Investigating the Pragmatic Functions of Discourse Markers in Ayi Kwei Armah's *The Beautyful Ones Are Not Yet Born*.

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Abstract

The need to persuade a person in discourse is ubiquitous in Ayi Kwei Armah's *The Beautyful Ones Are Not Yet Born.* But, in the framework of this work, emphasis will be laid on discourse managing skills. That is, in which way one's style and innovations in creating meaning complies with identity. Therein, the present discussion aims to display Ayi kwei's linguistic ways of increasing others' mind adherence to theses presented to their assent. Though this work does not intend to carry out an exhaustive observation of them, it focuses on their internal coherence, testing their mutual compatibility and discursive value. One will easily realized that in Ayi Kwei Armah's *The Beautyful Ones Are Not Yet Born* conversations are not idle, but constitute essential aspects of negotiating, making agreement, and inquiring activities.

Key words: conversation, discourse, identity, management, negotiation, persuasion.

Resumé

Le besoin de persuader l'autre dans le discours est omniprésent dans *L'âge d'or n'est pas pour demain* d'Ayi Kwei Armah. Mais, dans cet article, l'accent est sur des techniques de gestion du discours. C'est-à-dire, dans quelle mesure, le style d'une personne, ses innovations en matière de sens fondent son identité. Nous espérons y montrer des indices linguistiques pour accroître l'adhésion des autres aux thèses présentées à leur consentement. Evidemment, nous ne pouvons pas les épuiser au terme de cette réflexion mais nous montrerons plutôt leur cohésion interne et testerons leur compatibilité mutuelle et leur valeur discursive. L'on pourra se rendre facilement compte que dans *L'âge d'or n'est pas pour demain* d'Ayi Kwei Armah, les conversations ne sont pas innocentes, mais constituent des aspects essentiels de négociations, d'accords, et d'activités de quête d'information.

Mots clés: conversation, discours, gestion, identité, négociation, persuasion.

Introduction

Discourse managers are usually good persuaders. They exercise these skills when they present projects, discuss problems, negotiate agreements and make decisions. It goes unsaid that management is not a solitary activity but involves social interaction mediated by language. Thus, to enhance the study of some discourse markers as linguistic evidence, we resort to Ayi Kwei Armah's *The Beautyful Ones Are Not Yet Born*, as a particular discourse type focused on the political discourse. In fact, in this corpus, management is at stake because the upright man resisting the temptations of easy bribes and easy satisfaction is expected to comply with the pervading corruption and greed in his society. It is in other words especially an investigation of the communicative strategies used by speakers to induce the co-speaker adherence. Therefore, attentions to discourse markers "well", "you know" and "I think" have been maximized in this paper.

Hence the topic that has oriented the study: investigating the pragmatic functions of discourse markers in Ayi Kwei Armah's *The Beautyful Ones Are Not Yet Born*[1]. The discussion explores the questions that follow: in which way can such discourse markers as "well", "you know" and "I think" be powerful instrument in argumentation? What particular orientation do these discourse managing devices give to *The Beautyful Ones Are Not Yet Born*? What do we learn from these discourse managers in terms of style, identity and innovations?

This investigation of the contents has been conducted in three parts. The first part deals with: discourse insufficiency markers. The second part discusses: face-threat mitigator markers and the third one: delaying management.

I. Markers of discourse insufficiency

To state that discourse managers function as insufficiency indicators in one's discourse means that they will be needed at loss or short of ideas, knowing that in conversations, the tendency is to avoid silence. This phenomenon will be evidenced in their argumentative and interactional functions.

[1] Hence shortened TBO.

I.1. **Argumentative function**

What is meant by argumentative function is that speakers will anyhow draw profit from situations to pursue their motives. They will not wait for opportunities. Rightly, Eduard Bonet, Hans Siggaard Jensen, Alfons Sauquet (2011:26) put that "Opportunities are not out there waiting to be discovered, but are constructed". Thus, a good number of discourse managers are involved in expressions the speaker uses for discourse management. In that vein, Deborah Schiffrin (1987: 24-28) displayed 11 English discourse managers[2] that are:"and, but, or, well, then, now, because, oh, y'know, and I mean".

With this high awareneness of what discourse markers are, it becomes obvious that in:

(1) - "**Well**", he shouted above the death rattle of the bus, "get out! (TBO: 6)"

The discourse marker "well" is argumentative. First and above all, it should be distinguished from the adverb "well". Some examples of the manner adverb "well" are:

(2) - "She has married **well** …" (TBO: 42);
(3) - "Life has treated her **well**" (TBO: 42);
(4) - "I mean if things go well, they will go **well** for all of us". (TBO: 42);
(5) - "It may be that you cannot lie very **well**, and you are afraid to steal." (TBO: 57).
(6) - "Koomson is doing very **well** for himself…" (TBO: 59).

From utterance 2 to 6, the linguistic unit 'well' complies with its original meaning, the one of manner adverb. Andreas H. Jucker (1997: 97) rightly revealed what follows:

> The earliest Old English uses of the adverb 'well' are derived from Indo-European *wel[3] — 'to will, wish'. The earliest meaning of this word and its cognates in related languages was 'according to one's will'. Very early on this developed into the meaning 'in accordance

[2] She called them: Discourse markers
[3] The asterisk indicates wrongness or ungrammaticality.

> with a good or high standard of conduct or morality; in a way which is morally good.

What is learnt from example 2 is that Estella got married in the right way, no short cut, she has fulfilled the requirements of marriage. Marriage is so good when regulations have been obeyed to that it can but lead to blessings. The context about utterance 3 is that 'Estella has been treated by life in a fair way, in a way that is commonly expected. This can be easily understandable because Estella's perfume is a good one. It teaches that the type of perfume one uses is linked to social standard. That is how utterance 3 becomes the consequence of 2. In example 4: the man's wife is simply conveying that if things go in their normal way, they (the man, his mother and his wife) will all be benefactors.

Apart from being a manner adverb, 'well' can be viewed as discourse management expression. This can be seen in example 1. Therein, the discourse marker 'well' is an emphatic interjection. Laurel Brinton (1996: 380) focused on that when she mentioned that:

> In Old English, 'well' was used as a discourse marker in the form of wel la or wella. It appears at the beginning of a speech or at the beginning of a conclusion after an exposition. It collocates in all cases with a vocative and is used emphatically to ask the addressee to pay attention to what is to follow. It introduces a particularly important statement. It is in this sense, an attention-getting device like you know in modern English.

Here, two things deserve to be noted: first 'well' amounts to 'you know' like in example 7 provided by Koomson's wife:

(7)- "**You know**, fish is foully expensive these days" (TBO: 138).

The second thing is that 'well' prepares to an important statement.
Therefore, it clearly appears that the conductor in example 1 lacks time and does not want to have to repeat what comes next. His short message shows

that he has lost control and therefore is short of ideas to be developed so as to compel the countryman to get off. The important statement to come is: "get out!".

This technique is argumentative in the sense that there is power in attention-attracting, lest not a bit of the message should be un-understood. This language of power has been advocated by Gustave Guillaume (1914:4) according to whom:

> Language (parole) is a force, a means to act upon others. This action upon other human beings who are like us, foreseen before the act of speaking, guides our thought, gives it a form and at certain moments becomes so imperious that it can break ancient moulds and create new ones which are suitable for our purposes.

Moreover, as Julie Van Bogaert, (2009: 144**)** put it "'you know' has a metalinguistic awareness". It can be seen in example 8 that is:

(8)- "**you know**", said the man slowly (TBO: 158).

One can easily observe that there is an argumentative tactic displayed. The organizer can normally not pretend not knowing what Nkrumaists are. If he does so, he will be considered abnormal in this case. The slow-ly 'you know' strengthens this attention-attraction. In fact, it is even not a dialogue; it is not a conversation between the organizer and the man. It is rather a monologue: the man talks to the man. Like in a postulate, the organizer should agree with what will follow. One will therefore conclude with Stephen Levinson (1983: 334) about 'well' that "the general conclusion is that it prefaces responses that are insufficient in some way".

In some ways, it can be viewed as an interaction function. That is to initiate interactions.

I.2 **Interactional Function**

Discourse markers "well", "you know" and "I think" are said to have interactional function when they are used as fillers. That is, they are part of sentence. For Ron Cowan (2008: 615) "Discourse markers ("well", "I mean", "you know",…) are words that are not an integral part of a sentence or its grammar but are interested by a speaker for various reasons". Commonsensically, they are known as twitches. For example, Schegloff and Sacks (1973: 317) identified ways in which pragmatic markers such as "ok" and "well" can signal that the participants want to move to farewells and close the conversation.

Examples are:

(9)- "**I think** you should go and get ready", she said. (TBO: 127).

In the novel Oyo coming from the kitchen introduces the interaction with the man by means of that discourse marker "I think". It does weaken the thing that follows because the speaker is making it as his personal opinion instead of as a statement of fact. It is different from "I'm telling you …" that strengthens the thing that follows. The discourse marker "I think" means that what is said should be taken on condition, that is not as gospel truth. Insufficiency is therefore at stake. Another example can witness it.

(10)- 'Nine I'll be free, **I think'** (TBO: 38).

In utterance 10, the suited man intends to be present this time. Previous appointments failed to be respected, but that one won't be. He has rightly guessed the incredulous answer of the man. Thus, to avoid ambiguity, he resorts to two segments. The deictic "this" in segment 1 and the discourse manager "I mean" in segment 2. As a real manager of discourse, he continues with the rapid calculation of his availability. Segment 1 'Nine I'll be free' has a focusing value. Segment 2, 'I think' can be understood as "I mean it". It conveys that the information is reliable. In the terms of Alan Partington (2004: 78), the discourse managing 'I mean' "is rather intriguing. It is generally used to introduce the re-interaction or reformulation of a proposition". In this case, it witnesses re-interaction. But such an answer is tricky, if ever the appointment come to fail anew, he will simply say: I thought I was free at that moment, then insufficiency of future un-awareness will be evoked.

In example (11) that is:

(11)-" **Well**, then" (TBO: 54)

The discourse marker ‘well’ indicate a turn in conversation. According to Stephen Croucher (2004: 40), that is the "formal function of ‘well’ and ‘you know’". It is followed by another discourse marker as a sign of mutual compatibility. ‘Then’ according to Schiffrin Deborah (1987: 24-28) is used to indicate the succession between the prior and upcoming talk. With this turn-taking, he gives the man the opportunity to continue his narration.

On the contrary, in the example that follows:

(12)- "**Well**, then, what, teacher?" (TBO: 54),

The informal function of the discourse manager ‘well’ which is to fill pauses in conversation is mentioned. The lady wants the man to complete his argumentation because she cannot agree with the man’s stubborn resistance to corruption. But the man clearly doesn’t want to. One can feel his reserve in his retaking of the discourse markers "well, then", to which he adds, the question "what"? It is a way of letting the lady herself say more about him.

As it can be seen, discourse markers are not easy to grasp considering the various terminologies and functions they have. According to Klaus Fischer (2006: 1) who refers to them as discourse particles, this multiplicity becomes unavoidable.

> For a newcomer to the field, it is (…) often very difficult to find the bits and pieces that constitute an original model of the meanings and functions of discourse particles. Moreover, the studies available so far are hardly comparable; the approaches vary with regard to very many different aspects: the language (s) under consideration, the items taken into account, the terminology used, the functions considered, the problems focused on, and the methodologies employed.

Thus, in the terms of Deborah Schiffrin (1987:31), discourse markers are "sequentially dependent elements which bracket unit of talk" and can function as face-threat mitigators.

II. Face-threat mitigator markers

Defining the discourse marker “well” Anne Finell (1989: 654) put that it is a face-threat mitigator that is, ‘a signal that the speaker wants to be on friendly terms with the interlocutor. This seems manipulative because the discourse marker “well” for example might convey disagreement of the interlocutor. This will be studied via the management in discourse of the hearer’s opinion.

II.1. **Managing the hearer’s opinions**

In the example that will follow, another use of discourse marker will be unveiled:

(13)- "**I think** I believe you" (TBO: 31),

Actually, the discourse marker ‘I think’ is mitigating the refusal in fact. It is simply a polite way of denying that fact. Anyway, how can one check someone else’s belief? On hearing this discourse manager, the visitor will feel less on nerves. The discourse marker "I think" conveys the effort of the man to satisfy the visitor trying to corrupt him. This is one way of showing how the hearer’s opinion is managed. As put by Bertram C. Bruce and al. (2011: 9) "Language is not like a pipe that conducts water, but rather has a transforming function".

The same idea is shared by John Dewey (1925:179) who defined communication as "The establishment of cooperation in an activity in which there are partners, and in which the activity of each is modified and regulated by partnership".

To give their free time, Estie adressed her husband Koomson with the discourse marker ‘you know’ in the following example:

(14)- "**you know** you’re always busy" with your friends. Ah perhaps Saturday" (TBO: 138).

That discourse marker shows all the difficulty to indicate the spare time of her man. Saturday that has been suggested is even not probable, knowingly it is followed by ‘perhaps’. Surprisingly, it can work because with that mitigator, she signals her husband’s interpretation. It thus "contributes to understanding by reducing the processing effort needed by the hearer to reach the intended interpretation" as observed by Karim Aijmer & Anne-Marie Simon-Vandenbergen (2011: 230).

For Jan-Ola Ostman **(**1995:62**)** "pragmatic markers can have meaning with regard to social and cultural parameters such as politeness, discourse coherence or involvement." It proves that language is both a language game and an effective instrument of management.

Another evidence of the face-threat mitigator occurs by means of the speaker's emotions which are revealed.

II.2. **Speaker's emotions devices**

In discourse management, tactics tend to be particularly varied. As it is shown in the example that follows:

(15)-"**Well**", he frowned, "it has been said that one of these boats can bring in a thousand pounds pure profit every year". (TBO: 137).

The discourse marker 'well' in Koomson's utterance complies with a question which was unexpected. His face shifts as his frowning illustrates his astonishment. The micro-context makes it clear: "The question seemed to have taken everybody by surprise" (TBO: 137). To evade the question, the answer will be provided in an ambiguous way: leaving the sayer un-named. As asserted by Hans Siggaard Jensen (2011: 58): "We actually take pleasure and get insight from the creation of ambiguity". This idea is shared by St Augustine quoted by Hans Siggaard (2011: 53) "Either obscurity or ambiguity hinders the hearer from discerning truth in words". Before that unpleasant question, another puzzling situation opposes Koomson and his wife.

(16)-"**Well**, not in their own names, of course". (TBO: 137).

Here Koomson's use of the discourse marker 'well' shows his un-easiness toward his wife's declarations. He makes a sign to her to silence her, but it goes unnoticed, so he cannot but manage her speech. The context states that in the novel, Koomson gives his wife an under-brow glance, as if to warn her that she has said things that are not to be said. The discourse marker 'of course' terminating his talk conveys his great expectation.

The wife's opinion seeking preface "do you" is a disseminating technique.

(17)-'Do **you know**, they…' (TBO: 137)

This preface encompasses her will to say more, if Koomson did not intervene. To some extent, it goes unsaid that the discourse marker "you know" prefaces a response or a reaction which is emotionally marked.

III. Delaying management

III.1 Repairing discourse markers

To repair a discourse is to readjust one's words or modify it so as to comply with the circumstance. This is politics, in the sense of circumstantial truth. As put by Colin Hay (2014: 161) "politics is what we make of it". Of course, it will require a great deal of creativity as a form of management. Hans Sigaard Jensen (2011: 56) put knowingly:

> A central function of management is to handle this situation and create forms and spaces for the process of interpretation, negotiation and persuasion that have to unfold […] because new environments and situations are constantly encountered.

Rightly, repairing one's discourse is not innocent. Therefore, a discourse marker is needed to prepare this politically oriented turn. It is qualified as politically oriented in Colin Hay's terms (2014:161):

> Politics is a social activity, and like most social activities, it works best in situations of co-operation and trust. If we assume that others cannot be trusted, or we assume (as in the precautionary principle) that they must first demonstrate themselves trustworthy before we will reciprocate, then we foreclose the very possibility of deliberation, co-operation.

In the following example, the co-operation intention is made relevant:

(18)- "**you know** that it is not what I meant" she said, (TBO: 116)

The co-operation is announced by the discourse marker "you know". The lady manages her words with the discourse marker "you know" so as to calm down the man. Managing "You know" amounts to instructing the hearer how the message should be interpreted. This discourse marker is different from the cognition verb "to know" that she used previously and

that has been misinterpreted by the man. The cognition verb "to know" can be used normally, that is displaying cognition as in the following:

(19)- "**you know** what I mean" (TBO: 142);

(20) - "Driver, **you know** where we went last Sunday" (TBO: 150)

(21) - "**you know** what has happened" (TBO: 174)

The different occurrences of “you know” can be associated with the necessity modal ‘must’ as in the example

(22) - "you must know people who …" (TBO: 116).

The discourse is repaired in the example:

(23)- "Things get done all the time, and if **you know** the people who can do these things, there is nothing wrong in that". (TBO: 116)

Thereafter follows a sort of negation of that presumed knowledge by the man: "I don’t know people…". In short, with the discourse marker "you know" the woman charges the man with his not knowing her ways of speaking. Similarly, in utterance

(24)- "**Well**, not in their own names, of course." (TBO: 137),

Koomson has repaired the unfair words of his wife.

III.2 Topic Shift Markers

By ‘topic shift markers’ it is intended to express a change of the topic under discussion with the use of a given marker. In fact, a noticeable occurrence of the discourse particle ‘well’ is at the very beginning of the utterance. It therein behaves like a cohesive tie with the preceding idea and the shift that follows as in this utterance:

(25)- "**Well**, so long as there is a place. Nature’s call is nature’s call’. (TBO: 134)

Here, ‘well’ calls to end the debate over the distinction between toilet and latrine. For having understood this displacing conclusion, the two men left their wives and went to the latrine. It

appears that the discourse marker "well" is commentary marker because it precedes a comment on the basic message.

Thomas Holtgraves (1997: 233) is right when he details that the discourse marker ‘well’ is used to ‘displace’ or delay some kind of disagreement or difference of opinion with the preceding speaker. It comes in moments when it is vital to gain thinking time in order to choose one’s politeness strategy with care. In other words, it expresses a pause in the speaker’s thought allowing it to function as a boundary marker between sub-topics as developed by Andreas Jucker (1986: 118-120). For Zorobi Philippe TOH (2016:231), this topic delaying is technical and “it is a token of the predator”. When he begins to feel the fall or the weakness of his argument, he will change the topic. Through the discourse marker “well” the two men have successfully shifted the topic under discussion.

(26)- "**Well**," I’Il let you choose, then’ said Koomson. To cut short, Koomson called Atinga for the trolley introducing thus the end of this endless hesitation on who will choose first the drinks. (TBO: 147).

With the utterance that follows, a short cut is envisaged.

(27)- “I think she is being fooled, that’s all” he said, (TBO: 146),

The man wants them not to linger on that Oyo debate. The atmosphere being unfair, the man will give a laconic answer as a way to support that the lesser they discuss OYO, the better it is. Unsurprisingly, the passage in the novel reads:

(28)-“The woman looked as if she would say something really indignant” (TBO: 147)

When she gets to state, the woman reveals her failure to decipher the discourse marker function in her man’s utterance, and thus misunderstanding poses as a result of that failure. As observed by Zorobi Philippe TOH (2012:8),

> There is a kind of perfect stimulus-response between the protagonists involved in discourse in the course of this relation of intersubjectivity. […] When in the process of information exchange, one protagonist uses a technique, the other protagonist will guess the message and react appropriately.

She would have let down that confusing matter. She has not paid much attention to his nothingness when she says:

(29)- “But the man said nothing and she continued.” (TBO: 146).

Possibly, the man has a self-interest that does not comply with OYO coming with them. Knowingly, Colin Hay (2014:2) observes: “A collective action problem exists whenever the common or collective interest of a group or society is not best served by the narrow pursuit by individuals of their own (perceived) self-interest.” Additionally, discourse markers “well” or “I think” are reasonably used to convey a shift of topic.

Conclusion

The discussion has emphasized that ‘well’, ‘you know’ ‘I think’ as discourse markers have multiple functions. They can be used as strategies to evoke discourse insufficiency. They are also used to manage the co-speaker’s face-threat or even as techniques of delaying one turn in interaction. As such, their propositional functions do exist but they can be referred to as discourse markers in the argumentation process. In Ayi Kwei Armah’s *The Beautyful Ones Are Not Yet Born*, the discourse marker ‘well’ is not only a manner adverb, but it goes sometimes as a discourse marker. Similarly, the linguistic units "you know" and "I think" are not merely verbal phrases and noun phrases but also and importantly discourse markers.

Not deciphering their signification appropriately will inevitably lead to misunderstanding because they convey the different kinds of clues not only for interpersonal interaction but also at textual levels. In Ayi Kwei Armah’s *The Beautyful Ones Are Not Yet Born*, the discourse markers “well”, “I think” and “you know” have sometimes failed to fulfill expectations for language is both a language game and an effective tool for discourse managing. Thus, being highly aware of their functioning is required by discourse protagonists for a successful interaction.

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