Mirjana Mišković-Luković[*]
University of Kragujevac
Faculty of Philology and Arts
Department of English and Literature Studies
Kragujevac, Serbia

THE MARKER *YOU SEE*: COGNITIVE-PRAGMATIC AND SOCIO-PRAGMATIC OBSERVATIONS

Abstract
This article sets out to explore various aspects of the linguistic existence of the pragmatic marker *you see* in order to take a general understanding of its role in communication. The article is organised in the following way. The first part focuses on the aspects of relevance theory that are crucial for a semantic-pragmatic analysis couched within this theoretic framework. The second part presents the data that served as input to my subsequent argumentation and conclusions. The third part speculates on the origin of the marker, and discusses its relation to the so-called *epistemic parentheticals*. The fourth part deals with the linguistic semantic meaning of the marker, which is then checked against two different types of context: the context of mood indicators (part five) and real life co-text (part six). The final section summarises the findings.

Key words: higher-level explicature, implicature, mood indicators, perception verbs, pragmatic markers, relevance

---

[*] E-mail address for correspondence: mmiskovic-lukovic@kg.ac.rs

1. The relevance-theoretic underpinnings

Although this paper presupposes familiarity with the main tenets of relevance theory, in what follows I roughly sketch two important relevance-theoretic distinctions in order to smooth over transition to the ensuing exposition.[1]

The first is a cognitive semantic distinction about the relation between a linguistic form and its role in interpretation. This forms the *conceptual-procedural* axis. In a nutshell, a linguistic form can map onto two types of cognitive information – concepts and procedures. Words with conceptual meaning are constituents of mental representations (e.g. the so-called "content" words such as *frame*, *install* and *user-friendly*). Words with procedural meaning tell us how to manipulate these representations, or how to constrain the processes of pragmatic inference (e.g. discourse connectives such as *but*, *moreover* and *so*, or discourse particles such as *kinda* and *sorta*). The conceptual/procedural distinction does not coincide with the truth-conditional/non-truth-conditional distinction; for example, conceptual sentence adverbials such as *seriously* and *unfortunately* do not contribute to the truth-conditions of the proposition expressed by an utterance while procedural pronouns do.

The second is a pragmatic distinction about the way assumptions are ostensively communicated. This forms the *explicature-implicature* axis. If a propositional form is inferentially developed from a logical form encoded by an utterance, it will be explicitly communicated; otherwise it will be (conversationally) implicated in the form of implicated premises and conclusions. The pragmatically enriched propositional form of an utterance (the base-level *explicature*) can further be embedded in a higher-level description such as a speech-act representation in (1a) or the propositional attitude representations in (1b) and (1c):

(1)   Eric: Did Jean-Louis attend the Quality Conference in Juan les Pins last week?
          Corinne (happily): He didn't.

---

[1] For a detailed account of relevance theory, see Sperber and Wilson (1986/1995); relevance-theoretic issues are further elaborated in Carston (2002); a relevance-theoretic introduction to procedural semantics and discourse markers is given in Blakemore (1987, 2002).

a. *Higher-level explicature*: Corrine is saying that Jean-Louis did not attend the Quality Conference in Juan les Pins at time$_t$.
b. *Higher-level explicature*: Corinne is certain that Jean-Louis did not attend the Quality Conference in Juan les Pins at time$_t$.
c. *Higher-level explicature*: Corrine is happy that Jean-Louis did not attend the Quality Conference in Juan les Pins at time$_t$.
Implicated premise: If Jean-Louis did not attend the Quality Conference in Juan les Pins, Jean-Louis and Corinne could spend the weekend in St. Tropez.
Implicated conclusion: Jean-Louis and Corinne spent the weekend in St. Tropez.

Higher-level explicatures are not part of the truth-conditional content of an utterance ('Jean-Louis$_x$ did not attend the Quality conference$_x$ in Juan les Pins$_x$ at time$_t$'), but they can still be true or false in their own right.

2. Data

The observations that I make in this paper are based on the data that have been collected from both oral and written media. The oral medium includes my own corpora (marked as 'PC' and 'BC') and the Santa Barbara Corpus of Spoken American English (marked as 'SBC'). The PC corpus, which was recorded in the United Kingdom (3.5 h) in 2001, consists of four informal face-to-face interactions among friends and acquaintances of the British (10) and American (4) nationalities. All the participants are middle-class Caucasians, in their 30s and 40s, of both feminine and masculine gender, mostly graduates of different occupations. The BC corpus was collected during a two-year period (1999-2001) in a multinational company in the south of France. It comprises frontstage and backstage interaction (Goffman 1959). Apart from face-to-face and telephone conversations, the material has been taken from software called *Win@proach*, which has the characteristics of both written and oral media (i.e. the use of graphic symbols and the possibility of spatial and temporal transmission are combined with on-line processing, greater or lesser informality and linguistic features typical of spoken discourse). The SBC corpus is the three CD-ROM volumes that contain 14 speech files (15.45 h) representing the American component in the *International Corpus of English*. It comprises the panoply of ways people use language in their lives: conversation,

gossip, arguments, on-the-job talk, card games, city council meetings, sales pitches, classroom lectures, political speeches, bedtime stories, sermons, weddings, etc. People of different ages, occupations, and ethnic and social backgrounds are represented in the corpus.[2]

The written medium includes contemporary British and American plays and novels and newspaper articles. Even though pragmatic (or discourse) markers have traditionally been regarded as oral linguistic phenomena *par excellence*, there are no principled grounds, as Schourup (1999) contends, for not complementing their study with data from written discourse.

Finally, invented examples, a practice not uncommon in relevance-theoretic analyses (Sperber and Wilson 1997), have been used to illustrate or underscore a pertinent point in a simple and concise manner.

3. The conceptual origin of the pragmatic marker *you see*

Perception verbs encode concepts which are considered to be communicatively important. For example, mental predicates such as *see* and *hear* are included in a list of universal semantic primitives (Wierzbicka 1996) and are, moreover, claimed to be frequent in mother-baby interaction even when the baby is blind (Gleitman et al. 1990).

The verb *see* encodes conceptual information but it appears to be polysemous:

(2)   Did you **see** what wretched conditions they live in?
(3)   Do you **see** what I mean?

In (2) the concept encoded by the verb *see* is tied to the literal meaning 'see with one's eyes'; in (3) to the metaphoric meaning 'see with one's mental eyes' or 'understand'. Wierzbicka (1996: 81), for instance, bases

---

[2] Transcription conventions:
-      Abrupt cutoff
..   Shorter pause
…   Longer pause
(H)   Inhalation
=   Sound extension
[ ]   Overlapping
< > Lento
' '   Reported speech

this perceptual-to-cognitive shift on the verb *know* – 'to see is to know something about something because of one's eyes'.

Tracing the origin of the pragmatic marker *look* from the corresponding perception verb, Brinton (2001) argues in favour of the process of grammaticalisation from the main clause to a parenthetical sentence adjunct. The pragmatic marker *you see* might have similarly evolved, namely, by losing the status of a matrix clause:

(4)   You see that [$_{\text{subordinate clause}}$] > You see Ø [$_{\text{subordinate clause}}$] > You see, [$_{\text{matrix clause}}$]

You see, as a pragmatic marker, has preserved the unmarked word order. However, the acquired status of a parenthetical has led to lexicalisation (i.e. the clause behaves like a lexical unit), desemanticisation (i.e. from conceptual to procedural meaning) and coalescence (*you see > y'see*). Furthermore, *you see* is structurally comparable with epistemic parentheticals such as *I hope, I think* and *I understand* in that it has a pronominal subject, non-progressive present and syntactic mobility.

Still, epistemic parentheticals have not undergone lexicalisation and desemanticisation as the following examples illustrate:

(5)   I **hoped** (that) the service could be recovered soon.
(6)   I **hope** (that) the service can be recovered soon.
(7)   [**I hope**,] the service [,**I hope**,] can be recovered soon [, **I hope**].

In (5) the verb *hope* dominates the subordinate clause and has a conceptual, truth-conditional meaning of a propositional constituent. In (7), by contrast, the parenthetical verb *hope* loses dominance but gains a semantic scope over the proposition. Although *hope* has kept the conceptual meaning, it no longer contributes to the truth conditions of the proposition, marking instead a specific propositional attitude. In (6) *hope* may have the interpretations of both (5) and (7) (cf. Andersen and Fretheim 2000: 4-5).

On the other hand, the conceptual meaning of the verb in the *you see*-clause requires that *that* should not be elided:[3]

---

[3]   If *that* is elided, the distinction between the regular *you see*-clause and the lexicalised *you see*-clause may be maintained by other means such as a modal construction (e.g. *you can see*), an interrogative form (e.g. *do you see*) or an echo-question (e.g. *you see?*).

(8)   [On displaying a slide to the audience]
         You see that the light is moving.

(9)   This can't be a star. [**You see**,] the light [,**you see**,] is moving
         [,**you see**].

However, instances, though rare, of the elided complementiser and conceptual ((non)literal) meaning of the verb have been attested in my data:

(10) The candles burned steadily and Alice turned to look at them with satisfaction. '**You see** they're all right now. It was a warning.' (HV: 209)[4]

Therefore, a possibility of a parentheticalisation of the regular *you see*-clause cannot be entirely dismissed:

(11) Sharon: 'how many people are there with whom you really enjoy talking to, and would really understand' and so on. I said 'There are two people'. '**You see**, you absolutely have no chance'. (PC)

In fact, this might point to yet another pragmatic marker in disguise – one that is typically used when the speaker wishes to check the addressee's understanding of a point, or when the speaker intends to prove her point.[5]

4. Cognitive-pragmatic observations

According to Blakemore's seminal relevance-theoretic analysis, discourse connectives are semantic constraints on relevance. In particular, *you see* introduces the proposition that is relevant as an explanation for the preceding proposition: "the presentation of this proposition has simply

---

[4] HV = Hold, V. (1975). *The Shivering Sands*. London: Collins.

[5] In my American English data, this form has been used in place of the marker *look* as well as for hedging.

raised the question 'Why?' or 'How?'" (Blakemore 1987: 89). In (12), for instance, *you see* prefaces evidence for the previously-given conclusion:[6]

(12)   I shall say no more of it here. **You see**, I've given my word.

I adopt in this paper the non-truth-conditional, procedural account of *you see*, without giving any further evidence as it was amply provided and argued for in Blakemore (1987). What I would like to reconsider, however, is the source of the evidential status of the marker in terms of the communicative level it affects.

According to Blakemore (1987) and Blass (1990), both *you see* and *after all* introduce evidence for a prior conclusion. In this way, their main contribution to utterance interpretation lies on the side of cognitive effects, more precisely, in strengthening an existing assumption. In terms of the explicit/implicit distinction, this means that they affect the implicit side of communication. Still, as the authors argue, *you see* and *after all* differ in one respect. The following example shows this:

(13)   Juliet was distressed.
         After all, Romeo had not seen her.
         You see, Romeo had not seen her. (Blass 1990: 128)

Whereas *after all* prefaces a reminder, *you see* introduces a new assumption (Blakemore 1987: 89, Blass 1990: 128). This raises an interesting question about the status of these "additional" instructions, especially in relation to their professed core meanings. Here is what Blass claims for the reminding function of *after all*: "historically, *after all* appears to have arisen as part of a clause which is still used sometimes: *after all is said and done*. I suggest, therefore, that what *after all* contributes, as an additional explicature, is that the proposition introduced with *after all* is known" (Blass 1990: 129). In other words, *after all* is viewed as an in-between case of both truth-conditional and non-truth-conditional meaning (but see Traugott 1997).

In sum, Blakemore's account is that *you see* and *after all* procedurally and non-truth-conditionally constrain implicatures (although she does not

---

[6] Just like the inferential connectives *after all*, *moreover* and *so*, *you see* indicates how the proposition it introduces is to be interpreted as relevant; that is, it expresses the relationship of dependent relevance and cannot be used in a conjoined utterance (Blakemore 1987).

explain the relation between the two instructions, or whether it is one complex instruction encoded by the connectives); Blass's account, on the other hand, is that *after all* is a procedural and non-truth-conditional constraint on implicatures, but that it additionally contributes to the truth conditions of the explicature (it is not altogether clear whether this latter contribution is of a procedural or a conceptual nature).

Confining my discussion to the pragmatic marker *you see*, I would like to propose a refinement of the above accounts along the following lines. The first instruction, according to which *you see* constrains the implicit side of communication by encoding the information about a type of cognitive effect (i.e. strengthening of an assumption on the basis of further evidence), is not controversial. Let us then focus on the second instruction. Assuming that the information about a given/new assumption is indeed signalled by *you see*, the question is whether it is coded or pragmatically derived. Together with Blakemore (1987) and Blass (1990), and contra Ariel (1998), I take it to be semantic. Unless we wish to revert to Grice's *conventional implicatures* (i.e. explicit non-saying), the only option open to pragmatic analysis is conversational implicating. But then, the information about the status of the introduced assumption would be cancellable without contradiction, which, surely, cannot be the case.

Linguistically then, *you see* encodes the information that the host proposition is assumed not to be known to the addressee. However, is this meaning part of the proposition expressed? Is it then conceptual? I do not think so. Notwithstanding various stages of grammaticalisation, especially in terms of the conceptual-procedural cline, linguistic items generally do not simultaneously maintain the meaning of the original class and that of a pragmatic marker at a given stage.[7],[8] Nevertheless, Blass (1990) may be on the right track in regarding this instruction as affecting the explicit side of communication, and to this point I shall briefly turn now.

A sketchy answer that I am suggesting lies in the assumption that *you see* procedurally encodes two distinct, non-truth-conditional, instructions: one constrains the formation of an implicature, the other constrains the formation of a higher-level explicature such that the speaker considers the proposition expressed by her utterance not to be (directly or indirectly)

---

[7] See Mišković-Luković (2004) for an account of *in other words*.

[8] As Fraser aptly puts it: "discourse markers are not adverbs, for example, masquerading as another category from time to time [...] when an expression functions as a discourse marker, that is its exclusive function in the sentence" (Fraser 1990: 388-389).

evident to the hearer. This saves the addressee's processing effort and enables his fuller attention to what the speaker intends to express. In this way, *you see* turns out to be a powerful discourse-strategic device that contributes to relevance on both the effort and effect sides. In order to test this assumption, I shall first examine how the marker relates to mood indicators, and then see how my proposal squares with the discursive functions attested in real-life examples.

5. The pragmatic marker *you see* and mood indicators

Compared to some other pragmatic markers originating from perception verbs, such as *look* and *listen* (Mišković-Luković 2006), *you see* is more restrictive because it only co-occurs with declaratives. This, however, should not be surprising given the instructions that the marker encodes.

On the one hand, the instruction that the host proposition is not evident to the addressee is incompatible with the instruction otherwise encoded by an interrogative form.[9] But it does not rule out declarative or imperative forms:

(14) Mike is an egotist.
       a. *It-is-not-evident-to-you, why do you care for him?
       b. It-is-not-evident-to-you, he doesn't care for you.
       c. It-is-not-evident-to-you, dump him/you must dump him.

On the other hand, the instruction about the inferential connection between the two propositions is compatible with the declarative form. The imperative form, in contrast, goes hand in hand with conclusions:

(15) Mike is an egotist. So, dump him/you must dump him.
(16) *Dump Mike/You must dump Mike. So, he is an egotist.

---

[9] The interrogative mood indicator constrains the inferential construction of a higher-level explicature that the question is an interpretation of a relevant answer (Sperber and Wilson 1986/1995).

The interrogative form is used to strengthen the preceding utterance only in rhetorical questions as signalled by the negative polarity item in (18):[10]

(17)   *Mike is an egotist. Does he help you?
(18)   Mike is an egotist. Does he **ever** help you?

To conclude, the higher-level explicature instruction precludes the interrogative form and the implicature instruction rules out the imperative form. This leaves us with the declarative form of a host utterance as the only type of mood indicators that satisfies both conditions imposed by the semantics of *you see*.

6. Socio-pragmatic observations

In comparison with *look* and *listen*, *you see* (or *see* in the SBC corpus) was more frequent in my data. It typically occurred within a speaker's turn, occupying the initial position in an utterance (*P. You see, Q*), and sometimes final (*P. Q, you see*).[11] The difference between initial and final *you see* may reflect turn-taking organisation in talk-in-interaction (speaker's continuation and turn-transition) or be a result of purely relevance-driven concerns (the initial position being more prominent and therefore more efficient in signalling the relevance of a following utterance):

(19)   Mary: So I stopped the car, and they said what are you doing. I said, <oh, I gotta tighten this wire here>. ... (H) ... So I had! .. turn on the ignition and turn it off. ... **See**, once you turn that key on, ... then you hear the .. the fuel pump .. come on. (SBC)
(20)   Andy: I've always wanted to work in Edinburgh.
         Pete: Yeah. I think it's a good place to live.
         Julie: Edinburgh? Excellent.

---

[10] Rhetorical questions are interpretations of the answers that the speaker considers to be relevant to the addressee (Sperber and Wilson 1986/1995).

[11] More frequent in the final position are the conceptual verb *see* and the regular *you see*-clause with rising intonation (i.e. the elliptical forms of *do you see/don't you see?*) functioning as tags and meaning roughly 'do/don't you understand the point?'.

Andy: Absolutely the opposite from Aberdeen. It's because of the Parliament, **y'see**.
Pete: Huh?
Andy: Parliament. It's gonna be the capital of the country. (PC)

Because *you see* attaches to an utterance that is interpreted as an explanation of what has previously transpired, it does not occur discourse initially (a nonverbal P), nor does it constitute a turn *per se* (a nonverbal Q).

The fact that *you see* does not mark the main discourse act directly follows from the instruction about the strengthening of a previous assumption; that is, the host utterance is perceived as an afterthought or repair to the topic introduced in the main discourse act:

(21) Rebecca: So then, ... and then, ... he sort of pulled the paper aside, and   [he's still]
Ricke: [Yeah].
   Rebecca: staring   [at you]
Rickie: [Unhunh] still sta=ring and, ... (H) just, you know, .. and the=n, .. but when uh uh=, ... like you come to a stop, **see** that's all through the tunnel.

(SBC)

You see is also used in argumentation. Unlike *look* and *listen*, however, the former marker is not a bearer of undesirable perlocutionary effects. In fact, the discourse strategy based on *you see*-utterances typically carries an "objective" undertone. The marker is, thus, freely used in both formal and informal conversational styles:

(22) Dom: Yes, but look here, the office is a space control and they know what the TR duty code is and how to use it. And if you
                        [could help-]
Mike: [I suggest] again that you send a telex to the security department and explain everything because, **you see**, we are not in charge of this and-
Dom: Yes, yes. Okay. Right. Okay. (BC)

(22), for instance, has been extracted from a relatively hostile frontstage interaction which is characterised by uncooperative transitions,

unmitigated dispreferred acts and so on. Interpreting Mike's prolonged and unnecessarily explicated prior answers as rejection, Dom challenges his interlocutor, who is a Help Desk agent, by reminding him of his principal duty to his customers (*if you could help*). Mike's potentially face-threatening metalinguistic repetition (*I suggest again*) is subsequently mitigated in the utterance which *you see* marks as a nonmanifest explanation as to why he has to turn down the addressee's request, and the interaction finally closes in agreement.

7. Summary

From a cognitive-pragmatic perspective, *you see* contributes to relevance on both the explicit and implicit sides of communication. The marker signals not only that the assumption the speaker is putting forward is not evident to the addressee, but also that this assumption must be taken as a confirmation of some previously-made assumptions.

From a socio-pragmatic perspective, *you see* does not occur discourse-initially, nor does it constitute a turn by itself. The contextually restricted *you see* does not mark the dominant part of discourse, but is, on the other hand, quite frequent in interaction. As an argumentative marker, *you see* is primarily used as an evidential-rhetoric marker (in contrast to the primarily epistemic-rhetoric markers *look* and *listen*) in both formal and informal conversational styles.

References

Andersen, G. and T. Fretheim (2000). Introduction. In: G. Andersen and T. Fretheim (eds.), *Pragmatic Markers and Propositional Attitude*, Amsterdam/Philadelphia: John Benjamins, 1-16.

Ariel, M. (1998). Discourse Markers and Form-function Correlations. In: A. H. Jucker and Y. Ziv (eds.), *Discourse Markers: Descriptions and Theory*, Amsterdam/Philadelphia: John Benjamins, 223-259.

Blakemore, D. (1987). *Semantic Constraints on Relevance*. Oxford: Blackwell.

Blakemore, D. (2002). *Relevance and Linguistic Meaning: The Semantics and Pragmatics of Discourse Markers*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Blass, R. (1990). *Relevance Relations in Discourse: A Study with Special Reference to Sissala*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Brinton, L. J. (2001). From Matrix Clause to Pragmatic Marker: The History of *Look*-Forms. *Journal of Historical Pragmatics*, 2, 177-199.

Carston, R. (2002). *Thoughts and Utterances: The Pragmatics of Explicit Communication*. Oxford: Blackwell.

Fraser, B. (1990). An Approach to Discourse Markers. *Journal of Pragmatics*, 14, 383-395.

Gleitman, L. R., H. Gleitman, B. Landau and E. Wanner (1990). Where Learning Begins: Initial Representations for Language Learning. In: F. J. Newmeyer (ed.), *Linguistics: The Cambridge Survey III. Language: Psychological and Biological Aspects*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 150-193.

Goffman, E. (1959). *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life*. New York: Anchor Books.

Mišković-Luković, M. (2004). Reformulation Markers: Do They Mean What They Say? In: K. Rasulić and I. Trbojević (eds.), *ELLSII75 Proceedings* (Vol. I), Belgrade: Faculty of Philology, 359-369.

Mišković-Luković, M. (2006). *Semantika i pragmatika iskaza: markeri diskursa u engleskom jeziku*. Beograd: Filološki fakultet.

Schourup, L. (1999). Discourse Markers. *Lingua*, 107, 227-265.

Sperber, D. and D. Wilson (1986/1995). *Relevance: Communication and Cognition*. Oxford: Blackwell.

Sperber, D. and D. Wilson (1997). Remarks on Relevance Theory and the Social Sciences. *Multilingua*, 16, 145-151.

Traugott, E. C. (1997). The Discourse Connective *after all*: A Historical Pragmatic Account. Paper presented at the Sixteenth International Congress of Linguists, Paris, July 1997. Retrieved from <*http://www.ua.es/dfing/rt.htm*>.

Wierzbicka, A. (1996). *Semantics: Primes and Universals*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Мирјана Мишковић-Луковић

МАРКЕР *YOU SEE*: КОГНИТИВНО-ПРАГМАТИЧКА И СОЦИО-ПРАГМАТИЧКА ЗАПАЖАЊА

Сажетак

Из перспективе теорије релеванције, у овом раду се бавимо семантичким значењем и прагматичким функцијама енглеског маркера (дискурса) *you see*, који се оквирно може превести као 'знаш/знате', 'јер', '(ово кажем) зато што' и сл., како бисмо јасније сагледали његову улогу у комуникацији. Разлог зашто смо за предмет нашег рада изабрали управо маркер *you see*, лежи, напросто, у чињеници да се он учестало користи у свакодневном разговору, али да није анализиран у савременој семантичкој и прагматичкој литератури на један обухватнији начин, који би језичку и когнитивно-прагматичку, значењску компоненту утемељио у социопрагматичким реализацијама.

Кључне речи: глаголи перцепције, експликатура вишег нивоа, импликатура, индикатори за начин, прагматички маркери, релеванција