The Different Functions of the Discourse Marker *well*

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**Introduction**

The word *well* can function as an adjective (*I don’t feel well*), adverb (*the team played well*), or even as a conjunction (*as well as*). However, have you ever wondered what functions it has as a discourse marker? This paper aims to explore these different functions of *well*.

Discourse markers are unique to spoken discourse, and using them can help learners of English sound more fluent. The focus is only on the discourse marker *well*, since it can have so many different functions. The first part of the paper is a literature review. It shows what important researchers believe *well* is used for. The next part is an analysis of a corpus. It gives several examples of *well* in conversations and talk show interviews. The last part consists of teaching materials. It has different activities that show how learners of English can discover the many functions of *well*. There are also three appendices, which include two example models of two different assignments, and one answer key to an activity.

**Functions of *Well* in Research**

According to Fraser (1999), most researchers believed discourse markers were expressions that relate discourse segments. However, there was little agreement on their functions or how they should be defined. Fraser (1999) tried to define what a discourse marker is by looking at the questions: “What do discourse markers relate? What are not discourse markers? What is the grammatical status of discourse markers? What are the main classes of discourse markers?” (p. 937). After his research, Fraser (1999) defined discourse markers as “a class of lexical expressions drawn primarily from the syntactic classes of conjunctions, adverbs, and prepositional phrases” (p. 946). He further explained that they signal a relationship between the
segment they introduced, and the prior segment. If a discourse marker is taken out of a response, the hearer would have no clue on the relationship intended between the two segments. Fraser (1999) also said that well could be used with delays, like marking a pause and gave this example: “What am I going to do now? Well….I really don’t know” (p. 942).

Schiffrin (1987) gave a very detailed description of the functions of well in her book. She argued that well had no semantic meaning as a discourse marker, and could therefore be used for many general discourse functions. Well often occurred when a respondent could not meet the demand of a response because the content of the answer would not fit the options opened by a prior question. The reason for this could be a lack of information or knowledge, an inaccurate assumption by the questioner or a complication of the situation being questioned (Schiffrin, 1987). Well could also be used to delay the main portion of an answer. For example, “Debby: What does your daughter in law call you? Zelda: Well that’s a sore spot” (p. 109). Schiffrin (1987), also discovered that well was often used to mark non-appreciative responses like disagreements, denials and insufficient answers. This was illustrated in the following example: “Freda: He can usually tell you not only what the piece is, but who it was written by. Jack: Well that’s no big deal” (p. 116). Here Jack disagrees with the boast, and therefore fails to give the appreciation Freda was requesting. Furthermore, two other functions found was the use of well with requests for clarification or elaboration. This is illustrated in the following examples:

“Debby: How did you get the name of the doctor you’re using now? Where’d y’find him? Zelda: Well y’mean our family doctor?” (p. 120). “Jack: Then I worked for the fruit store. Yeh, I was selling eggs. I think I was fifteen, then. Debby: Well was that a full time job, or like a…” (p. 120). In the first example we see that Zelda uses well when she asks for a clarification. The second example shows that Debby uses well to ask for further elaboration. Lastly, Schiffrin
(1987) also found that *well* was used with self-repairs: “Look at Bob’s par-eh father an’ mo-
Well I don’t think his father accepted it- his mother” (p. 123). “So we decided since he was living in West Philadelphia, well both my mother and father, we decided to come out here” (p. 124). Here, we see that the speakers modify their previous utterance.

In her study, Fuller (2003) examined the use of the discourse markers *you know, like, oh, yeah* and *well* in interviews and casual conversations. The results from her study revealed that the speakers used *well* more in casual conversation than interviews. Furthermore, she found that *well* was used less by the interviewees because they were speaking more than they were listening. They were not expected to offer as many responses to the contributions of the interviewer. The interviewers, however, were primarily listeners and therefore used *well* more frequently. The difference between *well* used in casual conversations versus interviews was found statistically significant. However, it should be noted that the interview setting was formal and structured. Her findings suggested that *well* might be more frequently used as a reception marker, used to create coherence between speakers’ turns. In other words, *well* is used more frequently by hearers who were in the role of listening and responding (Fuller, 2003).

Fuller’s (2003) results indicated that the most common function of *well* in both contexts was to mark insufficiency or, in other words, to modify a previous utterance. Two other functions were to introduce new topics or to introduce reported speech. This occurred more frequently in the interview data. Furthermore, Fuller (2003) believed that *well* was also used to mitigate face threats. This was the least frequent function she found. It was infrequent in the casual conversations, and it was completely absent in the interviews. Fuller (2003) found this logical because one expects fewer face threats in more structured interactions between relative strangers, such as interviews. *Well* could also be used to delay a response, which occurred
frequently in the conversations data. In conversations, one might need to compete for the floor, while in interviews, one is usually given the floor (Fuller, 2003).

Jucker (1993) analyzed four functions of well as a discourse marker by using Sperber and Wilson’s relevance theory (1986, as cited in Jucker, 1993) as a descriptive framework. According Jucker (1993), well had distinct functions, but they could all be related to one core meaning, which was that well was a signpost. It directed “the way in which the following utterance should be processed by the addressee” (p. 438). Jucker (1993) believed well had four main functions. The first one was well as a marker of insufficiency. In other words, it was used with answers that did not supply the information required by the question, or questions that made inaccurate assumption, for instance, “Zelda: Are you from Philadelphia? Sally: Well I grew up uh in the suburbs. And I lived for about seven years up in upstate New York. And then I came back here to go to college” (p. 443). Here Sally made an incorrect assumption that Zelda either was or was not from Philadelphia. Well could also be a face-threat mitigator. Here either the speaker or the hearer is confronted, and well is used to make the confrontation less serious or severe, for example, “A: they must worry about you though Eddie, don’t they, your Mum and Dad, when you’re doing all these jumps. B: er well they always come to all the shows” (p. 444). Here speaker A assumed that Eddie’s parents worried about his dangerous jumps, and wanted to elicit an agreement. However, Eddie disagreed by saying that his parents were not that worried since they came to his shows. Here is another example: “A: Can I just see them. B: um well I’m not allowed to do that” (p. 444). Here B could not comply with A’s command. The third function Jucker (1992) mentioned was well as a frame. In this case, well was used to separate discourse units, for instance, “A: but if they wanted people around to talk to, then I would be very happy to stay, and got a letter back saying we have arranged for you to say- well let’s take the interview
first” (p. 446). In this example, there was a shift in the focus of the topic. *Well* could also be used to frame direct speech: “and I said well I don’t really think I could write- and this sort of ninety-six page booklet you know about that big” (p. 446). Lastly, *well* could also function as a delay device, for example, “B: on the floor. A: on on well on you know on hatchway there” (p. 447). Speaker A obviously needed time to think about the answer.

To summarize, the literature review showed several different functions of *well*. The functions were that *well* could be used to mark delays, self-repairs, direct speech, non-appreciative responses like disagreements or refusals. Furthermore, it could also be used to mitigate face threats, and frame discourse units like direct speech, or frame a shift in focus or topic. The next part of the paper, aims to examine the functions of the discourse marker *well* in daily conversations and talk show interviews.

**Method**

The corpus used for the analysis was created by Hakonsen, Karlsson, and Catahan in 2013. It contains 56 transcriptions from daily conversations and talk shows. The transcriptions were obtained from the website Talkbank (http://talkbank.org), and the David Letterman’s talk show (http://www.oocities.org/davidletterman82/TVInterviewTranscripts.html). The total word count in this mini corpus is 211097. Our group used the computer program *AntConc* to analyze the corpus data.
Analysis

The two pictures below were taken from AntConc. They reveal the frequency of the discourse marker *well* in the corpus. Here *well* is number 41, but we can exclude numbers 13, 18, 37 and 39 on the list since they do not represent actual words, so *well* is actually ranked at 37 for frequency. The are 857 occurrences of *well* in the corpus. However, *well* is not always a discourse marker. It also function as an adjective, noun, adverb and verb. Thus, the number does not represent the frequency of *well* as a discourse marker. After looking through the 857 concordance lines of *well*, it was discovered that there were 65 cases where *well* was not used as a discourse marker. In other words, the count of *well* as a discourse marker was 792, which means it has a frequency of 0.37% in the mini corpus. Here are some examples of *well* as an
adverb and adjective in the data:

1. We had our little visit with Perot. It didn't turn out too well.
2. LETTERMAN: It’s working out pretty well for you?
3. LETTERMAN: Your wife is a well-known actress in a big blockbuster summer film.
4. I thought I ran well.
5. AND: Does that pay well?

There were other cases where well was used as a conjunction, such as as well as or as well:

1. I hope it's a HUGE hit for ya, and for David Spade, and everybody else as well.
2. I mean, you might as well take a picnic lunch, you know?
3. *ALA: uh, it's gonna need more content as well .
4. And you guys are friends as well as working together on the show, and now in this big movie.
5. All the signs are in Arabic as well as English.
6. I think you've proven to a lot of people, and perhaps to yourself, that you can be taken seriously as an actress as well as a regular entertainer.

In my analysis, I exclude these instances of well and focus only on instances where it is used as a discourse marker. I found that all the functions of discourse marker well are also mentioned in the literature.

There were several cases of well being used to frame direct speech:

1. DUCHOVNY: And he said, "Well, the bees have to wrap by 4:00."
2. DUCHOVNY: And they said, "Well, as the sun starts to go down, the bees start to get cranky"

3. And she says "Well thanks very much."

4. And uh, she sticks her head in the door at intermission and says "Well, it's going real well."

5. PAME: I bit my tongue the other day because remember you said to Deven well I really want to spend time with you?

6. PAME: I said well they're the spirit of Santa Claus and in they represent Santa Claus.

*Well* was often used to delay a response. Mainly the reason for the delay seemed to be that the respondent needed a pause to think. However, in the last example Grant might have delayed the answer because he did not want to talk about the topic, something Letterman seemed to picked up on:

1. DUCHOVNY: That’s like saying, "Would you rather work two days a week or would you rather work seven days a week?" (Pauses) Well … (Audience laughs) … I’ll have to get back to you on that


3. DARR: What does that have to do with heaven and hell in the book. PAME: Well uh I'm just sort of: reiterating.

4. PAME: in I thought to myself if she asked me that like ? on ? Christmas Eve DARR: well? she? must have gotten some? sort of a signal somewhere .

5. JIM: and that is an opportunity for to meet spirituality . MICH: Yeah well there's u?

6. DESCHANEL: Yeah, I like to um --well, I sing, and I play the ukulele, I play piano.
7. LETTERMAN: Now what was he doing there? (Short silence) GRANT: Well....

LETTERMAN: I'm sorry, I don't... I mean, I understand you and Nelson Mandela

There were also several cases where well was used to mark non-appreciative responses, such as disagreements. In example (1) Anderson disagreed with Letterman’s statement that nobody had been working on the Y2K digital bug. In (2), Letterman jokingly stated that Roberts was drunk the whole time the movie was filmed, to which she disagreed. In (3), Winslet thought that Letterman’s previous utterance would make everyone believe she was an alcoholic, but he disagreed. In the last example, the two speakers talked about math fractals, and Mich disagreed with Jim’s statement.

1. LETTERMAN: ……I’m thinking, well, certainly people must have been working on this since like the 1940's, and it turns out nobody's been working on it at all. ANDERSON: Well, no, I think in a way that they have been. But the problem was that…..

2. LETTERMAN: oh come on, you must have been drunk the whole time. ROBERTS: Well, now, well, no not the entire time. Only during my scenes.

3. WINSLET: I am not going to have the nation thinking that I'm an alcoholic.

LETTERMAN: Well, no. But it is odd that you're working on the job.

4. JIM: & in well they imply no they don't imply morals but they do imply that there's more than the obvious going on .MICH: Well all math does that.

Well was also used to mark insufficiency. In the first two examples the speaker corrected a previous utterance. In examples 3-5 the speakers modified their responses by replacing their previous utterances:

1. LYNN: you have to? uh to graduate you know or well to get the degree you know.
2. LYNN: and I mean there's in millions of ligaments and millions of tendons you know
   \textbf{well} not millions but I mean.

3. MARI: It's just like \textbf{well} we could've gone? out?

4. AND: But, well, when you get, \textbf{well}, you can step, like if two guys are fighting, you can
   step between them and break them up

5. LIMBAUGH: We have a lot of things -- \textbf{well}, I've overcome my obstacles too, and am
   still in the process of overcoming them.

Lastly, \textit{well} was also used to mark topic shifts. In Example (1), Roberts first talked about herself,
and then used \textit{well} to shift the focus onto Letterman. In (2), Letterman ended the conversation
because the talk show had to go on commercial break. In (3) Letterman wanted to shift the topic
to what was troubling Madonna in general. Lastly, in (4), Letterman wanted to talk about his
guest’s movie, instead of himself:

1. ROBERTS: It is and it's quite shocking to me actually - I wake up in the morning and I'm
   like "Who's that woman in my bathroom?" Um, yeah, \textbf{well}, I've done some research on
   your show. I have a video library.

2. LETTERMAN: \textbf{Well} ... we'll pause here and regroup. We're gonna take time out for a
   commercial.

3. LETTERMAN: Now what specifically are you getting at. What is driving you nuts here?
   What's troubling you? MADONNA: About you or life in general? LETTERMAN: \textbf{Well},
   let's start with life in general.

4. LETTERMAN: Yeah, that's how that worked. And that's why I had to leave! \textbf{Well}, let's
   talk about the movie!
In the analysis, all the functions from the literature review were confirmed, except for one. There were no cases of well being used to mitigate face threats. The discourse marker well is also used to delay a response or to frame direct speech. It was also used to mark non-appreciative answers, topic shifts and insufficiency.

Teaching Functions of well

The importance of teaching different functions of well as a discourse marker lies in the fact that it can help learners sound more fluent. Furthermore, discourse markers can help learners avoid being misunderstood. For instance, if learners do not use well to mark non-appreciative responses then they might come across as rude and abrupt. However, teaching the functions of well is a difficult topic, and should only be taught to students at a high skill level. The following teaching material was designed for students at a high intermediate to advanced proficiency level. The teaching setting is EFL, more specifically Norwegian high school students at the age of 18. The teaching material introduces the different functions of the discourse marker well. The goal is that students will be able to identify/recognize some of the different functions of well.

Activity 1: Matching

Activity focus: Make students identify different functions of well through examples.

Level: Advanced

Time: 30 min

Description of activity to students: You will work on a handout that has a matching exercise. The task is to find the examples that match the functions listed. Read the instructions on the handout.
Keep in mind that in two of the examples *well* do not represent any of the functions listed, can you see why?

**Matching Functions of well**

**Instructions:**

Match the different examples (1-8) of *well* with the functions (A-F). Put the number of the example in the empty box (answer) in the table below. Notice that two of the examples do not match any of the functions listed.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Function</th>
<th>Answer</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A. Used to delay a response</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B. Indicate a disagreement</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C. Ask for clarification</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D. Used to begin direct speech (repeats a previous utterance)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>E. Ask for elaboration</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F. Face threat mitigator (make a confrontation less serious)</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Examples</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>1</strong> A: Then I worked for the fruit store. Yeh, I was selling eggs. I</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>think I was fifteen, then.  B: <strong>Well</strong> was that a full time job, or</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>like a…”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>2</strong> A: He can usually tell you not only what the piece is, but who</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>it was written by.  B: <strong>Well</strong> that’s no big deal.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>3</strong> A: How did your test go?  B: It went <strong>well</strong>.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>4</strong> A: Can I just see them?  B: um <strong>well</strong> I’m not allowed to do</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>that.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>5</strong> I asked Kathy if she was still running and stuff and she says</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“<strong>well</strong> I guess you’d call it walking”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>6</strong> A: What does your daughter in law call you?  B: <strong>Well</strong> that’s</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>a sore spot.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>7</strong> A: How did you get the name of the doctor you’re using now?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Where’d y’find him?  B: <strong>Well</strong> y’mean our family doctor?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>8</strong> A: How are you doing today?  B: I feel <strong>well</strong>.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Assignment 1: Identify functions of well.

Assignment focus: Identify one function of well by reading transcripts at MICASE.

Level: Advanced

Time: Approximately two hours.

Handout of assignment description:

**Finding Functions of well**

In this assignment you will try to identify a function of well by looking at transcript data. You will look through transcripts in the MICASE database. The task is to identify one function. Give a short description and provide at least five examples that you believe represent the function.

**Step 1:** Go to this link: [http://quod.lib.umich.edu/cgi/c/corpus/corpus?c=micase;page=simple](http://quod.lib.umich.edu/cgi/c/corpus/corpus?c=micase;page=simple)

**Step 2:** Narrow down the search: There are three boxes where I want you to select a specific topic. Under the *Academic Position/Role* box, select *senior undergraduate*. In the *Native Speaker Status* box select *Native Speaker, American English*. Under the *Participant Level* box select *Mixed Undergraduate*.

**Step 3:** Type well into the *find* box, and click on submit search. You should now see several example sentences with well. In total there should be 100 sentences.

**Step 4:** Scroll through the examples and try to identify functions of well. When you think you have found an example, click on the *view* button. This will let you see the phrase the sentence occurs in, which will make it easier to identify the function.

**Step 5:** When you think you found an example copy the sentence and paste it into a word document. Make sure there is enough text before and after the word well to illustrate the function.
Model Example of Assignment 1:

Name:__________________

Description of function:

The discourse marker *well* can be used to mark self-repairs. In other words, speakers use it to change a previous utterance. Reasons for the self-repair can be to make a correction, add information, or to replace a previous utterance:

1. Look at Bob’s par-eh father an’ mo- **Well** I don’t think his father accepted it- his mother.
2. So we decided since he was living in West Philadelphia, **well** both my mother and father, we decided to come out here.
3. . .the only thing different I think may be – **well** in our area, it isn’t because of the school.
4. And you have land, and uh.. **well** in fact, yu don’t have t’o-uh have land, as long as you have serfs.
5. I know she's like alri- **well** cuz i think they ha- you know

Assignment 2: Talk show transcription

Assignment focus: Identifying functions of *well* in a talk show.

Level: Advanced

Time: Approximately two hours

Description of assignment: In this assignment, you will be assigned a short video clip from youtube. The clip will be from the David Letterman talk show. The youtube clips from this show are usually 10 min long, but you will only be assigned a short section lasting approximately 2 min. Your task is to transcribe the section of the clip assigned. After that you will describe the functions of *well* in the transcription. Use red font to describe each function.
Model Example Assignment 2:

Name:___________________

Assigned video clip: http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RYo7u6GUTEY

TV Show: The David Letterman Talkshow

Time of clip being transcribed: 00:38 to 1:47

Transcription:

LETTERMAN: How ya doing? Welcome to the show. Very nice of you to be here.

FAWCETT: Well, I'm so happy to be here.

Here *well* is used as a frame to mark a shift in focus. Letterman shows his appreciation, and Fawcett responds by shifting the focus to her appreciation of being invited.

LETTERMAN: Now, you've never been on this program before. You were never on this program before. You were never on the other program we did at the other network. Is there any reason?

FAWCETT: You don't remember?

LETTERMAN: Remember?

FAWCETT: Just kidding. No, no. Let me think. Why?

LETTERMAN: Why what?

FAWCETT: Haven't I been?

LETTERMAN: I don't know. That's what I had just asked you.

FAWCETT: Oh. Well --

Here *well* functions as a delay marker. Fawcett uses well because she need a pause to think.

LETTERMAN: How are you doing? Are you all right?

FAWCETT: Don't I seem all right?

LETTERMAN: You seem fine. I know you were kind of harried getting over here. Was there a problem? Was there traffic? Were you stuck somewhere?
FAWCETT: There were people, lots of people.

LETTERMAN: Well, that's New York.

Here well is used to as a frame, marking a shift in focus. The shift Letterman makes is that a characteristic of New York is its large population.

FAWCETT: People who like, love me, so sweet and blocking for me.

LETTERMAN: Now, what is that like when you go out, when you travel around the country and people say, "Oh, my god, there she is," because you're undeniably an icon, of course, and people go out and they say, "Oh, look, there's Farrah Fawcett."

FAWCETT: There um well, different cities have different reactions. I love New York. New York loves me. It's so sweet.

Here well is used to mark a delay. Fawcett need a short pause to think about her response.

Activity 2: Role-play

Activity focus: Practice using well when refusing a request, to make the refusal sound less rude and abrupt.

Level: High intermediate.

Time: 15 min.

Description of activity to students: On this task you will work in pairs and exchange between two different roles. Role A has to request a favor. For example: Can I borrow your book?

Role B has to refuse the request from their partner, by using well followed by a short delay. For example: well… I need it today. If these two features are absent in a refusal of a request, then people might think you come across as rude and abrupt. The two different handouts, one for role A and one for role B, will help guide you:
Role A: Requesting a favor

Instructions: Request a favor from your partner. Below are some example phrases to start a request. Complete them by asking for a specific favor. You are not restricted to using the examples, be creative.

- Can I see your……
- Can you give me a ride to……
- Can you pick me up from……
- Can I borrow ……
- Could you show me……
- Would you mind giving me directions to…..
- Will you help me with…

Role B: Refusing a request

Instructions: Refuse the request from your partner. Respond with the discourse marker well and a short delay. Also, include a reason for the refusal.

For example:
A: Can I borrow your book?
B: well…I kind of need it today. Maybe you can borrow it tomorrow?
Activity 3: Role-play

Activity focus: Practice using *well* with disagreements.

Lever: High Intermediate

Time: 15 minutes.

Description of activity to students: On this task you will work in pairs. There are two different roles you will exchange between. The person playing role A will ask for an agreement on a topic. For example: Don’t you think *Les Misarables* was the best movie this year? Role B has to disagree with their partner, by using the *well* and a short delay. For example: well….I think Django Unchained was better. *Well* can make the disagreement sound less abrupt. The two different handouts, one for role A and one for role B will help guide you:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Role A: Asking for an Agreement</strong></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Instructions:</strong> Ask your partner to agree with you on a topic. The topic can be anything, like your favorite movie, celebrity, sport etc. For example: Don’t you think surfing is the best water sport ever?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Role B: Make a Disagreement</strong></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Instructions:</strong> Disagree with whatever your partner says. Start the disagreement with <em>well</em> and a short delay, then give a reason for the disagreement. For example: A: Don’t you think surfing is the best water sport ever? B: Well…., I kind of prefer boogie boarding.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Conclusion

In conclusion, using corpora to study language can be a valuable tool for teachers. The benefit with corpus-based teaching is that learners get to see authentic language examples from real life situations. This can help them speak and write more like native speakers. A problem with many traditional textbooks can be that their language examples, like dialogues, are made up. Meaning, they do not represent how native speakers really talk.

One teaching technique commonly used with corpora is data driven learning. The principle with this technique is that students will play detectives with the language. Teachers can select data from authentic texts, which can guide students to discover grammatical patterns or functions. The purpose of Assignment 1 and 2 was that students on their own would discover different functions of \textit{well}, by looking at transcript data.

At first, I found it challenging to creating five hours of teaching material. I though it would be difficult to expand the topic. The focus was only on one discourse marker after all. However, as I continued to learn more about the many different functions of \textit{well}, developing the material became easier. After finishing the paper, I am pleased with the end result of the teaching material. The material is very varied, for instance, there are two role-play activities, one matching exercise and two assignments using data driven learning. In addition, the skill level varies from high intermediate to advanced. The two role-play activities are easier than the other tasks, and can be used to introduce a specific function of \textit{well}. 

The fact that one word can have so many different meanings fascinates me. Before this paper, I commonly used well as a discourse marker. However, I could not explain why I used it. Now I know that I would often use it to delay a response, or to mark a disagreement. As a teacher, being able to identify these functions is important. Students need to know why we use well and other discourse markers. This paper only focused on well, however, writing this paper has convinced me that teaching discourse markers is essential, as it can help learners sound more native. However, as previously stated discourse markers are complex features of a language, as they can have several different functions. That is why I believe they should be more in focus for advanced learners of English.

References


Appendix

Answer key and notes to teachers

Activity 1: Matching Functions of well (p. 12-13)

This recognition activity should not be used to introduce the functions of well, as discourse markers are complex features of a language. It should be used later when students have become more familiar with the topic through some lecturing. As mentioned in the description, two examples do not represent any of the functions. In example number three well is used as an adjective, and in number eight well is used as an adverb. Students should recognize that well does not always function as a discourse marker. This can help avoid confusion, and the teacher can use those examples to make the students aware of that. View the handout on the following page.

Activity 1: Answer Key (p. 13)

A. = 6
B. = 2
C. = 7
D. = 5
E. = 1
F. = 4

Assignment 2: Describing Functions of well (p. 15-17)

I used the concordance plot in AntCont to find a transcript from the David Letterman talk show that had several cases of well as a discourse marker. Then I searched YouTube to find the actual clip of the transcript. Without the concordance plot function on AntConc, creating this assignment would have been very time consuming.