



How Pragmatic Markers Influence Audience Perception in Public Speaking

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Abstract

Pragmatic markers are regarded as significant linguistic items that are responsible for the interpersonal, textual, and cognitive structuring of oral discourse. In oral presentations, pragmatic markers determine the way audience members receive a speaker's confidence, naturalness, and emotional appeal. The paper discusses the role that pragmatic markers play in shaping audience perception through the presentation speeches of some selected speakers, namely, Barack Obama, Malala Yousafzai, and Steve Jobs. Based on the theory of discourse-pragmatics (Schiffrin, 1987; Fraser, 2009; Aijmer, 2013), the paper explains the way markers, for example, "well," "you know," "I mean," "so," and "actually," determine the audience's perception regarding speaker credibility, fluency, and empathy. The study findings are that pragmatic markers are not filler items but highly strategic linguistic items that promote the increase of coherence, rapport, and persuasion power in the oral presentation situation.

Key words: pragmatic markers, discourse, public presentation, audience interpretation, communication strategies





Как прагматические маркеры влияют на восприятие аудитории в публичных выступлениях

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Аннотация

Прагматические маркеры рассматриваются как значимые языковые элементы, отвечающие за межличностную, текстуальную и когнитивную организацию устного дискурса. В устных выступлениях прагматические маркеры определяют, как слушатели воспринимают уверенность, естественность и эмоциональную привлекательность оратора. В статье рассматривается роль прагматических маркеров в формировании восприятия аудитории на примере выступлений таких спикеров, как Барак Обама, Малала Юсуфзай и Стив Джобс. Основываясь на теории дискурс-прагматики (Schiffrin, 1987; Fraser, 2009; Aijmer, 2013), работа объясняет, как такие маркеры, как *well, you know, I mean, so, actually*, влияют на восприятие слушателями достоверности, беглости и эмпатии оратора. Результаты исследования показывают, что прагматические маркеры не являются просто словами-заполнителями, а представляют собой стратегически важные языковые элементы, повышающие связность, взаимопонимание и силу убеждения в устных выступлениях.

Ключевые слова: прагматические маркеры, дискурс, устное выступление, восприятие аудитории, коммуникативные стратегии





**Pragmatik markerlar auditoriya idrokiga qanday ta'sir ko'rsatadi:
ommaviy nutq misolida**

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Annotatsiya

Pragmatik markerlar og'zaki nutqning shaxslararo, matniy va kognitiv tuzilishini ta'minlovchi muhim lingvistik birliklar sifatida qaraladi. Og'zaki nutqlarda pragmatik markerlar tinglovchilarning notiqning ishonchliligi, tabiiyligi va hissiy ta'sirchanligini qanday qabul qilishini belgilaydi. Ushbu maqolada pragmatik markerlarning auditoriya idrokini shakllantirishdagi o'rni Barack Obama, Malala Yousafzai va Steve Jobs kabi notiqning nutqlari misolida tahlil qilinadi. Diskurs-pragmatika nazariyasiga (Schiffrin, 1987; Fraser, 2009; Aijmer, 2013) tayangan holda, maqolada *well, you know, I mean, so, actually* kabi markerlarning tinglovchilar tomonidan notiqning ishonchliligi, ravonligi va hamdardligini baholashga qanday ta'sir ko'rsatishi tushuntiriladi. Tadqiqot natijalari pragmatik markerlar shunchaki to'ldiruvchi so'zlar emas, balki og'zaki nutq jarayonida izchillikni, samimiylikni va ta'sirchanlik kuchini oshiruvchi strategik lingvistik vositalar ekanini ko'rsatadi.

Kalit so'zlar: pragmatik markerlar, diskurs, og'zaki nutq, auditoriya idroki, kommunikativ strategiyalar

Introduction

Public speech is perhaps the most effective form of oral communication, requiring not only rhetorical proficiency but also pragmatic understanding. Speakers are constantly





evaluated not simply for what is said, but for how it is said, with what inflection, and how sincerely it is said. Pragmatic markers—small linguistic forms like "well," "you know," "I mean," and "so"—play a significant role here in the handling of relations between speaker and hearer. These items were always found to be optional or filler; however, studies now reveal that these carry indispensable communicative functions that directly affect audience interpretation and response (Brinton, 1996; Aijmer, 2013). The current paper aims to investigate the pragmatic marker effects on the audience perception under the pragmatic functions and the psychological responses. Based on the analysis of actual materials from speeches of Barack Obama, Malala Yousafzai, and Steve Jobs, the current study demonstrates how effective speakers utilize these markers to appear confident, approachable, and credible.

Literature Review: Research into pragmatic markers has changed substantially ever since the late 20th century. Schiffrin (1987) initially described discourse markers as linguistic expressions that structure the discourse and signal relations between fragments. Subsequent researchers, for example, Fraser (2009) and Aijmer (2013), further refined the definition, highlighting the pragmatic markers' multifunctionality to convey interpersonal meaning, to handle the flow of the discourse, and to signal speakers' attitudes. Collecting the Definitions

Pragmatic markers are linguistic devices that are context-dependent and do not seem to contribute to the propositional meaning but to the pragmatic meaning of the discourse (Fraser, 2009). The typical examples are, well, you know, I mean, actually, so, now, look, and okay. Brinton (1996) categorized them under textual markers (structuring speech), interpersonal markers (marking attitude), and cognitive markers (indicating planning and hesitation).

Functions in Oral Discourse

According to Aijmer (2013), pragmatic markers strive to maintain interactional balance by being polite, empathetic, and invested. They also perform the role of meta-communicative, i.e., signaling the speaker's attitude toward the speech or the addressee. In speeches, these markers facilitate formal speech approaching natural conversation, reducing the distance between the speaker and the listeners. Audience Perception and Communication Audience perception during public communication is subject to a blend of linguistic, paralinguistic, and pragmatic





variables. Beeching (2016) contends that pragmatic markers are indicative of social identity and communicative competence. When appropriately utilized, speakers can become more credible; however, if excessively utilized, speakers become less powerful. Therefore, the efficacy is subject to context, usage, and style of delivery.

Methodology

This is a qualitative discursive analysis. The following public speeches were sampled for analysis:

1. Britney Spears, at the 2008 Brit Awards—embodying dance.
2. Malala Yousafzai at the 2013 UN Youth Assembly – exempl.
3. Stanford Commencement Address of Steve Jobs (2005)—embodying inspirational public speech.

In the speeches, the pragmatic markers were studied under the parameters of frequency, position, and communicative function. The study is directed by Schiffrin's (1987) taxonomy and Aijmer's (2013) categorization of pragmatic functions.

Data Analysis and Discussion

Barack Obama: Building Credibility through Discourse Control

Obama's speeches are widely recognized for their rhetorical coherence and interpersonal warmth. Pragmatic markers such as *now*, *look*, and *well* frequently appear in his transitions:

“**Now**, let's be clear—this was never going to be easy.”
“**Look**, we've been through tough times before.”

These markers also carry textual and persuasive tasks. *Now* indicates a shift to a next point, enabling the audience to follow the argument, whereas *look* is attention-grabbing and exudes authority. Research (Fraser, 2009) indicates that these markers build up discourse coherence and facilitate the audience's cognitive engagement.

Malala Yousafzai: Empathy and Emotional Connection

Malala's speeches often include interpersonal markers such as *you know* and *so*:

“**You know**, I had two options—one was to remain silent, and the second was to speak up.” “**So**, I decided to speak for the right of education.”

The marker *you know* appeals to shared understanding, constructing solidarity between speaker and audience. *So* indicates causal connection, giving logical





progression to emotional arguments. These choices enhance empathy and authenticity—key elements in audience perception of sincerity.

Steve Jobs: Naturalness and Storytelling Flow

In Steve Jobs's 2005 Stanford speech, markers like *well*, *you know*, and *actually* appear frequently:

“**Well**, connecting the dots will only make sense looking backward.”
“**You know**, death is the single best invention of life.”

These markers maintain the narrative flow and simulate spontaneous conversation. *Well* introduces reflection, softening transitions between anecdotes. *Actually* adds emphasis and signals self-correction. Beeching (2016) emphasizes that moderate use of such markers enhances perceived authenticity in performance speech.

Improving Fluency and Naturalness: Jobs's narrating is paced with cognitive markers (*well*, *actually*, *you know*) that mimic spontaneous thinking, giving it a conversational flow. Such fluency induces an audience's impression that the contents are not recited but natural, corresponding to Brinton's (1996) account of naturalness in discursial talk.

Conclusion

This experiment verifies that pragmatic markers are the necessary component for efficient public speaking. They do affect the audience's impression through facilitating the coherence, affective force, and perceived sincerity. The results confirm the following overall conclusions: Smart usage of markers, including "well," "you know," and "look," helps enhance audience comprehension and participation as well; interpersonal markers improve empathy as well as relational connection, particularly for motivational or humanitarian functions; moderate use and contextual relevance decide if markers inflate credibility.

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