

**Kate Beeching.** *Pragmatic markers in British English. Meaning in social interaction.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. 2016. 255 pp.  
ISBN: 9781139507110. Reviewed by **Karin Aijmer**, University of Gothenburg.

A large-scale study of pragmatic markers in their historical and contemporary contexts has so far been missing, although there is no shortage of articles, book chapters and books dealing with pragmatic markers. It is therefore gratifying to welcome Kate Beeching's *Pragmatic markers in British English. Meaning in social interaction* advancing studies of pragmatic markers by describing them from a broader perspective. The volume consists of chapters on individual markers as well as chapters contributing to the theoretical and methodological debate in the literature with respect to their multifunctionality and semantic developments.

Chapter 1 is a theoretical background chapter overviewing recurring themes in the area of pragmatic markers such as issues of terminology, definition, categorisation and function. Beeching aligns with definitions of pragmatic markers focusing on their sociolinguistic, interactional, and extra-linguistic facets rather than their logical connective qualities (p. 5) and adopts the term pragmatic marker rather than discourse marker to highlight their interpersonal meaning. They are "a fundamental part of oral fluency" (p. 4) and respond to the spontaneous, interactional, social, sociable and polite properties of conversation. However, pragmatic marker is seen as a fuzzy category, and pragmatic markers are therefore best characterized by their prototypical properties at different linguistic levels. They are generally difficult to analyse, because their meanings are vague, open to multiple interpretations and dependent on the analyst's subjective interpretation.

Beeching's own approach to the study of pragmatic markers is broadly sociolinguistic and attempts "to reconcile variationist, constructionist, interactionist and perceptual dialectological views" on pragmatic markers (p. 17) with the aim to analyse how pragmatic markers are used in interaction and, where possible, chart the paths along which they are changing. In order to describe the semantic developments which pragmatic markers undergo, Beeching builds on

the IITSC framework (Invited Inferencing Theory of Semantic Change) familiar from Traugott and Dashers' (2002) theory of semantic change and foregrounding the role of conversational interaction.

Chapter 2 deals with the advantages of corpus approaches, choice of markers and methodology. The corpus is mainly the British National Corpus (BNC) from the 1990s. To investigate the macro-sociolinguistic categories associated with the pragmatic markers, the BNC web query system was used. Moreover, the BYU interface was used to gain access to genre-related distributional frequencies of the markers. In order to describe the functions of the selected pragmatic markers in the spoken English of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, the BNC files were supplemented with data from a 'younger' and considerably smaller corpus consisting of role-play data representing 18–22 year-old 'studentspeak' (The UWE Role-Play Corpus 2010–2011).

Six pragmatic markers *well*, *like*, *just*, *you know*, *I mean*, and *sort of* were selected for detailed examination on the basis of the following criteria: they "are only just beginning to appear in any numbers" (p. 31), they are self-oriented (*I mean*) and other-oriented (*you know*), they occur more frequently in clusters or collocations than other markers (e.g.: *I mean you know*) indicating that they have become routinised; and they are amenable to diachronic investigation on the basis of corpora.

The corpus-based investigation of pragmatic markers was complemented by a modified matched-guise attitudinal questionnaire to explore the salience and perceptions associated with each marker. The participants in the test (three groups distinguished by age) were presented with two texts (one with and one without the selected pragmatic marker) and were asked to evaluate the exchanges along bipolar scales (polite/impolite, direct/indirect, educated/not educated, friendly/unfriendly).

Finally, diachronic studies were used as a help in the construction of meanings for the pragmatic markers by showing how the markers have evolved over time. The main source of information was the *Proceedings of the Old Bailey Corpus* 1674–1913 which consists of transcriptions of court trials and thus reflects the spoken language of the period.

The chapters devoted to the individual pragmatic markers were organized in a similar way. After a general introduction to the pragmatic marker, its functions were illustrated on the basis of the UWE Role-Play Corpus, followed by an analysis of its sociolinguistic features (such as class, age, gender and genre) drawing on the BNC. In order to uncover attitudes to the pragmatic markers, the modified matched guise test was applied to several groups of informants. Finally, a survey of the evolution of the pragmatic marking uses from a core

meaning was carried out on the basis of the *Old Bailey Corpus* helping us to understand the development and rise in frequency of the pragmatic marker. The contents of the chapters are summarized below.

Chapter 3 (*well*). *Well* is assumed to have the core function 'flagging a demurral' covering a number of different functions (hesitation, transition, changing the topic, raising an objection, prefacing a dispreferred response, taking a turn, other- or self-correction, hesitation). The sociolinguistic analysis showed that female speakers used *well* more than male speakers and that speakers used it a great deal more as they became older, especially in the social class of skilled manual workers. There was general agreement in the matched guise test that *well* was indirect, polite and friendly. *Well* was most frequent in informal conversation, but its frequency in sports commentaries is also noteworthy. The meaning of demurral and the range of pragmatic functions it covers could also be demonstrated historically in the data.

Chapter 4 (*just*). As in previous analyses of *just*, meanings such as 'simply' and 'merely' represent the vast majority (categorized as 'restrictive', 'minimising' and 'intensifier'). But other meanings such as 'filler', 'precision' (recently, exactly) could also distinguished. The highest rates of *just* were found in consultations in the doctor's surgery, lectures and demonstrations (often with the function to formulate requests).

It is suggested that the pragmaticalisation of *just* can be understood as a change from above to below, spearheaded by young females particularly in the 14–24 group (p. 88). The changes may also be reflected in the fact that younger speakers in general were shown to have a more positive view of *just* than the older participants on the scales of polite/impolite and friendly/unfriendly.

Tracking the developments in the *Old Bailey Corpus* the pragmatic marking usages 'are little in evidence', although the trend from 'exactly' ->emphasis -> 'only' -> downtoning appears to be confirmed (p. 95).

Chapter 5 (*you know*). *You know* has the core function to create common ground. The list of its common functions (which are both textual and interpersonal) include hesitation and appeal to common knowledge, word search and appeal to the interlocutor to fill in the gap, clarification and appeal to common knowledge, attention-getting, direct appeal to shared knowledge, repair, pointing out a self-evident truth. *You know* was most used by the older speakers and appears to be well-established. Females tended to use *you know* more than males, especially in initial position as an attention-getter. *You know* was more frequent in the categories 'oral history interviews' and consultations than in informal conversation. In the matched guise test respondents generally felt that *you know* (in the right-hand position) rendered the utterance slightly more indi-

rect and uneducated. The *Old Bailey Corpus* provided additional evidence for how *you know* comes to be used to appeal to consensual truth and how new interactional and strategic functions develop by pragmatic enrichment or semantic bleaching.

Chapter 6 (*like*). One of the most widely discussed on-going changes in English involves *like*. *Like* has non-pragmatic uses (*I like fruit, he looks like his father*) as well as pragmatic-marking uses of a fairly recent origin. The pragmatic-marking uses can be subcategorized as exemplifying, approximative, quotative (*be like*), focuser and hedging. The core meaning is 'resemblance to' which persists when *like* is used with pragmatic functions. The examples of pragmatic marking *like* include examples of final *like* typical of northern dialects in the UK. Usage of *like* was shown to be at its highest in the 15–24 age group, and young females show higher usage than males. *Like* was especially frequent in educational contexts in the context-governed texts in the BNC Sampler and the classroom context (in BYU). In the attitudinal test the *like*-exchange was evaluated as an uneducated form by all respondents; however, it was rated as friendlier and more polite than the same exchange without *like* by the younger participants in the test.

Chapter 7 (*sort of*). *Sort of* was one of the commonest markers used in the UWE Role-Play Corpus, indicating that its frequency is increasing among young people. The functions of *sort of* were classified as metacommenting, hedging or qualifying. The sociolinguistic analysis indicated that the upper middle-class speakers used *sort of* the most while there were very low rates for working-class speakers. The analysis provided no support for earlier claims that women used *sort of* more for hedging purposes than males. The highest rate of *sort of* was in the 24–35 age-group. It was most frequent in tutorials and lectures, suggesting that it is a common way of hedging scientific and other forms of academic discourse. Older informants in the attitudinal test were more prone than the younger informants to consider that a speaker using *sort of* was uneducated. Younger speakers also found *sort of* more friendly. The examples from the Old Bailey Corpus illustrate dialogue interactions in which 'What sort of x?' is responded to through a descriptive paraphrase and not a sub-type answer and which therefore indicate that *sort of* is not straightforwardly a binominal construction, and that it can therefore serve as a bridge to the pragmatic-marking function.

*I mean* (Chapter 8) is also one of the most frequently occurring markers. It can be a stand-alone expression used emphatically and it occurs in tag forms (*if you know what I mean*). The six functions illustrated in the UWE Role-Play Corpus were self-repair, hesitation, clarification (exemplification, elaboration, refor-

mulation), justification, concession and nuancing, hedging with the highest rate of uses in the clarification meaning. These usages are close to the canonical signifying function of *I mean*. The heaviest users were skilled manual workers, and a higher percentage of females than males used *I mean*. *You know what I mean*, on the other hand, was associated with working-class speakers and also with females. Rates of *I mean* were highest in the 49–59-year-old groups and described as a form whose different usages are acquired over a life time (p. 97). It was produced most frequently in tutorials and consultations. In the attitudinal test the younger age group considered the version with *I mean* to be more polite, more educated, and more friendly than the older group. The historical analysis suggests that ‘I mean (to say) that’ would seem to be a possible locus for its signifying sense and the development of its pragmatic functions.

The concluding chapter sets out to draw together the information from the individual chapters about how pragmatic markers are used strategically for interactional and interpersonal goals and how this is reflected in rises in frequency and in semantic developments over time. Another aim is to contribute to the theoretical debate regarding the lexical polysemy of the pragmatic markers, the semantics-pragmatics interface (generalized and particularized implicatures) and whether they develop by means of grammaticalisation and pragmaticalisation processes. These theoretical questions were introduced already in the introductory chapter and the reader may feel that it would have been easier to have the discussion in one place. Questions related to the figure-ground distinction also get an interesting discussion in this chapter (however the manner of the figure-ground shift on the basis of Table 9.7 would benefit from some explanation).

Summing up, the book provides a milestone in the study of pragmatic markers and should be read by anyone interested in or engaging on a study of pragmatic markers and therefore wants an up-to-date account of the issues being debated. It is also important methodologically by showing how we need to combine many different methods and corpora to describe and understand the flexibility and multifunctionality of pragmatic markers and their semantic developments over time. The innovative methods also include the use of a matched guise questionnaire to study changing attitudes to the pragmatic markers and how these can reflect on-going semantic change. I feel confident that the present volume will inspire more research on pragmatic markers and on many different markers including those where the hedging or interactional function is weaker. The pragmatic markers selected for analysis in this study were the commonest markers. It would also be interesting to use the same methods to study less frequent markers representing different stages of emergence or weakening.

## ***References***

Traugott, Elizabeth Closs and Richard Dasher. 2002. *Regularity in semantic change*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.