous research mentioned above only scrutinized a single pragmatic marker, making it difficult to develop a complete framework for analyzing the pragmatic functions of this category. Second, the pragmatic functions of each pragmatic marker depend on the specific situational context, meaning that certain pragmatic functions of some pragmatic markers are difficult to explore in a framework. Moreover, through language change, the pragmatic functions of a given pragmatic marker may evolve (Romeo-Trillo, 2019).

To date, Brinton’s (2008) theoretical framework of the pragmatic functions of the pragmatic markers may be considered the most suitable for functional analysis. This framework considers that pragmatic markers reveal both textual and interpersonal relationships in communication. This framework has been generally acknowledged in several previous research (Crible & Blackwell, 2020; Leuckert & Rüdiger, 2021; Pan & Aroonmanakun, 2022). Figure 2 presents the framework adapted from Brinton’s (2008) research.

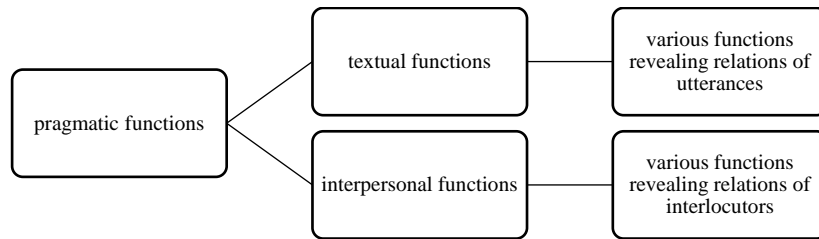


Figure 2. Theoretical Framework of Pragmatic Functions of Pragmatic Markers Adapted From Brinton (2008)

Despite the apparently clear guidance of this framework, the functional analysis must be accomplished according to the specific pragmatic functions of each pragmatic marker revealed in the previous research, because each pragmatic marker possesses different pragmatic functions. In this research, therefore, the functional analysis of both *well* and *you know* is conducted not only with the guidance of Brinton’s (2008) framework, but also with the conclusions of previous studies on the specific pragmatic functions of *well* and *you know*, which will be discussed in the next section.

C. Previous Studies on Pragmatic Markers *Well* and *You Know*

The present research gave focuses to two “interpersonal-centered” pragmatic markers (Pan & Aroonmanakun, 2022, p. 208) for three reasons. Since the early studies of the pragmatic markers (Aijmer, 2011; Brinton, 2008), it was found that both pragmatic markers were used frequently by native English speakers. Although no fixed inventory of the pragmatic markers can be provided due to the innovation of this category with the language change, *well* and *you know* has always been acknowledged as the pragmatic markers widely used in communication (Leuckert & Rüdiger, 2021). Both pragmatic markers exhibit their diversely unique pragmatic functions, especially the interpersonal functions, which deserve to be further studied (Aijmer, 2011; Sakita, 2013). Sakita (2013) found that, as a pragmatic marker, *well* was used as a stance marker in various contexts and as an interpersonal marker to maintain the interpersonal relationship between the interlocutors.

In addition, although both pragmatic markers have been studied in second language acquisition (SLA), different findings were from the aspects of frequency and pragmatic functions used by ESL learners with different L1 backgrounds. Some research found that ESL learners used *well* or *you know* in low frequencies in communication; for example, Swedish ESL learners (Aijmer, 2011), Chinese ESL learners (Xiao et al., 2021), Macedonian ESL learners (Kusevska, 2019). By contrast, some research found that ESL learners used *well* or *you know* in high frequencies; for example, Arabic ESL learners (Alkhwaja et al., 2023). Meanwhile, each study reported different pragmatic functions *well* and *you know* used by the ESL learners with different L1 backgrounds. Different findings in the previous research indicate that the pragmatic markers are used in a diverse range of patterns by the ESL learners with different L1 backgrounds, which cannot draw a conclusion easily of how ESL learners use the pragmatic markers as a whole picture.

Moreover, Arya (2020) and Pan and Aroonmanakun (2022) recently studied pragmatic markers used by Thai ESL learners. Arya (2020) attempted to compile a frequency list of the pragmatic markers that Thai ESL learners used in oral communication and found the most-used pragmatic markers by Thai ESL learners: *and*, *OK*, *but*, and *so*. Pan and Aroonmanakun (2022) examined six English spoken pragmatic markers and compared their use between Thai ESL learners and native English speakers. Both studies found that the pragmatic markers *well* and *you know* were rarely used by Thai learners of English in English conversation, and pointed out that Thai ESL learners were more inclined to use the textual functions, while the interpersonal functions were rarely used. However, both studies did not specifically examine the pragmatic functions of *well* and *you know* used by Thai ESL learners. Thus, the present research is intended to further study the use of the pragmatic markers *well* and *you know* by Thai ESL learners in interlanguage communication.

To study the pragmatic functions of both pragmatic markers *well* and *you know*, this research concludes the pragmatic functions identified by previous research listed in the previous section under the overarching framework proposed by Brinton (2008). Both pragmatic markers possess the textual functions and interpersonal functions, as illustrated in Table 1 and Table 2 below.

TABLE 1
PRAGMATIC FUNCTIONS OF *WELL*

pragmatic functions of <i>well</i>	textual functions	searching for the right words
		self-repair
		marking a new topic
		marking more explanation/information
		leading to a conclusion
	interpersonal functions	indicating an incomplete answer
		indicating an unexpected answer
		marking a dispreferred response
		marking agreement/reinforcement
		marking a request (a new start)
		an implicature of opinion/stance/feeling
		a hedge/mitigator

TABLE 2
PRAGMATIC FUNCTIONS OF *YOU KNOW*

pragmatic functions of <i>you know</i>	textual functions	searching for the right words
		self-repair
		marking more explanation/information
		marking a topic shift
		marking an approximation
		leading a quotation/story
	interpersonal functions	an implicature of shared or common knowledge
		acquiring an involvement from the hearer
		leading to an imaginary scene
		an implicature of opinion/feeling/stance
		emphasis/repetition
		a hedge/mitigator

Concerning the textual functions, both pragmatic markers can be a signal to indicate that the speaker is looking for the right words of the next utterance as is also known as marking a hesitation (Arya, 2020). Both pragmatic markers can mark a correction to a spoken error in the previous utterance (self-repair) and to mark more explanation or information towards previous utterances (marking more explanation/information). The pragmatic marker *well* can mark a new topic and lead to a conclusion, while the pragmatic marker *you know* can mark a topic shift, show an incomplete information (marking an approximation), and lead a quotation or a story. Regarding the interpersonal functions, both pragmatic markers have their unique interpersonal functions in communication. The pragmatic marker *well* can mark different types of answers, such as an incomplete one, an unexpected one, or a dispreferred one. It can mark the agreement or a request in communication as well. The pragmatic marker *you know* can be used as an implicature of shared or common knowledge or to acquire an involvement from the hearer. It can lead to an imaginary scene or mark emphasis or repetition. Furthermore, both pragmatic markers are used as a hedge or a mitigator while an argument or a conflict occurs. They can also elicit personal opinion, feeling, or stance towards the on-going topic in communication.

To fill the gaps identified above, this comparative study examines the use of the pragmatic markers *well* and *you know* by Thai intermediate-level ESL learners and Thai advanced-level ESL learners. Three research questions are proposed below:

1. Is there a significant difference in the use of the English pragmatic markers *well* and *you know* between Thai intermediate-level ESL learners and Thai advanced-level ESL learners?
2. What are the pragmatic functions of the pragmatic markers *well* and *you know* as used by Thai ESL learners?
3. Is there any difference in the use of the pragmatic markers *well* and *you know* between Thai intermediate-level ESL learners and Thai advanced-level ESL learners?

III. METHODOLOGY

A. Participants and Data Collection

This research involved 30 Thai intermediate-level ESL learners and 30 Thai advanced-level ESL learners, accounting for a total of 60 participants. There were 12 male and 18 female among the intermediate-level participants, and 14 male and 16 female among the advanced-level participants. Thus, a total of 26 male and 34 female participated in this research. They all came from three different faculties at a public university in Bangkok, Thailand whose ages were between 18 and 21 years old from first year to third year of the level of undergraduate. The 60 participants were all Thai nationality whose L1 was Thai and were all raised in Thailand to the level of undergraduate. No participants had lived in an English-speaking country before the data collection. They had studied ESL between twelve to fourteen years before the data collection. The main criteria for the English levels were the scores of TOEIC and IELTS based on CEFR standards (Council of Europe, 2020).

This research attempted to use nearly naturally occurring data to study the pragmatic markers in interlanguage communication among Thai ESL learners. Each participant was requested to join in a dyadic conversation with another participant at the same English level. Each conversation among the three participants lasted approximately 20 minutes. All the participants were given a total freedom to choose the topics they intended to discuss in the conversation. To ensure the smoothness of the conversation, each conversation was held at any place on the campus where each participant felt comfortable and relaxed, such as the library. Each participant was informed that the conversation would be recorded by a recording machine for the analysis of the spoken form produced by Thai ESL learners. However, they were not informed of the objectives of the research to avoid the risk of collecting unnatural data. Thus, this research collected 15 pairs of English conversation from Thai intermediate-level ESL learners and 15 pairs of English conversations from Thai advanced ESL learners, accounting for a total of 30 pairs of English conversations in the genre of interlanguage communication among Thai ESL learners. The researcher transcribed the spoken data into written data by using CHAT format (MacWhinney, 2000) for analysis.

B. Data Analysis

This research used learner corpus research (LCR) method to study the pragmatic markers used by Thai ESL learners. LCR has been used in L2 or interlanguage pragmatics in recent years although it is still a newer methodology (Fernández & Staples, 2021; Staples & Fernández, 2019). Following the corpus linguistic methodology, LCR uses naturally occurring data to combine both the top-down analysis and the bottom-up analysis from the machine-readable database to study the linguistic phenomenon in L2 or interlanguage pragmatics (Fernández & Staples, 2021). Staples and Fernández (2019) stated that LCR was used in different interlanguage pragmatic studies, including the studies of the pragmatic markers. Hence, LCR is suitable for this research to study the pragmatic markers from both the frequencies and the pragmatic functions.

Two corpora were built in this research: the Corpus of Thai Intermediate-Level ESL Learners (CTIL) and the Corpus of L1 Thai Advanced-Level ESL Learners (CTAL). AntConc MacOS version (Anthony, 2022) was used to obtain the descriptive statistics of both corpora and to retrieve both pragmatic markers, *well* and *you know*, by keyword searching. The concordancer function was used for the identification of pragmatic markers and the functional analysis. Meanwhile, the log-likelihood (LL) statistical test (Rayson & Garside, 2000) was used for the significant difference in the use of the pragmatic markers between the two corpora. As mentioned earlier, Brinton's (2008) framework of the functions of the pragmatic markers was used to identify each function of *well* and *you know* as used by Thai ESL learners. Furthermore, to compare the differences of using the pragmatic functions of both pragmatic markers by the two different English proficiency levels of Thai ESL learners, the raw frequency of using each function of both pragmatic markers, the normalized frequency of using each function of both pragmatic markers, the LL test results of each function of both pragmatic markers, and the number of the participants who used each pragmatic function of both pragmatic markers were used concurrently to understand the differences comprehensively.

IV. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The descriptive statistics retrieved from AntConc show that CTIL contains 28,092 tokens and CTAL contains 63,307 tokens. In CTIL, 18 instances of *well* and 26 of *you know* were produced. As identified by the definition and the features of the pragmatic markers, this research found two instances of the pragmatic marker *well* and seven of the pragmatic marker *you know*. In CTAL, 69 instances of *well* and 45 of *you know* were found, among which 41 instances of the pragmatic marker *well* and 16 of the pragmatic marker *you know* were identified. Table 3 presents the details of both corpora.

TABLE 3
DESCRIPTIVE DATA OF CTIL AND CTAL

corpora and relevant information		CTIL	CTAL
all tokens		28,092	63,307
well	as a pragmatic marker	2	41
	as a non-pragmatic marker	16	28
you know	as a pragmatic marker	7	16
	as a non-pragmatic marker	19	29

A. Significant Difference

To examine the difference in the use of pragmatic *well* and *you know* between the two English proficiency levels, the LL test was used. The critical value was set at 15.13 ($p < .0001$), which has been suggested as the optimal critical value when comparing the frequencies of lexical items between two corpora (Rayson & Garside, 2000). Table 4 presents the results of the LL test of the pragmatic marker *well* and *you know* between the two corpora.

TABLE 4
DESCRIPTIVE STATISTICS AND LL TEST RESULTS (NORMALIZED FREQUENCY: PER 10,000 TOKENS)

pragmatic marker	observed frequency in CTIL	normalized frequency in CTIL	observed frequency in CTAL	normalized frequency in CTAL	LL
well	2	1	41	6	18.65
you know	7	2	16	3	0.00

From both the descriptive statistics and the results of the LL test, there was a significant difference of using the pragmatic marker *well* between the two English levels. However, no significant difference was found in the use of the pragmatic markers *you know*, suggesting that there is no significant improvement in the use of the pragmatic marker *you know* in communication among Thai ESL learners as the English proficiency level increases.

This result suggests a dissimilarity of acquiring the English pragmatic markers along with the increase of the English proficiency levels. Xiao et al. (2021) found that ESL learners at different English proficiency levels have dissimilar development with different pragmatic markers. This research further ascertains Xiao et al.'s (2021) finding that ESL learners may have different patterns of using the English pragmatic markers with the increase of the English proficiency level. That is, some pragmatic markers are used significantly higher at a higher level than the lower level; for example,

the pragmatic marker *well* based on the LL test result. By contrast, some pragmatic markers are used at a similar frequency; for example, the pragmatic marker *you know* found in this research.

In addition, the finding above is partly in line with previous research (Arya, 2020; Pan & Aroonmanakun, 2022) in which the pragmatic markers *well* and *you know* were not included in the list of pragmatic markers used by Thai ESL learners. As indicated by Arya (2020), the pragmatic markers, such as *well*, were rarely found to be used by Thai ESL learners. Moreover, this finding extends the one in Pan and Aroonmanakun (2022)—that there exists a significant difference in the use of the pragmatic markers *well* and *you know* by Thai ESL learners and native English speakers—by revealing that the Thai ESL learners of both levels rarely used both pragmatic markers in English conversation. This finding is consistent with other research (Aijmer, 2011; Kusevska, 2019; Xiao et al., 2021) that found infrequent use of the pragmatic marker *well* and the pragmatic marker *you know*. In contrast, research into other non-native speakers has produced different results. For example, an overuse of the pragmatic marker *you know* was reported in Alkhawaja et al. (2023). These findings indicate that the use of the pragmatic markers by ESL learners varies by the learners' backgrounds. As suggested in previous research (Aijmer, 2011; Salas, 2022; Santos, 2019), more data should be compiled for further analysis.

Following the synthesis of Brinton's (2008) framework for the pragmatic functions of the pragmatic markers and a summary of the specific pragmatic functions of both *well* and *you know*, the researcher analyzed the function of the pragmatic markers in each instance in the discursive situation provided by the concordancer in AntConc. In the following section, each pragmatic function of both pragmatic markers is demonstrated in succession, followed by an illustration of the different uses of the two English levels of the Thai ESL learners.

B. Pragmatic Functions of the Pragmatic Marker *Well* in CTIL and CTAL

Table 5 summarizes the pragmatic functions of the pragmatic marker *well* used by Thai ESL learners.

TABLE 5
PRAGMATIC FUNCTIONS OF THE PRAGMATIC MARKER *WELL* IN CTIL AND CTAL

	<i>type of pragmatic function</i>	<i>pragmatic function</i>	<i>instances found in CTIL</i>	<i>instances found in CTAL</i>
<i>well</i>	textual function	searching for the right words	1	8
		an implicature of opinion/ stance/feeling	1	26
	interpersonal function	an implicature of an incomplete answer	0	7

(a). *Searching for the Right Words*

According to previous research (Aijmer, 2011; Ament et al., 2020) on the data of native English speakers, this textual function, i.e., searching for the right words, was used almost universally in interaction. To identify this function, two linguistic characteristics reported in previous research were used. First, an unusually long pause co-occurs with the insertion of the pragmatic marker *well*, indicating that the speaker is considering the right words for the following utterance. Second, there is usually some spoken fillers accompanying the pragmatic marker *well* (e.g., *uhh*, *emm*), likewise suggesting the cognitive process of thinking about the right words for the following discursive action, as demonstrated in Excerpt 1 below (retrieved from CTIL).

Excerpt 1

P19: (.) how did that happen?

P21: (.) &-uhh (..) *well* (..) &-emm (..) first, I jumped on [/] on the bed.

In the excerpt shown above, there existed two longer pauses before and after the production of the pragmatic marker *well*. At the same time, two spoken fillers, i.e., *uhh* and *emm*, were inserted in the middle of the two longer pauses. These two phenomena indicated a hesitation from the speaker P21 that P21 was considering the right words to respond to the prior question raised by P19 at that moment in the conversation. Hence, this pragmatic marker *well* was identified as the textual function: searching for the right words.

(b). *An Implicature of Opinion/Stance/Feeling*

The interpersonal function of marking a stance, feeling, or opinion has been discussed repeatedly in previous research due to its association with various pragmatic markers; for example, *I think*, *I mean* (Brinton, 2008; Caprario et al., 2022). Given the prevalent use of this function found in previous research (Caprario et al., 2022; Sakita, 2013), the use of this function by Thai ESL learners at a high frequency found in this research is comprehensible. It is argued by Sakita (2013) that this function of the pragmatic marker *well* is used by native English speakers in conversation to indicate a diverse range of stances, revealing the intrinsic nature of this function of the pragmatic marker *well* in dialogic activities. One of the excerpts extracted from CTAL is shown below.

Excerpt 2

P38: yeah (.) that's my brother (.) like that.

P37: &=laugh (.) I'm sure he loved you.

P37: *well* (.) I personally don't mind this.

P38: yeah I know (.) he just being child.

The identification of this function is relatively straightforward, as there is a personal stance, feeling, or opinion after the insertion of the pragmatic marker. As demonstrated in Excerpt 2, speaker P37 expresses one stance, with the lexical bundle *personally don't mind* revealing the speaker's attitude toward the topic under discussion. The stance ensued after using the pragmatic marker *well*, which can be interpreted as an implicature intended for the prior speaker P38 that by no means did P38's brother deliberately intend to hurt P38's feelings. It is interesting to note that P38 accepted this implicature with the utterance, *yeah I know*, acknowledging their understanding of the implicature of P37.

(c). *An Implicature of an Incomplete Answer*

In conversation, a speaker may lack the ability to answer a question, and the pragmatic marker *well* indicates to the hearer that the ensuing utterance is an incomplete answer. This function has been found to be used by native English speakers (Sakita, 2013). In this study, the researcher followed three principles from previous research to identify this function. Initially, a question is uttered by the previous speaker. The current speaker begins their utterance with the pragmatic marker *well*, followed by a partial answer to the preceding question. Given that this incomplete answer cannot fulfill the previous speaker's expectation, the current speaker usually enhances the incomplete answer with more explanations in the following utterances, as illustrated in Excerpt 3 retrieved from CTAL.

Excerpt 3

P37: the school has the [/] the tradition.

P38: oh ok .

P39: how did you follow (.) the tradition?

P37: (.) I (.) *well* (.) I follow (.) only some.

P37: like (..) oh (.) my classmate told me (..).

P37: like (.) going to the club with the dress code.

In the excerpt above, the question *How did you follow the tradition?* is uttered by the previous speaker P39 in the preceding context. The current speaker P37 first utters the word *I* with short pauses before and after it, followed by the pragmatic marker *well* to lead the subsequent utterance, *I follow only some*. This continuous manipulation of the words in this utterance may be interpreted as a lack of certainty on the part of the current speaker P37 in being able to give a complete answer to the question, resulting in an incomplete answer. This incomplete answer leaves some doubts to the prior speaker with the use of the co-occurred expression *only some*. It is assumed that, at this moment, P37 realizes that the incomplete answer may cause confusion among the other listeners, thus leading to more explanations.

C. *Pragmatic Functions of the Pragmatic Marker You Know in CTIL and CTAL*

Table 6 summarizes the pragmatic functions of the pragmatic marker *you know* used by Thai ESL learners.

TABLE 6
PRAGMATIC FUNCTIONS OF THE PRAGMATIC MARKER *YOU KNOW* IN CTIL AND CTAL

you know	type of pragmatic function	pragmatic function	instances found in CTIL	instances found in CTAL
		textual function	marking further explanation	3
	interpersonal function	to acquire the involvement from the hearer	4	7
		an implicature of common background knowledge	0	3
		an implicature of a stance/feeling/opinion	0	2
		marking an emphasis	0	1

(a). *Marking Further Explanation*

Based on previous research (Brinton, 2008; Romeo-Trillo, 2019), to identify the function of marking further explanation, the information conveyed in the utterance preceded by the pragmatic marker *you know* is an extension of the utterance made before the insertion of the pragmatic marker *you know*. This expansion of the utterance preceded by the pragmatic marker *you know* provides supplementary information relevant to the information in the preceding context. One of the excerpts retrieved from CTIL demonstrates the use of this function.

Excerpt 4

P12: I think it (.) was (.) the summer.

P12: &-emm (..) yeah it was .

P12: *you know* I can remember (.) because it was hot.

P12: so hot (.) so people can't [/] can't (.) do it.

The context before the insertion of the pragmatic marker *you know* reveals that the speaker P12 is in the process of recalling a time span by using the English spoken filler *emm*, three times of longer pauses among the utterances, and the formulaic pattern *I think* at the initial of the utterance. The correctness of the process of recalling the time span, which is the summertime, is supported by the utterance preceded by the pragmatic marker *you know*, since the speaker starts to explain his correct memory with the short expressions, i.e., *I can remember, because, so hot, so*. By inserting *you know*, the speaker P12 provides further explanation toward the preceding context. This expansion of the reasons for the information provided in the previous utterances by using the pragmatic marker *you know* increases the reliability of the prior information provided by P12 (i.e., *it was the summer; yeah, it was*).

(b). To Acquire the Involvement From the Hearer

Previous research (Brinton, 2008; Ferrante, 2021; Kusevska, 2019) has found the use of the pragmatic marker *you know* to involve the hearer to be commonly used in interaction primarily to sustain the interpersonal relationship between the interlocutors. The insertion of the pragmatic marker *you know* encourages the hearer to become involved in the conversation. To identify this function, the sustainable connection between the prior utterance and the utterance preceded by the pragmatic marker *you know* must be logically well explained, as the objective of the insertion of the pragmatic marker *you know* in this functional category is solely to hold the attention of the hearer. This study found that the pragmatic marker *you know* is either inserted at the start of an utterance or at the end of one, as demonstrated by this excerpt found in CTAL:

Excerpt 5

P55: so (.) are we going to go (.) really?

P57: yeah (.) I will.

P57: I want to know the art.

P57: those (.) uhh. (.) amazing arts *you know*.

P56: yeah.

Speaker P57 inserts the pragmatic marker *you know* at the end of the utterance, in which the information, *those amazing arts*, can be interpreted as the reason for P57 to visit the art museum that is being discussed. The function of the pragmatic marker *you know* is given its proper effect due to the reply from speaker P56 with the word *yeah*, indicating the involvement of P56 in the conversation.

(c). An Implicature of Common Background Knowledge

The common background knowledge in this situation refers to the information that is known by all the interlocutors in the interaction. As suggested by previous research, this common background knowledge can also be understood as the universal information that everyone is aware of (Xiao et al., 2021). One of the excerpts extracted from CTAL is shown below.

Excerpt 6

P56: sometimes I think (.) I didn't think.

P56: I just sleep.

P57: &=laugh.

P57: yeah I know (.) *you know* the school board in every school do the same.

P56: oh yeah (.) everyone know it.

The information in the utterance *the school board in every school do the same* is confirmed as common background knowledge of both interlocutors with the utterances *oh yeah* and *everyone know it* by P56. In certain conditions, this function is often used along with the previous function, namely, to acquire the involvement of the hearer. In the excerpt above, speaker P57 uses the common background knowledge in the utterance preceded by the pragmatic marker *you know* to involve the hearer. This research has not been able to make a precise statement that a pragmatic marker may serve several pragmatic functions at the same time due to a lack of linguistic arguments or frameworks in previous research. Nonetheless, this dual co-existing pragmatic function of the pragmatic marker *you know* is recorded in this research for future consideration.

(d). An Implicature of Opinion/Stance/Feeling

As with the pragmatic marker *well*, the function of the pragmatic marker *you know* to mark a stance, feeling, or opinion was found in previous research (Pan & Aroonmanakun, 2022). The speaker intends to use it as the start of an utterance embedded with his or her stance, feeling, or opinion toward the information in the preceding context, as illustrated in the excerpt below retrieved from CTAL:

Excerpt 7

P42: &-emm (.) I don't know the reason.

P42: I think we (.) &-emm (..) sometimes (.) don't really care ?

P42: don't really enjoying it?

P40: yeah I think so too (..).

P42: *you know* I (.) just (.) don't really care (.) don't really focusing it.

The utterance preceded by the pragmatic marker *you know* (i.e., *I just don't really care, don't really focusing it*) indicates the stance of speaker P42 toward the information conveyed in the previous context. The analysis of this interpersonal function of *you know* is similar to the one of *well* pointed out in the previous section that the speaker's stance, feeling or opinion must be identified in the utterance preceded by the pragmatic marker *you know*.

(e). Marking an Emphasis

The pragmatic marker *you know* is also used to give emphasis to a piece of information from the preceding context. To identify this function, two linguistic features are useful. First, this emphasis may be determined by the suprasegmental speech feature in which the word or the short expression that the speaker emphasizes is stressed.

Second, the emphasis can be determined by the repetition of the emphasized information in the utterance marked by the pragmatic marker *you know*, as demonstrated in the excerpt retrieved from CTAL below:

Excerpt 8

P42: (.) yes not really (.) like what I mean just now.

P42: I don't think it's useful to our country.

P42: *you know* (.) not useful at all.

The identification of the function of the pragmatic marker *you know* in the excerpt above involves the linguistic features mentioned above. The word *useful* is repeated by speaker P42 after inserting the pragmatic marker *you know*. Moreover, the utterance *not useful at all* is stressed in the recording, with *not useful* being particularly stressed.

D. Differences in the Use of the Pragmatic Marker *Well* and *You Know*

The differences in the use of the pragmatic markers *well* and *you know* between the two English levels of the Thai ESL learners were determined using the normalized frequency, the result of the LL test and the number of participants who used each function of both pragmatic markers. The results are presented in Tables 7 and 8.

TABLE 7
DIFFERENCES IN THE USE OF THE PRAGMATIC MARKER *WELL* BETWEEN CTIL AND CTAL

	<i>pragmatic function</i>	<i>normalized frequency in CTIL</i>	<i>normalized frequency in CTAL</i>	<i>LL test result</i>	<i>number of participants who used it in CTIL</i>	<i>number of participants who used it in CTAL</i>
<i>well</i>	searching for the right words	0	1	1.96	1 (3.3%)	5 (16.7%)
	an implicature of opinion/stance/feeling	0	4	12.90	1 (3.3%)	8 (26.7%)
	an implicature of an incomplete answer	0	1	5.14	0 (0.0%)	5 (16.7%)
	all	1	6	18.65	1 (3.3%)	9 (30.0%)

TABLE 8
DIFFERENCES IN THE USE OF THE PRAGMATIC MARKER *YOU KNOW* BETWEEN CTIL AND CTAL

	<i>pragmatic function</i>	<i>normalized frequency in CTIL</i>	<i>normalized frequency in CTAL</i>	<i>LL test result</i>	<i>number of participants who used it in CTIL</i>	<i>number of participants who used it in CTAL</i>
<i>you know</i>	marking more explanation	1	0	0.96	1 (3.3%)	2 (6.7%)
	acquiring the involvement from the hearer	1	1	0.16	2 (6.7%)	6 (20.0%)
	an implicature of common background knowledge	0	0	2.20	0 (0.0%)	2 (6.7%)
	An implicature of opinion/stance/feeling	0	0	1.47	0 (0.0%)	1 (3.3%)
	marking an emphasis	0	0	0.73	0 (0.0%)	1 (3.3%)
	all	2	3	0.00	2 (6.7%)	8 (26.7%)

The normalized frequency of each function is similar, and no significant difference was found in the use of each function with both pragmatic markers. These findings can be explained, however, by the rare use of both pragmatic markers in the two corpora. Overall, the results show that the Thai ESL learners at both English proficiency levels used both pragmatic markers at low frequencies in English conversation.

A slight difference was found, however, in the normalized frequency of the use of each function of the pragmatic marker *well* in both corpora. The function of marking a stance, feeling, or opinion exhibited the largest difference in terms of the normalized frequencies and the result of the LL test between the two corpora. This finding is in line with the findings of the previous research on both the native English speakers (Crible & Blackwell, 2020; Leuckert & Rüdiger, 2021; Romeo-Trillo, 2019; Sakita, 2013; Vine & Holmes, 2023) and ESL learners (Aijmer, 2011; Ferrante, 2021; Kusevska, 2019; Xiao et al., 2021). In contrast, almost no difference was found in the use of the pragmatic marker *you know* between the two corpora, owing to the similarly low normalized frequencies and the results of the LL test of all the functions found in this research.

However, through a closer examination of the raw frequency of each function identified in this research displayed in Table 5 and Table 6, differences were found in the use of both pragmatic markers. Overall, the interpersonal functions of both *well* and *you know* were used more by Thai advanced-level ESL learners, with 33 raw frequencies of the interpersonal functions of *well* and 13 raw frequencies of the interpersonal functions of *you know*, while one raw frequency of the interpersonal functions of *well* and 4 raw frequencies of the interpersonal functions of *you know* were used only by Thai intermediate-level ESL learners. Meanwhile, Thai advanced-level ESL learners used two types of the interpersonal functions of *well* and four types of the interpersonal functions of *you know*, whereas Thai intermediate-level ESL learners only used one type of interpersonal function of each targeted pragmatic marker. As such, these findings reveal that Thai advanced-level ESL learners may have a higher ability to use the interpersonal functions of the pragmatic markers. On the other hand, Thai advanced-level ESL learners used the textual function of *well*, searching for the right words, more than Thai intermediate-level ESL learners, with 8 raw frequencies found in CTAL and only one

raw frequency in CTIL, suggesting that Thai advanced-level ESL learners may have a better awareness of using *well* to search for the right words in the conversation.

However, it can be evidently seen that Thai ESL learners at different English proficiency levels used both English pragmatic markers at relatively low frequencies and a limited range of the pragmatic functions as the previous research revealed (Arya, 2020; Pan & Aroonmanakun, 2022). Since this research further analyzed the use of the pragmatic markers *well* and *you know* by Thai ESL learners at two English proficiency levels, it is conceivable that there exists a deficiency of using the English pragmatic markers by Thai ESL learners in interlanguage communication from both the frequency and the pragmatic functions.

As for the number of participants who used each function of both pragmatic markers, this research found that Thai advanced-level ESL learners had a higher number of participants who used each function of both pragmatic markers than Thai intermediate-level ESL learners. In total, nine Thai advanced-level ESL learners (30.0%) used the pragmatic marker *well* and 8 Thai advanced-level ESL learners (26.7%) used the pragmatic marker *you know*. In contrast, only one Thai intermediate-level ESL learner (3.3%) used the pragmatic marker *well* and two Thai intermediate-level ESL learners (6.7%) used the pragmatic marker *you know*. These results likewise suggest that Thai advanced-level ESL learners may be more capable of using the pragmatic markers in English conversation than Thai intermediate-level ESL learners.

V. CONCLUSION

This research sought to reveal the two interpersonal-centered pragmatic markers *well* and *you know* as used by Thai ESL learners at two English proficiency levels. As the results show, Thai ESL learners produce the two pragmatic markers at relatively low frequencies, with no significant difference of using the pragmatic marker *you know* between the two English proficiency levels. The functional analysis revealed that only a few of the pragmatic functions of these multifunctional pragmatic markers were used by Thai ESL learners, and the more diverse range of functions of both pragmatic markers identified in previous research (Aijmer, 2011; Brinton, 2008; Crible & Blackwell, 2020; Ferrante, 2021) was not found in this study.

The results indicate several problems in the use of the pragmatic markers by Thai ESL learners. First, both the quantitative and the qualitative results indicate a dearth of pragmatic markers in interlanguage communication among Thai ESL learners, resulting in insufficient understanding of the significant role that pragmatic markers play in the interpersonal relations of the interlocutors in oral communication. As the appropriate use of the pragmatic markers in interaction has been argued to be a focal component to achieve a high level of the pragmatic competence (Arya, 2020; Xiao et al., 2021), this research may draw an ultimate concern emerging from all the results and discussion illustrated in the previous sections that Thai ESL learners may face a severe deficiency in the pragmatic competence in English oral communication.

This research has several limitations, from which corresponding recommendations for future studies can be made. First, this research focused only on two interpersonal-centered pragmatic markers in the genre of dyadic English conversation. Future research should analyze more pragmatic markers used by Thai ESL learners to determine the similarities and differences in their use. Second, this research did not examine the causes of the lack use of both pragmatic markers. Future research could conduct more analysis to determine the causes.

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