

A Conversational Analysis on the Pragmatic Functions of “X1+you know+X2” in Interview

Yueqi Ma and Yi Zhang*

School of Foreign Studies, Northwestern Polytechnical University, Xi'an, China

Email: mayueqi@mail.nwpu.edu.cn (Y.Q.M.); yizhang@nwpu.edu.cn (Y.Z.)

*Corresponding author

Manuscript received March 31, 2025; accepted April 4, 2025; published October 29, 2025.

Abstract—Discourse markers have been significant in various fields for several years, especially pragmatics and syntax. Among those multifunctional discourse markers, one of the commonest one is “you know”. However, its usage has not been thoroughly explored from the perspective of conversation analysis. This study intends to fill this gap by deeply analyzing pragmatic functions of “you know” when appearing in the middle of a turn by taking an interview as the corpus. Samples were chosen from an English interview program on Cable News Network (CNN)-Larry King Live on March 28th, 2018 and through transcription and the use of Antconc4.2.4 as the instrument, the research findings demonstrated that among all the 221 “you know” identified from the corpus this study established, “X1+you know+X2” appeared 89 times, 54 of which appeared at the initial position of the sequence, playing the function of confirming the mutuality, opening a topic and reminding the information, whereas 35 non-initial “X1+you know+X2” played the function of showing the attitude and emphasizing. The qualitative analysis manifested the relationship between sequential positions and the pragmatic functions of “X1+you know+X2”.

Keywords—“X1+you know+X2”, conversational analysis, pragmatic function

I. INTRODUCTION

As a very common language phenomenon in daily conversation, Discourse Markers (DM) have become the main focus for linguists from different fields. Schiffrin [1] stated that, in English there were many words and phrases marking certain relations between the present utterance and the former ones. At the same time, as one of the commonest English discourse markers in oral English, “you know” has been extensively examined from different perspectives. However, less attention has been paid to sociological understanding of using this kind of linguistic tool. In the past few years, a variety of theoretical approaches have agreed that DMs are (meta) pragmatic [1]. Discourse markers can serve different functions when put in different positions. However, few scholars analyzed specifically used functions from the perspective of conversation analysis, that is, to put discourse markers in the turn and sequence [2].

Conversation Analysis (CA) is a methodological approach within the field of sociology and linguistics that focuses on the detailed examination of talk in interaction [2]. Conversation analysis pays attention to turn design and sequential structure to dig out some potential intentions for social behaviors between the speakers [3]. In terms of CA, discourse makers can be put at the beginning, middle and

end of a turn which can be the initial or non-initial position of a sequence [2].

Interview embraces the features of natural dialogues and topic-oriented context which can provide the complexity for the pragmatic functions of certain discourse marker [3]. But studies on DM in interviews remain insufficient and unexplored. In view of the complexity of different discourse markers in different language patterns, this article focuses on “you know” in the middle of the turn which is quoted as “X1+you know+X2”. Based on CA, this study intends to investigate different pragmatic functions of “X1+you know+X2” according to whether it is at the initial turn of a sequence or not by taking an interview as the real and natural corpus.

II. METHODOLOGY

A. Research Questions

- (1) What are the distributional features of “X1+you know+X2” according to the sequential position in this interview?
- (2) What is the relationship between the pragmatic functions and sequential positions?

B. Research Corpus and Tools

As for the research corpus, it is chosen from Cable News Network (CNN) program-Larry King Live, which is Known for its straightforward and conversational style, and in-depth interviews with a wide range of guests. The exact corpus is the interview on March 28th, 2018. As for the research tool, transcription becomes significantly important in this research. The marking tool is Antconc4.2.4 and manual marking for specific type, and each turn that is transcribed is encoded with number (e.g., 01, 02, 03...) (Figs. 1 & 2).

Transcription is based on the rules postulated by Gail Jefferson in 1984 [4]. In the present study, some frequently used signs are shown as follows:

“=” means continuous utterance. “[” means the place where the overlap begins. “]” means the place where the overlap ends. “(.)” means the intervals within and between utterances. “(())” means transcriber’s description like cough, sniff, nod, smile, etc. “...” means ellipsis. “PREformed” means part of one sentence is stressed. “w(h)ord” indicates breathiness, as in laughter, crying, etc. “hhh” means an out-breath, “.hhh” means an in-breath, “><” means this part is faster than others, “.” means a falling tone, and “?” means a rising tone.

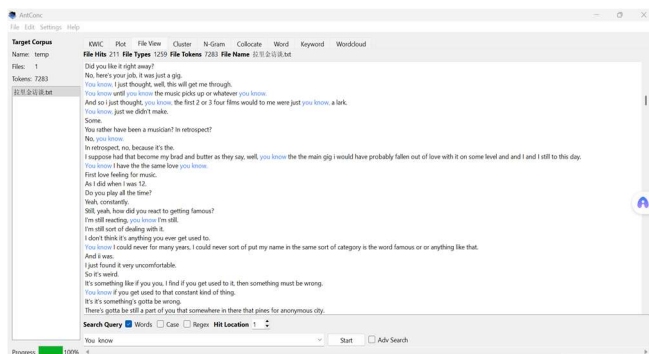


Fig. 1. Marking of “you know” in Antconc4.2.4.

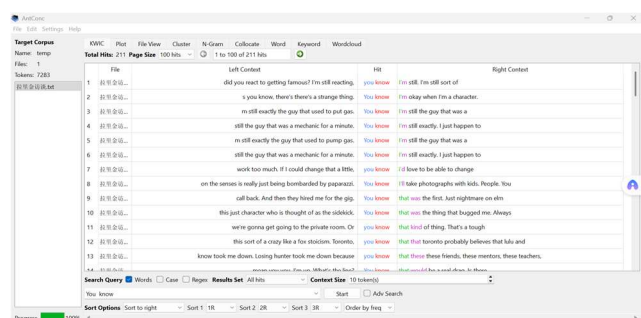


Fig. 2. Marking of “X1+you know+X2” in Antconc4.2.4.

C. Operational Definition

1) Sequential organization

In conversation analysis, sequential organization refers to the way in which turns at talk are ordered and structured in a conversation [5]. The way to judge a sequence is whether it conducts a new social behavior or opens a new topic. In short, the start of a sequence is the start of a behavior, and the end of sequence is the end of the behavior [6]. The initial position of sequence is the point where a new sequence of talk begins. In this study, the turn of the initial position always serves the function of opening a new topic or initiates a new speech act by the interviewee himself, which is in bold type for indication (line 05).

Example 1:

05: **D: =(I dn't know). There's a: (there's a)there's auh::(h)you know, there's there's a strange thing...**

06: L: uh(h)

The non-initial position refers to any position within a conversation that is not the start of a new sequence. In this study, the turn of non-initial position in bold type is characterized by answers to the host, or the elaboration from the interviewee himself to the topic already in progress. (line 08).

Example 2:

07: **=If I'm playing a character, I can do(.)you know...**

08: **But if I'm just me, ii feeluh::: you know.exposed(.).hhssort of,you know,**

2) Pragmatic functions of “you know”

As shown in previous studies, some scholars have scrutinized different functions of “you know”, which plays a significant role in utterances, reflecting the intention and internal perspectives of the speakers. The receptive functions of “you know” include confirming the mutuality, reminding the information [7], opening a topic, showing the attitude, and emphasizing [8].

Confirming the mutuality is used to check or confirm if the speaker and the listener share common knowledge or understanding (Example 3).

Example 3:

98: **D: I want my kids to know me as dad, you know uh(h), and already.h(.), you know, if they have access to the internet or or whatever,**

Opening a topic indicates that “you know” can be used to introduce a new topic of conversation (Example 4).

Example 4:

41: **and::um got a call back? and then they hired me for the gig, you know that was the first(.).hh Nightmare on Elm Street**

Reminding the information manifests that it helps the speaker to remind the listener of some information that has been mentioned before or is supposed to be known to the listener (Example 5).

Example 5:

14: **(And) that's the one .hh(.).uh::Sort of uh(.) thing , you know, as an actor in terms(.) of job.**

Showing the attitude exemplifies that “you know” can also be used to convey the speaker's attitude or stance towards the information being presented (Example 6).

Example 6:

59: **I don't think it's anything you ever get used to, you know, I could never(.).hh for many years, .**

Emphasizing shows that “you know” can be used to emphasize a particular point or aspect of what is being said. By using “you know”, the speaker draws the listener's attention to a specific detail or idea (Example 7).

Example 7:

33: **But I mean in terms of(hh) making a living, it was it was pretty(h)(yem::)uhh(.).straight, you know, pretty close to the bone.**

D. Research Procedure

In terms of research procedure, the first step is to mark the turn in which “you know” appears by Antconc 4.2.4, and especially the one put in the middle by using manual marking. The second step is to transcribe the marked turn according to Jefferson's rules and also turns before and after it. The third step is to judge each “X1+you know+X2”, including what sequential position it occupies and for what purpose based on the operational definition, and to categorize them to conduct statistic calculations. The fourth step is to conduct quantitative analysis and qualitative analysis.

III. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This part focuses on the results and specific analysis after detailed transcription on each “X1+you know+X2” used in the interview, especially how they are distributed and in what situation the specific function appears.

A. Distributional Features of “X1+you know+X2”

Through the use of Antconc4.2.4, in this forty minutes and thirty-five seconds interview, there are 525 turns, 7283 tokens, and 221 “you know” used by the speakers. After the manual calculation, “X1+you know+X2” appears 89 times

(see Table 1).

Table 1. Frequency of “X1+you know+X2”

Cluster	Freq.
you know	221
X1+you know+X2	89

Based on the operational definitions in Chapter 2, this study shows the precise and specific classification of the functions of “X1+you know+X2”. Table 2 below manifests the distributional features of “X1+you know+X2” under the change of sequential position. In view of the template for this article, in the following table, A refers to “confirming the mutuality”, B refers to “opening a topic”, C refers to “reminding the information”, D refers to “showing the attitude”, and E refers to “emphasizing”, respectively.

Table 2. Distributional features of “X1+you know+X2”

Sequential Position	Initial Position			Non-initial Position	
Functions	A	B	C	D	E
Frequency	21	18	15	19	16

As indicated in the above table, under the column of initial position, “X1+you know+X2” is mostly exploited to confirm the mutuality between both speakers, which appears 21 times, and then is to open a topic, which appears 18 times, the least used one is to remind the information. While under the column of non-initial position, showing the attitude is used 19 times, because in an interview, the aim is to know more about the interviewee, especially his feelings and thoughts.

B. Interpretation on the Functions Based on Sequential Position

1) Initial position of sequence

a) Confirming the mutuality

Example 8

01: L: You do(n't) do many things like this.(.) [So] why do you not like to be interviewed or(h)=

02: D: [uh:]

03: =Ohgh(h)no,(em)(0.2) >I'm just not very good at it<, **you know**, never have been very good at it.=

When “X1+you know+X2” occupies part of the initial turn of a sequence, the first function it plays is confirming the mutuality. From the perspective of epistemic [9], conducting a conversation is a process of broadening the room of cognitive mutuality, or knowledge mutuality. It is postulated that there are two types of knowledge-possessed situation between two speakers A and B, as shown in figures in which C refers to the domain of shared knowledge (Figs. 3 & 4).

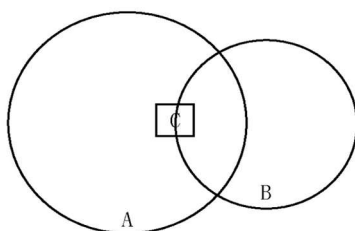


Fig. 3. Knowledge domain with shared knowledge (Heritage, 2012).

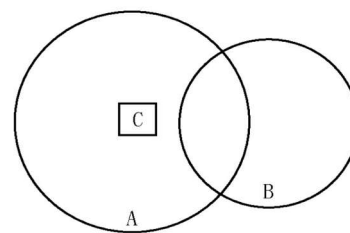


Fig. 4. Knowledge domain without shared knowledge (Heritage, 2012).

In example 8, from line 02 to line 03, the interviewee begins a new sequence, and it is about his feeling on doing an interview program. From the perspective of mutuality, the speaker has not told the listener that he is not good at interview, so all of the information just belongs to his own knowledge domain, and not belongs to the listener's [10]. Therefore, here, he uses “you know” between his repetitions of his feeling to confirm whether the listener does not know that and he waits for the answer and then he can continue his turn.

b) Opening a topic

Example 9

05: D: =(I dn't know). There's a: (there's a)there's auh::(h)**you know**, there's there's a strange thing, you know, I'm okay when I'm a character?=
06: L: uh(h)
07: =If I'm playing a character, I can do(.)you know, virtually anything in front of a camera.

In example 9, line 05 opens new sequence, that is, the speaker wants to show that his feeling on program is very strange and he can only do well when he acts as a character. He even uses “strange” to attract the listener's attention, and he gets what he is expecting. In line 06, L makes a continuer-- “uh” to asks for more information about D's topic.

c) Reminding

Example 10

12: D: hh(.)Yeah,(.) I do.

13: .hl do because I'm fascinated with people..

14: (And) that's the one .hh(.)uh::Sort of uh:(.) thing , **you know**, as an actor in terms(.) of job.

15: uh(h)uh(h)(.)

16: Necessity is that is the ability to be able to watch people to observe .h=
17: L:(nod))

The third function of this position is reminding the commonsense, which was stated by Ran in 2002. It means that in a conversation, the speaker uses “you know” to remind some common information that the listener has already known to initiate a new topic. By using “X1+you know+X2”, the speaker can stress the mutual information that is necessary for the conversation to strengthen the force of persuasion when he conducts a new speech act. In example 10, line 12, 13, 14, 15, and 16 form a whole TCU, that is, a complete turn.

2) Non-initial position of sequence

a) Showing the attitude

Example 11

05: D: =(I dn't know). There's a: (there's a) there's auh::(h)**you know**, there's there's a strange thing, you know,

06: (0.3)

07: =If I'm playing a character, I can do(.)you know, virtually anything in front of a camera.=

08: But if I'm just me, ii feeluh::: you know.exposed(.).hhssort of.you know, it it f(h)feels awkward.=

09: =We won't expose you.((smile))

In example 11, from line 05 to line 08, there is a whole sequence on D's feeling when he is an actor on the screen and ends with D's second turn-- line 08, because after D just opens a new sequence from line 05 to 07, he continues his topic to talk about the situation if he is just himself he will not be good at talking in line 08, so, line 08 is not the initial turn of the speaker's sequence.

b) *Emphasizing*

Example 12

31: D: I'd move to Los Angeles in (.)1983:: and was living here playing, you know, playing music and(hh)>

32: (nd we wenon the road) for a little bit. And that was all fine.

33: But I mean in terms of(hh) making a living, it was it was pretty(h)(yem::)uhh(.)straight, **you know**, pretty close to the bone.

Same as the preceding explanation on the position in a sequence, line 33 continues the topic of the whole sequence which starts from line 31 when the speaker talks about his working experience. Following the first turn of line 31 and line 32, the speaker continues to say that his life of playing music was not enough for his own life and he was poor at that time. Here, he uses "X1+you know+X2" to describe his experience that time, and he firstly uses "pretty straight" and then he adds "you know" for emphasizing his life used to be very tough, and he says "close to the bone". In a way, "X1+you know+X2" here can call for empathy and create a good atmosphere for his later story.

IV. CONCLUSION

This article concentrates on the use of "you know" when it is in the middle, which is coded as "X1+you know+X2". The position of "X1+you know+X2" can be classified into initial turn of a sequence and non-initial turn of a sequence [11]. Through the use of Antconc 4.2.4 as the instrument, the research findings demonstrated that among all the 221 "you know" identified from the corpus this study

established, "X1+you know+X2" appeared 89 times, 54 of which appeared at the initial position of the sequence, playing the function of confirming the mutuality, opening a topic and reminding the information, whereas 35 non-initial "X1+you know+X2" played the function of showing the attitude and emphasizing. However, there are still some limitations of this research, firstly, the corpus of this article is limited to one English interview, the results may be restricted; secondly, the pragmatic functions can change according to the context based on the established scheme; thirdly, the research objective is "X1+you know+X2" in view of the complexity of language usage, the other two types are not included in this study. In a nutshell, it is also expected that this article can become an example for the study on pragmatic functions of discourse markers by the means of conversation analysis.

REFERENCES

- [1] D. Schiffrin, "Discourse markers," Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987.
- [2] K. Aijmer, "English discourse particles: Evidence from a corpus," John Benjamins Publishing Company, 2002.
- [3] D. Blakemore, "Understanding utterances," Black-well: Oxford, 1992.
- [4] H. Sacks, E. A. Schegloff, and G. Jefferson, "A simplest systematics for the organization of turn-taking for conversation," *Language*, vol. 4, pp. 696-735, 1974.
- [5] J. Verschueren, "Notes on the role of meta-pragmatic awareness in language use," *Pragmatics*, vol. 10, no. 4, pp. 439-456, 2000.
- [6] G. Brown and G. Yule, "Discourse analysis," Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983.
- [7] Y. Fu, "A comparative analysis of the use of the discourse marker "But" in a British televised political interview show: A socio-pragmatic perspective," *Corpus-based Studies across Humanities*, vol. 2, no. 2, pp. 285-309, 2024.
- [8] G. Jefferson, "Transcript notation," in *Structure of Social Action: Studies in Conversation Analysis*, J. M. Atkinson & J. Heritage, Ed. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984.
- [9] J. Heritage, "Epistemics in action: Action formation and territories of knowledge," *Research on Language & Social Interaction*, vol. 45, no. 1, pp. 1-29, 2012.
- [10] G. M. García, "Turn-initial discourse markers in L2 Spanish conversations: Insights from conversation analysis," *Corpus Pragmatics*, vol. 5, no. 1, pp. 1-25, 2020.
- [11] R. Quirk et al., "A comprehensive grammar of the English language," London: Longman, 1985.

Copyright © 2025 by the authors. This is an open access article distributed under the Creative Commons Attribution License which permits unrestricted use, distribution, and reproduction in any medium, provided the original work is properly cited ([CC BY 4.0](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/)).