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## Pragmatic markers revisited with a focus on *you know* in adult and adolescent talk

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### Abstract

The two main questions this paper addresses are: Do adolescent speakers use the pragmatic marker *you know* differently from adult speakers in spontaneous interaction and do the results support the hypothesis that this pragmatic marker is undergoing a change in meaning and function? The results from the present corpus-based study answer the first of these questions in the affirmative. Young speakers increasingly seem to be using this marker as a metalinguistic monitor with a modal function emphasizing the force of the speech-act and as a social monitor eliciting a reaction from the addressee(s); adults, in contrast, primarily use the marker to build up a text, and create coherence, the marker functioning as a textual monitor. As for the second question, the results appear to point to an ongoing change in the use of *you know*. The direction of the change speaks for the marker being further pragmaticalized, and thus having at least a potential for being grammaticalized and ending up as a grammatical morpheme. © 2001 Elsevier Science B.V. All rights reserved.

**Keywords:** Metalanguage; Modal function, Prefabricated chunks; Pragmaticalization; Grammaticalization; Spoken interaction

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### 1. Introduction

The overall aim of this paper is to review the functions of pragmatic markers in spoken discourse. Apart from the two well-established functions of pragmatic markers, as monitors of discourse and interaction, I propose a third function, notably as metalinguistic monitors. In this function the marker is clearly modal and speaker-oriented, either emphasizing the speaker's authority as to the illocutionary force of an utterance or serving as a face-saving device. I thus propose three main functional domains in

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which markers are used as monitors in communication, viz., the textual, social and metalinguistic domains. In the light of these monitoring domains I specifically look at *you know* as this phrase is used by adolescent speakers of British English. Comparisons are made with results from earlier investigations involving adult speakers, notably, in a British corpus (Erman, 1987), and in an American corpus (Schiffrin, 1987).

A substantial part of the paper deals with how conventionalized, or prefabricated, combinations of pragmatic markers can be strategically used as a means to ensure fluency. Again, there is particular focus on *you know* and on how this pragmatic marker combines with other markers to fulfill this function. Finally, leaning back on the results of the functions of *you know* in a diachronic perspective I suggest that the phrase has moved one more step towards having at least a potential for being further pragmaticalized, i.e. appearing more freely and in more varied contexts, and may some time in future even be grammaticalized, i.e. develop into a grammatical morpheme, having predominantly one main function. For a discussion of these two suggested paths of development, see the conclusion section of this paper, as well as Erman and Kotsinas (1993).

This is not a strictly diachronic study, however, since the two groups of speakers are not comparable from the point of view of age or class. Nor is it a synchronic study of adult and adolescent talk, since the London-Lund recordings were made about 30 years ago. So, any conclusion drawn in this paper about differences in the use of *you know* by different age groups or about a possible meaning/function shift of this expression should be seen in the light of these factors. However, what the results indeed indicate is that in the young corpus we get at yet other functions fulfilled by this versatile expression.

## 2. Material

The material for the adolescent part has been extracted from the Bergen Corpus of London Teenager Language (henceforth COLT) recorded in 1993 by Stenström and collaborators in various school districts in and around London. Via Tactweb on the Internet and a recently released CD we now have access to the corpus. The British adult material originates from the London-Lund Corpus (LLC) recorded between 1960 and 1975 (Svartvik and Quirk, 1980). The speakers of Schiffrin's American corpus are middle-aged first generation Americans of Jewish origin residing in a lower middle class Philadelphia neighbourhood; the recordings were made in the 70s (cf. Schiffrin, 1987: 44–45).

## 3. Three functional domains of pragmatic markers

### 3.1. General background

The importance and multifunctionality of pragmatic markers in everyday conversation is not a controversial issue. Indeed, a number of linguists have been involved

in synchronic studies (e.g. Östman, 1981, 1995; Erman, 1986, 1987; Schiffrin, 1987; Fraser, 1990; Redeker, 1990; Jucker and Smith, 1998; Jucker and Ziv, 1998; Lenk, 1998) as well as diachronic studies (cf. Brinton, 1990, 1996). Some points, however, will need clarifying.

In very general terms, pragmatic markers presuppose one speaker and at least one addressee taking part in a speech situation, which they at the same time create and monitor via discourse. Pragmatic markers have little or no meaning in themselves and can only be understood either through clues in the context and/or situation, or else by having a conventionalized pragmatic meaning mapped onto them. In other words, the function of pragmatic markers is that of monitoring discourse and conversation in various ways. They are exclusively functional in that they do not directly partake in the propositional content of the utterance in question, but occur 'outside' the syntactic structure. They are all restricted to spoken language (or mimetic dialogue) and some have functions that come close to e.g. those of punctuation or paragraphing in written texts.

### *3.2. Three functional domains – An overview*

It is generally recognised that pragmatic markers function on two main levels, viz. the textual/ideational and the interpersonal level, their basic functions being that of monitoring discourse and the activity of communicating, respectively (cf. Jakobson, 1960; Halliday, 1970b; Brown and Yule, 1983; Redeker, 1990; Brinton, 1996). Like many other linguists I recognise these two levels, or domains, as I prefer to call them, notably the discourse domain where markers function as **textual monitors** and the social domain, where their overall function is as **social monitors**. As textual monitors, pragmatic markers are in the main focussed on the text, the speaker by using them turning sometimes fragmented pieces of discourse into a coherent text. As social monitors their principal function is to negotiate the meaning and management of discourse and to ensure that the channel is open between the interlocutors.

However, I have found it difficult to do without a third category, i.e. pragmatic markers with metalinguistic functions. Pragmatic markers functioning in the metalinguistic domain are focussed on the message proper. That is to say, they function as comments, not on the propositional content of the message, but on the implications of it and on the speaker's intended effect with it, thereby functioning as **metalinguistic monitors**. Metalinguistic monitors are basically modal; that is, the speaker by using them informs the addressee about her/his commitment to the truth of the proposition or judgement of the importance or value of what is being communicated. Below I give an overview of these three domains.

It is generally acknowledged that meanings are negotiated and redefined in actual social practices, and that linguistic structures are interactionally generated (cf. van Dijk, 1997: 10–11, and, in particular, Linell, 1998: 111ff.). This is also true of speakers' and hearers' understanding of pragmatic markers. However, of the three functional domains in which markers are suggested to operate in the present study, the last two, i.e. the meanings of markers functioning as social and metalinguistic monitors, are more open to negotiation than markers functioning as textual monitors.

As textual monitors, I hold that markers at least have potential to be given preferred or even routinized interpretations, which are in turn, naturally, the result of communicative work (Linell, 1998: 119).

The most important function of pragmatic markers as textual monitors is that of organising discourse, notably as discourse markers. As discourse markers their most salient function is to create coherence. Although coherence should not be seen as a text-inherent property, but as the result of collaborative work between speakers and hearers, thereby changing direction as the conversation proceeds, I again maintain that the textual monitoring function is the most text-oriented one (cf. Lenk, 1998: 246). *You know* is frequently used to fulfil this function, and, in its most salient sub-function, i.e. as a discourse marker. Other typical examples of discourse markers include: *and then, and finally, (but) anyway, however, the thing is that, I mean, you see, as I said, it's just that*, to mention just a few (cf. Schiffrin, 1987; Aijmer, 1996; Erman, 1997; Lenk, 1998). Discourse markers are used to signal transitions of various kinds, between smaller or larger chunks of discourse, either in the thematic organisation at clause level or connecting larger pieces of discourse at the textual level. That is to say, they are either used to ensure global or local coherence (cf. Lenk, 1998). Their basic function is to 'move' the text forward and to ensure that the hearer gets a coherent picture and can make sense of what is being communicated. But they are also used for the sake of guiding the addressee in the decoding of the message. In this function they are used in order to highlight certain elements in the discourse, thus functioning in the thematic structure (for a more detailed discussion see Erman and Kotsinas, 1993: 82).

Another important text-oriented function is connected with the encoding of the text. Encoding and the ensuing editing imply that the speaker is preoccupied with selecting the right word or structure, i.e. giving the message the appropriate linguistic form. For this purpose the speaker may signal either repair of previous discourse or a new direction of it, or s/he may stall for time for the planning of the continuation of the utterance. Typical examples in this category include *I mean, or rather, you know, what was I going to say, hang on*. Encoding and editing are clearly oriented towards the text proper, and therefore belong in the textual domain. Broadly speaking, markers in the textual domain thus 'belong to the text' and could be said to be part of it in a wide sense, although they do not contribute to its propositional content or partake in the syntactic structure.

The main function of pragmatic markers as social monitors is for the speaker to ascertain or elicit audience involvement by calling for action on the part of the addressee, e.g. confirmation of a previous claim and/or to signal turn switches. Examples include tags (*wouldn't it, ok, right*) but also *you know* is frequently used in this function. Another important function in the social domain is the speaker ensuring that s/he has been properly understood, or that the addressee agrees with the speaker's understanding of a certain reference in the text, i.e. the pragmatic marker having a comprehension-securing function. As social monitors markers clearly function outside the text proper.

In the metalinguistic domain the overall function of pragmatic markers is modal. In the German literature it is generally held that modal particles function on a level

higher than the syntactic chain, indicating the expressive attitude of the speaker towards the propositional contents of the utterance (Weydt, 1969; Krivonosov, 1977), what Krivonosov calls “subjective modality” (1977: 187). Krivonosov’s subjective modality category corresponds to Bublitz’ “emotive modality”, which is oriented towards the speaker’s attitude and the relationship between speaker and hearer (1978: 8). As in the German studies, modal markers in the present study are oriented towards the speaker’s emotions and attitude. However, they differ from German modal particles in that they are exclusively speaker-oriented, i.e. they are neither directed towards the contents of the utterance nor towards the relationship between speaker and hearer. In other words, the speaker does not negotiate with the hearer to reach consensus about the relevance of the utterance to earlier or upcoming discourse, or about the propositional contents of the utterance, which is a description of the modal function frequently found in literature on German modal particles (see also Lütten, 1977). Rather, in the present study markers with a modal function are assumed to be directed towards the speaker’s subjective appreciation of the illocutionary force of the utterance as a whole. Their most characteristic function is as emphasisers typically underscoring and rounding off an evaluative utterance.

Another important modal function is to relieve the speaker from being completely committed to the truth value of the proposition in question, i.e. they function as hedges and approximators. The hedging and approximating functions are indeed quite close. Examples of markers with a hedging function include *I think, I guess, you know, sort of, kind of*. Examples of approximators include *or something, and all this, and everything, and all that, and so on and so forth*, etc. Through approximators the speaker gives the listener/s “a rough but sufficiently exact idea about a certain state of affairs for the general purpose of the conversation”, as I have suggested elsewhere (cf. Erman, 1995: 144). As hedges and approximators the markers clearly have a face-saving function. Typical counterparts of these two functions in written text are modal auxiliaries and adverb(ial)s (*et cetera, and so on perhaps, probably, in all likelihood*). Markers in this domain function above and beyond the text. Although I have mapped the various functions above onto specific linguistic items, we should be wary of tying certain forms to specific functions (cf. Erman, 1998).

Summing up: Pragmatic markers functioning in the first of the three proposed domains, the discourse domain, are clearly oriented towards the text and broadly speaking a part of it, in that they concern the organisation, the encoding and the editing of it. Markers functioning in the social domain primarily involve the addressee and are removed from the text. In the metalinguistic domain markers are clearly oriented towards the speaker and her/his attitude to the content and value of the message.

If we chart up the basic functions in these three functional domains it will look as follows:

#### **Text-monitors**

Discourse markers  
Editing markers  
(incl. Repair markers  
& Hesitation markers)

#### **Social monitors**

Interactive markers  
(incl. Turn-regulators)  
Comprehension-  
securing markers

#### **Metalinguistic monitors**

Approximators  
Hedges  
Emphasisers

These functional domains are not discrete, with clear-cut boundaries between them. Rather, the predominant function of the marker in a given context and situation seems to belong in one domain rather than in the other. However, in order to get a fair picture of what a text is and of the phenomenal task of at the same time composing it and conveying it to other people, we have to recognise many functional subgroups within these domains. We will therefore turn to a more detailed description of them.

The examples are mainly from the COLT corpus; this corpus has to my knowledge not yet been studied with a focus on the marker *you know*. In some examples, the LLC will also be represented. (For a more extensive discussion of the functions of *you know* in the LLC see Erman, 1986, 1987.)

### 3.3. Textual monitors: Structuring and editing discourse

Textual monitors include markers used in the encoding process, i.e. the speaker putting thoughts into words, and in the structuring process, i.e. turning words and phrases into a text. The more versatile and inclusive of the two groups in this domain include markers used for the structuring of discourse, commonly referred to as discourse markers. As already mentioned, they indicate boundaries between topics, between modes of speech (direct and reported speech), between foregrounded and backgrounded information in the thematic structure, and as cohesive devices between sets of propositions at the textual level. In this last function, they are comparable to conjunctions at the sentence level. In the following, we will look at *you know* as a discourse marker operating at two levels of discourse, the clause level and the textual level.

At the clause level, the speaker uses *you know* primarily to guide the listener in the interpretation of the message. The most typical subfunction of *you know* at clause level is to mark certain elements in the thematic structure, e.g. the speaker urging the listener to accept part of the information as ‘known’ or ‘given’, or in connection with topicalisation and highlighting of certain elements. Another subfunction at this level is the speaker using the marker to introduce a change of information content, frequently correcting or modifying previous discourse. (This function should not be confused with the repair function, where the speaker stops in mid-structure to make a restart.) Examples of these two subfunctions of *you know* at the clause level are given in examples (1) and (2) from COLT (the punctuation marks /, / ./ / ? / ! / indicate continuing, terminating, questioning, and exclamatory intonation, respectively), and (3) from the LLC:

- (1) /.../ *and we, we all buy, we all buy chips yeah, and the next minute, you know, we're all walking into the arcade all these girls just come up to us and start taking chips /.../* (B132801)
- (2) <1> /.../ *I can't believe it! Oh my god! It's been a year today, you know a year today with Sally. I can't believe it!*  
 <2> *Explain it to me.*  
 <1> *She's been going out with her boyfriend for a year today and they get on so well!* (B132803)

- (3) B /.../ and he's sort of next one, **you know** next senior one after Hart.  
A m — Harold. (1.5.452)

*You know* in (1) is marking, possibly also highlighting, the fronted time adverbial, which functions as a scene setter for the ensuing course of events; in examples (2) and (3) *you know* introduces a specification of previous discourse, which, as shown in these examples, is often achieved by means of repetition of parts of it. A similar function is shown in (4) where *you know* occurs after a left-dislocated element, which functions as a kind of headline for the following discourse.

- (4) <1> *That woman, you know that advert, the thingy [she does]*  
<2> *[Right] the woman out of the advert, right.* (B132701)

In contrast, discourse markers functioning at the textual level are not primarily concerned with the addressee's decoding of the message, but rather with the organisation of the discourse. Instead of marking transitions between interdependent elements and thus guiding the addressee's interpretation of them, as exemplified above, the markers at the textual level typically mark transitions between propositions which are largely independent. The overall function of the markers at the textual level is to mark 'moves' between arguments, states/events or modes in the text. When used in argumentative discourse, the marker will typically occur between, for instance the speaker's position and the backing up of it. This function of *you know* from COLT is shown in (5):

- (5) /.../ *they did it in a completely, slapstick farce way, you know the the men who were dressed up supposed to be women had great big balloons and, had rosy red cheeks and wigs and things /.../* (B133602)

However, in the teenage corpus *you know* linking propositions in argumentative discourse is rare, whereas in the two adult corpora it is quite frequent. Here is an example from Schiffrin (1987: 54):

- (6) *I believe ... that ... y'know it's fate*  
*So eh y'know it just seems that that's how things work*

Here *so y'know* introduces the proposition.

It is obvious that adult and adolescent speakers are involved in different discourse types. Young people seem to be more preoccupied with telling stories and reporting events which they have heard of, seen in films, or experienced themselves, than engage in argumentative discourse. Therefore the most common context and function of *you know* as a discourse marker in the young corpus is that of linking propositions in narrative and descriptive discourse. We frequently find *you know* marking transitions between states and events, as in (7) and (8).

- (7) /.../ *No, she jumped on my bed and when she gets on top of you she thinks she's some little baby. And she grabs hold of my tee-shirt and she sucks it! Thinking*

*it's a teat, you know, and she's sitting there going (sucking noises) all over your tee-shirt /.../* (B132707)

- (8) */.../ the film I saw was Thelma and Louise. That was good. Well, it's about these two women and one of them's married and other one's, like, she's got a boyfriend. And they go on holiday ... and they're not supposed to, you know, they neither of them told their boyfriend they go in this club /.../* (B132705)

The example in (7) shows *you know* occurring between reported states in a long descriptive passage and in (8) the speaker retells an episode in a film, the marker occurring between reported events in narrative discourse (the narrative from which the extract in (8) is taken is quite an extended passage).

Another function of *you know* at the textual level is to mark inserts of parenthetical comments containing information that the speaker assumes the addressee needs to know in order to be able to follow. The example in (9) shows this context and function.

- (9) <1> */.../ Shelley, come round to me right, and she was, stroking Dempsey and he walked past wagging his, you know when they put the tail down [and]*  
 <2> *Yeah.*  
 <1> (continues) (B132708)

As we will presently see, this function is close to the comprehension-securing function. Another important function of *you know* at the textual level is to mark transitions between direct and reported speech, close in function to quotation marks in written text. This context and function are demonstrated in (10).

- (10) */.../ I thought I'd warn you though. Right, he goes excuse me, why is there a bear sitting there? He goes well you know, don't ask okay, but just don't touch him okay, cos he's dangerous just don't, anyway the man gets drunk /.../* (B132701)

*Goes* is a reporting verb here (a characteristic feature of adolescent speech; Romaine and Lange, 1991) and *well you know* marks the beginning of the quotation; through the marker *anyway* the speaker resumes direct narration. We now turn to the other group in the textual domain, viz. markers used in the encoding of the text, as editing markers.

Markers with an editing function can turn up anywhere in a text where there is need for either stalling for time, as hesitation markers, or signalling repair, as repair markers. The explanation of the speaker's motivation for using hesitation markers is largely based on their position either within the phrase or at clause level. It is worth noting that in both cases they usually occur after function words, within the phrase after a determiner, the speaker obviously doing lexical search, or after a con/disjunct at the beginning of the clause for the sake of planning the overall continuation of it. In (11) and (12) we see examples of these two motivating forces.

- (11) /.../ *Come on Jane. Advertise your business on, on, you know, on tape.*  
(B132801)
- (12) *My sister really needed that. She cos like, cos you know like these interesting lighters when she went to France? /.../*  
(B132409)

Not infrequently *you know* co-occurs with other markers of hesitation, e.g. repetition in (11) and repetition plus *like* in (12). However, hesitation is a relatively rare phenomenon in adolescent speech, at least to judge by duration and position of pauses. Young speakers seem to fill potential silence with words, which often come out in pre-patterned chunks. I will presently come back to this.

Repair is also a fairly infrequent phenomenon in adolescent speech, but here is an example where the speaker makes a restart.

- (13) *The question is are you actually interested, attracted to her enough to want to, you know, what are you really interested in doing /.../*  
(B132503)

Again, it seems that young speakers are more concerned with getting across their message as quickly as possible than worrying about its linguistic form. We will shortly consider figures that show this tendency.

Next we will consider pragmatic markers as social monitors functioning in the negotiation of discourse.

#### 3.4. Social monitors: Negotiating discourse

'Can I butt into the conversation here?', 'You can go on speaking and I'm still listening', 'Could you listen to me, please', 'Excuse me could I say something', 'What do you think? You haven't said *anything* so far', 'Hang on I'm not finished yet', 'Can I get some response, please'. These are examples of what conversation management signals would look like if they were spelt out. However, this is rarely done directly, but implicated or indicated in various indirect ways. Such signals are indeed very subtle, and, a potential speaker shift typically involves the following three-level completion on the current speaker's part, viz., the speaker having reached the end of a completed tone unit with a non-level nuclear tone, the end of a syntactically completed sequence, and the end of "a semantically fully rational sequence" (Oreström, 1983: 172; see also Sacks et al., 1974). Several pragmatic markers, among them *you know*, are also good candidates for the job. The fact that negotiating signals of this kind are a prevalent feature of communication is only natural, since one of the strongest driving forces behind our engaging in conversation is to socialise with one another and to convey our attitudes to and understandings of phenomena around us and in the world. Hence these signals are here called social monitors.

In conversation management, *you know* may be used with both a turn-taking (frequently also highlighting) and a turn-yielding function. In the adult corpus *you know* is more frequently used to elicit a response from the listener/s, i.e. the marker has a turn-yielding or confirmation-seeking function, whereas in the adolescent corpus the marker tends to have a turn-taking and highlighting function, shown in (14) from the

adolescent corpus. When *you know* is used in this function in the adolescent corpus, the speaker is typically not selected by the previous speaker but selects him/herself as in (14) (cf. Sacks et al., 1978).

- (14) <1> *Er you know I told you that thingy?*  
 <2> *What?*  
 <1> (continues) (B132503)

Yet another common function in the social domain is the speaker making sure that the listener has correctly understood specific references made in the text, usually to people but also to objects and other phenomena. This function will here be referred to as ‘comprehension-securing’. *You know*, in view of the lexical meaning of the verb, readily lends itself to this function. Interestingly, I found only one example in the British English adult corpus, whereas in the adolescent corpus the marker is frequently used to fulfil this function. In the American adult corpus the comprehension-securing function of *you know* was not at all uncommon. (15) and (16) are examples from the COLT corpus and (17) from Schiffrin’s American corpus (Schiffrin, 1987: 271).

- (15) <1> */.../ I hate it when you see someone being sick. They go (mimicking vomiting sound)*  
 <2> *No.*  
 <1> *I watched erm, you know Warren? He was being sick right and he was hanging over the banisters like this in these flats /.../* (B132707)
- (16) <1> */.../ you’ve got to use one of them cap things, not a swimming cap.*  
 <2> *Steam cap?*  
 <1> *Yeah, well, you know them white, ones, have you seen the plastic ones yeah?*  
 <2> *Yeah, but that /.../ (continues)* (B133203)
- (17) Zelda: *Y’know that eh orthopedic doctor?*  
*Y’know that took care of Henry when he had his back problems?*  
 Irene: *Who, that Chinese doctor?*  
 Zelda: *No, the Italian. Bonzi!*  
 Irene: *Oh yeh.*  
 Henry: *He was not Italian, Zelda, he was Spanish.* (simplified version of ex. (3) in Schiffrin, 1987: 270–271)

Since this function is common both in the British young corpus and the American adult corpus, the age of the speakers does not seem to be a decisive factor. What seems to determine the comprehension-securing function of *you know* is rather the relationship between the speakers, the type of discourse and the subject matter being discussed. In the American corpus there is quite a close-knit relationship between the participants and in the recorded conversations they frequently recall past events and shared experiences in life. There are many features in the young corpus too which speak in favour of the participants being quite intimate with one another and as in

the American corpus the dominant discourse type is narrative. The British-English corpus, by contrast, is more varied both as regards topics, discourse type and degree of intimacy between the participants. I therefore conclude that these three factors are more important for the comprehension-securing function to be operating than the age of the participants.

Next we will consider *you know* functioning in the metalinguistic domain. As already mentioned, markers used as metalinguistic monitors are focussed, not on the text or on the participants, but on the message as a whole. The three most important groups in this domain are markers used to enhance the effect of the message, i.e. emphasising the speaker's authority, markers serving as face-saving devices, i.e. primarily with a hedging function, and markers with an approximating function, i.e. the speaker setting a limit to how specific s/he is prepared to be for the purpose of the conversation.

### 3.5. Metalinguistic monitors: Commenting on discourse

Jakobson, in his paper on linguistics and poetics, recalls the distinction made in modern logic between two levels of language, 'object language' and 'metalanguage', where the former could be defined as 'speaking of objects', and the latter as 'speaking of language' (1960: 356). So metalanguage in Jakobson's definition is focussed on the code proper. That is to say, whenever in a conversation there is need for the speaker to check whether the addressee shares the speaker's understanding of the code, typically expressed in questions like 'Do you know what I mean?', the metalinguistic function is operating. I assume that markers which "issue instructions and provide advice as to how information is being processed or is to be processed" could also be said to have a metalinguistic function (Jucker and Smith, 1998: 196–197).

As already mentioned, I take the metalinguistic function one step further. In this paper the metalinguistic function is operating whenever the speaker underscores the illocutionary force of the utterance as a whole. The most obvious instantiation of the metalinguistic function in everyday talk is in connection with emphasis. This function of *you know* is relatively common in adolescent speech (45/282, i.e. about 16%), but totally absent in the two adult corpora. *You know* with an emphatic function is shown in (18), where the speaker urges the listener to appreciate the force of the utterance as a whole.

- (18) <1> *I didn't realize what I was doing. I dunno.*  
 <2> *You're so stupid! You know.*  
 <1> *Yeah, yeah erm.*  
*Melanie was talk ... I was talking to Melanie about <unclear> and Melanie goes to me, <unclear> if you go out with him, and you realize that I'm mad, and you pull your eyes out of your head!*  
 <2> (laugh) (B133203)

As already mentioned, two more subgroups are recognised in this domain, notably, markers used as hedges and as approximators. Hedges notify that the speaker is

either not completely certain of a reported state of affairs or of her/his position in a certain matter, or does not want to commit him/herself. Markers in this group include *I suppose, I (don't) think, I guess, it seems that*, etc. Other markers in this group are used to tone down the effect of the message, e.g., *kind of, sort of*, etc. *You know* is not used in connection with hedging and therefore this group will not concern us here.

The other metalinguistic subgroup includes markers used as approximators, the speaker giving “the listener/s a rough but sufficiently exact idea about a certain state of affairs for the general purpose of the conversation” (Erman, 1995: 144). Typical examples include *and so on, and all that, or something*, etc. In view of the lexical origin of such markers, it is not surprising that neither of the adult corpora exhibited this function of *you know*; still, there was one example of *you know* with an approximating function in the adolescent corpus shown in (19). We can see that *you know* alone does not fulfil this function.

(19) *She said you're, you're nice, you're pretty, you know whatever.* (B132616)

However, approximators can also be used with an appealing function, the speaker appealing to shared knowledge of the world, general truths, or otherwise ‘uncontroversial’ issues. *You know*, in view of the lexical meaning of the verb, is a good candidate for the appealing function, as shown in these examples from the LLC (20) and from the American corpus (21).

(20) A: *we spent about an hour and a half, just arranging for us to take one occasional student, you know the sort of thing*  
 B: *Oh yes, frightful* (LLC 1.4.160)

(21) Henry: *I'm not a – we're all not perfect, y'know*  
*I'm not perfect Zelda, after all.* (ex. (11) in Schiffrin, 1987: 276)

The speakers in (20) and (21) both seem to be taking their hearers' endorsement of the generalisation for granted. An example of the appealing function of *you know* from the adolescent corpus is shown in (22).

(22) <1> *Stop the tape. Don't even tape this.*  
 <2> *!.../ I don't know if I'll be allowed, I'll have to ask cos, you know how it is.* (B132615)

Speakers using markers with an appealing function are quite effectively playing on the cooperative principle as a basis for communication. Indeed, it is highly unlikely that a hearer will not accept these appeals as something which, without further discussion, can be agreed on, since they do not in any way constitute a threat to the addressee's face.

In the next section, we will consider differences between the two age groups in their use of *you know* over the three functional domains.

#### 4. Comparisons of the use of *you know* in the COLT and LLC corpora

In this section, we will consider some statistics. I will have to confine the statistics to the LLC and COLT corpora, i.e. the two British corpora, since corresponding figures for the American corpus are not available. First, I show the positions of *you know* in the speaker's turn (Table 1). We then look at the distribution of *you know* over the three domains (Table 2) and over the various subfunctions in these domains (Tables 3–5).

##### 4.1. Position of *you know* in the turn

We can see that the LLC speakers use *you know* more often in the middle of a speaking-turn as compared to the COLT speakers. In COLT, middle position is also preferred but both initial and final positions show higher figures than the LLC.

Table 1  
Position in the turn in LLC and COLT

Corpus	Initial		Medial		Final		Total	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
LLC	14	5.0	236	84.6	29	10.4	279	100
COLT	28	9.9	217	77.0	37	13.1	282	100

However, position in a speaker's turn does not specify the marker's functions. In order to find out whether the marker is used differently in the two corpora, we will have to take a closer look at how the three functional domains are distributed over the two groups. This is shown in Table 2.

Table 2  
*You know* over three functional domains in LLC and COLT

Corpus	Textual domain	Social domain		Metaling. domain		
	N	%	N	%	N	%
LLC	228/279	81.7	43/279	15.4	9/279	3.2
COLT	140/282	49.6	76/282	26.9	48/282	17.0

The total figures in the table show that there are noticeable differences in the way the speakers from the two groups use *you know*. The adult speakers turn out to be most concerned with using the marker in order to create a coherent text, which facilitates the decoding of its propositional content. The young speakers, by contrast, in nearly half of the instances use *you know* for other purposes. If we conflate the figures for the social and metalinguistic domains, we notice that in about 44% of the

instances these speakers use the marker to ensure that the channel is open between the interlocutors (the social domain) and that the illocutionary force of the message gets across in accordance with the speaker's intentions (the metalinguistic domain). We will now turn to each of the three domains.

#### 4.2. You know in the textual domain

Table 3 shows the use of *you know* as a textual monitor, that is, for the sake of structuring and editing the text.

Table 3  
*You know* as textual monitor in LLC and COLT

Corpus	Text-structuring				Text-editing				Total	
	Disc.mark.		Them.org.		Repair		Hesitation			
	<i>N</i>	%	<i>N</i>	%	<i>N</i>	%	<i>N</i>	%	<i>N</i>	%
LLC	99	33.5	39	14.0	54	19.3	36	12.9	228/279	81.7
COLT	109	38.6	10	3.5	13	4.6	8	2.8	140/282	49.6
Total	208		49		67		44		368	

Some interesting differences between the groups emerge in the table. First of all, as we already established, the young speakers do not use *you know* mainly for text-monitoring purposes. However, of the four text-monitoring functions, the young speakers mainly use the marker to ensure textual coherence (as a discourse marker), whereas they usually do not use it for organising the text thematically, nor for editing purposes, i.e. to stall for time, or to carry out repair. We can see that the figures are quite low for these three functions. The adult speakers are more evenly spread over the four text-monitoring functions, although, like the young speakers, they prefer the marker in a discourse marking function.

#### 4.3. You know in the social domain

As already mentioned, the three functions in the social domain are comprehension-securing, turn-taking (frequently at the same time highlighting) and turn-yielding (or confirmation-seeking). These three functions are distributed as follows over the two groups.

The total figures for adolescent talk in the social domain are nearly twice those for the adult speakers. As was pointed out above, I found only one instance of the comprehension-securing function in the LLC and I suggested that this might be due to the overall discourse function and the topics of the conversations in this corpus. Schiffrin gives quite a few examples from the American corpus of this function, which mostly tend to concern direction-giving (1987: 288). In the adolescent corpus, the comprehension-securing function mostly concerned introducing a new referent

Table 4  
*You know* as a social monitor in LLC and COLT

Corpus	Compr. sec.		Turn-taking		Turn-yielding		Total	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
LLC	1	0.3	14	5.0	29	10.4	44/279	15.7
COLT	23	8.6	31	11.0	22	7.8	76/282	26.9

into the discourse, the speaker making sure that the listener/s had enough information to identify the referent. It is also clear from the table that in the social domain, the adult speakers tended to use *you know* in order to elicit speaker involvement, whereas the adolescent speakers more frequently used the marker to take the turn (frequently also highlighting a certain item).

#### 4.4. *You know* in the metalinguistic domain

The hedging function did not occur in either age group and is therefore not represented in the table below. The table shows that the approximating function is only meagrely represented in both. The emphatic function, by contrast, is quite frequent in the adolescent group, but conspicuously absent in the adult one.

Table 5  
*You know* as a metalinguistic monitor in LLC and COLT

Corpus	Emphatic function		Approx. function		Total	
	N	%	N	%	N	%
LLC	–	–	9	3.2	9/279	3.2
COLT	45	15.9	3	1.1	48/282	17.0

As mentioned earlier, the young speakers use *you know* to further underscore an evaluative statement, thus emphasising its illocutionary force. The reason this function is absent in the adult corpus may be that the discourse types are radically different in the two corpora. The characteristic type of discourse in the adult corpus is informative, descriptive and argumentative, the interlocutors frequently asking for and providing information and describing various phenomena either at work or at home, and putting forward opinions and beliefs in various matters. The discourse in the young corpus is on the whole more jocular and expressive, the interlocutors telling each other stories or jokes, either made up or experienced, quoting sometimes lengthy pieces of dialogue that they have engaged in themselves or overheard (for a description of adolescent language, see Kotsinas, 1994). In other words, their discourse is characteristically narrative. The speakers frequently 'bring matters to a head', as it were, always seeking to take their listener/s by surprise. In fact, the main

purpose of engaging in conversation seems to be for the speaker to make the others laugh. Admittedly, sometimes their behaviour towards one another is best characterised as rough and impolite, although I am convinced that this was not always the effect it had ‘there and then’.

The approximating function is scarce in both corpora. This may be explained by the fact that there are many other markers better suited to fulfil this function. However, in the LLC corpus *you know* was occasionally used with an appealing function.

#### 4.5. Summing up

The main results as evidenced in the distribution of functions of *you know* over the two age groups show that:

##### *The textual domain*

- The LLC-speakers show much higher figures than the COLT-speakers for text-structuring and text-editing purposes (81.7%). This means that they do not primarily use the phrase to involve the listener (only about 18%). The COLT-speakers, by contrast, only use *you know* in text-oriented functions in half of the total number of instances (49.6%). In other words, slightly more than half of the instances of *you know* involved the addressee in various ways (50.4%).
- The COLT-speakers mainly use *you know* to tie pieces of discourse together at the textual level, not in the thematic organisation at the clause level.
- The LLC-speakers use *you know* considerably more often to signal repair and hesitation.

##### *The social domain*

- The COLT-speakers use *you know* more frequently to ensure listener involvement, by highlighting a new referent in the discourse, which was apparent in connection with turn-taking.
- The LLC-speakers rather used the marker to elicit a response or confirmation from the listener, i.e. the marker having a turn-yielding function.
- Only the COLT-speakers used the marker with a comprehension-securing function.

##### *The metalinguistic domain*

- The COLT-speakers use *you know* in new and more varied contexts, the marker frequently functioning as an emphasiser after an evaluative statement. There were no instances of this function in the LLC corpus.

Finally, the COLT-speakers tend to embed *you know* in larger prefabricated structures, thus ensuring fluency and presumably decreasing processing time. No such tendency is apparent among the LLC-speakers. The examples in (19) and (22) above indeed showed that certain lexical items have a tendency to co-occur with *you know*. The next section will deal with the abundance of ready-made prefabricated structures in connection with *you know* in adolescent speech.

## 5. Chunking and fluency in adolescent speech

Since the end of the 1960s there has been a growing interest in the production of fluent speech. Most research on fluency concerns temporal fluency. Many researchers agree that a prerequisite for fluency is automatic processing, which is typically fast and effortless, involving retrievals from long-term memory. Its counterpart, controlled processing, is typically slow and effortful, limited by the capacity of short-term memory and frequently causing disfluency, manifested through pauses and other hesitation phenomena (cf. Schmidt, 1992). Automatic speech takes over in recurring, standardised processing tasks, whereas controlled speech typically occurs in connection with novel and unfamiliar processing. One explanation of the quick and effortless processing in connection with automatic structures is that they are produced with little or no editing or manipulation of their internal structure, thereby considerably reducing the cognitive processing for the text producer.

Automatic structures, retrieved from memory as wholes, are not an infrequent phenomenon. For example, Jackendoff suggests that the number of fixed structures in a speaker's mental lexicon is of at least the same magnitude as the single words of the vocabulary. This is confirmed in a recent study where it was found that 40%–60% of an appreciable body of spoken and written texts consists of more or less ready-made, idiosyncratic combinations of words (Erman and Warren, 2000). In fact, it has been argued, to quote Bolinger, that “speakers do at least as much remembering as they do putting together” (Bolinger, 1976). He maintained that from a neurophysiological and psychological point of view the human brain is capable of extensive memory storage. Pawley and Syder in their article ‘Two puzzles for linguistic theory: nativelike selection and nativelike fluency’ (1983) are more specific, taking this reasoning towards a more formalised description. One of their strongest claims in this article is that in order for a speaker to be fluent, he or she has to be able to access numerous, what they call, lexicalised sentence-stems, i.e. recurrent combinations of words which speakers use again and again and which have therefore become conventionalized designations to refer to standard phenomena in a speech community. In fact, they go as far as to claim that lexicalised sentence-stems form “the *main building blocks* of fluent connected speech” (1983: 214; my italics).

According to Pawley and Syder lexicalised sentence-stems tend to cluster around words which are core members of the vocabulary of a language. They convincingly illustrate this by providing a sample list of lexicalised sentence-stems built around the verb *think* in English. The verb *know* is another core member of the vocabulary of English and the marker *you know* is one of those frequent combinations of words, which, forming part of larger prefabricated structures, in turn form lexicalised sentence-stems and can be expanded and changed in various ways (cf. Pawley and Syder, 1983: 210).

In my material, the lexicalised sentence-stems built around *you know* typically serve as openers introducing new topics, or topical aspects, thereby moving the text forward. But they also have other functions.

When comparing the speech of the two age groups, one immediately notices the tendency for adolescent talk to come out in more or less ready-made chunks, which

are presumably retrieved from memory as wholes. The most apparent consequence of this in the present study is that the adolescent speakers rarely signal that they are at a loss of words or need more time for planning. Rather, they tend to produce a stream of continuous talk, which comes out in fluent chunks involving only a minimum of hesitation and repair-work. Adult talk by contrast is frequently interrupted by pauses, the speakers sometimes going to considerable lengths to find the right word or phrase. (At least this is true of the speakers in the LLC.)

In the next section we will consider the marker *you know* embedded in larger prefabricated chunks. Some seem quite established while others take the shape of bundles of pragmatic markers stapled one upon the other. The more conventionalized ones are relatively fixed constructions, close to ‘fixed patterns’ in the Construction Grammar framework (Fillmore et al., 1988; Goldberg, 1995). The meaning and function of some of these are indeed to be found in the construction proper, i.e. neither in the meaning nor in the syntactic structure of the composite words per se, while others can be manipulated and expanded quite extensively.

### 5.1. ‘You know’ embedded in larger prefabricated structures

There are numerous examples of chunking in adolescent talk. In fact, in no less than 30% of the instances of *you know* in my material from the COLT corpus the marker forms a part of larger structures. They are listed in Table 6 and arranged in terms of frequency.

Table 6  
*You know* in prefabricated structures

Structure	
<i>do</i> if you know what I mean (like)	33
<i>you know</i> + NP (proper name, proform, etc.)	15
<i>you know how</i> (like) + S	9
<i>you know what</i> ((+NP often proper name) done (does, did))	9
<i>you know (the bit) (like) when</i> + S	7
<i>like you know</i>	3
<i>I mean you know</i>	2
<i>you know like</i>	2
<i>it's like you know when</i> + S	2
<i>you know why</i> + S	1
<i>you know whatever</i>	1
<i>guess what? you know</i> + S	1
<i>you know the thing that gets me</i>	1
<i>like cos you know like</i>	1
<i>you know just sort of like</i>	1
<i>you know I mean</i>	1
Total	89

The larger prefabricated structures with *you know* have a wide range of functions in all three functional domains outlined above. Here I will only comment on the four

top-ranking ones in the list. The most frequent prefab structure *do/if you know what I mean (like)* was evenly distributed in all three domains, notably as a discourse marker (in the text-monitoring domain), to ensure comprehension (in the social domain) and as an emphatic marker (in the metalinguistic domain). Number two in the list *you know + NP (proper name, proform, etc.)* mainly functioned as a discourse marker, more specifically as a theme-setter and foregrounding device (much like a headline), but also in the metalinguistic domain conveying emphasis. The structure ranking third *you know how (like) + S* functioned exclusively as a discourse marker introducing specification of previous discourse in the text-monitoring domain. The next structure in the list *you know what + NP (often proper name) done (does, did)* is used partly as a textual monitor, for the sake of highlighting certain elements, and partly in the metalinguistic domain, in connection with emphasis. The next two prefabricated structures in the list are quite interesting from the point of view of L1 acquisition and therefore merit some further comment.

According to Östman (1981) structures like *you know what? you know what happened?* appear quite early in a child's language. The reason for this, according to Östman, is that the child soon finds out that in order for her/him to get the adults' attention s/he has to be able to distinguish the pieces of discourse which s/he wants to highlight from those which s/he wants to keep in the background. One way the child learns this is first "through short, easily manageable, and context-bound fixed routines (like the summons-answer routine in turn-taking)" (Östman, 1981: 52). The child then learns how to extend these routines and use them in new contexts and situations. The routines *you know what? you know what happened?* as highlighting devices are sometimes learnt even before productive declarative and interrogative utterances. Furthermore, Östman distinguishes routines with *you know* which are typically topic changing, from those which are topic-maintaining. Examples of the former are *you know what? you know what happened?*, whereas the latter typically appear as *you know + Q-word + S* (Östman, 1981: 54–55). There are many examples of the topic changing structures with *you know* as well as the topic maintaining ones in the adolescent corpus. *You know what + NP (often proper name) done (does, did)* is an example of the former and *you know how (like) + S*, *you know (the bit) (like) when + S* and *it's like you know when + S* are examples of the latter. All of these structures also clearly serve as markers of social involvement and highlighters.

Schiffrin refers to larger prefabricated structures with *you know* exemplified in the list above as 'expanded frames of *you know*'. However, she confines these structures to *(Do) y'know WH-comp*, *(Do) y'know NP*, *(Do) y'know WH*, but does not offer any frequencies (1987: 288). *WH (where)-complements* mostly occur in direction-giving "where they solicit hearer information about locational knowledge" (ibid.).

In passing should be mentioned that, like *you know*, the lexeme *just* also tended to be embedded in larger prefabricated structures in adolescent language as compared to adult language, and frequently with a modal function. As was the case with *you know*, *just* turned out to have a wider positional range in the young corpus and to be used in more varied contexts (cf. Erman, 1997).

## 6. Conclusion and discussion

The overall aim of this paper was to review the functions of pragmatic markers in spoken discourse. It was suggested that the principal function of pragmatic markers is to monitor discourse. As monitors of discourse they function in three main domains: the textual domain, the social domain, and the metalinguistic domain. Although several pragmatic markers were used to illustrate these functional domains, there was particular focus on the marker *you know*, and the ways this marker is used by British English adolescent speakers. The results were compared with an earlier study of *you know* in British English adult speech from the LLC corpus. Occasional comparisons were also made to an American corpus of adult speakers. Finally, a part of the paper dealt with the tendency for adolescent speech to come out in ready-made chunks, with *you know* embedded in larger prefabricated structures. It was also hypothesized that the marker *you know* would have a wider positional range in the young corpus and be used in more varied contexts. This would in turn point to the marker being in the process of being further pragmatized.

The results of the study show clear indications of differences in the use of *you know* by adult and adolescent speakers. The most conspicuous difference between the two groups of speakers is that the marker, on the whole, is more text-oriented in adult talk in the British as well as in the American corpus, typically used in the thematic organisation of the text and as a cohesive device to bracket utterances, in both cases primarily functioning as a textual monitor. In teenage talk, by contrast, *you know* tends to function as a social as well as a metalinguistic monitor. That is to say, the marker is more oriented towards the activity of communicating, ensuring that the channel is open between speaker and hearer, and that messages are understood in accordance with the speaker's intentions. A typical context of *you know* as a social monitor was found to be with a comprehension-securing function, the speaker ensuring that s/he has been properly understood, or that the addressee agrees with the speaker's understanding of a certain reference in the text. In teenage language, *you know* is generally used also in more expressive contexts, which, in view of what we know about teenage language, is not surprising. (cf. Romaine and Lange, 1991; Kotsinas, 1994; Stenström, 1995).

Another obvious difference between the two groups is that *you know* is frequently used as part of formulaic chunks, or prefabs, thus ensuring quick processing and fluency. *You know* forming part of larger structures in adolescent speech was compared to similar tendencies for the particle *just* as evidenced in earlier studies (Erman, 1997). The results clearly show that both *you know* and *just* are used in new contexts and functions, frequently forming part of larger chunks, by adolescent speakers. The most noticeable overall function of *you know* and *just* in the teenage corpus is for the markers to have an increased modal, metalinguistic function as compared with earlier studies.

The main modal function of *you know* is that of an emphasiser, not of any particular part of the proposition, but of the illocutionary force of the utterance as a whole. The fact that *you know* in the young corpus is used to convey the speaker's

attitude, rather than organize the text and ensure coherence, points to the phrase moving in the direction of being further pragmaticalized; it thus appears more freely and in more varied contexts. In order to establish if the results gained in the present study could be said to suggest that the marker is undergoing a shift in meaning and function, we will have to look more closely at the conditions for such shifts to take place.

Results from analyses of meaning shifts and language change indeed show that linguistic items appearing in increasingly varied contexts are in the process of changing category membership. This is at the very core of language change. Recategorisation, or reanalysis, another term used for this phenomenon, can be established on the basis of two different processes. Either it is a synchronic process evidenced in the speech of different age groups at one given point in time, so that the younger speakers use the item in new contexts, whereby recategorisation is shown to have taken place. Or the data consist of comparable age groups from different time periods, where it is shown that speakers from later periods use the item in new functions and contexts, again resulting in reanalysis and language change.

However, to say, on the basis of the differences in usage accounted for here, that the marker *you know* is undergoing reanalysis would be premature at this stage, the main reason being that there are too many uncontrolled variables involved. First of all, we do not have a constant time variable, i.e. synchronic data, since there is a time interval of about thirty years between the recordings of the two groups of speakers. Secondly, we do not have a constant age variable, since the age span of the speakers in the LLC is 40 years, which means that we cannot view the results in a diachronic perspective. What we can maintain with some certainty is that the pragmatic marker *you know* has great potential for becoming further pragmaticalized, as evidenced in this study. Indeed, once this process has started the doors are open for meaning shift and language change to take place. Further pragmaticalization may eventually lead to the marker becoming fully grammaticalized; it may even end up as a bound morpheme or clitic. However, we have not seen this happen yet. In order to establish whether reanalysis of *you know* is indeed taking place we should keep an eye on this versatile marker and scrutinise the new contexts and situations in which it will no doubt appear.

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