



**“THEY NEVER REALIZED THAT, YOU KNOW”:
LINGUISTIC COLLOCATIONS AND INTERACTIONAL
FUNCTIONS OF *YOU KNOW* IN CONTEMPORARY
ACADEMIC SPOKEN ENGLISH**

**“They Never Realized That, You Know!”: Colocações
Linguísticas e Funções Interacionais de *You Know* no
Inglês Acadêmico Falado Contemporâneo**

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Abstract

Discourse markers are a collection of one-word or multiword terms that help language users organize their utterances on the grammar, semantic, pragmatic and interactional levels. Researchers have characterized some of their roles in written and spoken discourse (Halliday & Hasan, 1976, Schffrin, 1988, 2001). Following this trend, this paper advances a discussion of discourse markers in contemporary academic spoken English. Through quantitative and qualitative analyses of the use of the discourse marker ‘you know’ in the Michigan Corpus of Academic Spoken English (MICASE) we describe its frequency in this corpus, its collocation on the sentence level and its interactional functions. Grammatically, a concordance analysis shows that you know (as other discourse markers) is linguistically flexible as it seems to be placed in any grammatical slot of an utterance. Interactionally, a qualitative analysis indicates that its use in contemporary English goes beyond the uses described in the literature. We defend that besides serving as a hedging strategy (Lakoff, 1975), you know also serves as a powerful face-saving (Goffman, 1955) technique which constructs students’ identities vis-à-vis their professors’ and vice-versa.

Key-words: *discourse markers; you know; facework; corpus linguistics.*





Resumo

Marcadores discursivos formam um grupo de termos com uma ou mais palavras que auxiliam os usuários de uma língua a organizar seus enunciados no que se refere à gramática, semântica, pragmática e interação. Pesquisadores descreveram algumas de suas funções no discurso escrito e falado (Halliday & Hasan, 1976; Schiffrin, 1988, 2001). Nesse cenário, este artigo discute o uso de marcadores discursivos 'you know' no Michigan Corpus of Academic Spoken English (MICASE), descrevem-se a frequência desse marcador no corpus, sua colocação na oração e suas funções interacionais. A análise quantitativa mostra que you know (como outros marcadores discursivos) é usado em qualquer lugar gramatical de um enunciado. Na interação, como sugerido pela análise qualitativa, seus usos extrapolam aqueles descritos na literatura. Defende-se que além de servir como uma estratégia para demonstrar incerteza (Lakoff, 1975), you know serve como uma poderosa estratégia de proteção da face (Goffman, 1955) dos interlocutores que constrói as identidades dos estudantes vis-à-vis as identidades dos professores e vice versa.

Palavras-chave: *marcadores discursivos; you know; trabalho de face; linguística de corpus.*

1. Introduction

Linguistics has long ago uncovered the importance of discourse markers and their influence on (1) the production of affinity/responsibility relations of an utterance producer and the utterances he/she produces in a given context and (2) the discursive production of interpersonal subjectivity and meanings which surround social relationships (Halliday & Hasan, 1976; R. Lakoff, 1975; Schiffrin, 1985; 1986; 1988; 2001; 2003; Bucholtz, 1999). Despite having been deeply characterized, words such as *and*, *but*, *well* or phrases such as *on the other hand*, *in other words*, *you know* are still a cause of misunderstanding among language





scientists. There is not a clear classification of what makes part of this set of linguistic features². However, following Schiffrin (1988, 2001, 2003), we consider, for the purposes of this study, discourse markers as a collection of one-word or multiword terms that aid language users organize their utterances on the grammar, semantic, and pragmatic levels. This definition is intended to be broad and encompasses the traditionally called conjunctions as well as vocalizations and sounds that have not been grammaticalized yet such as *oh*, *hum*, *uh*, *ah* (see Atkinson And Heritage, 1984; Gardner, 2001 for interesting discussions of the interactional functions of these vocalizations). In other words, discourse markers are used in written and spoken discourse. Their functions are multifold: they build cohesion/coherence onto discourse and give writers/readers and speakers/listeners contextualization cues (Gumperz, 1982) on the relation of the utterance producers with the utterance they produce in a given text (written or spoken) and this utterance's relations with the text being produced.

Bearing this in mind, in this article we investigate the use of the marker *you know* in contemporary academic spoken English. Our analysis is two-fold. Firstly, we analyze *you know*'s collocation on the grammar level in an attempt to answer the question: are there grammatical constraints on the collocation of *you know* on the utterance level? Secondly, we put under scrutiny the interactional functions of this marker in order to understand the kinds of relations *you know* designs (1) between the producer of an utterance and the utterance itself and (2) between the speaker who uses this marker and his/her interlocutor(s) in an academic setting.

To do this, we use the Michigan Corpus of Academic Spoken English (MICASE, henceforth), provided by the University of Michigan English Language Institute³. In order to keep records of the characteristics of spoken academic discourse, its characteristics, its purposes, its functions, in 1997 the English Language Institute at the University of Michigan initiated the MICASE project which involved recording and

2. For an inspiring discussion of the lack of conceptual consistency on discourse markers, see Schiffrin (2001).

3. Available at <http://quod.lib.umich.edu/m/micase/>





transcribing hours of interactions from across the university campuses. One of the many purposes of this project is to register naturally occurring talk in order to investigate the properties of contemporary academic English and refine the understanding of academic discourse's features. The team responsible for the corpus believed their data would show divergences from what is described in books as the usage of academic speech and what makes up this register in today's universities (Simpson & Swales, 2001). Because there was no database of this kind available, MICASE was designed to be an open project to the public and therefore promote the development of further research and projects. It is in this scenario that the research reported here is inserted.

2. Well, like, uh, you know what I mean: on discourse markers in contemporary North American English

As indicated above, discourse markers include grammaticalized words as *just* (Lindemann & Mauraen, 2001), vocalized sounds that have never been grammatically classified as *oh* (Heritage, 1984) and *mhm* (Coates, 1998, Gardner, 2001), and lexicalized phrases as *you know* (R. Lakoff, 1975). Their interpersonal and textual function throughout interaction has been studied by well-known linguists such as Schiffrin (2001), Swales e Malczewski (2001), George Lakoff (1973) to name a few. However, a handful of researchers have investigated discourse markers in written discourse. Following the trend motivated by Schiffrin's (1998) research, we focus on the *interactional* use of these linguistic items in an attempt to characterize some of their functions in academic spoken English. More precisely, for this paper, we focus on one unique item from the long list of the so-called discourse markers which was surprisingly frequent in the Michigan Corpus of Academic English (MICASE), namely *you know*. Our efforts here are to fulfill the scientific needs for understanding how interactants organize their talk in academic interactions and to understand the functions and collocations of the discourse marker under our attention.

The token analyzed in this paper has been regarded as a hedging strategy broadly used to display tentativeness or inexactitude (Lakoff, 1975). However, we want to complement Poos and Simpson (2002)





studies on the multifunctionality of hedging, which remains as an ushering gap to be filled. Robin Lakoff in her ground-breaking book *Language and Woman's Place* (1975) characterized *you know* as one of the indicators of women's conversational insecurity. We do not intend to claim whether this widespread belief is true or not, but we decidedly agree with new approaches to the relations between language and gender that state that it is not the frequency of use of specific terms by men and women that defines the gendered usages of language (Eckert & McConnell-Ginet, 1992; 2003). On the contrary, when considering gender, its complex relations to discourse and, most importantly after feminist and *queer* emphasis on the discursive socioconstruction of gendered and sexual identities (Holmes & Meyerhoff, 2003, Butler, 1990), its socio-interactional production, one must look well beyond use of a single word, and beyond that word's supposed meaning (Poos & Simpson, 2002) in order to grasp its fragmentation and nuances to the construction of identities. In other words, the relation between a given word and the identity of its user is not one-to-one, but one-to-many, considering the context of use. Based on this approach, we look at the uses of *you know* having in mind the likely multifunctionality of this marker. With this in mind, we intend to add another view to the widespread hedging theory, showing that the marker under scrutiny here also has metapragmatic interactional functions, which modalize the speaker's position towards his/her interlocutor, as we will discuss later.

It is important at this stage that two things be clear: (i) utterances as "Did you know that?", "Do you know what I mean?", "Do you know Betsy?", and others which were operated as questions explicitly aiming at a response and, therefore, marked as the first part of an adjacency pair (Schegloff & Sacks, 1973), were edited out of our search since they do not accomplish the same interactional functions the word sequence we are interested in does and (ii) our analysis does not aim at verifying whether or not women are conversationally insecure. Instead, we intend to argue that the widespread belief which considers tokens as *you know* as mitigators is not the only one applicable in contemporary academic spoken English.





3. Methods

Our data were taken from MICASE which consists of transcriptions of a myriad of modes of naturally occurring conversations audio-taped on the University of Michigan Campuses. Poos and Simpson (2002) suggest that interactants in academic settings might sound tentative in order to present their claims cautiously, and modestly in order to negotiate a balance between authority and concession. In a similar vein, Tracy and Naughton (1994) show how lexical choices, time references and the use of marked and unmarked question forms in intellectual discussions can be related to someone's identity being at stake. Likewise, we intend to demonstrate that the uses of *you know* not always convey the stereotyped uncertainty and inexactitude hedging classification has imposed on this set of discourse markers.

We used MICASE search engine to look for instances of the use of *you know*. Searches in MICASE have brought us 7013 tokens of the marker under scrutiny here. As we have already mentioned, sequences that were marked as the first part of an adjacency pair and, thus, conditionally motivating the production of a second pair part were swept out of our analytic focus since they function as questions and not as discourse markers in the sense we understand markers (see Schiffrin, 2001). After editing these out, 6567 tokens of the discourse marker we aim at were left. We worked on this search during the first academic term of 2005. As MICASE was still under construction then, numbers may vary nowadays.

Here we point to some tendencies of the use of *you know* in contemporary academic spoken English so that further research may be undertaken in the future. As a consequence, our purpose with this paper is not to analyze all the tokens found as we believe the results could turn out to be sweeping and, as a consequence, misleading. Having this in mind, we reflected upon some criteria as to which transcript should be chosen to be thoroughly analyzed. Our criteria are as follows. We have chosen an interaction taped during a class about writing compositions which is part of the Humanities and Arts division. First and foremost, this interaction was chosen because of the huge frequency of use of *you know*. We found 110 tokens being used during the 95 minutes of





conversation transcribed, out of which 8 were clearly adjacency first pair parts. Another factor that motivated us to analyze this transcript was its highly visible interactional format in which all the students could take part in the interaction. Last but not least, this transcript was selected among the large number of transcripts that make up MICASE, because it consists of male and female speakers. We consider a cross-gender interaction the milieu for linguistic behaviors which are likely to influence the speakers' interactional patterns, as identity differences might be rich resources for linguistic and identity (re)negotiations (Borba, 2008; 2009).

In what follows, firstly, we carry a concordance analysis to investigate the discursive contexts interactants use *you know* and its collocation on the utterance level. To analyze its interactional multifunctionality, we study the interactional environments (its sequentiality in the turn-taking system) in which the tokens are used with two questions to orient our analysis: Is *you know* used as a hedging strategy in a stretch of conversation? And what interactional job does the use of *you know* perform in an utterance? We also hope to show that using quantitative and qualitative analytic techniques to study discourse markers in interaction is useful since this coordination of analytic approaches may underpin the markers' syntactic and interactional malleability.

4. Concordance analysis: the collocation of *you know*

The hedging system of the English language has been exhaustively examined since George Lakoff (1973) stated their existence in interactions. Several linguists have already had them under scrutiny and analyzed the hedging system underlying the English grammar through a handful of different perspectives (R. Lakoff, 1975; Tannen, 1996; Fishman, 1998; Coates, 1998; Poos & Simpson, 2002; Lindemann & Mauranen, 2001). However, they took for granted G. Lakoff's assumptions on hedging operational usages throughout discourse which claim hedges to be fluid, i.e. words like *kind of*, *sort of*, *you know*, *just*, *like*, etc. are randomly issued about discourse. In an attempt to investigate *you know*'s linguistic collocations, we performed a detailed concordance





study to verify how the interactants deal with *you know*'s interactional functions on the utterance level.

Discourse markers have received much attention lately. Scholars who are interested in the construction of a descriptive grammar of spoken English have largely studied these linguistic features to dissect their functions in all levels of the language. Linguistics has paid closer attention to what has been called hedging system and many studies have taken for granted hedges structural uses in utterances. However, the token under spotlight in the current analysis, we reckon, is a special member of the system mentioned earlier. A striking number of hedges consists of single words, such as *like*, whose canonic grammatical usage may be easily subverted and transformed into a hedge word (as in “like I don’t really think you did a good thing). Others, such as *sort of* and *kind of*, may be semantically and interactionally modified to fulfill the contextually-bound interactional needs of tentativeness, vagueness and deference (as in “it’s sort of messy around here”). Nevertheless, we regard the discourse feature this article describes as a different type of sequence: *You know* is a lexicalized word sequence that derives from a first or second pair part of adjacency pairs which has been modified and adapted to accomplish the interactional functions of hedge words. The following characterization aims at describing how *you know* is discursively manipulated in the transcript the current study analyses.

As has been mentioned, our efforts are directed to a unique cross-gender interaction which has been chosen mainly because of its highly interactive mode. The transcript includes eleven participants: six males and four females. We regard such an interaction as a rich milieu for a variety of interactional strategies for two reasons: (i) it is held during a class in which the professor motivates the participation of all students, which might threaten students’ constructed public images (Goffman, 1955) and, therefore, entice facework strategies and (ii) the differing genders involved in interaction may also motivate the operation of linguistic strategies for the construction of social identities and differing interactional statuses. We came across 110 tokens of *you know* in the transcript analyzed, but we only focus on the tokens explicitly operated as discourse markers, that is, we weeded out those that were constructed as adjacency pair parts. Table one shows the different categories of *you know* we found in this transcript.



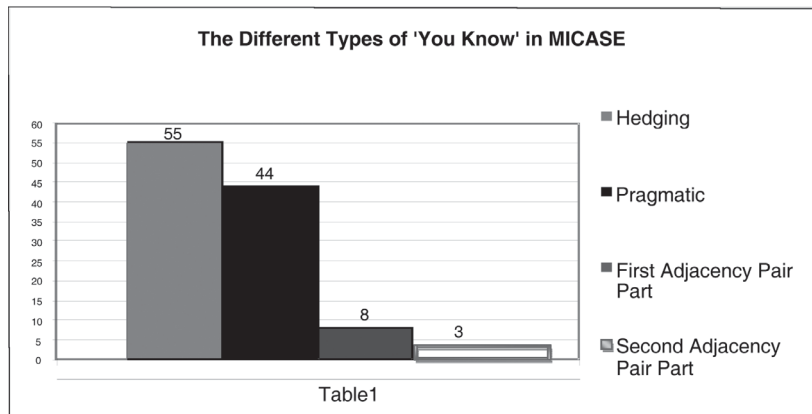


Table 1: the different types of 'You Know' in MICASE

As the table 1 makes clear, the amount of sequences operated as either first or second parts in adjacency pairs is very small: 11 out of 110. Most of them were operated as questions which sometimes were not responded. The quantity of second pair parts, therefore, is lower.

- [1] (what do you know?)
- [2] it sounds like (you know the Bible pretty well.
- [3] do you know the Bible very well?
- [4] oh by any- do you know Betsy Williams?

You know as a discourse marker comprises the great majority of occurrences in the interaction we investigate here. The tokens we identified as hedges focused clearly on expressing tentativeness and/or inexactitude. Instances of what we call pragmatic *you know* are to be described in the next section having the interactional context in mind to scrutinize its pragmatic usages. Grossly speaking, pragmatic *you know* aims at fulfilling social requirements for interaction, i.e. matters of identity and status in the interaction.

We now turn to the description of the structures in which *you know* is inserted. Despite being an especial member of the hedging



system, *you know* seems to be freely distributed throughout the interaction under depiction. The concordance analysis we carried out corroborates the widespread knowledge about hedging usage, i. e. it reinforces the idea of fluidity that is inherent to the utilization of this type of words. Utterances like

[5] um well you know it's not really a story, worth telling, until, this thing that ...

[6] in _ at church you know they they, teach you about the figure of Christ...

[7] this isn't a story about, you know, Jerry Falwell or something like that...

are paradigmatic excerpts. *You know* in the examples above is inserted in a variety of differing syntactic positions. In [5], it is followed by a subject pronoun as well as in [6]; it is preceded by a preposition in [7]. Thus, when it comes to linguistic collocation, it is visible how flexibly operated *you know* is. This finding reinforces George Lakoff's (1973) ground-breaking discoveries regarding the English resources for conveying interactional uncertainty, vagueness and respect to one's interlocutor.

To have a better view of how the token we focus is linguistically administered, an analysis of the words that precede and the words that follow *you know* was undertaken. Hence, the following characterization helps understand its grammatical adaptations to fulfill the hedging system requirements, that is, the operational fluidity. Tables 2 and 3 show the detailed study of the structures where interactants used the token described here.

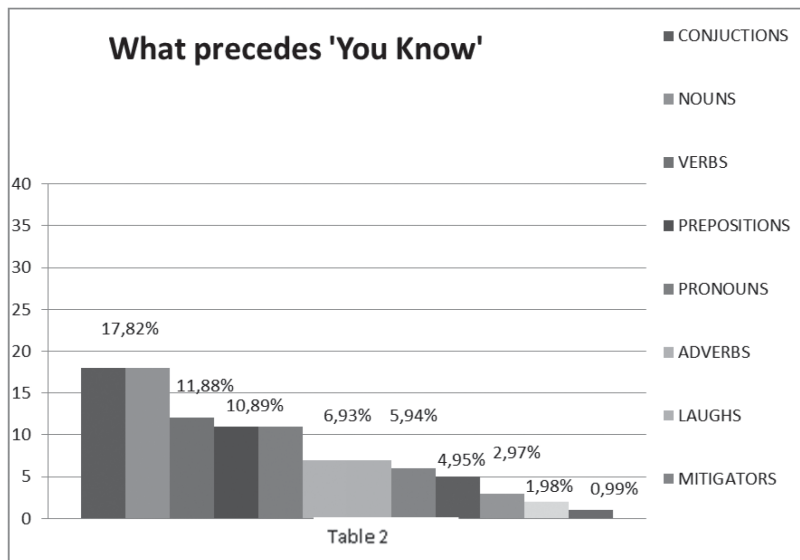


Table 2: what precedes 'You Know'

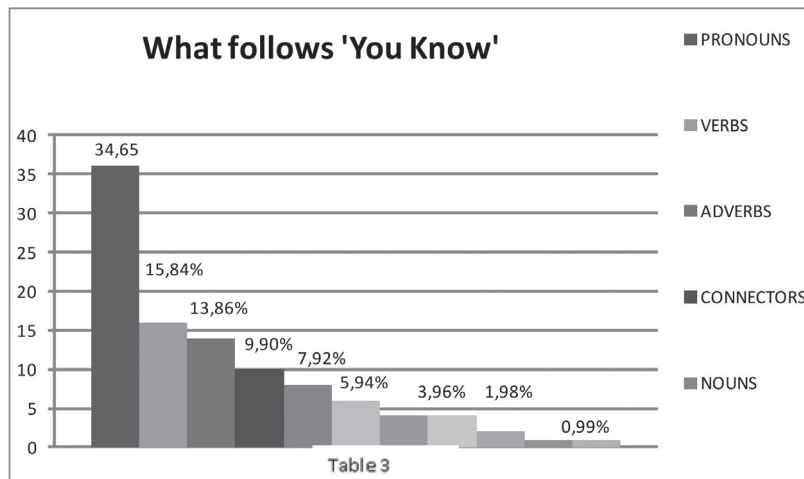


Table 3: what follows 'You Know'



Tables 2 and 3 summarize our findings of what *you know*'s distribution is like. A great many tokens are preceded by conjunctions, such as *but*, *however* and *and*, *but* being the most frequent. We reckon it is so because of the face threatening status utterances like the following one have

[8] you use it in one way and you mean for the reader to understand it and the second time you mean it there's a second aspect to that word, that you mean in, in that part of the sentence. Right? But **you know** those scarce _ cases are rare **um**, so otherwise **it's it's** usually **just uh um**, you know laziness of of writing, right **of of** writing drafts. **um** you didn't feel like taking out a thesaurus at that moment or you just wanted to get that idea down on the page before you forgot it or something. **alright? um**, so fix it between drafts. **um**, good. you have anything to say about what Chris is talking a ...

This example was produced by the professor and here *you know* seems to be fulfilling his institutional role of protecting his students' face. In this utterance, upon criticizing his students ideas in a piece of writing, the professor seems to use *you know* to flag the entrance of an opinion which contradicts what the student had proposed to discussion. The use of *you know* seems to weaken the illocutionary force of the criticism and, thus, lessen the face-threatening potential of the utterance. This is an example of what we call pragmatic *you know* which is more thoroughly discussed in the next section.

To sum up, these findings come to corroborate the hedging collocation theory which, as we have made explicit, states the fluidity with which interactants operate the lexical resources English has to show deference, uncertainty, vagueness, and, as we claim throughout the next section, respect to one's interlocutor's face. Now we turn to the pragmatic analysis of *you know* bearing in mind the context in which they are inserted to show that we cannot face hedge words in a simplistic manner; instead, we have to look beyond the word and sometimes beyond the sentence to have a more nuanced understanding of hedges' important intersubjective functions in talk-in-interaction.



5. The interactional functions of *you know*

As far as this point of our analysis is concerned, we have already reinforced the tradition pioneered by G. Lakoff (1973) and perpetuated by many other language scientists which states the freely operated discursive collocation of tokens that make up the extensive class of hedge words in the English language. We cannot claim, however, that the hedging system has been loosely studied over the years because there are a handful of analyses on them following a large number of perspectives. However, we do agree with new approaches to the study of these discourse markers that look beyond the lexicon and have under scrutiny the entire context in which the tokens are inserted. Linguists have focused single-mindedly on the hedging system *per se*, which we believe conveys much more than just hesitation, deference, uncertainty, and the like. Thus, for the remaining of this paper we look at *you know* and the interactional context which surrounds it. As Poos and Simpson state in their outstanding paper on *kind of* and *sort of*:

We found that the hedges, taken in context, cannot be defined with a single meaning, but are better considered as pragmatic tools for managing speaker's relations to one another and to the topic being discussed. (Poos & Simpson, 2002:4)

Before going on to the depiction of *you know*'s functions, we found it relevant for the purposes of this study to verify whether Poos and Simpson (2002) claims about the occurrences of *kind of* and *sort of* are similar to those of *you know*. The authors discovered that hedges are much more frequent in what they call soft sciences, i.e. sociology, humanities and arts, etc. than they are in academic divisions such as physics and medical sciences. As they propound, "hedging frequencies are lowest in the physical sciences, slightly higher in the biological sciences, highest in the social sciences and second highest in the humanities" (Poos & Simpson, 2002:9). Our findings are quite similar to what these authors have found, that is, the frequency of the word sequence under our attention is higher in the soft sciences than in the physical and medical divisions. As figure 1 summarizes, the frequency is only different in one aspect: the lowest frequency is found in the biological and medical departments..



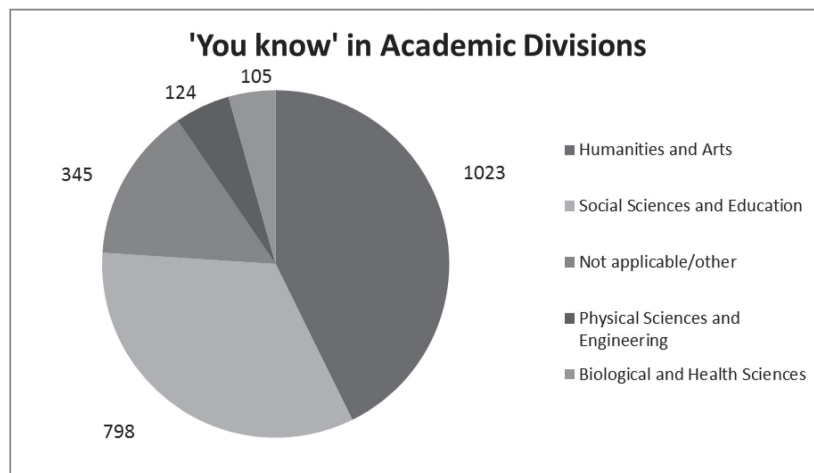


Figure 1: 'You Know' in academic divisions

The search for *you know* in MICASE brought about 4.762 tokens out of which 2.395 occurrences as discourse markers. The distribution of this discourse marker is as figure 1 shows. We decidedly agree with the evidence from the experimental study carried by Schachter et al (1991, 1994), (cited in Poos and Simpson, 2002). The authors' experiment attributes the striking difference in frequency of hedges to the vocabulary range available to humanists' best description of what they discuss. Poos and Simpson note that

language in the social sciences or humanities is characterized by richer vocabularies than in the sciences, and is therefore more likely to include pauses and filled pauses uttered by speakers searching for the right words among many possibilities (Poos & Simpson, 2002:13).

Nevertheless, besides sharing the opinions stated above, we think hedges are not only used as a device for holding the floor while seeking for the right word to fill a given interactional slot. For us, the hedging system is deployed in contexts where the face of the interactants maybe under threat. As has been mentioned above, the academic environment





is very likely to expose people's face and therefore the usage of hedges is essential to maintain the good flow of interaction and interactants positions vis-à-vis their interlocutors in a given discursive event. According to Goffman (1955), face is a projection of self delineated in terms of approved social attributes. Goffman propounds that this projection is an image that others may share, as when a person makes a good showing for his/her profession or religion by making a good showing for himself/herself. In this sense, the interactants' face is a negotiation which shows the involvement of interlocutors with their own face needs and others'. Thus, in the university campus, the negotiation of faces is essential to the flow of interaction and to the effective and respectful exchange of information.

Let us take a look at example [8] from the previous section, reproduced below,

[8] you use it in one way and you mean for the reader to understand it and the second time you mean it there's a second aspect to that word, that you mean in, in that part of the sentence. Right? But **you know** those scarce _ cases are rare **um**, so otherwise **it's it's** usually **just uh um**, you know laziness of writing, right **of of** writing drafts. **um** you didn't feel like taking out a thesaurus at that moment or you just wanted to get that idea down on the page before you forgot it or something. **alright? um**, so fix it between drafts. **um**, good. you have anything to say about what Chris is talking a ...

As has already been mentioned, *you know* is in the context here presented doing what Goffman named as face-work strategy. The structure of the sentence is operated around the idea of opposing what the professor's interlocutor had pushed into discussion to class, it is explicitly expressed by the connector *but* which precedes the lexicalized sequence this paper focus on. *You know*, in this discursive environment, is operated to fulfill an essential characteristic of interaction: the protection of the speaker's and his/her interlocutors' faces. In other words, in this example, the professor does not seem to be conveying inexactitude or uncertainty regarding his opinion, quite the opposite. *You know* seems to be used here as a marker to weaken the illocutionary force of his





utterance. This is an example of what we call pragmatic *you know*, i.e. instances of use of *you know* which serve as face-saving strategies in interactional contexts where the interactants's face may be under threat. Note that this type of you know comes "packaged" (Pomerantz, 1984) in a cluster of hesitations (um, uh, of of) and other hedging words (just, alright?). These "perturbations" to the production of the utterance only emerge in the context where the *pragmatic you know* is used, showing its close relation to the context where it is inserted, to the ideas being exposed and to the addressee's face needs.

Hedge words are usually operated in clusters of words that convey hesitation, uncertainty, and so on (it is actually the criterion we had to count the tokens we found). Pragmatic *you know* is often used in contexts in which the face of participants are under any danger, such as in the following examples:

[9] i mean you can mean you can mean that i don't mean to bully you or anything but, **you know** it's them fight- them's fighting words...

[10] well, you can do it, **you know**, the easiest way to do it would be...

[11] well i, **you know**, i like this, i like this because, you know you're t- you're, taking Atwood, somewhere that, that it hasn't gone yet in this class...

[12] what if you, what if you looked at an A paper, **you know** a paper that he gave you an A on and compared it to the, paper that he gave you the D on?

All the examples above can show the beyond-the-sentence functions of *you know*. It is important that we have in mind the context in which the tokens are inserted. From [9] to [12] the face of the participants are under threat because of the nature of this environment, i.e. the professor's giving his (sometimes acid) position about his students assumptions. Hence, to protect each other's face *you know* is operated to postpone the threatening utterance and/or flag the face-threatening nature of the forthcoming utterance.





It is necessary at this moment to claim that the face-work function of *you know* is always used by the professor to fulfill his institutional role pedagogically, i.e. he tries to avoid the threat imposed by his utterances to his students public image. On the other hand, none of the students make use of this interactional objective of the token here analyzed; instead, they frequently operate *you know* to achieve its well-known function: hesitation. By doing so, they signalize their insecurity about what they defend and accomplish two important goals: (i) conveying uncertainty to ask for their professor's backing in case they do not live up to his expectations and (ii) showing distance from the topic they talk about, thus avoiding labels from their classmates. Students deploy utterances such as:

[13] well she seems to, it gives her power to be a, to, **you know** like a preacher who, like a

televangelist who's trying to get money (SU-F LAUGH) but, you know, it gi- ...

[14] i don't know he said **you know** it just wasn't he said your arguments are not clear like things weren't and i said oh that's really bizarre...

[15] ...you're like in the front and you have to be like sort of like on better behavior and like, if you make jokes it has to be like really quiet. **You know** like you can't just like bust out...

As can be seen, students make frequent use of *you know* which is surrounded by clusters of hedge words reinforcing the functions that hedging system is given. Yet we have focused throughout this paper on another function *you know* has to keep the good flow of the interaction under scrutiny.

Our findings support the belief about alternative ways of investigating the hedging system. Although they have already been exhaustively analyzed, linguistics has shown another possible interactional functions these words may have in talk-in-interaction. The pragmatic function of *you know* is just one example of the multiple linguistic work carried by these discourse markers. *You know*, as we





have shown here, is a powerful device to construct speakers' positions toward their interlocutors and the topic being discussed. In the academic environment from which MICASE has been taken, this is useful to fulfill the institutional roles participants have in relation to one another and to the topic of conversation. Therefore, as it is shown in table 1 from the previous section, the pragmatic usage of *you know* is more frequent in the conversation here depicted. There is some degree of overlapping on the two discursive functions of this discourse marker, but we considered it essential for pedagogical purposes to show the face-saving *you know* and its hedging function as different bearing in mind the context in which they were found. Hedging *you know* is commonly surrounded by other hedge words reinforcing, thus, its conveying deference, vagueness and uncertainty. On the other hand, the pragmatic *you know* is inserted in face threatening contexts, i.e. contexts in which participants may be exposed to some interactional danger.

6. Final considerations

Following the flow of studies which approach the hedging system in English through different perspectives, this paper comes to corroborate Poos and Simpson (2002) analysis of hedging words in MICASE. Our findings try to show that hedging words are not just operated to express the wide spread functions theorized by Lakoff (1975), Fishman (1998), Tannen (1996) etc. Instead, the hedging function of the word sequence that is analyzed throughout this article conveys interactional work to save the face of the participants involved in conversation.

We found *you know* as a facework strategy focusing on the interactional contexts in which it was inserted during the interaction. The transcript we had in hands was one of a very interactive class during which the professor motivates students' participation. Hence, students' participation exposes their public image to the whole group and, while defending their views, students were frequently interrupted by the professor who face-savingsly tried to protect his and his student's face. Although the pragmatic function that has been described here does not stand for the majority of *you know* tokens operated during the conversation we analyze, we still believe it is a powerful device available



to interactants to protect theirs and their interlocutors' faces. Yet students apparently used hedging words to ask for their professor's support and to protect their role as students, that is, the distance hedging words convey can also be considered as an in-group marker. The professor's frequent use of *you know* and other discourse makers conveying deference indicates his position as a facilitator of learning, and not as the almighty knower-of-the-right-answer.

This paper points to the necessity of further research on discourse markers in contemporary academic spoken English in order to describe their operational and interactional functions in academic environments. This research move might shed light on the changing characteristics of interactions in such settings and of the identities that currently populate educational settings.

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