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Pragmatic markers in contrast: The case of *well*

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Abstract

Well is the most frequently analysed discourse marker. However, its meaning still remains elusive. The question explored in this paper is to what extent a contrastive analysis of a pragmatic marker can help identify its meaning and functions. The answer to this question is supported by an analysis of the occurrences of *well* in the film *Four Weddings and a Funeral* and their functional equivalents in the Catalan and Spanish dubbed versions. The analysis provides evidence that pragmatic markers such as *well* exhibit differences in meaning when compared with logical markers such as *but*. Their meaning is fully pragmatic since it does not refer properly to a propositional content but to structural or modal discourse functions, and it can be represented as a radial category or semantic network.
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1. Introduction

Well is probably the most frequently analysed discourse marker. Different authors (e.g., Blakemore, 2002; Aijmer and Simon-Vandenbergen, 2003; González, 2004, among the most recent works) cite a number of papers and books either devoted to this item or including an analysis of its uses, such as those by Lakoff (1973), Murray (1979), Svartvik (1980), Owen (1981), Carlson (1984), Schourup (1985), Schiffrin (1987), Bolinger (1989), Watts (1989), Jucker (1993), Schourup (2001). Despite the different approaches, critically reviewed in Blakemore (2002:section 4.4), they all agree on the polysemous nature of *well* and its elusiveness.

The difficulties in identifying the different functions of certain markers are obvious, especially when the meaning of the marker must be defined in pragmatic terms. It is often hard to determine whether the meaning of a marker belongs to the marker itself or to the context. The research

question in this paper is to what extent contrastive analysis of a pragmatic discourse marker can contribute to identifying its meaning and functions.[1]

Some scholars have used methods such as commutation or paraphrase to define the meaning of discourse markers. For instance, Portolés (1998:80) groups together Spanish markers such as *por tanto* ('therefore') and *en consecuencia* ('consequently'), and illustrates their behaviour with examples such as the following:

(1)   a.   Se ha ido la luz. *Por tanto*, la televisión no marcha
           'The electricity went. Therefore, the TV set is not working'
      b.   Se ha ido la luz. *En consecuencia*, la televisión no marcha
           'The electricity went. Consequently, the TV set is not working'

In (1) the consecutive markers *por tanto* and *en consecuencia* can occur without any (or almost any) difference in meaning.

On the other hand, by commuting markers in different contexts, Portolés also observes differences among similar markers, as in the following example (1998:81):

(2)   a.   Le ha comprado un helado y, además, un juguete
      b.   Le ha comprado un helado y, encima, un juguete
           'He has bought him an ice-cream and, *además/encima* (in addition), a toy'
(3)   a.   # Le ha comprado un helado y, además, llora
      b.   Le ha comprado un helado y, encima, llora
           'He has bought him an ice-cream and, #*además* (in addition)/*encima* (however), he is crying'

Además ('in addition) and *encima* (literally, 'on top of it' and discursively equivalent to a contrastive marker) can appear in similar contexts without a change in the general meaning of sentence (2). However, in some contexts such as (3), where the global meaning is contrastive, only *encima* is acceptable.

Commutation makes it possible to establish the general meaning of a discourse marker and uncovers some differences between similar markers. However, since strict synonymy between markers is not expected, this method has obvious limitations, which increase when dealing with pragmatic markers such as *well*.

The use of paraphrase as a method to determine the meaning of a discourse marker is usually too broad and subjective to capture the different meanings and nuances of the marker easily. The paraphrase of *well* proposed by Wierzbicka (1976:360, *apud* Aijmer, 2002:20) is an example:

(4)   -I don't want more time to pass like this
      -this is well (more idiomatically: "this is all right" or "this is okay")
      -something else has to be said

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[1] Other authors have used contrastive analysis with a similar aim (e.g., Svartvik, 1980; Carlson, 1984), but not exhaustively nor dealing with parallel texts. The study by Aijmer and Simon-Vandenbergen (2003) is more similar to this research, though their analysis focuses more on the translation equivalences of *well* in Swedish and Dutch than on establishing the meaning and functions of the English marker.

As Aijmer observes, "there is always a risk that the core function (or functions) proposed for a DP [discourse particle] is too broad and therefore does not show how a DP is distinct from other DPs in the same field" (Aijmer, 2002:23).[2]

The limitations of paraphrasing were also noticed by Svartvik after his analysis of *well*: "paraphrasing different instances in context as a means of establishing its meaning, let alone defining them, did not turn out to be easy" (1980:173).

In this paper, contrastive analysis is considered an instrument for determining the pragmatic meaning of discourse markers. To illustrate and test the method, the occurrences of *well* in the film *Four Weddings and a Funeral* and their functional equivalents in the Catalan and Spanish dubbed versions are analysed. Comparison of the English excerpts with *well* and the translations into two relatively similar Romance languages can enable us to identify common strategies beyond the translator's personal style. As Aijmer and Simon-Vandenbergen (2003:1131) claim in a contrastive analysis of the Swedish and Dutch equivalents of *well*, translation and translation corpora are useful tools for identifying the meaning and function of discourse markers:[3]

> First, translations can be used to compare discourse particles in two or more languages [. . .] Secondly, if a discourse particle in the source language is shown to have been translated by a range of items in the target language, this finding forces one to consider the contextual meaning which the source language item adopts. The translations may thus highlight the contextual factors contributing to the apparent chaotic picture that such words as *well* present. Consequently, the polysemic nature of the discourse particle becomes more tangible.

The contrastive analysis of *well* makes it possible to substantiate answers to questions such as:

- To what extent can the different uses of a pragmatic marker be considered polysemic or homonymic? (See section 4).
- Is there a single core meaning of *well* or is its meaning better seen as a radial category? (See sections 5 and 6).
- Is there any empirical evidence to support the hypothesis that discourse markers such as *well* have a procedural meaning that differs from that of connectives such as *but* or *after all?* (See section 7).

The analysis presented in this paper starts by establishing the translation equivalents of *well* in the Catalan and Spanish versions of *Four Weddings and a Funeral* (section 2). The results of the contrastive analysis provide evidence of the polysemous nature of *well* and highlight the existence, already argued by several authors, of two general functions of the marker: structural and modal (section 3). In section 4, the problem of the homonymy or polysemy of the marker is addressed. Then, in light of this problem, in section 5 the focus turns to a discussion of the core meaning of *well*, which has been identified with the contrary options 'it is well' and 'it is not well'. Finally, a polysemy approach to the meaning of *well* based on radial categories is presented

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[2] Fischer (1998) presents an interesting variety of paraphrasing, based on Cruse's test-frames for lexical semantics, as a method to validate the semantic analyses of markers.

[3] An audiovisual corpus is especially useful for this kind of analysis because a dubbed text is more similar to real conversation than are other fictional texts. Although dubbing is a complex mode of translation and contextual factors can affect the final outcome, this does not seem to be the case in the film under analysis (see Cuenca, 2006). *Four Weddings and a Funeral* was chosen because it includes a great quantity and variety of discourse markers, and the dubbed versions in Spanish and Catalan show different translation strategies even though they are linguistically related (as shown in Table 1, section 2 below). All versions were transcribed directly from the videotape, and the examples including *well* were classified in a database program (Access).

(section 6), and the procedural meaning of the marker is discussed by contrasting its translation with that of the adversative conjunction *but* (section 7). The conclusion summarizes the findings and points out the importance of contrastive analysis as a tool for analysing the meaning of pragmatic discourse markers.

2. Translation equivalents of *well*

It is generally recognised that *well* can be used as a manner adverb or as a discourse marker. These two uses can be compared in the following example:

(5)　　Charles:　　　　**Well**, how are you?
　　　　　　　　　　　Cat. **Què?** Com estàs?
　　　　　　　　　　　Sp. ***Dime**, ¿cómo estás?*
　　　　Carrie:　　　　I am really **well**. (FW, 43:10)[4]
　　　　　　　　　　　Cat. Estic molt **bé**.
　　　　　　　　　　　Sp. *Estoy muy **bien**.*

In the first occurrence in this example, *well* is a discourse marker: it is appositional, sentence initial, and introduces a question. In Carrie's response (*I am really well*), *well* is an adverb and functions as the key element in an attributive predicate indicating that the speaker is feeling fine. As a discourse marker, it has been translated non-literally in both Romance languages (Cat. *què*, lit. 'what?, so?'; Sp. *dime*, lit. 'tell me'), whereas as an adverb, it has been translated literally as Cat. *bé* and Sp. *bien*. In fact, as an adverb, *well* is usually translated by Cat. *bé* and Sp. *bien*. The contrastive analysis of *well* in the film *Four Weddings and a Funeral*, however, highlights the fact that, as a pragmatic marker, *well* is translated by a wide range of possibilities according to different facets of its meaning (Table 1).

Table 1
Translations of the pragmatic marker *well*[5]

Catalan			Spanish		
Equivalent	*n*	(%)	Equivalent	*n*	(%)
			bueno 'good'	19	33.9
Omission	26	46.4	Omission	14	25.0
doncs 'so'	9	16.1	*pues* 'so'	7	12.5
bé 'well'	6	10.7	*bien* 'well'	3	5.3
Integration	5	8.9	Integration	5	8.9
Others: *eh, oh, uh, però; sí; quan, quan; val, val; què?; és clar*	10	17.9	Others: *eh, oh, uh; pero; dime; a… a lo mejor; ¿qué?; qué sorpresa*	8	14.3
Total	56	99.9		56	99.9

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[4] At the end of each of the English examples from the film, the location of the fragment has been added: *FW* stands for the title of the film (*Four Weddings and a Funeral*), and the figures identify the time in the tape: (hour:) minute: second. The Catalan and Spanish correspondences are restricted to the turn including *well*, though some further context in English is generally transcribed in order to make the fragment more understandable.

[5] The standard chi-square measure of association among nominal variables was applied to the results in Table 1. The probability results obtained ($p < 0.001$) reject the null-hypothesis and reveal the statistical relevance of the data, i.e. the translation of *well* is dependent on which of the target languages is used, Catalan or Spanish.

The discourse marker Sp. *bueno* (lit. 'good'), the closest equivalent of the English pragmatic marker *well*, is predominant in the Spanish version (19 examples out of 56, 33.9%). *Bueno* is an adjective corresponding to Cat. *bo*, which is not used as a pragmatic marker in standard Catalan.[6] In the Catalan dubbed version of the film omission is clearly the preferred option (26 examples, 46.4%), and this option is also frequent in Spanish (14 examples, 25%). The consecutive markers, Cat. *doncs* (*bé*) and Sp. *pues* 'so', are the third most frequent option for translating *well* (16.1% and 12.5%, respectively).[7] Finally, the literal translations of *well* as an adverb (Cat. *bé*, Sp. *bien*) are scarcely used in Catalan (6 examples out of 56, 10.7%) and Spanish (3 examples out of 56, 5.3%).

The main tendencies in the translation of *well* can be observed in the following examples, which are part of the same take:

(6) Carrie: Hi.
     Charles: Hi. Hiyah. I thought you'd gone.
     Carrie: No, not yet. I was just wondering where you're staying tonight.
     Charles: Oh, **well**, I was staying at some pub, called the Lucky … the Boat, or something like … (FW, 23:49)

         Cat. **Doncs bé**, em volia quedar a la Barca de la Sort o alguna cosa per l'estil.
         Sp. *Oh.* ***Pues***, *iba a dormir en un albergue que se llama algo de animales, El pato no se qué …*

(7) Carrie: Boatman.
     Charles: Right. But now I'm going to stay at some friend's house with some friends. **Well**, I say 'house' – I think 'enormous castle' is a more accurate description. (FW, 24:10)

         Cat. *Sí, però al final em quedaré a casa d'uns amics amb … uns amics.* **Ø Encara que** *digui casa és més apropiat dir castell.*
         Sp. *Eso es. Pero al final, me quedaré en casa de unos amigos … con unos amigos.* ***Bueno***, *he dicho casa* ***pero*** *sería más acertado decir castillo.*

(8) Carrie: Oh, that's too bad 'cos I'm at the Boatman.
     Charles: Oh.
     Carrie: **Well**, it was nice not quite meeting you. It was a great speech. (FW, 24:23)

         Cat. **Bé**, ha estat distret haver-te conegut una mica. Un discurs preciós.
         Sp. ***Bueno***, *ha sido … bonito haberte casi conocido. Un discurso precioso.*

(9) Charles: Thanks.
     Carrie: **Well**, I'm going now.
     Charles: No. No, no, no. Don't go. No, no. (FW, 24:25)

         Cat. *Ø Me n'haig d'anar.*
         Sp. ***Bueno***, *me marcho.*

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[6] *Bueno* is also used in Catalan informal speech as a discourse marker which alternates with *bé* (see González, 1998, 2004). However, since it is a borrowing from Spanish (a lexical transcodic item, in the terms of Vila, 1998), its use is not accepted in standard texts such as film translation.

[7] Rojo and Valenzuela (1995) analyse the possible translations of Sp. *pues* in a book of short stories and propose *well* as an alternative for several uses of the Spanish marker.

In (6), Charles is nervous at Carrie's question about the place where he is spending the night, and he answers by using what he considers to be an incomplete answer prefaced by *Oh, well*. In this case, the marker is translated by a consecutive marker (Cat. *doncs bé*, Sp. *Oh. pues*). After that, Charles gets to the point and reformulates the first part of his statement by using *well*, which is translated by *bueno* associated with *pero* 'but' in Spanish, while in Catalan only a concessive conjunction *encara que* ('although') appears (7). In the following examples, *well* precedes two pre-closing statements from Carrie, translated by *bueno* in Spanish, while in Catalan it is firstly translated by *bé* (8) and secondly omitted (9).

The previous examples show the main translation strategies for *well*: a directly related counterpart (Cat. *bé*, Sp. *bueno*), a continuative-consecutive marker (Cat. *doncs*, Sp. *pues*), and the omission of the marker. However, integration is also used as a specific translation strategy for *well* combined with other markers, as in (10):

(10) Carrie: [. . .] So I noticed the bride and groom didn't kiss in the church which is kind
                 of strange. Where I come from, kissing is very big.
     Charles: Is it? **Yes, well**, I think you're right. I think we are probably more reserved,
                 you know. (FW 30:57)
                 Sp. ¿*Ah, sí*? **Tal vez** *tengas razón. Probablemente, aquí seamos más reservados.*

In cases like (10), the combination *yes, well* corresponds to a single lexical item indicating doubt (Sp. *tal vez* 'maybe'), so that the meanings of the two English components are integrated.

These results are consistent with other contrastive studies based on English texts and their translation into different European languages, such as Bazzanella (1999) and Bazzanella and Morra (2000) for Italian; Aijmer and Simon-Vandenbergen (2003) for Swedish and Dutch; Sol (2003), González and Sol (2004), and Matamala (2004:section 7.4) for Catalan. The former are based on a corpus of translated fiction, while the papers contrasting English and Catalan analyse audiovisual texts: a dubbed film (*Pulp Fiction*) and sitcoms, respectively.[8]

In spite of the differences in corpora and languages, there are some conclusions common to all the analyses that may be highlighted (see Cuenca, 2006):

(a) There is a wide range of translations of English *well*.
(b) The most direct counterparts of *well* do not exceed 40% and in some languages are relatively
    infrequent.
(c) Although semantic cognates of *well* exist in all the languages studied, they are not very
    frequently used, so a tendency toward non-literality can be observed in almost all cases.[9]
(d) The most regular correspondences of *well* identified in the different languages share semantic
    origins (continuity and contrastive markers, forms indicating agreement and affirmation),
    though they exhibit different frequencies and contexts of use.
(e) The omission of *well* can be observed in all corpora, and it is sometimes very frequent.

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[8] Other contrastive studies have been based on parallel oral texts, such as García and Martínez (2005), who compare the use of *well* with Sp. *bueno* in oral texts; Romero (2002), who contrasts the use of discourse markers (including *well*) by native and non-native (Spanish) speakers of English; Müller (2004), who deals with the use of *well* by American and German students; and, finally, González (2004:sections 5.1.1 and 6.1.1), who analyses the use of *well* in English and *bé* and *bueno* in Catalan oral narratives. These studies show differences in the functions and frequency of *well* and its closest equivalents in the languages under analysis.

[9] Aijmer and Simon-Vandenbergen (2003:1149) also point out the tendency toward non-literality. Considering the different contrastive analyses cited, the closest equivalent of *well* would be Spanish *bueno*, as noted by García and Martínez (2005). However, García and Martínez also observe some differences in the functions that *well* and *bueno* carry out, and in the frequency of use of some common functions such as attenuation.

In short, non-literal translation and omission of the marker are the most outstanding strategies identified in the contrastive studies reviewed. Omission is very frequent in many contexts and in different contrastive corpora dealing with both *well* (see Cuenca, 2006) and other pragmatic markers.[10] In fact, omission is the most frequent strategy in the three Catalan-English corpora that have been mentioned: 46.4% of the examples in *Four Weddings and a Funeral*, 46% of the cases in Matamala's (2004) corpus, and 35.5% in González and Sol's (2004) complete corpus. It is also frequent in the Spanish dubbed version of *Four Weddings* (25%).[11]

To sum up, the different possibilities for translating *well* provide evidence for its polysemous nature and further confirm Aijmer and Simon-Vandenbergen's hypothesis:

> If an item in the source language is translated by a wide range of target language items, this variety will bring the polysemic nature of the item in question into focus more clearly. (2003:1154)

Consequently, the aim of many authors of identifying a single meaning of *well* should be revised.

3. The meaning(s) of *well*

The examples in *Four Weddings* show different functions of *well*, which, along the lines of Svartvik (1980) and Carlson (1984), can be grouped into structural (or frame) and modal (or qualifying) functions.[12] When *well* has a structural function, it usually indicates the opening or closing of a discourse unit, as in (11):

(11)   Scarlett: One, two, three, smile!
        Tom: This is splendid tuck.
        Fiona: Yes, I think I might say a little word.
        Scarlett: Yeah.
        Fiona: **Well**, as many of you know, I have been a close observer of Charles' love life for many years now, but recently I've started to despair, and fear that really he was married to us lot- apart from the fact that we won't have his babies.
              (FW 1:31:48)

In (11) Fiona starts her speech with *well*. The marker indicates a boundary and a change in the discourse structure. The structural use of *well* in (11) has been translated as *bé* in Catalan and as *bueno* in Spanish.

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[10] Chaume (2004) compares the omission of *now* and *oh* in different Spanish versions of *Pulp Fiction* (written, dubbed, and subtitled). His analysis shows that subtitling increases omission, while dubbing exhibits lower figures (i.e. a lower rate of omission), more similar to written translation, in which the markers can be maintained more easily since there are no external conditioning factors. However, all translation versions use omission as a frequent translation strategy for some discourse markers.

[11] Omission can be attributed to different factors, such as the belief that pragmatic markers do not carry meaning, or the process of synchronization in dubbing. However, omission is also frequent in written translation, as some of the papers referred to in this section show. As regards *Four Weddings*, only in two cases of omission, in both Spanish and Catalan, is the character present but the lips are not completely visible all the time. In Catalan only in three cases can the lips not be seen, and in one case the speaker is off screen. Interestingly, in these four cases, which are supposed to favour omission, *well* has not been deleted in Spanish.

[12] There are many different classifications of the functions of *well*. However, this two-fold classification seems to be the most generally adopted (cf. Aijmer, 2002:13; Bazzanella and Morra, 2000:152), since it also covers the description of other markers. In fact, it can be related to Halliday's classic theory of three levels of discourse: ideational, textual, and interpersonal, where textual and interpersonal are the concepts that roughly correspond to structural and modal functions, respectively.

In an intermediate position inside a turn, *well* can occupy a transition slot and can express reformulation or change of topic, as is the case in (12), or it can convey doubt and the need to search for the adequate form of expression, as in (13).

(12) Charles: Tom, are you the richest man in England?
       Tom: Oh, no. No. I believe we're about seventh. The Queen, obviously . . .
       Charles: Right.
       Tom: . . . that Branson bloke's doing terribly well. **Well**, excellent news. I'll go and
                 tell Scarlett. (FW, 23:20)

(13) Charles: Oh, look. Sorry, sorry. I . . . I just . . . **Well**, this is a really stupid question,
                 particularly in view of our recent shopping excursion, but I . . . I just
                 wondered if by any chance, I mean, obviously not, because I am just
                 some git who's only slept with nine people, but I just wondered, I really
                 feel (hm) . . . In short, to recap in a slightly clearer version in the words
                 of David Cassidy, in fact, while he was still with the Partridge Family,
                 "I think I love you". (FW 1:06:28)

In example (12), *well* indicates the recovering of the previous topic (the place where they are going to sleep) and also precedes a closing statement. It has been translated by Cat. *bé* and Sp. *bien*, markers typically associated with structural functions. In (13), however, Charles is trying to find a way to express his feelings properly. The use of different discourse markers helps him elaborate his speech and put off saying something that is a highly face-threatening act (declaring his love for Carrie). In this case, the marker has been deleted in Catalan and translated by *bueno* in Spanish.

The modal functions of *well* range from (qualified) agreement to contraposition. *Well* can indicate partial agreement, doubt, (partial) disagreement, and contraposition.

(14) Carrie: Charles, I'd like for you to meet Hamish, my fiancée.
       Charles: Excellent. Excellent. How do you do, Hamish. Delighted to meet you.
                 Charming surprise to find Carrie back in the country.
       Hamish: **Yes, well**, took a lot of persuading, I can tell you. (FW, 43:25)

In (14), *well* is restricting the positive meaning of *yes* so that the combination indicates partial agreement in the sense that it introduces an utterance that partially contradicts the implicit assumption in Charles' statement (i.e. that Carrie wanted to be back in the UK). The combination *yes, well* has been translated by an adversative conjunction in Catalan (*però* 'but') and the same conjunction combined with *yes* in Spanish (*sí, pero*). Therefore, both translations reinforce the contrastive function of *well* in this context.

The next use of *well* (15) prefaces a statement indicating contraposition to the one expressed in the previous turn. It has been deleted in both translations, probably because the sentence-final marker *actually* maintains the contrast.

(15) Charles: Oh, God, I'm depressed, Hen. How are you?
       Henrietta: **Well**, I'm cheerful, actually. I weigh almost nothing and I've got a divine
                   new boyfriend. (FW 1:12:53)

From a contrastive perspective, as established in the previous section and extensively discussed in Cuenca (2006), the discourse marker *well* exhibits a wide range of Spanish and Catalan equivalents which highlight the different interpretations that this English discourse marker can receive depending on its contexts of use. Although there do not seem to be clear-cut corre-

spondences between the most common translations of *well* in *Four Weddings and a Funeral* and the specific meanings that the marker expresses, some tendencies can be outlined:

(a) Structural functions are translated using different expressions, but Cat. *bé* and Sp. *bien* are usually restricted to this kind of function.
(b) Modal meanings are translated as *bueno* or *pues* in Spanish; omission can also occur in Spanish and is the most frequent option in Catalan.
(c) Combinations with *well* exhibit a modal meaning and are not usually omitted. However, sometimes a component of the combination in English is deleted when translated, or the combination is translated into a single lexical item that integrates the meaning of the original English combination.
(d) Omission tends to occur with modal or modal-structural meanings in Spanish, and covers all kinds of meanings in Catalan.

These tendencies in translation support the proposal of two different general though intertwined meanings of *well*: structural and modal.[13] When the structural function dominates, it can precede opening or closing statements and indicate a pause or a change of topic or orientation in conversation. Although different equivalents are possible, structural meanings are typically translated as Cat. *bé* and Sp. *bien*. When the modal function is outstanding, *well* can indicate either (partial) agreement, doubt, (partial) disagreement, or contraposition. *Well* with a modal meaning and uncombined is more frequently deleted than when it has a structural function.

4. Multifunctionality: homonymy or polysemy?

The multifunctionality of discourse markers like *well* or *oh* is well-established, both theoretically and empirically.[14] However, there are different positions concerning how to deal with multifunctionality. Jucker (1993:437) lists three possible ways:

> The first solution is to say that a particular discourse marker, for instance *well*, is ambiguous and requires several separate entries in a lexicon. The second solution is to say that all uses can be related to one core meaning. The third solution, finally, does not accept the polyfunctionality but claims that – properly understood – all uses can be summarised under one general description.

Aijmer (2002:19) claims that the traditional way is homonymy (Jucker's first solution): "This implies specifying a large number of meanings corresponding to the different contexts in which the discourse particle occurs ('meaning maximalism')." The problem with homonymy, as Carlson points out, is that it does not have an upper limit with items like discourse markers, as each one seems "to have next to no value on its own", because "context gives it a quite distinct and unmistakable colouring" (1984:28). However, leaving aside the consideration that some discourse markers have no value on their own and are (fully) context dependent, the point is that homonymy does not provide a good solution to the problem of multifunctionality.

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[13] Aijmer and Simon-Vandenbergen conclude: "Some of the translations focus on the textual function of *well* (boundary marking, topic introducer, signalling elaboration, flagging a conclusion), others highlight its interpersonal function (marker of surprise, resignation, hesitation or intensifier)". See also Svartvik (1980:176).
[14] In the introduction to a volume on discourse markers, Fischer (2006) identifies the problem of multifunctionality as one of the most important when dealing with discourse particles. The volume includes papers adopting different methodological approaches.

Jucker's third solution seems to be the aim of almost all researchers in this area, namely finding one core meaning. Carlson (1984:34) illustrates this position:

> In one sense, there is just one meaning to *well* [...]. Further subdivisions of its uses are based on a classification of conversational situations, and given the open endedness of dialogue, there is no definite upper limit to the fineness of that partition.

Aijmer (2002:21) calls this option 'meaning minimalism' or 'methodical minimalism' (as opposed to 'meaning maximalism', i.e. homonymy). Aijmer refers to Hansen (1998) as an example of minimalism when she argues that the French adjective *bon* and the discourse marker *bon* are "two uses of the same item, and not a pair of homonymous expressions" (1998:89).[15] However, it must be noted that the polysemy of *well* or *bon* can be defended on semantic grounds, but the equivalence in the morpho-syntactic behaviour of the adjective/adverb and the discourse marker is harder to argue, since grammaticalised discourse markers and their sources exhibit distinctly different categorial behaviours.

Jucker (1993) and Aijmer (2002) propose an intermediate solution, which implies that "all uses can be summarised under one general description" (Jucker, 1993:437) or, more precisely, that a marker "can have different functions, which are related to a prototype or core in a polysemous way" (Aijmer, 2002:21). Specifically, Jucker (1993) describes *well* as a signpost of a deviation from optimal relevance. He differentiates four main uses of *well*, namely, marker of insufficiency, face-threat mitigator, frame marking device, and delay device. Similarly, Aijmer and Simon-Vandenbergen (2003) think of *well* as a positive appraisal device indicating the speaker's heteroglossic stance, and differentiate three uses: textual, interpersonal, and phatic.

As will be argued in section 6, an alternative version of the intermediate solution is possible by considering the cognitive linguistics concept of radial category. In this case, there is no need for a single core meaning, as two (or more) interrelated meanings can be considered core meanings. In order to understand the implications of this proposal better, the more general position that considers a single core meaning for *well* will be further examined in the next section.

5. The core meaning of *well*

Most studies of *well* have the main objective of determining its core meaning, a common denominator which can capture all its uses. Blakemore (2002:section 4.4) classifies the different accounts of this pragmatic marker into two groups:

(a) Proposals assuming that *well* indicates that something is not well in conversation ('it is not well'): e.g., R. Lakoff's (1973) insufficiency of response, Svartvik's (1980) shift of topic focus in discourse, Schiffrin's (1987) lack of coherence, Jucker's (1993) deviation from optimal relevance.[16]

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[15] More precisely, Hansen (1998:96) considers *bon* (both as an adjective and a discourse marker) to be a case of "heterosemy":

> [a case] (within a single language) where two or more meanings and functions that are historically related, in the sense of deriving from the same ultimate source, are borne by reflexes of the common source element that belong in different morphosyntactic categories [...].

[16] Similarly, Murray (1979) relates its use in answers to the speaker's awareness that it is not quite what was wanted; Greasley (1994) defines *well* as a signal of a perceived problem in the preceding dialogue move and/or a problem or difficulty in responding.

(b) Proposals relating *well* as a pragmatic marker to its original adverbial use. These approaches consider that the core meaning of the discourse marker coincides with its adverbial meaning ('it is well'): e.g., Carlson's (1984) acceptance of a move in a dialogue game, Bolinger's (1989) acceptance of a norm, Blakemore's (2002) treatment of *well* as a go-ahead signal, Aijmer and Simon-Vandenbergen's (2003) signalling of positive appraisal (speaker's heteroglossic stance).[17]

It seems difficult to reconcile such contradictory positions. However, the following observations may help us solve the contradiction:

(a) Almost every definition of the meaning and/or uses of *well* includes negative words, even in the case of 'it is well' proposals. Carlson (1984), Blakemore (2002), and Aijmer and Simon-Vandenbergen (2003) allude to this tendency (my italics):

> [. . . *well*] is motivated in two different types of non-obvious decision situations:
>
> (i) acceptance of a *suboptimal* (*defective or indifferent*) situation.
> (ii) acceptance of an *exceptional (transition or inexplicit)* situation. (Carlson, 1984:31)

> What it [*well*] encodes is the information that the utterance is relevant. What justifies its uses – in the utterances just discussed – is the speaker's belief that certain assumptions are *not manifest* to the hearer. (Blakemore, 2002:144)

> We have proposed that *well* has the core meaning of positive appraisal. Its core function is to express the speaker's *heteroglossic* stance, signalling awareness of *heterogeneity*, and more specifically *counterexpectation*. (Aijmer and Simon-Vandenbergen, 2003:1130)

(b) As already shown, *well* can convey contrary meanings (see also Aijmer and Simon-Vandenbergen, 2003:1129, 1144; Bazzanella and Morra, 2000:153). *Well* as a modal or interactional marker, in the terms of Andersen's description of interactional markers (2001:73), can either indicate alignment (agreement) or divergence (disagreement). In structural uses, it can open a unit (conversation, narration, or unit in a conversation or narration, including reported speech) or pre-close it, signalling the borders of a closing statement.

(c) Several authors have related *well*, or some of its uses, to contrastive conjunctions (e.g., Aijmer and Simon-Vandenbergen, 2003:1124, 1144; Carlson, 1984:42; Norrick, 2001; Schiffrin, 1987:118–119; Smith and Jucker, 2000). Most of them assume that *well* expresses a modified or mitigated opposition, in contrast with *but* and other conjunctions.[18]

The conflict that underlies the contrary positions on this matter is that of the positive meaning of the adverb *well* and the elusive positive-negative uses of the pragmatic marker. It is clear that, although the core meaning of *well* can be conceived positively, most of its uses imply some degree of insufficiency or negativity. Greasley (1994:493) views this meaning as an implicature:

> [. . .] if, as Carlson and Wierzbicka argue, the adverb *well* developed currency as a particle in the form of a sign of acceptance (*that is well, alright*, etc.), but only to be used due to a

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[17] See also Schourup (1985, 2001) and de Klerk (2005).

[18] Schiffrin establishes a graduation in appreciating: *but, well, and, so*; she considers *well* similar to *but* except that *well* is softer. Similarly, Smith and Jucker (2000) deal with *actually, in fact*, and *well* as markers of apparent discrepancy and conclude that the difference between *well* and *in fact* is that the former is downgrading, while the latter is upgrading.
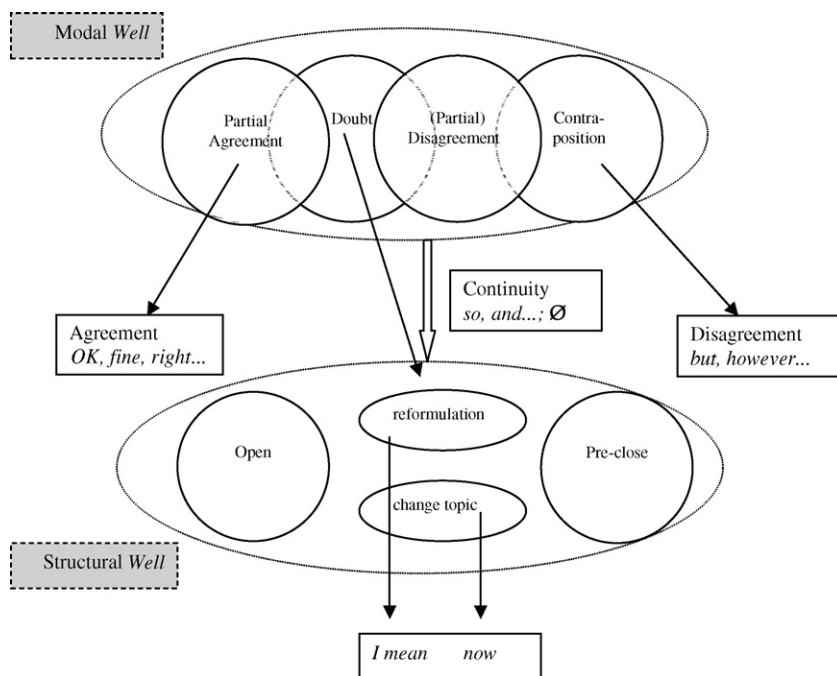
Fig. 1. Semantic network for *well*.

> qualification in the discourse, *when there is some problem of acceptance*, then such uses may come to form a standard implicature (*that is not well, not alright*, etc.) and thereby invert its original meaning. Hence, *well* becomes a signal of a kind of 'non-acceptance' – a problem, difficulty, insufficiency, qualification, disbelief, etc. (Greasley's italics)

All in all, it is clear that *well* includes a tension between its literal (positive) meaning and its non-literal (somehow negative) meaning. By observing this problem within the theoretical framework of cognitive linguistics, and specifically taking into consideration the concept of radial category, it may be possible to shed more light on this matter.

6. The meaning of *well* as a radial category

Radial categories are abstract representations of relationships between members of a category (see G. Lakoff, 1987). They have proved useful for representing polysemy because they relate senses of the same word using a prototype structure.[19] In a radial category or semantic network some senses are closely related, whereas others are more peripheral and unrelated.

As Fig. 1 shows, the semantic network of *well* can be thought of as a radial category with two main meanings (prototype foci), modal and structural, which include different interrelated meanings.

The meanings within each focus occupy the space between almost opposite poles: partial agreement and contraposition within the modal focus, and opening and pre-closing function

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[19] For an updated account of polysemy within the framework of Cognitive Linguistics, see Tyler and Evans (2001). Silva (2006) also proposes a radial network for representing the polysemy of the Portuguese discourse marker *pronto*.

within the structural focus. The meanings in each space form a gradual cline including multiple relationships with other elements, namely, conjunctions (*and, but*), parenthetical connectives (*so, however, I mean, now*), and interjections (*OK, fine, right*). These elements indicate agreement, disagreement, continuity, and reformulation, so the meanings that they convey can be considered as overlapping or bordering on the meaning(s) of *well*.

The translation equivalents of *well* in Catalan and Spanish support this interpretation. As noted in section 2, different contrastive analyses of the translation of *well* into various European languages identify regular correspondences with similar semantic origins, namely, continuity and contrastive markers, as well as forms indicating agreement and affirmation. By the same token, if we observe the backtranslation of the basic counterparts of *well* (Sp. *bueno, bien*; Cat. *bé*) in the Spanish and Catalan dubbed versions of *Four Weddings and a Funeral*, we find English forms indicating agreement (*fine, good, right, OK*), continuity (*so*), and reformulation (*I mean*). Contrastive analysis, therefore, provides evidence in support of the radial structure of *well* proposed here, and of the fuzzy limits between *well* and other discourse markers.

There are also internal relationships between the different meanings of the marker. This view accounts for the fact, well established by different authors, that the meanings of *well* are not exclusive but sometimes compatible and concurrent (cf. Jucker, 1993; Andersen, 2001:64).

In fact, the meaning of *well* is often difficult to establish, since it may be so general, or its potential meanings may be so closely related, that modal and structural functions cannot always be dissociated, as in the following case:

(16) Lady: Tell me, are you married?
      Fiona: No.
      Lady: Are you a lesbian?
      Fiona: Good Lord! What made you say that?
      Lady: **Well**, it is one of the possibilities for unmarried girls. It is a bit more interesting than saying "Oh, dear, just never found the right chap". Eh? (FW, 45:30)

Well in (16) is a follow-up marker and a response initiator (structural), but it also exhibits a modal value related to contraposition of ideas and politeness.

In short, considering the examples analysed in the film under study and the results of the contrastive analysis of *well* discussed above, the meaning of *well* can be seen as a radial network of related meanings within two cores, that of modal functions and that of structural functions. However, a further question can still be posed: Are there any core features of *well*? Fig. 1 suggests that it is possible to identify two core features of the marker, namely, continuity and downtoning. Svartvik (1980:177) refers to a similar idea when he defines the function of *well* as follows:

> *Well* signals a modification or partial change in the discourse, i.e. it introduces a part of the discourse that has something in common with what went before but also differs from it to some degree.

As highlighted in several studies, *well* is both retrospective and prospective: it presupposes an existing previous context to which the forthcoming utterance is a qualified response, and it indicates that such an utterance is about to come. More specifically, modal uses have been tied to its retrospective nature, and structural uses, to its prospective one, as Svartvik (1980:177) suggests:

> Again, the distinction [between qualifier and frame] parallels that between backgrounding and foregrounding. In its qualifying, referring function, *well* may be seen as a device for backgrounding old information which is common ground (when the utterance prefaced by *well* agrees with, reinforces, challenges the views, etc., of the previous speaker) as well as a device for foregrounding the pragmatic function of the following contribution (such as indicating insufficiency). In its framing, proclaiming function *well* may be seen as a device for foregrounding new information, such as announcing a new topic, a new start, etc.

Continuity corresponds to the transitional quality invoked by Wierzbicka (*apud* Schourup, 2001:1058) or Schiffrin's definition of *well* as a response marker.[20]

On the other hand, several authors have observed that *well*, when used to introduce an utterance, is a downtoning or downgrading device. For instance, Owen (1981:110) relates the use of *well* to a face-threatening act:

> Thus we can describe *well*, used to preface a second pair-part which is also a face-threatening act, as a strategy for signalling that a face-threat is about to occur, thereby giving attention to alter's face and reducing the subsequent threat.

In a similar vein, Bolinger (1989:316) states that "*well* is simply *used* as an agent for smoothing the seams and contradictions in discourse." Stenström (1994:112–115) describes uses of *well* in objecting utterances as an uptake having a shock-absorbing effect; she also relates the use of this marker to answers that give inadequate information or consciously avoid answering, so that a threat shows up (see also García and Martínez, 2005; Finell, 1989; Jucker, 1993:section 4; Schourup, 2001; Smith and Jucker, 2000, 2002).

In conclusion, the broad meaning of *well* and the variety of uses that it exhibits correlate with the different translation equivalents found in the contrastive studies reviewed here. The number of publications devoted to its description indirectly demonstrates the semantic complexity of this kind of discourse markers, whose meaning can only be determined on pragmatic grounds. *Well* is probably the best example of this semantic and functional complexity, to which Andersen (2001:81) refers in terms of "functional levels":

> The reason why pragmatic markers constitute such a complex category is that they can be primarily associated with one of the three functional levels; that is to say, some markers are predominantly textual, others predominantly subjective, and yet others predominantly interactional.

The pragmatic marker *well* can be associated with the three functional levels differentiated by Andersen. The meanings that I have considered modal (or qualifying in other authors' terminology) are subjective and interactional, while the structural uses of *well* can be seen as textual.

7. The procedural meaning of *well*

Contrastive analysis not only supports the radial category description of pragmatic markers such as *well*, but it also has other important theoretical implications related to the procedural nature of its meaning. The analysis of *well* has led Blakemore (2002:147) to the conclusion that procedural meaning is not a unified concept. Procedural information is different in the case of

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[20] Bolinger (1989:316) claims that "the discourse particles with the closest equivalence to *well* are probably *so* and *after all*, the one expressing a consequence and the other a succession".

Table 2
Translations of *but* in the Catalan and Spanish versions of *Four Weddings*

Equivalents of *but*	Catalan	Spanish
Cat. *però*/Sp. *pero* 'but'	25	26
Contrastive		
Cat. *no ... sinó* 'not ... but'	1	
Sp. *sin embargo* 'however'		1
Sp. *aunque* 'although'		1
Cat. *i*/Sp. *y* 'and'	2	1
Omission	5	4
Free translation of excerpt	2	2
Total	35	35

well, when compared with that of conjunctions and parenthetical connectives such as *but, so, however*, and *after all*:

> [...] in contrast with *so* and *but*, *well* does not activate a particular cognitive effect but simply encodes the speaker's guarantee that his utterance yields cognitive effects.

From a contrastive point of view, this hypothesis can be substantiated by the fact that markers like *but* or *after all*, which are more linked to the propositional level, receive a more consistent translation than markers like *well*, which are more linked to pragmatic levels of discourse construction. An analysis of the translations of *but* in *Four Weddings* illustrates the hypothesis (Table 2). A frequency analysis reveals that on most occasions *but* is translated as its verbatim equivalent, Cat. *però* (71.43%) and Sp. *pero* (74.28%).

(17)   Scarlett: Hello. My name's Scarlett. Named after Scarlett
                         O'Hara **but** much less trouble. What's your name?
         Chester: My name's Rhett. (FW, 1:11:58)

> Cat. Hola. Em dic Scarlett. Com l'Scarlett O'Hara, **però** sóc menys problemàtica. Com et dius?
> Sp. *Hola. Me llamo Scarlett. Por lo de Scarlett O'Hara **pero** soy menos problemática. ¿Tú cómo te llamas?*

In contrast with the translation of *well*, the omission of *but* is not very frequent and usually takes place when *but* is combined with an adverb or another marker, such as the question tag in (18):

(18)   Carrie: What do you think?
         Charles: You are kidding.
         Carrie: **But** it would be wonderful, *wouldn't it?*
    Maybe next time. (FW 1:00:09)

> Cat. Ø Seria una meravella, oi? La pròxima vegada.
> Sp. Ø *No me negarás que es precioso. Tal vez la próxima vez.*

In the previous example, *but* and the tag *wouldn't it?* have been translated as an idiomatic predicative construction in Spanish, *no me negarás que* ... ('you will not deny that ...'), whereas in Catalan the adversative conjunction has been deleted and only the tag has been translated (*oi*? 'huh?').

Table 3
General strategies used to translate *well* and *but*

Strategies	Well				But			
	Catalan		Spanish		Catalan		Spanish	
	n	*%*	*n*	*%*	*n*	*%*	*n*	*%*
Literal	6	10.7%	22	39.2%	25	71.4%	26	74.3%
Omission	26	46.4%	14	25%	5	14.3%	4	11.4%
Others	24	42.9%	20	35.7%	5	14.3%	5	14.3%
Total	56		56		35		35	

The differences in the translation of *well* and *but* are shown in Table 3. The data clearly indicate a more stable translation of *but* and a higher level of coincidence between the two dubbed versions regarding *but* than regarding *well*. This confirms the idea that conjunctions like *but*, from the perspective of the ideational or propositional level, have a more precise meaning and are less conditioned by context, though contextual effects can also be noticed in the case of combinations.

8. Conclusions

Contrastive analysis is an indirect way of highlighting the polysemous nature of pragmatic markers and identifying the precise meanings that they can activate. The analysis of *well* in the film *Four Weddings and a Funeral* and its Catalan and Spanish versions, although restricted to a limited number of cases, supports several conclusions, which either confirm or challenge certain hypotheses about *well* found in the literature, such as:

(a) *Well* is a polysemous marker. Its meanings are organized into two broad spaces: that of modal functions and that of structural functions. These functions are not mutually exclusive but related in a number of ways. The analysis of *well* leads to the conclusion that its meaning may be better represented as a radial category including interactive meanings (such as agreement, which is very similar to the adverbial use of *well*) and pure textual meanings (such as change of topic or pause). Some of the meanings are related to each other and also to other markers.

(b) Two core features of *well* can be identified, namely, continuity and downtoning. *Well* is both forward and backward-looking since, at least in its prototypical uses, it indicates a reaction to a previous utterance, while it also opens up the expectation of another utterance. It acts as a filter for the second utterance by announcing that some change in attitude, expectations, or text structure is about to take place. Continuity is more directly associated with the structural functions of *well*, whereas downtoning is associated with the modal functions and politeness.

(c) The meaning of discourse markers like *well* is different in nature from the procedural meaning of logical markers such as *but, however*, or *after all*. The latter receive a more stable translation in dubbing. The meanings and translations of *well* are closer to interjections, as can be proved by comparing the analysis of the translations of *well* with the contrastive analysis of expressive interjections (Cuenca, 2002, 2004).[21]

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[21] The analysis of expressive interjections translated from English into Spanish and Catalan in the same corpus confirms that literal translation is relatively infrequent, especially in Catalan, whereas omission is more frequent (see also González and Sol, 2004). An analysis including a greater number of examples could further confirm the conclusions reached in this paper.

Contrastive Analysis is useful not only for applied purposes such as translation or second language teaching, but also for descriptive and theoretical purposes, since hidden meanings or nuances become focused in contrastive contexts and allow the researcher to test hypotheses about the nature of discourse markers. It is especially useful for establishing the meaning of pragmatic elements such as discourse markers.

The best approach to pragmatic markers should resort to different methods to establish their meaning(s), including contrastive analysis, commuting, and paraphrasing. However, contrastive analysis has an advantage over commutation and paraphrase in that the person who interprets a given expression and seeks an adequate equivalent form in another language is a translator rather than a linguist. The biases imposed by the personal characteristics of the translator can be minimised by using different corpora and by comparing the results among different target languages.

In conclusion, in this paper I have provided some evidence for the idea that ''the translations into another language thus strengthen or weaken the claims made on the basis of a single language'' (Aijmer, 2002:25). Contrastive analysis is a powerful tool for studying pragmatic meaning in general and, specifically, that of pragmatic discourse markers. Conversely, discourse markers contribute to translation theory because research in this area makes it necessary to take the pragmatic nature of communication in general, and of translation in particular, into account.

Acknowledgments

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