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## PRAGMATIC MARKER USE IN POLICE INTERVIEWS: THE CASE OF *I MEAN* AND *YOU KNOW* (PART 2)

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### Abstract

Intended as a follow-up to Part 1 of the study focusing on the use of *I mean* in police interview data, Part 2 of the analysis offers insight into the recruitment of the related marker *you know* by the interviewers and the interviewees, respectively. In particular, acknowledging that the primary function of *you know* is that of “inviting addressee inferences” (Jucker, Smith 1998) and in agreement with the categorisation of functions proposed by Fox Tree and Schrock (2002), the paper reveals how *you know* is deployed for interpersonal, turn management, repairing, monitoring and organising purposes. To this end, it focuses on the syntactic behaviour of *you know* and examines the patterns of use linked to individual interview participants. What is more, given the potential of *you know* to invite addressee feedback, the analysis also looks at listener responses to *you know* and *you know*-introduced ideas, revealing at the same time the linguistic coding of power asymmetry in institutional interaction. In sum, Part 1 and Part 2 of the study highlight the subjective and intersubjective meanings conveyed by the markers *I mean* and *you know* in police interviews and draw attention to the contribution that pragmatic marker research can make to court and police interpreting practice.

While the focus of Part 1 was on the patterns of use and the discourse-pragmatic functions of *I mean*, Part 2 sets out to reveal the interpersonal and discourse-organising potential of the related marker *you know*. As follows from Part I, *I mean* and *I mean*-introduced phrases were high-frequency items in the corpus, with sentence-initial *I mean* resurfacing as the clearly preferred choice. Predictably,

*I mean* was used for the purposes identified in Fox Tree and Schrock (2002), among which the monitoring function was particularly visible. With regard to listener responses, even though no clear patterns were noted, it was found that in the majority of cases (76.27%), *I mean* was followed by some kind of response, i.e. a proper verbal response or a backchannel signal. Unsurprisingly, the analysis revealed that *I mean* was used chiefly by the interviewees, who made low-level adjustments resulting from speech production problems as well as aimed to produce precise and coherent accounts of events. By analogy to *I mean*, in the remainder of Part II, I will describe the syntactic behaviour of *you know*, look at its most frequent discourse-pragmatic functions and examine the patterns of use linked to individual interview participants.

#### 4.2. *You know* in police interview data

The analysis has yielded 346 instances, in which *you know* operated as a pragmatic marker (Table 4), which by far exceeds the corresponding figure for *I mean* (143 occurrences). Of the recurrent syntactic realisations, (*and/but/so*) *you know what/sth*. proved to be the preferred choice (27.74%). Also common, sentence-medial and sentence-initial *you knows* were used with almost identical frequencies (22.83% and 22.54%, respectively). Next came sentence-final *you know* (9.53%) and (*do*) *you know what I mean?* (8.95%). The least frequent choices included: *you know...* (3.75%), *well/hm*-prefaced *you know* (2.89%) and *you know* used in reported language (1.44%). Strikingly, *as you know*, presupposing mutual background knowledge, was represented only by one token.

Similarly to *I mean*, the marker *you know*, as used in the police interview data, could be associated with the categories of functions proposed by Fox Tree and Schrock (2002), namely: interpersonal, turn management, repairing, monitoring and organising. As will be demonstrated in the following discussion, thanks to its positional mobility, *you know* invited listener inferences in sentence-initial, -medial and -final positions. What is more, the marker signalled either the interviewer's certainty/power or the interviewee's uncertainty/powerlessness. Likewise, the interviewees tended to rely on *you know* to prevent dysfluency and to ensure listener involvement, whereas the interviewers seemed to use *you know* primarily to control discourse.

Looking more closely at the preferences of the interviewers and the interviewees (Table 5), I noted that various syntactic realisations of *you know what* were attributed chiefly to the detective conducting the first interview, so it may be rightly speculated that the increased incidence of this expression resulted either from his idiosyncratic style or his conscious attempt to assert power over the 20-year old detainee, or both.

As can be seen in Example 7, the detective explains the interview procedure to the detainee, and by repeating *you know what*, he manifests his institutional authority, while tying the discourse together.

CATEGORY	REALISATION	NO. OF OCCURRENCES		
		Inter- view 1	Inter- view 2	Total
(and/but/so) you know what/sth.	<i>And you know what...</i>	15	81	96
	<i>So you know what...</i>	(4.33%)	(23.41%)	(27.74%)
	<i>But you know something...</i>			
... you know ... (sentence-medial)	<i>Tell us you know we can all work...</i>	47	32	79
	<i>Uh, ... you know... uh, uh, uh...</i>	(13.58%)	(9.24%)	(22.83%)
	<i>Like, you know, you just kind of...</i>			
You know (+S) (sentence-initial)	<i>You know just when you think...</i>	52	26	78
	<i>You know, I didn't know...</i>	(15.02%)	(7.51%)	(22.54%)
	<i>You know we didn't want...</i>			
..., you know. (sentence-final)	<i>...there you go, you know.</i>	24	9	33
	<i>...petty little things, you know.</i>	(6.93%)	(2.60%)	(9.53%)
(Do) you know what I mean?	<i>You know what I mean?</i>	0	31	31
	<i>Do you know what I mean?</i>		(8.95%)	(8.95%)
you know ... (sentence-final)	<i>Just, uh, you know...</i>	7	6	13
	<i>No, I want, you know...</i>	(2.02%)	(1.73%)	(3.75%)
Well/hm, you know	<i>Well, you know, they were...</i>	8	2	10
	<i>Well, you know pal...</i>	(2.31%)	(0.57%)	(2.89%)
<i>In reported language</i>	<i>She'll say, dad, you know, I'm...</i>	5	0	5
	<i>She said, you know George...</i>	(1.44%)		(1.44%)
as you know	<i>Your life, as you know, it is...</i>	1	0	1
		(0.28%)		(0.28%)
<b>TOTAL:</b>		159 (45.95%)	187 (54.04%)	346 (100%)

Table 4. Syntactic realisations of *you know* in the data<sup>1</sup>

**Example 7**

DETECTIVE: (...) And actually, **you know what**, the first little bit other than uh, we just need some personal information for our charge confirmation. Other than that, **you know what**, you can just sit there and listen. Um, if you need to use the bathroom, if you want to drink your coffee while you're talking with us or eat your sandwich, **you know what**, that's perfectly alright with us, okay? Any questions?

DP: No.

DETECTIVE: No, okay. (Int.2\_p.7)

<sup>1</sup> Table 4 shows only these syntactic realisations of *you know*, in which this clause operated as a pragmatic marker. What follows, non-PM uses have been excluded from the analysis.

SYNTACTIC REALISATION	NO. OF OCCURRENCES PER PARTICIPANT	
	Interviewer	Interviewee
(and/but/so) you know what/sth.	76 (21.96%)	20 (5.78%)
... you know ... (sentence-medial)	23 (6.64%)	56 (16.18%)
You know (+S) (sentence-initial)	16 (4.62%)	62 (17.91%)
..., you know. (sentence-final)	1 (0.28%)	32 (9.24%)
(Do) you know what I mean?	0	31 (8.95%)
you know ... (sentence-final)	4 (1.15%)	9 (2.60%)
well/hm, you know	1 (0.28%)	9 (2.60%)
<i>In reported language</i>	0	5 (1.44%)
as you know	0	1 (0.28%)
TOTAL:	121 (34.97%)	225 (65.02%)

Table 5. Syntactic realisations of *you know* vs. interview participant role

During the same interview, the powerless party, that is the interviewee, repeatedly signalled uncertainty. Example 8 illustrates one such situation, where the detainee expects confirmation of his account of events asking *You know what I mean?*<sup>2</sup> Worth highlighting is also the fact that the phrase was not used by any of the interviewers, who, being the powerful parties, did not need to seek acknowledgment of understanding.

#### Example 8

DP: Gotta tell you, did whatever needed to be done to get us ...

DETECTIVE: Yeah.

DP: ... into safety.

DETECTIVE: Yeah.

DP: **You know what I mean?**

DETECTIVE: I'm not denying that. I'm not ... (Int.2\_p.198)

Power relations aside, as has already been mentioned, *you know* invited listener inferences regardless of its sentence position, though, by analogy to *I mean*, a preference for sentence-initial uses was observed. By way of illustration, in Example 9, where *you know* is used sentence-initially, the interviewee appeals to the interviewing officer, as if trying to create the impression that they both share common ground. Again, by eliciting an immediate reaction, the interviewee seems to be seeking confirmation of co-operation as well as understanding.

<sup>2</sup> Cf. Section 4.1 of Part 1.

**Example 9**

GA: get through also. Yeah we were financially pretty tight and I just.. when this came up I'm like God this is a quick fix for us to get back on our feet. **You know** to keep our house going. Because my wife...

SB: It hit you at the right time. (Int.1\_p.29)

Sentence-final *you know* can, on the other hand, be seen in Example 10, showing an attributive, I'm-sure-you-know-the-kind-of-thing-I-mean use of *you know*, where the interviewing officer is expected to arrive at the missing pieces of the overall picture created by the interviewee. Also this time, the interviewee is trying to establish the feeling of intimacy and togetherness.

**Example 10**

GA: Right. I just want to let you know that's, something I been holding back from my wife 'cause.. all this is.. each day it's something more and more and different and it's just like, what's going on? You know just when you think that you know someone that you've cared for, for all these years. And old friends that she had, the new friends are the one that I think all this stuff is really come to light on. **And you know...**

FBI OFFICER: There's a reason that old friends aren't in the picture right now.

GA: Right and they gave us everything I.. they possibly can I know that. Because they've known her since elementary school, middle school, high school.

FBI OFFICER: Uh-huh. (Affirmative) (Int.1\_p.11)

It might also be added that sentence-final occurrences of *you know...*, like the one shown above, where the speaker does not finish a point but lets his voice trail away instead, can be regarded as strategic uses of this marker letting the speaker, on the one hand, create the impression of familiarity, and, on the other, avoid potential face-threats caused, for instance, by embarrassing details.<sup>3</sup>

Finally, it is worth pausing to consider the types of response to *you know*, a frequent appealer in private conversational data (cf. Povolná 2010: 92). As Table 6 indicates, as many as 83.33% of *you knows* in the transcript data were followed by responses, with a mere 16.66% of cases having no related verbal response.<sup>4</sup> Unlike intuitive predictions which a layperson might have, *you know*-introduced ideas proved to be more effective response elicitors (46.82%) than *you knows* ending the prior utterance, which resembles the pattern noted in the case of *I mean*.<sup>5</sup>

Examples 11 and 12 below instantiate, respectively, a longer verbal response and a backchannel to the *you know*-introduced idea. In Example 11, when asked about

<sup>3</sup> A similar observation is made by Furkó (2013: 19) with reference to political news interviews, where politicians rely on *you know...* in order to avoid embarrassing conclusions.

<sup>4</sup> In conformity with the approach adopted in the case of *I mean* in Part 1 of the article, also in the case of *you know*, I examined only these responses which followed *you know* or *you know*-introduced ideas occurring in the last syntactic unit of the prior utterance.

<sup>5</sup> Cf. Section 4.1 of Part 1.

Verbal response		Backchannel		No verbal response <sup>6</sup>	
After <i>you know</i> ending the last syntac- tic unit	After <i>you know</i> - introduced idea	After <i>you know</i> ending the last syntac- tic unit	After <i>you know</i> - introduced idea	After <i>you know</i> ending the last syntac- tic unit	After <i>you know</i> - introduced idea
24 (19.04%)	32 (25.39%)	22 (17.46%)	27 (21.42%)	13 (10.31%)	8 (6.34%)

Table 6. Types of response to *you know*

his father, the detainee (starting his utterance with the focusing *you know*) elaborates on the idea that his father was a young single parent. Example 12, conversely, illustrates a situation, where the listener produces only a backchannel to indicate that he is following the speaker's train of thought.

#### Example 11

DETECTIVE: What kind of man is your dad? Like what...

DP: He's uh, he's an honest man.

DETECTIVE: Yeah. What about his discipline? Like if you did something wrong, **you know**, you knocked over the glass of milk or something like that?

DP: **You know**, I can't speak intelligently on my dad's habits and why he did what he did. I can tell you this much, that he was a single parent at uh, probably the age I am right now, at the time. And uh, uh, he lived in the country. No, it wasn't in the city. And he had to get up every day... (Int.2\_p. 109).

#### Example 12

GA: You know you want to believe, you try to believe 'em. **You know** I still want to go out and look around myself.

SB: **Yeah.** (Int.1\_p.112)

By contrast to the two excerpts quoted above, the transcript data also provide evidence that in certain cases, infrequent as they were, *you know* did not elicit any verbal response related to *you know* or the *you know*-introduced idea. Instead, the marker was followed by topic shift signalled with the imperative (Example 13) or the vocative (Example 14).

<sup>6</sup> Like in the case of responses to *I mean* described in Part 1, silent feedback and non-verbal reactions to *you know*, where indicated in the data, are classified as belonging to the category of "No verbal response."

**Example 13**

DP: There is definitely no, there was no, no uh, equivalence there whatsoever.

DETECTIVE: Okay.

DP: **You know.**

DETECTIVE: **Let's talk** production levels. (Int.2\_p. 136.137)

**Example 14**

DP: Yeah, man ...

DETECTIVE: I want to unders' ...

DP: ... tell yourselves what you want, **you know what I mean?**

DETECTIVE: **Dustin** ...

DP: There's just no way in hell.

DETECTIVE: **Dustin**, just hear me out here. All the evidence will be, be presented in court if you so ... (Int.2\_p.202)

In sum, as the study has revealed, *you know* and *you know*-introduced phrases were frequently used by the interview participants. While a clear preference for sentence-initial uses was noted, a significant share of sentence-medial occurrences was also found. With regard to the prevalent functions, in turn, it should be stated that, as the data suggest, *you know* performed functions, which could easily be classified as belonging to Fox Tree and Schrock's (2002) categories introduced earlier in this article, i.e. interpersonal (signalling certainty or uncertainty, reducing face-threats), turn management (inviting inferences at different points in the turn), repairing ("buying time", presumption that the listener can draw the desired conclusions), monitoring (requiring confirmation of understanding) and organising (closing off prior discourse, highlighting particular points). As for listener responses, on the other hand, it was observed that in the majority of cases (83.33%), *you know* or *you know*-introduced ideas elicited a proper verbal response or a backchannel signal, though no significant regularities were recognised. Finally, it was noted that the patterns of use identified in the data were correlated with the participant status, i.e. the interviewers tended to use *you know* to organise and control discourse, whereas by using *you know* and *you know*-introduced expressions, the interviewees appeared to seek understanding or signal uncertainty.

## Conclusions

As follows from the foregoing discussion, the deployment of *I mean* and *you know* in police interviews was not atypical and it resembled trends noted in similar contexts (see e.g. Furkó 2013). More specifically, both *I mean* and *you know* – whose individual meanings could be traced back to the basic meanings of "forewarning upcoming adjustments" and "inviting addressee inferences", respectively – were found to mark

the contrastive roles of the interviewing officer and the detainee. Like in other asymmetrical encounters, with the police interview being no exception, the incidence of the said pragmatic markers identified in the case of the interviewees was much higher than in the case of the interviewers, which is understandable, given that the interviewers' role was to ask questions, while the interviewees' task was to produce longer narratives. Unsurprisingly, the interviewees betrayed uncertainty and sought confirmation of their version of events (e.g. *you know what I mean?*), strived for precision (e.g. using self-repairs introduced by *I mean*) as well as marked their attempts to save face by resorting to mitigation and understatement (e.g. *I mean...*, *you know...*). The interviewers, on the other hand, tended to use the analysed markers (e.g. *you know what*) to control discourse and to ensure coherence. Worthy of note is also the visible disproportion between the frequencies with which *I mean* (143 tokens) and *you know* (346 tokens) were used in the analysed interactions. Since *you know* is a *you*-oriented marker, as opposed to *I mean* centred on the speaker, the above might be suggestive of the speakers' need to constantly involve the listener in the interaction by inviting their inferences and seeking acknowledgment of understanding. While not entirely novel, these findings highlight the subjective and intersubjective meanings conveyed by pragmatic markers in police interviews. Furthermore, in agreement with Fox Tree and Schrock (2002: 736), they reveal that *I mean* and *you know* can indeed adopt new meanings every time they are used (e.g. note the concessive meaning of *I mean*).

Another point to consider is the contribution that research into pragmatic marker use in legal genres in general can make to court or police interpreting practice. Firstly, it can raise interpreters' awareness of the role that pragmatic markers play in determining the tone and the illocutionary force of an utterance as well as in creating the hearer's overall impression of the speaker, including their veracity and authenticity, which, in turn, may have tangible consequences in the form of a court ruling in favour or against the defendant. Secondly, it can help interpreters to make informed choices and, consequently, to produce appropriate target language renditions of pragmatic markers used by suspects or witnesses. Viewed from this perspective, genre-based pragmatic marker studies show promise and are certainly needed. Possible avenues of research might include, for instance, a quantitative analysis of *I mean* and *you know* in a whole spectrum of legal genres, with a view to determining which uses of these markers are genre-specific, thus revealing context-bound subtleties of individual genres and subgenres and enriching genre-based descriptions of legal communication. By the same token, it would also be fruitful to delve into the role that other clausal markers (such as, for instance, *look*, *you see* or *as you say*, to name but a few of them) play in the police interview, and to pinpoint differences and similarities in their usage across various legal settings, which might as well include cross-linguistic studies of parallel or multilingual corpora. That being said, research into pragmatic marker use in dyadic legal encounters such as police interviews may not only prove useful for theorists describing genre-specific uses of language, but also benefit practitioners facing the challenge of interpreting institutional interaction.

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