

Wider possibilities of meaning in Early Modern English Text, collocation and interpretation

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1. Introduction

The present paper examines interpretative possibilities of linguistic meaning in Early Modern English. Shakespearean texts, particularly Quartos and Folios are used. Potential discourse markers in these texts will be analysed from a collocational point of view. Focusing on the word *well*, one of the commonest possible markers, I will discuss three issues – First, both lexical and marker uses of a word normally coexist along the process of historical development. Secondly, these uses are closely associated with each other, which can be demonstrated in conversation scenes in plays and in textual variations also. Thirdly, the collocational patterns of marker *well* are of great help in elucidating wider interpretative possibilities of the word *well* in Shakespearean texts.

2. Coexistence and association: lexical and pragmatic uses

When it comes to the topic of lexical and marker uses of a word or phrase, the idea of coexistence is important: both uses normally coexist along the process of historical development. A similar idea can be seen when (Traugott 1995: 3-4) refers to cases of decliticisation in Japanese. She also notes that ‘layering or coexistence of variants is a characteristic of all change’ (Traugott 1995: 4n.; for ‘layering’, Hopper 1991; Brinton 2001: 149). Adamson (2000) and Adamson and González-Díaz (2005) go further and say that diachronic layering brings about synchronic correlates or correlatives in terms of its socio-stylistic distribution.

The concept of synchronic correlativity comes to the fore in examining potential discourse markers, because they coexist with other correlatives too closely associated with each other to be clearly differentiated. Such a close relationship has been reported to specifically exist, for instance between *well* as an introductory word and *well* as an adverb (Hines 1977: 317; Svartvik 1980: 168n.), and also between pragmatic meanings and earlier, less pragmatic meanings (Traugott and Dasher 2002: 156; Brinton 2006: 307). In the case of *however*, the propositional and discourse marker functions cannot always easily be kept apart but are closely related (Lenk 1998: 105ff.; Lutzky 2006: 16-17). This close relationship leads to another point which should also be taken into consideration, the idea of association: when lexical and pragmatic functions or meanings coexist, they are always ready to be conjured up associated with each other.

The idea of coexistence and association should be kept in mind when we examine the use

of *well*. *Well* can be either a discourse marker or a lexical word, or both when textually explicable as such. This means that when interpreting *well* in Shakespeare, the reader is always required to take into consideration the coexistence of and association among alternative functions and meanings of *well*.

3. Possible (mis)interpretations of Shakespeare's *well*: a lexical or marker use?

The use of *well* in quotations (1) and (2) leads to alternative (mis)interpretations or ambiguities.

(1) Three thousand ducates, **well**. (F1 MV 1.3.1)

(2) *Pan[thino]*. Wilt thou go? – *Launce*. **Well**, I will go. *Exeunt*. (TGV 2.3.59)

Two different interpretations are possible: one is as a lexical word, with the semantic meaning of compliance ('That is acceptable') in (1) and of acceptance of the preceding request ('Yes') in (2); the other interpretation is as a marker implying that the speaker stops short groping for words to continue in (1) and introducing the following utterance in (2). These examples indicate that the interpretation of a single lexical item in texts, particularly in historical ones, is not so straightforward that you can say 'the context will tell you'.

4. Coexistence and association

4.1 Contextual evidence in conversation scenes in plays

The idea of coexistence and association can be illustrated by a number of passages from conversation scenes in Shakespeare's plays.

(3) *Clo[wn]*. [...] doth your honor marke his face?

Esc[alus]. I sir, very **well**. [1] (compliance)

Clo. Nay, I beseech you marke it **well**. [2] (adverb)

Esc. **Well**, I doe so. [3] (discourse marker)

(F1 MM 2.1.149-152)

In quotation (3), numbers in square brackets and functions in parentheses are given in the right-hand margin for the sake of convenience. The verbal exchange in this scene is based on the coexistence and the close association of three different usages of *well*. Clown's question triggers Escalus' answer with the compliance formula 'very well' [1], which, intentional or not, is far from what the questioner may have pragmatically expected. Then, the questioner makes his pragmatic meaning clear by repeating the word *well* [2], here used as an adverb. This example

of *well* is slightly different in meaning from the first one, but it is important to note that they are closely and quickly associated with each other. The association among different meanings and functions of *well* here finally leads to the third example of *well* [3] as a discourse marker.

Quotation (4) is an example which ‘must be the first recorded instance in written English of someone failing to understand a discourse function of *well*’ (Crystal 2004: 193).

- (4) *Doct[tor]*. What a sigh is there? The hart [=heart] is sorely charg'd [=burdened].
Gent[lewoman]. I would not haue such a heart in my bosome, for the dignity of the
 whole body.
Doct. **Well, well, well.**
Gent. Pray God it be sir. (F1 Mac 5.1.57)

The Doctor’s use of a triple *well* can be understood either as a response to the previous speech by the Gentlewoman or as a pathetic reaction to the profound sigh from the sleepwalking Lady Macbeth, or as both of these. In either case, it can also be interpreted as a response token with the meaning of sympathetic understanding or as a hesitation marker probably pouring out from the Doctor, who is paralysed at a loss to know how to react to the dreadful and horrendous sight in front of him. In addition to these two slightly different readings, it is interesting to note that the Gentlewoman’s response makes the reader aware of the presence of another possible interpretation to be readily invoked when *well* is used. When she says, ‘Pray God it be sir’, it indicates that she (mis)understands the preceding *wells* in the semantic meaning of something like ‘healthy’ and ‘all right’.

4.2 <*shew well*> and/or <*shew, well,*>: textual evidence

Although lexical *well* and marker *well* may seem to be clearly separate and readily distinguished, a number of textual variations show that this distinction is not necessarily so clear as we may think.

Quotation (5) is the last line of a conversation scene in Q1 *Romeo and Juliet*, where Benvolio gives Romeo advice before attending a ball in Juliet’s house.

- (5) And she shall scant shew **well** that now seemes best. (Q1 Rom 1.2.104)

It may be sensible to understand the word *well* here, to have been intended to be an adjective or the complement of the verb *shew* with the lexical meaning ‘fair/pretty’, so that the line means something like: ‘And the woman who at the moment looks the most beautiful (to you) will hardly even look pretty’. In Q3, however, *well* occurs with commas on both sides of it, and this punctuation is followed by the 1st and 2nd Folios, as in quotation (5’).

- (5') a. And she shall scant show, **well**, that now shewes best. (Q3)
 b. And she shew scant shell, **well**, that now shewes best. (F1)
 c. And shele shew scant, **well**, that now shewes best. (F2)

It seems safe to say that these lines with commas on both sides of *well* show that those who are responsible for these texts took or (mis)interpreted the word for marker *well*. Modern editions normally follow Q1 or Q2 probably because it reads more fluidly. However, the reading or misreading in (5') not only makes some sense in itself, but also shows that there must have been a real and strong possibility of association or (mis)interpretation between coexisting functions or meanings of *well*. It is important to note that these wider interpretive possibilities of *well* are unlikely to come to the reader's awareness while he/she is reading modern editions ignoring the other possible reading indicated in (5') as a misreading or textual error.

This example can be textual evidence of the adjective/adverb *well* which may have been likely to be mistaken for a marker in certain linguistic circumstances, and these circumstances or combinations must have 'triggered' the misreading when they were strongly established so as to readily associate the word with a marker. It may follow that such combinations or collocations can be linguistic evidence to support the interpretation of *well* as a marker.

5. *Well* in Shakespeare: Text, collocation and interpretation

Discourse marker *well* in Shakespeare occurs with particular modes of collocation. Fuami (2009) summarises twelve typical modes or patterns of collocation involving marker *well*.

5.1 <*Well* + *if*-clause/emphatic phrase + *I* + auxiliary verb>: Collocational feasibility

The modes <*well* + emphatic clause + *I will*> and <*well* + *if*-clause + *I will*> were the most prominent patterns of combination in Shakespeare. The former may have been one of the distinctive and new ways of expression which help support the expressiveness and subjectivity of the discourse. The latter can be characteristic of a particular character, occurring very frequently in the speech of Falstaff.

In Early Modern English, discourse marker *well* was followed by the combination <first person pronoun + modal auxiliary verb> so often that the sequence <*well* + *I* + modal auxiliary verb> can be recognised as a collocation. This mode of collocation can also be observed in the wider range of discourse sequence, particularly with *if*-clause/emphatic phrase immediately after *well*. Quotation (6) includes examples of 'emphatic' clauses inserted after *well*, and (7) includes examples of *if*-clause which are very frequent in the speech of Falstaff.

- (6) a. [...] **Well, while I live I'll** fear no other thing /
 So sore, as keeping safe Nerissa's ring. *Exeunt.* (MV 5.1.306)

- b. **Well**, my lord, since you have given me leave to speak, /
 Freely **will I** speak. (Per 1.2.101)
- c. [...] / **Well**, Catesby, ere a fortnight make me elder, /
I'll send some packing [=send away] that yet think not on't.
 (Ff R3 3.2.60)
- (7) a. [...] **Well**, if Percy be alive, **I'll** pierce him. (1H4 5.3.56)
- b. [...] **Well**, and[='if'] I be serv'd such another trick,
I'll have my braines ta'en out and buttered, [...] (Wiv 3.5.6)
- c. [...] **Well**, if my wind were but long enough [to say my prayers],
I would repent. (Wiv 4.5.102)
- d. **Well**, and the fire of grace be not quite out of thee,
 now **shalt thou** be moved. [...] (as Henry IV; 1H4 2.4.383)

In what follows, I would like to demonstrate that a number of instances of *well* which are normally punctuated as a lexical word in standard modern editions can be a discourse marker, and that the interpretation will be supported in terms of collocation.

- (8) a. [...] I cannot get a service, no, I have ne'er a tongue in my head, **well!**
 [*Looking on his palm.*] If any man in Italy have a fairer table [=part of a palm]
 [...], I shall have good fortune.
 (Lancelot Gobbo in monologue; Riverside MV 2.2.157)

The *well* in quotation (8a) is interpreted as modifying the preceding utterance, separated from the following utterance by the exclamation mark. This interpretation also means that the discourse structure here is understood in parallel as in (8b).

- (8) b. {I cannot get a service, **no!**} : {I have ne'er a tongue in my head, **well!**}

This reading follows the punctuation in Q1, F1 and F2 and F3 and F4 as in (8c).

- (8) c. *head, wel:* (Q1) *head, well:* (Ff 1&2) *head well:* (Ff 3&4)

The *well* here, however, can also be understood to be attached to the following utterance, detached from the preceding one, as shown in (8d).

- (8) d. I cannot get a service, **no**, I have ne'er a tongue in my head. **Well**, if any man
 in Italy have a fairer table [...], **I shall** have good fortune.

This punctuation makes it clear that the *well* is understood as a discourse marker which prefaces

5.2 *Well* preceded by <*I am glad to see* + person>: Collocationally feasible?

Finally, the present section examines instances of *well*, which are unlikely to be supported by any formal modes of collocation involving marker *well* as summarised in Fuami (2009). This is to demonstrate that patterns of collocation or combination involving *well* can also be a powerful linguistic clue to help support or lead to alternative readings, when they are considered in a wider context not restricted to the utterance involving *well* as a marker.

Quotation (11a) is from F1 *Wives* with a colon immediately after *well*.

- (11) a. I am glad to see your Worships **well**: I thanke you for my Venison Master
Shallow. (F1 Wiv 1.1.79)

This punctuation indicates that the *well* is a lexical word with the semantic meaning ‘in good health’ or ‘all right’, acting as an objective-complement of the greeting formula <*I am glad to see* + person>. No readers are supposed to think of any other alternative readings. In fact, most modern editors put a full stop after the *well*, and make it more explicit that they understand the *well* to modify the preceding formula as its objective complement. Schmidt in his *Lexicon* also uses this passage to illustrate the definition of *well* meaning ‘in good health’. Quoting this example, however, Blake (2002) suggests the possibility of interpreting the word *well* as a discourse marker, as can be shown in the punctuation in (11b).

- (11) b. I am glad to see your Worships. **Well**, I thanke you for my Venison Master
Shallow. (As suggested by Blake 2002: 293)

But he does not provide any linguistic evidence to support his interpretation as we would normally expect him to do. It may be sensible to pay attention to the development of topics in the context and/or a marked shift of addressee in the passage, which takes place between before and after the use of *well*: the utterance preceding *well* is a greeting to welcome all of those who have just visited the speaker Page, while the utterance following *well* is addressed to one single person among those visitors, Shallow. It seems reasonable, therefore, to suggest the interpretative possibility of the *well* acting as a linguistic device to signal the shift of addressee.

A number of similar instances of *well* exist in Shakespeare.

- (12) a. Y’are welcome Masters, welcome all. I am glad to see thee **well**: Welcome
good Friends. O my olde Friend? Thy face is valiant since I saw thee last:
[...] (F1 Ham 2.2.417)

In quotation (12a), *well* is also preceded by the formula <*I am glad to see* + person>, and can be understood as shown in (12b).

- (12) b. <Group> → <Individual> (*I am glad to see thee*) → **well** (back again to)
 → <Group> → <Individual>

The *well* in Hamlet's speech in quotation (13a) also comes immediately after the same formula, and may also be understood as a marker as opposed to what the F1 punctuation apparently points to.

- (13) a. *Hor.* Haile to your Lordship.
Ham. I am glad to see you **well**: *Horatio*, or I do forget my selfe.
Hor. The same my Lord, / And your poore Seruant euer.
 (F1 Ham 1.2.163; also Q2)

Hamlet's line appears in Q1 as in (13b).

- (13) b. I am very glad to see you, (Horatio) or I much forget my selfe. (Q1)

The *well* in F1 disappears in Q1 with the intensive adverb *very* inserted before the adjective *glad* and also with the adverb *much* replacing the auxiliary verb *do* before the main verb *forget* in F1. This suggests how unstable in texts, expressions such as emphatic adverbs and possible discourse markers are. Wherever in the process of text transmission these words may have been inserted, deleted or replaced. Closely associable alternate functions could have been understood in either way wherever the context permits. It may be reasonable to suppose, furthermore, that the absence of the *well* in Q1 suggests that the *well* in F1 was not necessarily seen as combined with the greeting idiom, but that it may also have been understood as a marker introducing the following utterance.

The instances of *well* now in question do not seem to present any specific formal patterns to identify them as markers except for the shift of topics and/or addressee. The point still at stake now is how their wider interpretative possibilities can be brought to the reader's awareness. We should pay attention to the existence of the greeting formula <*glad to see* + person> immediately before *well*, which shows that in this position, *well* can be a discourse marker.

Although there are cases where the status of *well* – lexical or marker – is ambiguous, at the same time, the combination <*I am glad to see* + person + *well*> with *well* as an objective complement was well-established in Shakespeare as illustrated in (14).

- (14) I am glad to see you **well**, good M. *Robert Shallow*: (F1 2H4 3.2.81)

It seems reasonable, therefore, to suppose that *well* in quotations (11a), (12a) and (13a) was most likely understood as an objective complement in accordance with the established combination, and that accordingly a colon (a semi-colon or a full stop in modern editions) was readily put immediately after a *well* which is preceded by the formula.

Well may have been more likely to be taken as a lexical word with the semantic meaning ‘fine’ and ‘all right’ when it comes after the formulaic expression <*glad to see* + person> because it accords in lexical meaning with the underlined expressions in (15).

- (15) a. I am glad to see your Honour in good health. (F1 Per 4.6.20)
 b. I am glad to see you in this merrie vaine, (F1 Err 2.2.20)
 c. We are very glad to see your grace so pleasant, (Q1 Ham 3.2.305)

All these objective-complement expressions have a similarly positive ‘semantic prosody’ (Louw 1993) as it were. It is probable that a similar collocational approach could also be applied to instances of *well* involved in combinations such as <... *shew well* ...> (§4.2) and <... *tell him well*, ...> (Example 10). The possible alternative interpretations could be better brought to the reader’s awareness in terms of the collocation with the preceding verbs and/or utterance.

6. Summary

To conclude, I will summarise three issues I have discussed. First, diachronic awareness coupled with synchronic competence will widen interpretive possibilities of linguistic meaning. Secondly, Synchronic coexistence and association of interpretive alternatives available can be illustrated in conversation scenes in plays and in textual variations also. Lastly, collocation can be of great help in elucidating the use of possible discourse markers in historical texts. I showed two cases of the use of *well*: one whose alternative reading is brought to awareness through modes of collocation involving marker *well*, and the other which can be read through collocational patterns in a wider context, not restricted to the utterance involving *well* as a marker.

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