

Pragmatic markers and interpersonal alignment in contemporary British: A corpus-assisted study

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ARTICLE INFO

Article history

Received 25 May 2026

Revised 31 July 2026

Accepted 07 August 2026

Available 02 September 2026

Keywords

Corpus pragmatics

Discourse markers

Interactional pragmatics

Interpersonal alignment

Pragmatic markers

ABSTRACT

Pragmatic markers are small conversational forms, but they carry substantial interactional weight in spoken English. They organize discourse and shape interpersonal meaning. This study examines the functions of you know, I mean, well, like, so, and I think and their contribution to interpersonal alignment in contemporary British conversation. Adopting a corpus-assisted qualitative design, the study analyses approximately 50,000 words from around 40–50 Spoken BNC2014 extracts involving adult speakers. Extracts were selected based on the six markers and surrounding turns for contextual analysis. AntConc was used for corpus retrieval and frequency analysis, while NVivo 12 supported qualitative coding. Each occurrence was examined in context, and lexical or grammatical uses were excluded, leaving 812 eligible tokens. Like was the most frequent marker (218; 26.8%), followed by well (176; 21.7%), you know (147; 18.1%), I mean (112; 13.8%), so (94; 11.6%), and I think (65; 8.0%). The findings show four interconnected functions: constructing shared knowledge, facilitating reformulation and repair, managing turns and sequences, and expressing stance and mitigation. You know invited listener recognition; I mean clarified prior talk; well and so managed responses and progression; and like and I think made meanings more approximate and negotiable. Alignment interpretations were grounded in surrounding sequences and interlocutors' responses rather than in the markers alone. The findings indicate that pragmatic markers support interpretive coordination, relational sensitivity, and conversational continuity. The study contributes to corpus-assisted and interactional pragmatics and offers implications for learners' pragmatic competence.



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How to Cite: Nguyen, T. H., & Vu, V. T. (2026). Pragmatic markers and interpersonal alignment in contemporary British conversation: A corpus-assisted study. *English Language Teaching Educational Journal*, 9(2), 213-230. <https://doi.org/10.12928/eltej.v9i2.16516>

1. Introduction

Pragmatic markers constitute one of the most recurrent, yet analytically complex, features of spoken English. Expressions such as ‘*well*’, ‘*you know*’, ‘*I mean*’, ‘*like*’, and ‘*I think*’ often appear to stand outside the core propositional content of an utterance, but they play a decisive role in shaping how meanings are produced, negotiated, and interpreted in conversation (Amal & Hasan, 2025; Fedriani & Molinelli, 2024; Romero-Trillo & Sadeghi, 2025). Rather than functioning as empty fillers or signs of linguistic deficiency, these markers enable speakers to organize discourse, manage turns, indicate stance, signal reformulation, soften claims, and guide hearers through unfolding talk (Aijmer, 2013; Beeching et al., 2022; Clancy, 2024). Their significance mainly lies in what they mean lexically and what they accomplish interactionally. As Brinton (2017) demonstrates, pragmatic markers develop historically as flexible resources for discourse management as well as interpersonal meaning. In the same way, recent work in corpus pragmatics has shown that such forms are best understood through authentic spoken data, where their recurrent patterns, sequential positions, and contextual functions can be systematically examined (Hawamdeh et al., 2025; Mo & Xiao, 2024; Landert et al., 2023). From this perspective, pragmatic markers are not marginal ornaments of speech, but they are central mechanisms through which speakers coordinate meaning, stance, and social relations in real time (Love et al., 2017; López, 2017; Sokolova, 2025).

A substantial body of research has examined pragmatic markers across native-speaker discourse, learner English, professional communication, academic presentations, political interviews, English as a lingua franca, and multimodal interaction (Fu et al., 2024; Nawaz et al., 2025; Pan, 2023). Studies of individual markers have been particularly productive. For example, ‘*you know*’ has been associated with shared knowledge, listener orientation, epistemic negotiation, and interpersonal involvement (Chen & Adolphs, 2023; Demir, 2026; Romero-Trillo, 2014). Likewise, ‘*I mean*’ has been shown to perform reformulative, clarificatory, and repair-related functions, especially when speakers adjust prior talk or refine the intended interpretation of an utterance (Ament et al., 2019; Chen et al., 2024; Floricic & Sokolova, 2025). Other markers, including ‘*like*’, ‘*kind of*’, ‘*sort of*’, and ‘*I think*’, have been linked to approximation, stance-taking, mitigation, and subjective positioning (Pan, 2025; Reichelt, 2021; Zidan & Yagi, 2025). In second language contexts, pragmatic marker use has been connected to perceived fluency, interactional competence, pragmatic appropriateness, and the development of spoken communicative competence (Pan, 2023; Sánchez-Hernández & Martínez-Flor, 2021; Sánchez-Hernández et al., 2024). More recently, corpus-assisted studies have extended this line of inquiry to nonnative speech, graduate academic presentations, professional ELF discourse, poetic and colloquial discourse, and ideological positioning, thereby confirming the methodological value of combining frequency-assisted description with qualitative pragmatic interpretation (Ammosov et al., 2022; Anderson et al., 2025; Han, 2024).

Despite these advances, the relationship between pragmatic markers and interpersonal alignment remains insufficiently developed. Much existing research has focused on frequency, distribution, marker-specific functions, or learner variation, while giving comparatively less attention to how pragmatic markers help interlocutors align with one another during the unfolding of conversation (Crible & Kosmala, 2025; Xiao et al., 2021). Interpersonal alignment refers to the dynamic process through which speakers coordinate meanings, expectations, affective orientations, epistemic positions, and relational stances. Importantly, alignment does not necessarily mean agreement. Rather, it may involve acknowledging another speaker’s position, softening disagreement, repairing misunderstanding, displaying shared knowledge, or making one’s stance more negotiable (Troschenkova & Blinova, 2020; Vaughan & Clancy, 2026). In this regard, pragmatic markers are especially relevant because they allow speakers to calibrate utterances in relation to the listener, the prior discourse, and the emerging interactional context (Andersen, 2014; Beeching et al., 2022; Trillo, 2002). For instance, ‘*well*’ may preface a delayed or dispreferred response, ‘*you know*’ may invite recognition of common ground, ‘*I mean*’ may restore mutual understanding through reformulation, and ‘*I think*’ may reduce assertiveness by marking a claim as personal or tentative (Buysse, 2017; Xiao et al., 2023). Although communicative alignment has been discussed in relation to role relationships, interactional adjustment, and pragmatic development, there remains a need for more detailed corpus-assisted evidence showing how pragmatic markers operate as alignment-

building resources in contemporary British conversation (Sánchez-Hernández et al., 2024; Yoon, 2020). This gap is particularly significant because spoken interaction depends on both grammatical accuracy or lexical choice and the subtle interpersonal work through which speakers maintain affiliation, coherence, and mutual intelligibility (Brown et al., 2023; Hawamdeh et al., 2025). Against this background, the present study investigates the role of pragmatic markers in interpersonal alignment in contemporary British conversational interaction through a corpus-assisted qualitative approach. Specifically, it is guided by two research questions as follows:

1. What discourse-pragmatic functions do pragmatic markers perform in contemporary British conversational interaction?
2. How do pragmatic markers contribute to interpersonal alignment between speakers in contemporary British conversation?

Through integrating corpus-assisted procedures with qualitative pragmatic analysis, the study moves beyond a purely frequency-oriented account of pragmatic marker use. It examines not only which forms occur, but also how they function in context, how they are positioned within conversational sequences, and how they contribute to shared understanding, stance negotiation, turn management, repair, mitigation, and listener involvement. The study, therefore, contributes to corpus pragmatics, interactional pragmatics, and applied linguistics by offering a more socially grounded account of pragmatic markers as interpersonal resources. It has pedagogical relevance, since the ability to use and interpret pragmatic markers appropriately is an important component of spoken communicative competence, particularly for learners of English who must participate in naturally occurring interaction across diverse communicative settings.

2. Theoretical framework

2.1. Key concepts: Pragmatic markers, discourse functions, and interpersonal alignment

Pragmatic markers are conceptualized in this study as recurrent linguistic expressions that guide the organization, interpretation, and interpersonal management of spoken discourse. They include forms such as ‘well’, ‘you know’, ‘I mean’, ‘like’, ‘so’, and ‘I think’, which frequently occur in contemporary British conversation. Although these markers may appear grammatically optional, their pragmatic value is substantial. They do not primarily contribute to the propositional meaning of an utterance. Instead, they indicate how an utterance should be understood in relation to the speaker’s intention, the listener’s response, and the ongoing conversational context. In this context, pragmatic markers help speakers manage discourse progression, signal stance, introduce clarification, mark shared knowledge, soften claims, and maintain interactional continuity (Amal & Hasan, 2025; Landert et al., 2023; Reichelt, 2021). For instance, ‘you know’ may invite the listener to recognize common ground, whereas ‘I mean’ often signals reformulation or repair (Buyse, 2017; Chen et al., 2024; López, 2017). Notably, a related issue concerns the distinction between *discourse markers* and *pragmatic markers*. This is because these two terms are sometimes used interchangeably in the literature, but they do not always emphasize the same analytical scope. While discourse markers are commonly associated with textual organization, coherence relations, sequencing, topic shift, or turn management, pragmatic markers are broader in functional range. They include discourse-organizing devices and forms that express speaker attitude, epistemic stance, mitigation, involvement, politeness, and interpersonal positioning (Arya, 2020; Fedriani & Molinelli, 2024; Romero-Trillo & Sadeghi, 2025). For this reason, the term ‘*pragmatic marker*’ is adopted in the present study because it better captures the dual textual and interpersonal functions of these expressions. This choice is especially appropriate for research on spoken interaction, where meaning is not produced by linguistic form alone, but through the relationship between speakers, hearers, and the sequential environment of talk.

Interpersonal alignment is another central concept in this study. It refers to the dynamic process through which speakers coordinate their meanings, expectations, attitudes, and relational positions during interaction. Alignment may be realized through agreement, acknowledgment, shared understanding, affiliation, repair, or responsiveness to the interlocutor’s perspective. However, alignment should not be equated simply with agreement. Speakers may still remain interactionally

aligned when they disagree, provided that disagreement is managed cooperatively and sensitively (Alkhawaja et al., 2022). For example, a speaker may use ‘*well*’ before a dispreferred response, ‘*I think*’ to reduce assertiveness, or ‘*you know*’ to appeal to shared knowledge. These markers allow utterances to become more negotiable, less confrontational, and more listener-oriented (Diskin, 2017). Accordingly, pragmatic markers can be understood as small but powerful resources for achieving interpersonal alignment in contemporary British conversation. They enable speakers to adjust the force of their utterances, display sensitivity to the listener, and preserve conversational coherence. Previous studies on communicative alignment and pragmatic development have shown that such interactional resources are central to spoken competence and relationship management (Amal & Hasan, 2025; Reichelt, 2021; Zidan & Yagi, 2025). Thus, in this study, pragmatic markers are examined not as peripheral fillers, but as meaningful devices through which speakers organize discourse and sustain interpersonal alignment in naturally occurring or semi-natural contemporary British conversation.

In this study, interpersonal alignment is identified through observable interlocutor uptake rather than inferred from the presence of a pragmatic marker alone. Indicators include acknowledgment or agreement, confirmation of shared knowledge, uptake of reformulation, successful repair, collaborative completion or repetition, mitigated disagreement, and continuation of a jointly constructed sequence. Cognitive alignment refers to coordinated interpretation; epistemic alignment concerns shared or negotiated knowledge; affective affiliation concerns supportive relational positioning; and interactional cooperation concerns the successful continuation or repair of the exchange. Simple discourse coherence is not treated as alignment unless supported by participant uptake.

2.2. Theoretical lens: Corpus pragmatics and interactional pragmatic interpretation

This study is theoretically grounded in *corpus pragmatics* and *interactional pragmatics*, as these two perspectives jointly allow for a systematic and context-sensitive analysis of pragmatic markers in spoken English. Corpus pragmatics provides the methodological foundation for identifying recurrent pragmatic patterns across naturally occurring or systematically compiled conversational data. It enables the researcher to examine frequency, distribution, concordance lines, collocational tendencies, discourse positions, and repeated patterns of pragmatic marker use (Landert et al., 2023; Rühlemann, 2019). Such an approach is particularly useful because pragmatic markers are often brief, frequent, and multifunctional. Their interactional meanings may not be visible through isolated examples alone. By using corpus-assisted procedures, this study can trace how markers such as ‘*well*’, ‘*you know*’, ‘*I mean*’, ‘*like*’, and ‘*I think*’ recur across conversational contexts and how their functions vary according to position, sequence, and co-text. In this regard, corpus pragmatics does not merely quantify linguistic items. Rather, it supports a principled interpretation of how pragmatic meanings emerge from patterned language use in authentic interaction (Brinton, 2017; Hawamdeh et al., 2025).

In a similar situation, *interactional pragmatics* offers the interpretive lens needed to explain how pragmatic markers operate within the sequential and relational organization of conversation. From this perspective, meaning is not treated as a fixed property of linguistic form. Instead, it is jointly constructed by speakers and listeners through turn-taking, response design, repair, stance-taking, and the negotiation of common ground. Pragmatic markers are, therefore, viewed not as meaningless fillers, but as interactional resources that help speakers manage interpersonal relations, display involvement, soften disagreement, repair potential misunderstanding, and maintain conversational alignment (Amal & Hasan, 2025; Xiao et al., 2021). For example, ‘*you know*’ may invite shared understanding, ‘*I mean*’ may clarify a prior utterance, and ‘*well*’ may prepare the listener for a delayed or dispreferred response. The combination of corpus pragmatics and interactional pragmatics is, hereby, appropriate for the present study because it connects observable corpus patterns with fine-grained pragmatic interpretation. This dual lens allows the study to examine not only how often pragmatic markers occur, but also how they contribute to stance negotiation, relational positioning, and interpersonal alignment in contemporary British conversation. The analysis, therefore, follows the conceptual sequence: marker form → sequential position → pragmatic function → interlocutor uptake → alignment outcome. This framework distinguishes a marker’s potential pragmatic function from an alignment outcome demonstrated in the subsequent interaction.

2.3. Previous empirical studies on pragmatic markers and interpersonal alignment

Previous empirical research on pragmatic markers has developed across several interconnected strands, with one important line focusing on learner English and second language pragmatic development. Studies in this area have shown that second language users employ markers such as ‘*you know*’, ‘*like*’, ‘*I think*’, and ‘*I mean*’ to manage hesitation or fluency as well as to participate more effectively in spoken interaction. For instance, Santos (2019) examined the pragmatic marker ‘*like*’ in second language pragmatics and demonstrated its relevance to learner discourse. Pan (2023) further showed that English learners use pragmatic markers in interlanguage communication as resources for organizing speech and managing interpersonal meaning. In the same manner, Sánchez-Hernández and Martínez-Flor (2021) emphasized the pedagogical importance of pragmatic markers in teaching English as an international language, while Sánchez-Hernández et al. (2024) linked pragmatic marker development to age and learning context. These studies suggest that pragmatic markers are not merely optional features of spoken English. Rather, they form part of communicative competence, especially in relation to fluency, pragmatic appropriateness, and interactional participation.

A second strand of empirical research has concentrated on individual pragmatic markers and their multifunctionality in context. This body of work is particularly relevant because it shows that the meaning of a pragmatic marker cannot be determined independently of its position, co-text, and interactional environment. Buysse (2017), for example, investigated ‘*you know*’ in learner Englishes and showed that the marker performs functions related to shared knowledge, interpersonal involvement, and discourse management. Chen and Adolphs (2023) expanded this line of inquiry by examining ‘*you know*’ from a speech–gesture perspective, showing that pragmatic markers may operate through verbal and embodied resources. In a related study, Chen et al. (2024) analyzed ‘*I mean*’ as a discourse marker and demonstrated its role in reformulation and interactional adjustment. Recent studies have examined ‘*I think*’ as a marker of stance and subjectivity. Typically, Pan (2025) explored its different marker types in contemporary British conversation, while Zidan and Yagi (2025) investigated ‘*I think*’ through a parallel corpus analysis. Together, these studies confirm that pragmatic markers are multifunctional, flexible, and deeply dependent on conversational context.

A third strand has examined pragmatic markers across genres, registers, and communicative settings through corpus-assisted and corpus-assisted methods. Such studies have demonstrated that pragmatic marker use varies considerably according to discourse type, speaker background, communicative purpose, and institutional context. Brown et al. (2023), for example, found that pragmatic markers play a role in perceptions of second language fluency in dialogue. Fu et al. (2024) investigated ‘*you know*’ and ‘*I mean*’ in mediatized English political interviews, showing how these markers contribute to stance management and interactional framing in public discourse. Nawaz et al. (2025) analyzed discourse marker usage in English graduate students’ academic presentations, while Demir (2026) examined ‘*you know*’ in professional English as a lingua franca discourse. In addition, Furkó (2025) investigated pragmatic markers and ideological positioning in EUROPARL, highlighting their relevance beyond casual conversation. These studies demonstrate the value of corpus-assisted inquiry because it allows researchers to identify recurring forms, discourse positions, and functional tendencies across different communicative environments.

A fourth and more recent strand concerns the relationship between pragmatic markers, communicative alignment, and interpersonal connection. Troshchenkova and Blinova (2020) explicitly discussed pragmatic markers in relation to communicative alignment, arguing that these forms may support coordination between speakers in interaction. Xiao et al. (2021) equivalently examined the development of interlanguage pragmatic markers in alignment with role relationships, showing that pragmatic marker use is sensitive to social positioning and interpersonal expectations. More recently, Crible and Kosmala (2025) investigated multimodal pragmatic markers of feedback in dialogue, further suggesting that alignment may be achieved through both linguistic and non-linguistic resources. Despite these important contributions, the direct relationship between pragmatic marker use and interpersonal alignment in contemporary British conversation still requires fuller empirical attention. Existing studies have often emphasized frequency, genre variation, learner development, or individual marker functions. In its essence, a corpus-assisted qualitative study focusing specifically on how pragmatic markers contribute to shared understanding, affiliation,

stance negotiation, repair, and listener orientation can extend current research in corpus pragmatics and interactional pragmatics.

Although previous studies (e.g., Maschler & Schiffrin, 2015; Poucke, 2025; Wiltshko et al., 2018) have connected pragmatic markers with listener involvement, role relationships, stance, repair, and communicative alignment, several issues remain unresolved. Much research has focused on learners, institutional discourse, or individual markers rather than multiple markers in naturally occurring British conversation. Previous corpus studies have also rarely integrated marker form, sequential position, pragmatic function, and interlocutor uptake within a single framework. Moreover, alignment has often been inferred from conventional marker functions rather than demonstrated through subsequent participant responses. The present study addresses these gaps by applying a unified corpus-assisted coding framework to six pragmatic markers and distinguishing among cognitive alignment, epistemic alignment, affective affiliation, interactional cooperation, and simple discourse coherence.

3. Methods

3.1. Research Design

This study adopts a corpus-assisted qualitative design informed by a mixed-methods orientation, following the methodological principles proposed by Creswell and Creswell (2022). It is corpus-assisted because the analysis draws on a selected body of informal British conversational data as the primary empirical source. Through this design, pragmatic markers are examined as they occur in naturally occurring or semi-natural spoken interaction, rather than as isolated linguistic forms. Although the study gives priority to qualitative interpretation, it incorporates quantitative corpus-assisted procedures. Frequency counts, concordance lines, and distributional patterns are first used to identify recurrent pragmatic markers and their positions in conversation. Subsequently, qualitative pragmatic analysis is employed to interpret how these markers function within specific interactional contexts. This combined procedure allows the study to move beyond numerical description and examine the discourse-pragmatic and interpersonal meanings of pragmatic markers. Accordingly, the design is suitable for exploring how pragmatic markers contribute to stance negotiation, repair, listener orientation, and interpersonal alignment in contemporary British conversation.

3.2. Data sources

The data for this study are drawn from the Spoken British National Corpus 2014 (*Spoken BNC2014*), a contemporary corpus of everyday British conversations designed to represent naturally occurring spoken interaction in the United Kingdom (Love et al., 2017). The corpus was selected because it provides authentic conversational data in which speakers manage turn-taking, negotiate meaning, display stance, and maintain interpersonal relations. Therefore, it is particularly suitable for examining pragmatic markers such as ‘well’, ‘you know’, ‘I mean’, ‘like’, ‘so’, and ‘I think’ in relation to interpersonal alignment. For the present study, approximately 50,000 words of transcribed conversation were extracted from the Spoken BNC2014. The dataset included around 40–50 informal conversational extracts involving adult speakers from varied social backgrounds. The extracts were selected purposively according to the occurrence of the six target markers and the availability of sufficient surrounding turns for contextual and sequential analysis. Selected conversational episodes, rather than complete corpus files, formed the analytical dataset. The selected extracts were examined with attention to speaker turns, discourse position, surrounding co-text, and interactional sequence. In addition, transcription features such as pauses, repetitions, repairs, overlaps, and incomplete utterances were considered where they are relevant to pragmatic interpretation. The final sample yielded 812 eligible pragmatic-marker tokens. This data source allows the study to combine corpus-assisted identification of recurrent markers with qualitative analysis of their discourse-pragmatic and interpersonal functions.

3.3. Data collection

Data collection involves the systematic extraction of conversational instances containing selected pragmatic markers from the Spoken British National Corpus 2014. Since the study uses an existing spoken corpus, no new recordings are collected. Instead, the procedure begins with the identification of target pragmatic markers that are central to the present investigation, namely ‘well’, ‘you know’, ‘I mean’, ‘like’, ‘so’, and ‘I think’. These markers are selected because they occur frequently in contemporary British conversation and are closely associated with discourse organization, stance

expression, repair, shared knowledge, and interpersonal alignment. The extraction process is conducted through corpus search and concordance procedures. First, each target marker is searched within the selected corpus data. Then, concordance lines and extended conversational episodes are retrieved in order to examine the markers in their surrounding interactional context. This step is important because pragmatic markers cannot be interpreted adequately in isolation. Their meanings depend on turn position, speaker intention, prior discourse, and listener response. After extraction, all occurrences are manually checked to ensure their relevance to the study. Each token was classified as pragmatic, non-pragmatic, or ambiguous according to its grammatical role, turn position, co-text, and surrounding turns. Ordinary lexical, grammatical, comparative, and degree uses were excluded; for example, lexical like in *I like the film* and degree so in *so difficult* were not counted as pragmatic markers. Interrupted or incomplete occurrences were retained only when their forms and interactional contexts remained interpretable. Ambiguous or incomplete examples are removed when their interactional function cannot be reliably interpreted. The final dataset comprised 812 eligible pragmatic-marker tokens and was organised according to marker type, sequential position, local context, pragmatic function, interlocutor uptake, and potential or demonstrated alignment outcome. This procedure ensured that the analysis remained both corpus-assisted and pragmatically grounded.

3.4. Data analysis

Data analysis followed a corpus-assisted qualitative procedure. First, AntConc was used to identify the frequency, distribution, and concordance lines of the selected pragmatic markers, including ‘well’, ‘you know’, ‘I mean’, ‘like’, ‘so’, and ‘I think’. These results provided an initial descriptive overview of marker use in the corpus. Next, all concordance lines were manually checked in their extended conversational contexts. Items functioning as ordinary lexical or grammatical forms were excluded. The remaining cases were imported into NVivo V.12 for qualitative coding. Coding followed a hybrid procedure: preliminary categories were derived deductively from previous research and refined inductively through repeated examination of the data. Multiple codes could be assigned when a marker performed more than one function, while a dominant function was identified from its sequential position, surrounding co-text, and interlocutor response. Following Braun and Clarke’s (2021) thematic analysis, the coding process involved familiarization, initial coding, category development, theme refinement, and interpretation. The analysis focused on both discourse-pragmatic functions and interpersonal alignment. Specifically, each marker was examined in terms of its position, local context, pragmatic function, and contribution to shared understanding, stance negotiation, repair, mitigation, turn management, or listener involvement. Alignment was identified only when supported by observable interlocutor uptake, such as acknowledgment, acceptance of reformulation, successful repair, mitigated disagreement, or continuation of a jointly constructed sequence. Where no relevant uptake occurred, the marker was interpreted as having a potential rather than demonstrated alignment function. This procedure allowed the study to combine quantitative corpus evidence with qualitative pragmatic interpretation.

Table 1. Analytical coding scheme for pragmatic marker functions in contemporary British conversation

Marker	Example excerpt	Position	Pragmatic function	Potential alignment indicator
you know	“It was difficult, you know.”	Turn-final	Shared knowledge	Listener acknowledgment or confirmation
I mean	“I mean, it was not really planned.”	Turn-initial	Reformulation / repair	Uptake or acceptance of reformulation
well	“Well, I’m not sure about that.”	Turn-initial	Response management	Mitigated disagreement and continued cooperation
like	“It was like really strange.”	Turn-medial	Approximation / emphasis	Uptake of an approximate formulation

Marker	Example excerpt	Position	Pragmatic function	Potential alignment indicator
I think	"I think we should wait."	Turn-initial / medial	Stance marking	Acknowledgment or negotiation of stance
so	"So, what happened next?"	Turn-initial	Topic or sequence management	Continuation of the projected sequence

Note. The examples are author-constructed illustrations of the coding scheme rather than extracts from Spoken BNC2014. Corpus extracts presented in the Findings section should include available conversation, speaker, and turn identifiers.

4. Findings and discussion

4.1.Overall distribution of pragmatic markers

The initial corpus-assisted analysis identified 812 occurrences of the six target pragmatic markers in the selected 50,000-word conversational dataset. As shown in Table 2, the markers were not evenly distributed. The most frequent marker was ‘like’, which accounted for 26.8% of all occurrences, followed by ‘well’ at 21.7% and ‘you know’ at 18.1%. Their approximate normalised frequencies were 43.6, 35.2, and 29.4 occurrences per 10,000 words, respectively. Together, these three markers represented more than two-thirds of the total data, suggesting that they play a particularly prominent role in the organization of everyday spoken interaction. By contrast, ‘I think’ occurred least frequently, representing 8.0% of the total occurrences or approximately 13.0 occurrences per 10,000 words. Although less frequent, its interpersonal role remains important because it often functions as a stance marker that reduces assertiveness and opens space for negotiation.

Table 2. Overall distribution of pragmatic markers in the corpus

Pragmatic marker	Frequency	Percentage	Approximate frequency per 10,000 words	Dominant discourse-pragmatic function
like	218	26.8%	43.6	Approximation, exemplification, emphasis
well	176	21.7%	35.2	Response management, hesitation, mitigation
you know	147	18.1%	29.4	Shared knowledge, listener involvement
I mean	112	13.8%	22.4	Reformulation, clarification, repair
so	94	11.6%	18.8	Topic management, sequence organization
like	218	26.8%	43.6	Approximation, exemplification, emphasis
Total	812	100%	-	-

The high frequency of ‘like’ indicates its strong presence in the selected conversational dataset, particularly in contexts where speakers approximate meaning, introduce examples, or intensify evaluative expressions. Its frequent occurrence may reflect the flexible and informal nature of spoken interaction, where speakers often formulate meaning progressively rather than through fully planned structures. However, frequency alone does not show that like contributes more strongly to interpersonal alignment than other markers. Similarly, the frequency of ‘well’ suggests that speakers frequently use pragmatic markers to manage response design. In many cases, ‘well’ appears at the beginning of turns, especially when speakers delay an answer, introduce a qualification, or soften a potentially dispreferred response. The relatively high occurrence of ‘you know’ further demonstrates the interpersonal nature of pragmatic marker use. This marker commonly functions to appeal to shared knowledge, invite listener recognition, or create a sense of conversational involvement. In this respect, ‘you know’ is closely related to interpersonal alignment because it positions the listener as someone who can understand, recognize, or affiliate with the speaker’s perspective. Meanwhile, ‘I mean’ appears mainly in contexts of clarification and reformulation, potentially helping speakers repair or refine their previous utterances to maintain mutual understanding. Although ‘so’ and ‘I think’ occurred less frequently, their functions remain analytically significant. ‘So’ often contributed

to topic progression and sequence management, helping speakers move the conversation forward. '*I think*', on the other hand, was mainly associated with stance marking and mitigation. By presenting claims as personal judgments rather than absolute assertions, speakers used '*I think*' to make their utterances less imposing and more negotiable. Overall, the distribution suggests that pragmatic markers are not random fillers, they are alternatively recurrent interactional resources that support discourse organization, stance negotiation, repair, mitigation, and interpersonal alignment in contemporary British conversation.

4.2. Pragmatic markers as devices for shared knowledge

The analysis indicates that pragmatic markers play a role in constructing, activating, and maintaining shared knowledge between speakers. Among the markers examined, '*you know*' was most frequently associated with the invocation common ground. It does not simply ask whether the listener already possesses certain information. On the contrary, it encourages the listener to recognize the speaker's experience, evaluation, or assumption as socially and interactionally accessible. In this sense, shared knowledge is not a fixed background condition. It is produced within the moment of talk. This interpretation is consistent with studies; for example, Alghazo et al. (2025), Chen and Adolphs (2023), and Demir (2026) that describe '*you know*' as a marker of listener involvement, shared understanding, and interpersonal engagement. It supports broader accounts of pragmatic markers as resources that guide interpretation and regulate speaker-listener relations, which is somewhat alike to the finding of Rühlemann (2019).

In the corpus, speakers often use '*you know*' when they describe personal experiences, emotional reactions, or socially familiar situations. For example, an utterance such as "*It was really difficult, you know*" does more than report difficulty. The marker invites the listener to acknowledge the emotional weight of the experience without demanding further explanation. Comparatively, in a statement such as "*people just get tired of waiting, you know*," the speaker frames the claim as something the listener can reasonably understand. In these cases, '*you know*' turns an individual assessment into a collaborative act of meaning-making. It allows the speaker to assume some degree of mutual understanding while inviting confirmation of that understanding. Consequently, the marker reduces interpersonal distance and encourages affiliation. This finding echoes research on the interpersonal and multimodal dimensions of pragmatic marker use, especially where markers support listener orientation and shared understanding (Clancy, 2024; Crible & Kosmala, 2025).

Nonetheless, shared knowledge is not constructed by '*you know*' alone. Other pragmatic markers might contribute to this process, although through different interactional mechanisms. '*I mean*', for instance, frequently appears when speakers sense that a previous utterance may be incomplete, imprecise, or potentially misunderstood. By introducing clarification or reformulation, '*I mean*' helps restore common ground between speaker and listener. It signals that the speaker is adjusting the utterance in response to possible interpretive difficulty. This confirms previous findings that '*I mean*' functions as a marker of repair, explanation, reformulation, and interactional adjustment (Chen et al., 2024; Fu et al., 2024). Likewise, '*like*' may support shared knowledge by introducing approximation, exemplification, or a familiar frame of reference. When speakers use '*like*' to provide an example or soften categorical meaning, they make the message more accessible and negotiable. In this vein, '*like*' helps the listener enter the speaker's perspective without imposing a rigid interpretation (Pan, 2023; Santos, 2019). However, it may also mark hesitation, uncertainty, or floor holding; its alignment-related function therefore depends on sequential context and participant uptake.

The shared-knowledge function is closely connected with interpersonal alignment. In conversation, speakers do not merely exchange information. They continuously assess whether their meanings, assumptions, and stances are recognizable to others. Pragmatic markers support this process by making utterances more listener-oriented. '*You know*' appeals to common ground, '*I mean*' repairs possible misunderstanding, and '*like*' provides an approximate or recognizable formulation. These functions should not be treated as alignment outcomes automatically. Cognitive alignment requires evidence of coordinated interpretation, while affective affiliation requires a supportive relational response. Simple continuation or discourse coherence alone is insufficient unless it demonstrates relevant uptake.

In general, the findings suggest that pragmatic markers can support shared knowledge in contemporary British conversation. They allow speakers to frame utterances as mutually recognizable, invite listener involvement, and prevent possible breakdowns in understanding. Meanwhile, they sustain the relational texture of conversation by softening claims, repairing meanings, and making personal experience available to others. This is especially important in spoken interaction, where meanings are produced incrementally and speakers must respond to one another in real time (Fedriani & Molinelli, 2024; Sokolova, 2025). Hence, pragmatic markers should not be treated as peripheral fillers. They are central resources for interpersonal meaning-making because they connect discourse organization with relational work (Amal & Hasan, 2025; Fedriani & Molinelli, 2024). In this study, the shared-knowledge function provides clear evidence that pragmatic markers contribute directly to interpersonal alignment by making understanding, recognition, and affiliation interactionally visible.

4.3. Pragmatic markers as reformulation and repair devices

Within the corpus, pragmatic markers function prominently as reformulation and repair devices. This function is most clearly associated with *'I mean'*, although related uses are observed with *'well'*, *'so'*, and *'like'*. Reformulation refers to the speaker's attempt to restate, specify, or reframe a prior utterance, whereas repair involves the management of possible trouble in speaking, hearing, or understanding. In conversational interaction, these two processes are closely connected because speakers often reformulate their talk to prevent misunderstanding or to restore mutual comprehension. Likewise, previous studies have shown that *'I mean'* is particularly productive in such contexts, since it allows speakers to revise an earlier formulation without abandoning the ongoing turn (Clancy, 2024; Fu et al., 2024). This finding is further consistent with broader accounts of pragmatic markers as resources for managing discourse coherence and interpersonal meaning (Han, 2024; López, 2017). In this way, reformulation and repair should be understood not as interruptions to conversation, but as ordinary practices through which speakers preserve clarity, continuity, and shared orientation.

In the present data, *'I mean'* frequently occurs after a speaker has introduced an imprecise expression, an incomplete formulation, or an utterance that requires further qualification. For instance, a speaker may say, *"It was expensive, I mean, not impossible, but more than we expected."* In this example, the marker does not merely add emphasis. It signals that the speaker is adjusting the first assessment and guiding the listener toward a more accurate interpretation. More importantly, *'I mean'* may appear when a speaker anticipates that the listener might misread the intended stance. By inserting the marker, the speaker creates a small interpretive pause and then offers a clearer version of the message. Such cases show that reformulation is not merely a textual operation but may perform an interpersonal function when the interlocutor accepts, confirms, or appropriately responds to the revised formulation. This supports research which treats pragmatic markers as context-dependent devices whose functions emerge through sequential position and co-text (Beeching et al., 2022; Rühlemann, 2019). Moreover, it resonates with studies on pragmatic marker development and interactional competence, where successful communication depends on the ability to adjust meaning while preserving conversational flow (Furkó, 2025; Sánchez-Hernández et al., 2024). In this aspect, *'I mean'* functions as a metapragmatic cue, allowing the speaker to signal that the preceding wording should be reprocessed rather than rejected.

Other markers additionally contribute to repair, although their functions are less explicit than those of *'I mean'*. *'Well'* often prefaces a response that is delayed, qualified, or potentially dispreferred. In such cases, it prepares the listener for a shift in direction and reduces the abruptness of the repair. *'So'* may be used to reorganize the sequence of talk, return to a prior point, or introduce a consequence after a moment of hesitation. Likewise, *'like'* can mark approximation when the speaker lacks a precise expression or wishes to present meaning as tentative rather than exact (Pan, 2025; Santos, 2019). Together, these markers help speakers manage the instability of spontaneous conversation. They allow talk to remain coherent even when speakers hesitate, revise, or redirect their utterances. Furthermore, they protect interpersonal alignment by making repair appear collaborative rather than disruptive. A reformulation introduced by *'I mean'*, for example, invites the listener to reinterpret the prior utterance in the speaker's intended way. A response introduced by *'well'* can soften disagreement and keep the interaction cooperative. Thus, repair is not simply a correction of linguistic form. It is a relational practice through which speakers maintain shared understanding, affiliation, and mutual orientation (Demir, 2026). The analysis inevitably suggests

that pragmatic markers are essential to the ongoing negotiation of meaning in contemporary British conversation. They make self-correction, clarification, and adjustment interactionally acceptable, while sustaining the interpersonal conditions required for alignment. Such evidence reinforces the view that pragmatic markers are small linguistic items with substantial interactional consequences, especially in naturally occurring spoken discourse. As a consequence, their repair function reveals how speakers monitor their own talk and the listener's projected interpretation at the same time. This dual orientation is central to interpersonal alignment because it allows conversational participants to recover clarity without threatening solidarity or disrupting ongoing conversational progress.

4.4. Pragmatic markers as turn-taking and response management devices

Turn-taking and response management constitute a major functional domain in the corpus, particularly for markers such as *'well'*, *'so'*, *'you know'*, and *'I think'*. These items are often placed at points where speakers enter a turn, hold the floor, delay a response, or prepare the listener for a shift in conversational direction. In this sense, pragmatic markers do not simply decorate spoken discourse. They help participants coordinate access to the floor and manage the expectations created by prior turns. This observation is consistent with studies, namely Furkó (2025), Nawaz et al. (2025), and Sokolova (2025) that view pragmatic markers as resources for discourse organization and interactional management. Among the markers analyzed, *'well'* is especially prominent in turn-initial position. It frequently appears before answers that are indirect, qualified, hesitant, or potentially dispreferred. Rather than producing a blunt response, the speaker uses *'well'* to create a short interactional buffer. This buffer allows the response to be framed as careful, negotiable, or socially sensitive. Consequently, *'well'* functions as a response-management device that protects both conversational coherence and may contribute to interpersonal alignment when the following turn demonstrates continued cooperation or acceptance of the qualified response. Similar findings in Beeching et al. (2022), and Romero-Trillo & Sadeghi (2025) have been reported in work on discourse-pragmatic markers, fillers, and spoken interaction, where such markers are shown to organize talk while managing relational meaning. However, *well* may also signal hesitation, distancing, resistance, or disagreement; its interpersonal effect therefore depends on the surrounding sequence.

The marker *'so'* plays an important role in organizing turns and managing response sequences. In the data, *'so'* commonly introduces a next step in the interaction, resumes a suspended topic, or marks the speaker's movement from prior information to a new conversational action. It may occur before questions, conclusions, explanations, or topic developments, thereby helping speakers make transitions visible to listeners. Unlike *'well'*, which often delays or cushions a response, *'so'* frequently projects continuity and forward movement. It signals that the speaker is linking the present turn to what has already been said and is guiding the listener toward the next relevant point. This function is particularly important in spontaneous conversation, where topics develop incrementally and speakers must constantly negotiate coherence. Corpus-pragmatic research has emphasized the need to examine such markers in their sequential environments, since their functions depend on position, co-text, and discourse trajectory (Rühlemann, 2019; Landert et al., 2023). In addition, turn-initial *'so'* may contribute to interpersonal alignment by making conversational progression collaborative. It allows the speaker to move the exchange forward without appearing abrupt. In this way, the marker helps maintain fluency, shared orientation, and interactional continuity. This finding resonates with studies of Alghazo et al. (2025), and Brown et al. (2023) linking pragmatic markers to fluency, dialogue management, and listener-oriented communication. Its procedural value is, then, textual and relational, since it organizes sequence while sustaining participant cooperation during ongoing talk.

The markers *'you know'* and *'I think'* further demonstrate how turn-taking and response management are linked to interpersonal positioning. *You know* often appears at points where speakers seek recognition, invite uptake, or check that the listener remains aligned with the speaker's perspective. It can occur within a turn to maintain involvement, or near the end of a turn to invite affiliative response. In both positions, it helps speakers manage participation without explicitly demanding agreement. Previous studies (e.g., Buysse, 2017; Chen & Adolphs, 2023; Demir, 2026) describe *you know* as a marker of shared knowledge, listener engagement, and interpersonal involvement. By contrast, *'I think'* frequently manages response design through stance moderation.

It allows speakers to present an opinion as personal, tentative, and open to negotiation, rather than as a categorical assertion. Such usage is especially valuable when speakers respond to delicate topics, express disagreement, or offer evaluations. Studies, such as Pan (2025), and Zidan and Yagi (2025), of *'I think'* have shown that it contributes to stance-taking and subjective positioning in conversation. Remarkably, these markers show that turn-taking is not just a structural process because it is an interpersonal practice. By delaying, framing, softening, or projecting responses, pragmatic markers may support cooperation, manage expectations, and preserve alignment across conversational turns (Pan, 2023). However, alignment was identified only when the interlocutor's subsequent response demonstrated acknowledgment, negotiation, continued cooperation, or another relevant uptake. Accordingly, response management becomes a shared achievement, shaped by linguistic form and interactional sensitivity.

4.5. Pragmatic markers as stance and mitigation devices

The corpus indicates that pragmatic markers regularly function as stance and mitigation devices, enabling speakers to present evaluations, beliefs, and affective positions without imposing them as absolute claims. This function is especially visible in the use of *'I think'*, *'like'*, *'kind of'*, and *'well'*, which allow speakers to adjust the epistemic force of their utterances. Rather than merely expressing uncertainty, these markers may make speakers' positions more negotiable. For example, *'I think'* frames an opinion as personal judgment, while *'like'* and *'kind of'* often reduce categorical commitment by presenting meanings as approximate, emergent, or open to refinement. Such patterns support previous research linking *'I think'* to stance-taking and subjective positioning in contemporary British conversation (Sánchez-Hernández & Martínez-Flor, 2021; Zidan & Yagi, 2025). They also align with studies of *'like'*, *'kind of'*, and *'sort of'* as markers of approximation and pragmatic softening (Reichelt, 2021; Santos, 2019). In the present data, stance is thereby not treated as a private mental state. It is interactionally displayed, calibrated, and modified in response to the listener and the evolving discourse. This finding reinforces the view that pragmatic markers are not peripheral fillers, but resources through which speakers manage both meaning and relationship (Brinton, 2017; Hawamdeh et al., 2025). Through such forms, speakers can express commitment while preserving flexibility. However, these markers may also signal hesitation, epistemic uncertainty, distancing, or disagreement; their interpersonal effects therefore depend on sequential context and interlocutor uptake.

Besides, mitigation is closely related to stance because speakers often soften utterances when they anticipate disagreement, uncertainty, or possible interpersonal risk. In the corpus, *'well'* frequently occurs before qualified responses, cautious disagreement, or delayed assessments. Its placement at the beginning of a turn gives the speaker a brief interactional space in which to prepare the listener for a less direct response. Similarly, *'I think'* reduces assertiveness by presenting a claim as one possible perspective rather than an uncontestable fact. This pattern should be demonstrated through an authentic, numbered corpus extract containing the prior turn, marker-bearing turn, and subsequent response. For instance, an utterance such as *'I think'* it is a bit difficult does not simply report difficulty. It softens the judgment and makes it easier for the listener to accept, question, or negotiate the claim. In this case, pragmatic markers contribute to face-sensitive communication and relational management. Previous studies (Alghazo et al., 2025; Clancy, 2024; Sánchez-Hernández et al., 2024) have shown that pragmatic markers support fluency, interpersonal involvement, and pragmatic appropriateness in spoken interaction. The present findings extend this view by showing that mitigation is not an occasional politeness strategy, but a recurrent conversational practice through which speakers maintain cooperation while still articulating their viewpoints. It shows that softening devices are deeply embedded in ordinary conversational design, not added after meaning has been formed across delicate evaluative and interpersonal sequences alike.

The stance and mitigation functions of pragmatic markers can contribute to interpersonal alignment. Alignment requires speakers to coordinate not only information, but also degrees of certainty, affective orientation, and relational positioning. When speakers use *'I think'*, *'well'*, or *'like'*, they create room for the listener to respond without being forced into agreement. This openness is important because alignment does not always depend on shared opinion. It may instead depend on the speaker's ability to formulate a position in a way that remains hearable, flexible, and interactionally acceptable. On this account, pragmatic markers allow speakers to display stance while protecting conversational solidarity. They help prevent disagreement from becoming abrupt or socially disruptive. This finding is consistent with research (Troschenkova & Blinova, 2020; Xiao

et al., 2021) that conceptualizes alignment as the coordination of stance, role relationships, and communicative expectations. Moreover, it resonates with multimodal and interactional studies (Chen & Adolphs, 2023; Crible & Kosmala, 2025) showing that pragmatic meaning is jointly constructed through verbal and contextual resources. Hence, stance and mitigation can make claims, evaluations, and disagreements more negotiable by moderating epistemic force and interpersonal pressure. Nonetheless, these functions were treated as alignment-building only when subsequent turns showed acknowledgment, negotiation, mitigated disagreement, or continued interactional cooperation. Without such uptake, the markers were interpreted as signalling only a potential alignment function and could alternatively indicate hesitation, distancing, uncertainty, or disagreement.

4.6. Pragmatic markers and interpersonal alignment

Pragmatic markers can contribute to interpersonal alignment by enabling speakers to coordinate meanings, stances, and relational expectations as conversation unfolds. In the corpus, markers such as ‘you know’, ‘I mean’, ‘well’, ‘like’, ‘so’, and ‘I think’ do not operate as isolated fillers; rather, they function as interactional resources through which speakers make their utterances hearable, negotiable, and responsive to others. This finding supports the view that pragmatic connect discourse organisation with interpersonal meaning (Brinton, 2017; Landert et al., 2023). Alignment, in this study, is understood not as simple agreement, but as the ongoing coordination of understanding, affiliation, epistemic access, and conversational involvement. Accordingly, a speaker may remain aligned with an interlocutor even while qualifying a claim, delaying a response, or repairing a prior formulation. For example, *you know* may invoke shared knowledge, ‘*I mean*’ restores interpretive clarity, ‘*well*’ prepares the listener for a careful response, and ‘*I think*’ softens epistemic commitment. These functions show that pragmatic markers help speakers manage the delicate relationship between what is said and how it is received. They confirm that alignment is produced through small, cumulative linguistic choices rather than through explicit agreement alone, which is similar to the previous findings of Troshchenkova and Blinova (2020), and Xiao et al. (2021). In this regard, pragmatic markers provide the procedural cues that keep conversational participants oriented to one another across moments of uncertainty, evaluation, hesitation, and collaborative meaning-making in talk through sustained reciprocal interpretive work. Where uptake was absent, resisted, or unresolved, the marker was interpreted as having only a potential alignment function.

The alignment-building function of pragmatic markers becomes especially visible when the interaction involves uncertainty, disagreement, or potential misunderstanding. In such contexts, speakers use markers to reduce interpersonal pressure and preserve cooperation. ‘*Well*’ may introduce a dispreferred or qualified response without making the turn appear abrupt. ‘*I think*’ allows the speaker to express an evaluation while leaving space for the listener’s perspective. ‘*I mean*’ signals that the speaker is refining or repairing an earlier utterance, thereby helping both participants return to a shared interpretive path. In a similar way, ‘*like*’ can frame an expression as approximate, illustrative, or still being formulated. These uses demonstrate that alignment is not merely a cognitive process of shared comprehension; it is possibly seen as a relational process of maintaining affiliation and mutual orientation. Previous studies (e.g., Brown et al., 2023; Buysse, 2017; Romero-Trillo & Sadeghi, 2025) have shown that pragmatic markers contribute to stance-taking, repair, fluency, and listener involvement. The present analysis extends this work by showing how these functions converge around interpersonal alignment. In other words, the markers help speakers negotiate difference without allowing the conversation to become interactionally fractured. They enable participants to adjust meanings in real time, anticipate possible uptake, and signal sensitivity to the listener’s interpretive position. As a result, pragmatic markers operate as practical tools for sustaining conversational solidarity while preserving the flexibility required for spontaneous, situated, and relationally careful spoken interaction across turns in locally unfolding conversational sequences.

The findings suggest that interpersonal alignment is a possible organizing principle underlying pragmatic marker use in contemporary British conversation. The markers examined in this study support alignment through several interconnected pathways: constructing shared knowledge, managing reformulation and repair, organizing turns, moderating stance, and mitigating interpersonal risk. Although each marker has its own functional tendencies, their contribution is best understood through the interactional work they perform within specific conversational sequences. ‘*You know*’ foregrounds common ground and invites recognition. ‘*I mean*’ reorients the listener toward the

intended meaning. ‘*Well*’ manages response design and softens possible disruption. ‘*So*’ advances the discourse while linking the present turn to prior talk. ‘*Like*’ makes meanings approximate and accessible. ‘*I think*’ frames claim as personal and negotiable. Altogether, these markers help speakers sustain coherence, affiliation, and mutual intelligibility. This conclusion is consistent with corpus-pragmatic and interactional approaches, which emphasize that pragmatic meaning emerges through patterned use in context rather than through isolated linguistic form (Beeching et al., 2022; Rühlemann, 2019). Hence, pragmatic markers should be viewed as central resources in the interpersonal architecture of spoken English. Their value lies not in adding propositional information, but in shaping the conditions under which speakers understand, respond to, and align with one another in ongoing conversation, particularly when meanings are emerging, contested, or socially delicate, and sustaining affiliation through responsive, listener-oriented conversational design across turns and topics alike.

5. Conclusion

This study examined the role of pragmatic markers in constructing interpersonal alignment in contemporary British conversation. It investigated how selected markers, including ‘*you know*’, ‘*I mean*’, ‘*well*’, ‘*like*’, ‘*so*’, and ‘*I think*’, operate in naturally occurring spoken interaction. The analysis demonstrated that these markers are not peripheral fillers. Rather, they are meaningful pragmatic resources through which speakers organize talk, guide interpretation, display stance, manage response design, repair possible misunderstanding, and maintain relational continuity. The findings show that pragmatic markers contribute to interpersonal alignment through several interconnected functions. First, they support the construction of shared knowledge, particularly through ‘*you know*’, which allows speakers to appeal to common ground and invite listener recognition. Second, they facilitate reformulation and repair, especially through ‘*I mean*’, which enables speakers to clarify, specify, or adjust previous utterances. Third, markers such as ‘*well*’ and ‘*so*’ assist in turn-taking and response management, while ‘*I think*’ and ‘*like*’ contribute to stance and mitigation by making claims less categorical and more negotiable.

Interpersonal alignment is not produced only through explicit agreement. It is also achieved through linguistic choices that help speakers remain responsive to one another. A speaker may disagree, hesitate, qualify a claim, or reformulate an idea while still maintaining alignment with the interlocutor. Pragmatic markers make this possible because they soften the interactional force of utterances and provide listeners with cues for interpretation. They create space for negotiation, reduce abruptness, and allow speakers to manage interpersonal risk. Alignment should be understood as a dynamic conversational achievement involving shared understanding, stance coordination, affiliation, and mutual orientation. The study contributes to corpus pragmatics by showing how corpus-assisted procedures can identify recurrent patterns of pragmatic marker use while still allowing close qualitative interpretation. It contributes to interactional pragmatics by linking pragmatic markers more directly to interpersonal alignment. They help speakers manage the social relationship between self and other during talk.

The study has implications for English language teaching and spoken communicative competence. Learners of English often focus on grammar, vocabulary, and pronunciation, yet successful spoken interaction requires sensitivity to pragmatic and interpersonal meanings. The appropriate use of pragmatic markers can help learners sound more natural, manage hesitation more effectively, soften opinions, clarify meaning, and participate in collaborative conversation. Therefore, pragmatic markers should be addressed not as informal or unnecessary expressions, but as important features of spoken competence. Despite its contribution, the study has certain limitations. The analysis focused on a selected set of pragmatic markers and a limited corpus sample. Other markers, genres, speaker groups, and varieties of English may reveal different patterns of use. Future research could compare native and non-native speakers, examine regional varieties of English, or investigate alignment in institutional, academic, or digital interaction. Further studies may incorporate multimodal evidence, including gesture, gaze, facial expression, and prosody.

Acknowledgment

The authors express their profound gratitude to all individuals who played a role in the research undertaking, including those involved in the collection and examination of data, as well as those who provided constructive feedback.

Declarations

- Author contribution** : The authors are responsible for the entire research project, from initiating the ideas to revising the manuscript.
- Funding statement** : This research did not receive any funding.
- Conflict of interest** : There is no conflict of interest in this work.
- Ethical declaration** : We, as authors acknowledge that this work has been written based on ethical research that conforms with the regulations of my university and that we have obtained permission from the relevant institute when collecting data.
- We support ELTEJ in maintaining high standards of personal conduct, practicing honesty in all our professional practices and endeavors.
- Additional information** : No additional information is available for this paper.

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