BEECHING, Kate (2016): *Pragmatic Markers in British English: Meaning in Social Interaction.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 255 pages + xvii. ISBN: 978-1-107-03276-7*

Cristina Lastres López

Universidad de Santiago de Compostela

cristina.lastres@usc.es

Ever since the publication of Schiffrin's (1988) seminal work on discourse markers, many different authors have contributed to the study of this category across languages. Beeching's (2016) *Pragmatic Markers in British English: Meaning in Social Interaction* brilliantly examines six of these constituents – *well*, *just*, *you know*, *like*, *sort of*, and *I mean* – in English speech, intertwining fine-grained functional and sociolinguistic synchronic analyses with diachronic approaches, in a novel way that had not been explored before. In her book, Beeching not only studies the role of pragmatic markers in spoken discourse and how they contribute to meaning in social interaction; but also makes relevant connections to the history of such markers, investigating the emergence of their new meanings and their historical development and evolution, to shed light on their multifunctionality in present-day English.

The book is structured in nine chapters. After the introduction to the monograph in Chapter 1, the choice of markers and corpus-based approaches are explained in Chapter 2. Chapters 3 to 8 have identical outlines and are devoted each to one of the six different pragmatic markers abovementioned. Each of these chapters starts with an introduction to the pragmatic marker, followed by a taxonomy of functions the marker may have, an analysis of their sociolinguistic implications and an explanation of their semantic changes throughout history, before offering a brief and informative conclusion about the pragmatic marker as a closure to the chapter. Finally, Chapter 9, which closes the book, draws together the results from the separate chapters and provides a comparison of the six pragmatic markers examined.

The chapter that opens the monograph introduces the reader into notion of pragmatic markers, described by Beeching as "expressions which may have little obvious propositional meaning but which oil the wheels of conversational

social interaction" (p. 1), and offers a very succinct account of different terminological labels that have proliferated over the years to designate the expressions under analysis. Although probably beyond the scope of the book, the subsection mentioning such terminological labels could have benefited from a more in-depth explanation of some of the differences between certain terms, which are only mentioned in passing. Beeching then focuses on the multifunctional nature of pragmatic markers and on their ability to fulfill such variety of functions simultaneously, mentioning some of their most distinct features, such as their potential optionality or their interactional nature, for example (p. 7). She then continues to sketch the connections between pragmatic markers and variationist sociolinguistics, in an interest in how change starts – from propositional meaning to pragmatic marking – and how it spreads among the population, and particularly, on the variation according to extralinguistic factors such as age, gender and social class. The chapter closes with some notes about the historical development of pragmatic markers, in the light of the Invited Inferencing Theory of Semantic Change of Traugott and Dasher (2002) and the theories of grammaticalisation and pragmaticalisation.

The choice of pragmatic markers and the corpus-based methodology is explained in Chapter 2. The data analysed are extracted from two main sources, the UWE role-play corpus, a small corpus of around 50,000 words compiled between 2011 and 2014 at the University of the West of England – from which most examples in the book are extracted – and the British National Corpus, which, with its 100 million words, offers an unparalleled source to analyse "the situational factors which may influence the rate of occurrence of the pragmatic markers" (p. 50). These data are complemented with the Old Bailey Corpus (1674-1913) to cover a greater time span. The choice of the six pragmatic markers under scrutiny – *well*, *just*, *you know*, *like*, *sort of* and *I mean* – is based on frequency reasons, but also on the grounds that they are salient from a sociolinguistic point of view and "contribute to interpersonal relations, face-management and the mediation of politeness through their hedging qualities" (p. 32). In addition, in order to explore attitudes towards pragmatic markers, Beeching uses the modified matched-guise test approach adopted by Buchstaller (2006a) and the focus group approach explored by Watts (1989), and implements a questionnaire to examine how identical utterances, with and without pragmatic markers, are perceived by different age groups.

Chapter 3 starts with the first pragmatic marker under examination: *well*, the most widely analysed pragmatic marker, as Beeching admits (p. 51). From a functional point of view, she argues that the main function of *well* in conversation can be summed up as "flagging a demurral" (p. 52), but provides a full list of nine fine-grained functions for this pragmatic marker: (i) hesitation, (ii) transition, (iii) change of topic, (iv) raising an objection, (v) prefacing a dispreferred response, (vi) taking a turn, (vii) other-correction, (viii) self-correction, and (ix) quotation. From the sociolinguistic perspective, she argues

that *well* is less subject to social stigmatisation than other pragmatic markers, and is considered a marker of politeness. Finally, the author shows that the pragmatic use of *well* derives from its function as an adverb, with similar evolutions in other languages, such as French or Chinese.

Chapter 4 is devoted to *just*, also further analysed by Beeching (2017), in comparison with its French equivalent, from which the English word derives. *Just* is highly multifunctional and its functions can be summarised, paradoxically, as both a downtoning and intensifying device, depending on the contextual situation. From a sociolinguistic point of view, it is remarkable that *just* does not occur most frequently in conversation, but rather in doctor-patient interaction, which Beeching attributes to the sensivity of the subject-matter, where a minimizing function can soothe the patient, for instance.

In Chapter 5, the author explores *you know* as a pragmatic marker, elucidating first the criteria she uses to distinguish the pragmatic use from the canonical one. She argues that the pragmatic marker is omitted from the utterance without being ungrammatical or resulting in a loss of propositional meaning and is syntactically non-integrated and prosodically detached from the rest of the utterance. As she anticipated in Chapter 1 with regard to the subjectivity of interpretations pragmatic markers may have (p. 9), Beeching claims that it is though difficult to distinguish both uses in a corpus without access to the sound files. In functional terms, *you know*, the only addressee-oriented marker analysed, serves to express common ground between the speakers. In this respect, the author mentions that it is frequently used in political speeches. It is also argued, however, that initial, final or middle position of the pragmatic marker in the utterance can result in different functions: in initial position, it functions as an attention-getting device; in medial position, as a pause-filler; and in final position, as a consensus-seeking marker. The findings also suggest that older speakers use *you know* more than younger speakers, but gender differences, which also resulted in slightly inconclusive results in prior studies, should be further explored.

Chapter 6 is devoted to the study of *like*, which, as it happens with *well*, has been one of the most widely analysed pragmatic markers (see D'Arcy (2017) for a book-length description of *like*). Functionally, *like*'s core function is to flag approximation and to hedge discourse, but Beeching describes five more fine-grained subfunctions: (i) to introduce an example, (ii) as an approximative, (iii) as a quotative, (iv) as a focuser, and (v) as hedge. Sociolinguistically, *like* is probably the most stigmatised – and thus the most interesting to study – of the six pragmatic markers examined. In British and American English, *like* and the quotative *be like*, are considered to be features of adolescent language which have been "roundly criticised by parents and educators" (p. 126). In their quotative use, several studies in different English varieties have also confirmed that *like* is a feature of female speech (Andersen, 2001; Macaulay, 2001; D'Arcy, 2007), but Beeching's striking findings – as she admits – based on data from the BNC show

that quotative *like* is absent from the corpus, confirming Buchstaller's (2006b) claims. These striking findings seem to be an excellent point of departure to compare these data against the new BNC 2014, which, with a time lapse of twenty years with its older version, could yield different results about on-going changes in *like* in present-day British English.

In Chapter 7, Beeching examines *sort of*, traditionally overlooked in the literature. From a functional perspective, *sort of* is a marker of hesitation and attitude, or an approximator or mitigator similar to *kind of*, and is frequently regarded as a mitigator of a face-threatening act. From a sociolinguistic point of view, Beeching's results suggest that, in British English, *sort of* could be an indicator of social stratification, characteristic of the upper middle class. The results from the questionnaire about attitudes towards *sort of* are clearly surprising, in that they show a mismatch between reality and perception: a certain amount of participants considered that *sort of* is indicative of lack of education. Beeching's data also confirms that this pragmatic marker is more frequently used by women than men.

Chapter 8 investigates *I mean*, another extensively studied pragmatic marker. The discussion of *I mean* should be directly regarded as complementary to *you know* (Chapter 5); the former marker being speaker-oriented, and the latter addressee-oriented. The same remarks regarding the difficulty to distinguish canonical and pragmatic usages, as mentioned above, can also be applied to *I mean*. Halfway between pragmatic and non-pragmatic usages are the formulaic forms *(if) you know what I mean* and *(if) you see what I mean*. Functionally, the author distinguishes up to six main functions: (i) self-repair, (ii) hesitation, (iii) clarification, (iv) justification, (v) concession, and (vi) hedging. Beeching seems to be the first one to investigate *I mean* from a sociolinguistic point of view. Her data shows that male speakers favour the use of *I mean* in utterance-initial position, while female speakers are more prone to use it in the middle of the sentence, introducing clarification or justification. Regarding age differences, the data show that its highest use is among the 45-59 population, with very low frequencies among the youngest speakers. Beeching concludes from this that *I mean* "is well-established in the adult population and is a form, whose various usages are learnt over one's lifetime" (p. 197).

Chapter 9 closes the book by comparing and contrasting the six pragmatic markers under examination. The six markers are essential to manage the spontaneity of conversation, and to be sociable and polite (p. 212). The author first examines from a functional perspective how the different markers overlap and diverge in their pragmatic usages. She explains, for example, that *well* and *you know* are more useful for turn-taking, while *just* and *sort of* are most frequently used to show politeness. Sociolinguistically, results for social class do not reveal a regular social stratification which would indicate that particular forms are indexical of a particular social class. Regarding gender, Beeching's results confirm prior research indicating that women use hedging pragmatic

markers more than men. While none of the six pragmatic markers are gender-exclusive, in terms of degree, female speakers use more the six forms analysed, and these differences are particularly significant for *well*, *just*, *like*, and *I mean*. As for differences in age, Beeching divides the six pragmatic markers in two groups. The first group comprises *well*, *you know* and *I mean*, which become more frequent with age, suggesting that their different usages are acquired throughout one's lifetime, and are therefore already well-established among the population. The second group, comprising *just*, *like* and *sort of*, exhibits a different pattern, with such forms being much more frequent among younger speakers. Beeching argues that this peak in adolescence suggests that these markers are spreading. With respect to attitudes towards these six pragmatic markers, *well* is revealed to be the most widely-accepted; *just*, *you know* and *sort of* are less well-accepted, particularly by elder speakers; *like*, highly stigmatised, is much more accepted by younger speakers, which use the form more frequently, than by older speakers, who show the reversed pattern of use; results for *I mean* show much variation and are, unfortunately, inconclusive. In terms of situational variation, the initial hypothesis was that pragmatic markers would be more frequently used in everyday conversation. This proved to be true only for *well* and *like*, the other pragmatic markers being more frequent in other situational contexts. Finally, regarding historical semantic changes, *just* is the one which is closest to its original meaning, while *well* shows the opposite pattern.

To conclude, Beeching's book is an insightful contribution, accessible and highly-informative, to the fascinating field of pragmatic markers in English. The novelty of the approach resides on the successful combination of functional, sociolinguistic and historical perspectives, which allows the book to consolidate itself as a must-read landmark for both researchers and students interested in disentangling the multifunctionality of pragmatic markers.

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