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The use of *well* amongst native speakers of English observed on the basis of CHILDES database. The comparison of Wells and Fletcher corpora

Wykorzystanie *well* wśród native speakers języka na podstawie bazy danych CHILDES. Porównanie korpusów Wells i Fletcher

Abstract: Discourse markers are part and parcel of linguistic behavior of speakers of all languages. In more reserved societies, people tend to express greater distance to other people. In more open societies, speakers maintain closer proximity with others, and are more inclined to preserve greater intimacy with people they come into contact with. All the same, depending on the society using the language, different forms of complementation of literal semantic meanings are used. In some cultures speakers feel, that apart from words, they need to respond to what other people say with, be it a gesture, a facial expression or an interjection. This reaction might be received as a kind of mockery by speakers of other languages. Native speakers of English seem to be more concerned with the point of view of their interlocutors. Whereas in some languages simple *no!* is enough to express disagreement, in English, a more likely response includes a discourse marker such as *well*, for instance. This *well* opens a plethora of interpretations, disagreement among them, but at the same time does not deprive the interlocutor of some degree of rightness. This paper discusses the problem of the use of *well* amongst native speakers of English, observed on the basis of CHILDES database.

Słowa kluczowe: native speakers of English, Wells (korpus), Fletcher (korpus)

Keywords: native speakers of English, Wells (corpora), Fletcher (corpora)

1. Discourse markers

In order to satisfy their aims, people use pragmatic reasoning. Pragmatism is evident in the language people use everyday. Discourse markers allow interlocutors to understand better what other people say, why they say it, if they really mean what they say, as well as what impact their message might have on other people. Discourse markers refer to concepts which are difficult to classify under unanimous taxonomy. Bączkowska (2016) provides an account of various outlooks concerning discourse markers; Lenk (1998) states, that particles are examined in most languages, but there is no clear and coherent terminology used with reference to them. It might happen, thus, that two parallel studies investigating exactly

the same phenomenon use totally disparate terminology. Blakmore (1987) uses the term discourse connectives. He highlights one of the features of discourse markers, that is they are used when there is an insufficiency of words in a communicative context. Őstman (1981) introduces the term pragmatic particles, (Fraser 1996, Brinton 1996, Aijmer et al. 2006) use the term pragmatic marker. Other versions of terminology referring to the same phenomena include – discourse marker (Zwicky 1985, Schiffrin 1987, Lenk 1998, Carter and McCcarthy 2006). Discourse particle, on the other hand, is the term used by (Schourup 1985, Labove and Fanshel 1987. Abraham 1991, Kroon 1995). One of the discourse markers is *well.* It is used in many contexts, alone, or accompanied by preceding or following words. It is universal. Depending on the nonverbal means of communication, such as the tone of the voice, prosody, facial expression, it might be used to express anything from admiration to disgust.

2. Well as a discourse marker

Well has been extensively studied by many scholars. Bączkowska (2016) presents the discussion of *well* as a discourse marker; Lakoff (1973) specifies that *well* is used when there is insufficiency of response. In such situations, well compensates for the potential gaps in the interaction. Svartvik (1980) perceives *well* as a mark of a topic shift. To Owen (1981), *well* possesses a mitigating function, when the conversation is at risk, or confrontation is anticipated. Aijmer and Simon–Vandenbergen (2006) ascribe to *well* a multifunctional prospective. They claim that it is the unit whose interpretations depend on the speaker, context as well as the relationship between the speaker and the listener. In this view *well* may represent a great number of meanings and a wide range of functions. *Well*, like other DMs, may express many functions. Aijmer (2013) mentions reluctance, disappointment, or resignation, on the one hand, and, on the other, coherence, involvement and politeness.

Well may occur in the beginning, in the middle or at the end of the sentence. It is more common in the spoken language, though used in writing, to suggest more spoken–like nature of the situation presented.

3. Aims of the study

The study was undertaken to observe *well* in a natural flow of speech in the linguistic repertoire of native speakers of English. To

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accomplish the task of finding out which pragmatic functions *well* is used for, the following research questions have been posed;

3.1 Firstly, what is the ratio of usage? Which group (caregivers, people of unknown age and the target children) use *well* most frequently?

3.2 Secondly, what are the main reasons for the production of *well*? Why, and for what purposes caregivers, people of unknown age and the target children use *well*?

3.3 Finally, what are all the functions expressed with *well* for each participant of the recordings?

4. Database and method

4.1 Sources and format of data

The research was conducted on the basis of CHILDES, i.e. Child Language Data Exchange System. The corpus was created in 1984 by Brian MacWhinney and Cathrine Snow as a tool to conduct research on first language acquisition. The dialogues between participants were transcribed in CHAT format. CHAT stands for Codes for Human Analysis of Transcript. CLAN programme was selected to find and analyze instances of *well*. CLAN is the acronym of Computerized Language ANalysis. R programme was used to create charts and bar charts illustrating the results. R is a programming language and software environment for statistical computing and graphics.

4.2 Data description

Two corpora were chosen for the study. The first, the Wells corpus, consists of 299 files from 32 British children (16 girls and 16 boys) aged 1;6 to 5;0. For this study eight children were selected, a total of about eighty files. [1], The second corpus also the part of CHILDES, was Fletcher. This corpus contains transcripts from 72 British children ages 3, 5, and 7.Dialogues were recorded in an interview situation between a female adult and the child. Children had not known the investigators before the experiment.

4.3 Method

CLAN programme was used to extract the desired files. These were then taken down and analyzed with reference to which function they represented. Apart from the lines containing the chosen discourse marker *well,* ten lines before and after the lines were referred to, in order to shed more light on their interpretation. Some-

[1] Prepared on the basis of MacWhinney, B. (2000). The CHILDES Project: Tools for Analyzing Talk 3rd Edition. Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.

times the whole file had to be viewed to properly allocate the discourse marker's pragmatic meaning.

5. Results

The number of utterances which appeared in the database was 179, after excluding those instances which eluded interpretation and when *well* was not used as a discourse marker. There were 14 utterances produced by children (8%), 133 by caregivers (74%), and 32 by persons of unknown age (18%).

Table1: Results yielded for *well!* from the Wells corpus

	overall	caregiver	child	person of unknown age
all appearances of *well*	210	157	16	37
eludes interpretation	17	14	1	2
not used interjectionally	14	10	1	3
analysable utterances	179	133	14	32

Ratio of usage

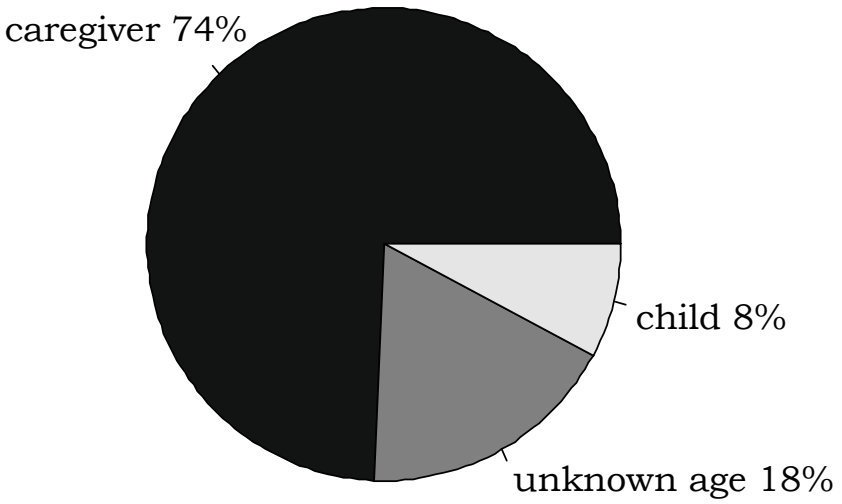

Figure 2. The overall use of well

The pie chart above illustrates the fact, that *well* is most frequently used by caregivers, followed by persons of unknown age and children. This may be due to the fact, that caregivers have spoken the most. They exchanged views with other adults as well as they spoke to the target children encouraging them to speak.

Main reasons for the production of *well* – caregiver. Wells

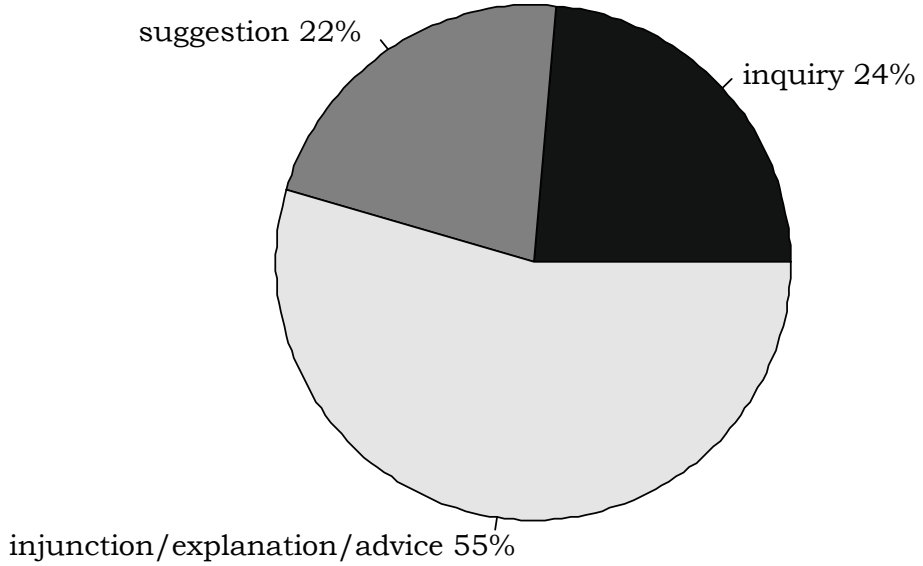

Figure 3. Three main functions of well for caregivers

Three main functions were analyzed. The criterion was the number of occurrence. The figure above shows when three main functions are treated separately and when injunction, explanation and advice are taken together, since they all three appeared the same number of times. When injunction, explanation and advice were counted separately, then it was 28% for each with suggestion 34% and inquiry 37%. When counted with reference to all functions, inquiry was 10%, suggestion and injunction were 9%, explanation and advice were 7% each and 21% when they were taken together.

Main reasons for the production of well–child. Wells

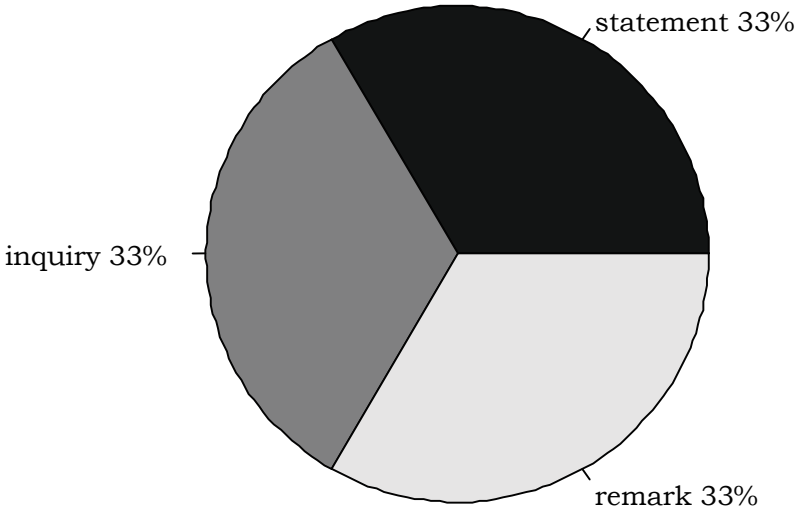

Figure 4. Three main functions of well for the target child

The figure above when three main functions treated separately. When calculated together against all remaining functions they form 64% together and 21% each separately.

Main reasons for the production of well–person of unknown age. Wells

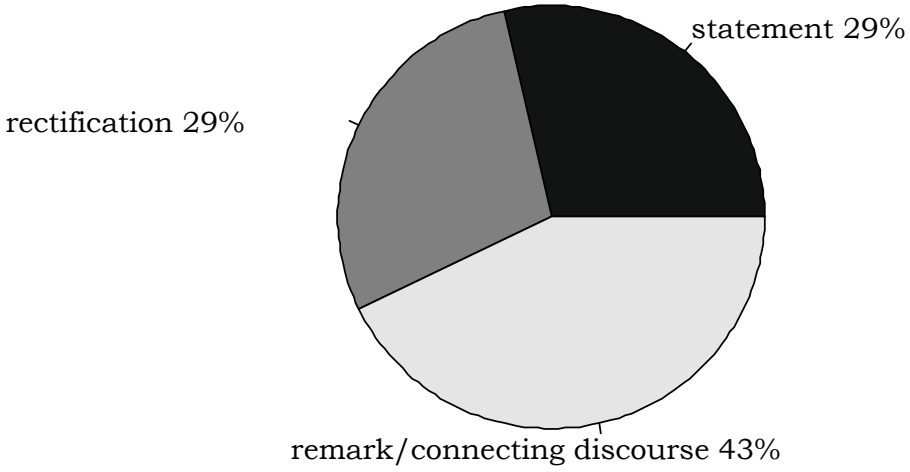

Figure 5. Three main functions of well for the person of unknown age

The figure above presents situations when three main functions were separated from other functions and remark and connecting discourse appearing the same number of times when they were counted together. When analyzed separately then statement was 36%, rectification also was 36% and remark and connection discourse were 27%. When matched with all the other functions than statement was 12,5%, rectification was 12,5% connecting discourse and remark were 19% when analyzed together and both 9% when they were treated separately.

Main reasons for the production of well together. Wells

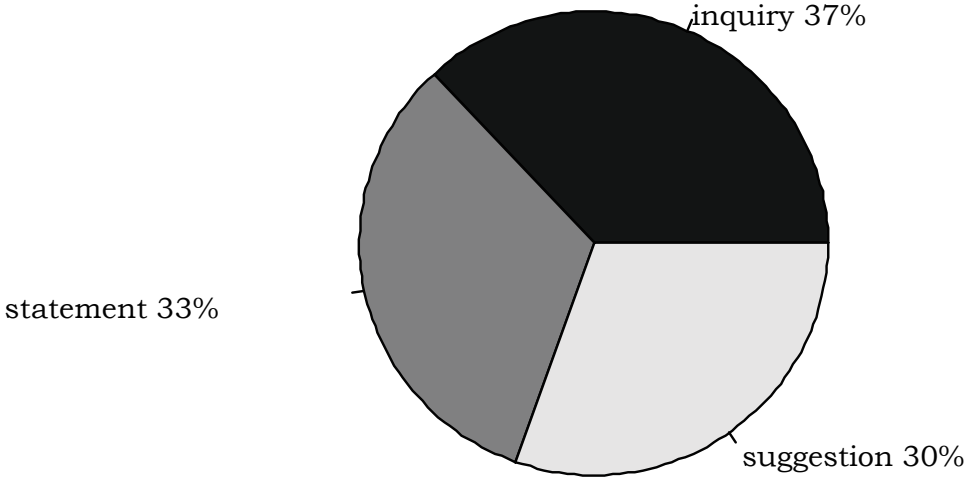

Figure 6. Three main functions of well for all participants together

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The pie chart above illustrates the main functions *of well* when three main functions are analyzed in isolation. When calculated together with all other functions the percentages are 10% for inquiry, 8% for statement and 7% for suggestion. Inquiry was an umbrella term for genuine questions as well as question tags and some forms of request.

Below all the thirty four functions will be ascribed to all participants of the recordings and presented with bar plots.

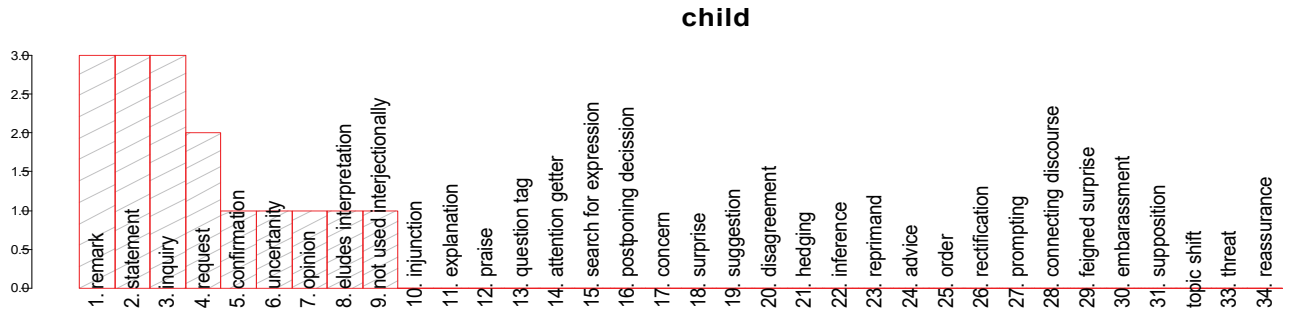

Figure 7. Specific functions of well for the target child

Children do not use *well* to express all functions, only nine functions out of thirty four. It might mark the overall developmental state of children's speech production. It is a gradual process in which the child gains complexity and mastery of speech with time.

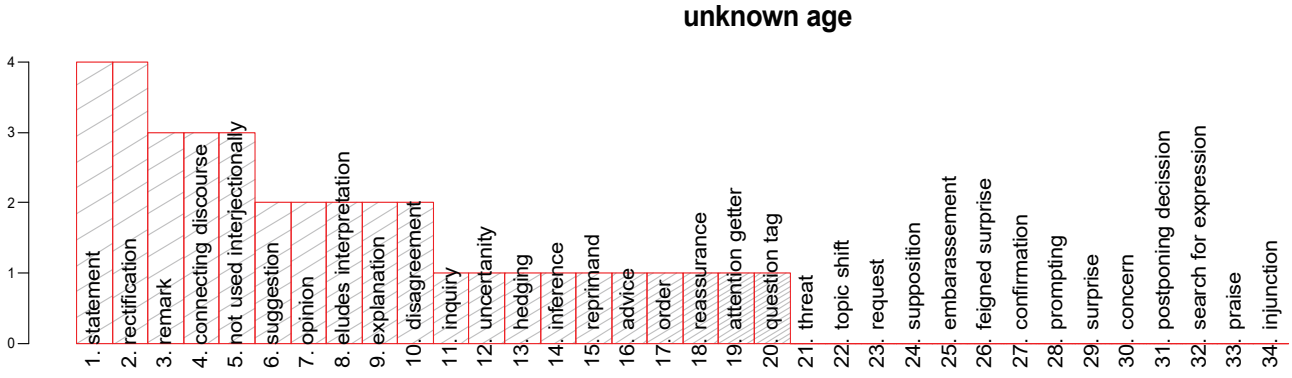

Figure 8. Specific functions of well for the person of unknown age

The person of unknown age was mainly represented by the siblings of the target child. In other cases these were the people who visited the family during the recording times. Statement and rectification were the most frequent functions fulfilled by *well*. It seems justifiable, since visitors usually are not dominant and more often than not gently clarify points if they think something is not correct or right.

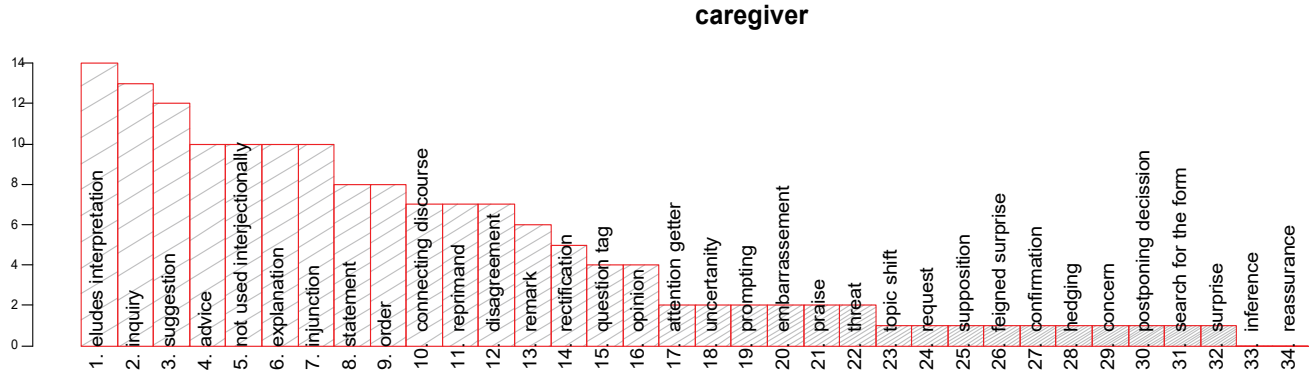

Figure 9. Specific functions of well for the caregiver

The cases where the meaning of the discourse marker researched could not be clearly inferred were not taken into consideration. It was caused by the fact that the transcribes were not able to hear exactly the words uttered. At other times, there was too little contextual information to learn which function of *well* was being addressed. Caregivers displayed the greatest creativity with the production of *well*.

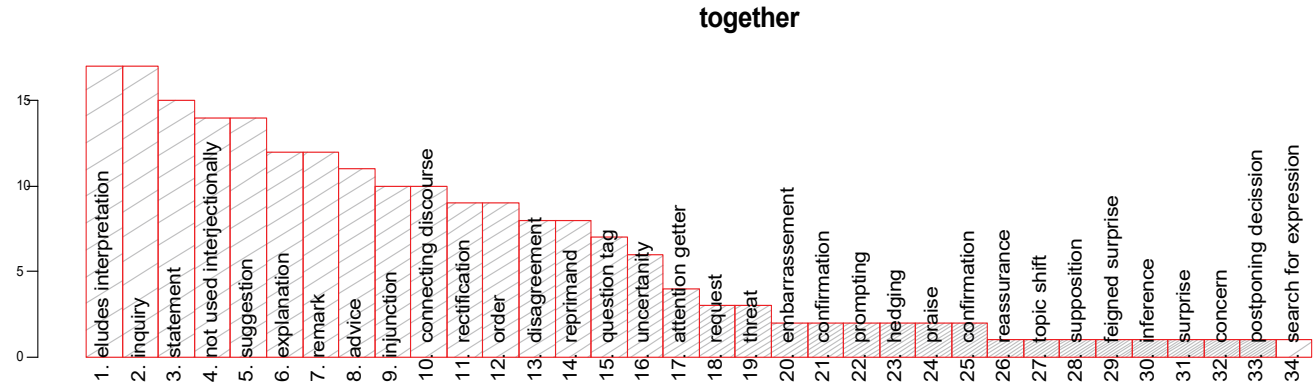

Figure 10. Specific functions of well for all the participants together

The most numerous category, apart from those not taken into consideration, was *inquiry.* It seems reasonable, bearing in mind that the dialogues recorded occurred between the child and his or her environment. Contacts with children are characterized by the fact that both sides, the child and adults mutually require something from one another.

Table 2: Results yielded for well! from the Fletcher corpus

	overall	caregiver	child
all appearances of *well*	98	50	48
not used interjectionally	40	31	9
analysable utterances	58	19	39

In the Fletcher corpus, which is smaller than the Wells corpus, there were fifty eight analysable utterances. Dialogues recorded in the Fletcher corpus were only conducted when two people were present, that is the target child and the caregiver. In this corpus the caregiver was an adult, a speech therapist, previously unknown to the child. The relationship between the child and the adult was formal, though the atmosphere was marked by affability.

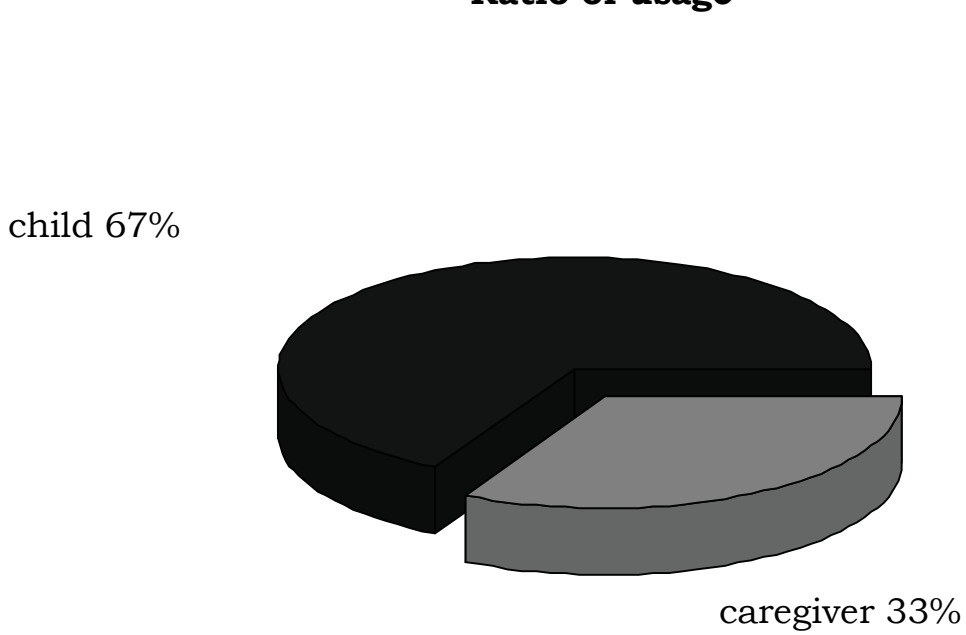

Figure 11. The overall use of well

In this corpus, unlike in Wells, children used the discourse marker *well* more. As it was mentioned earlier, the recordings took place in a more formal context. It might have influenced the target children

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who, at least linguistically, were more hesitant. They were less certain of their opinions and used *well* more.

Main reasons for the production of well – caregiver. Fletcher

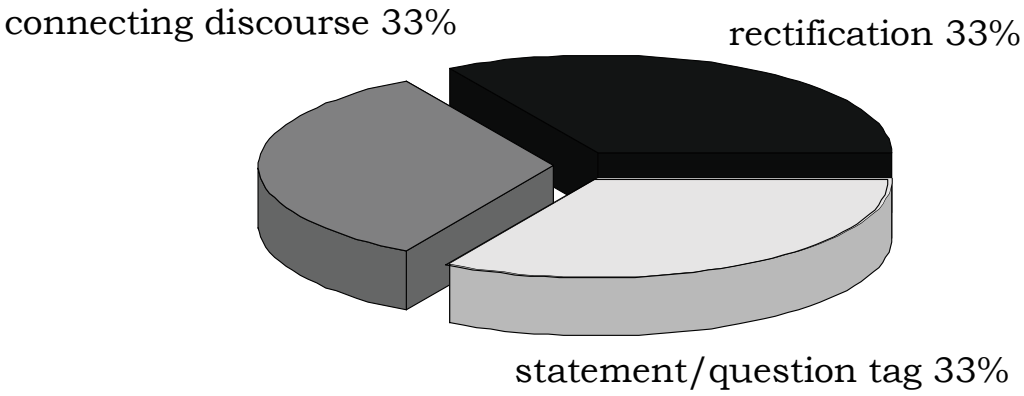

Figure 12. Three main functions of well for caregivers

The main reasons for the production of *well* illustrate the social situation very well. The context was formal, and the children had not known their caregivers before and vice versa. They used rectification to enlighten the other side, if they did not know something. At other times they connected discourse, which they would not have to do with people they were more familiar with. They also expressed their respect to the other side using more question tags, suggesting less authority.

Main reasons for the production of well – the target child. Fletcher

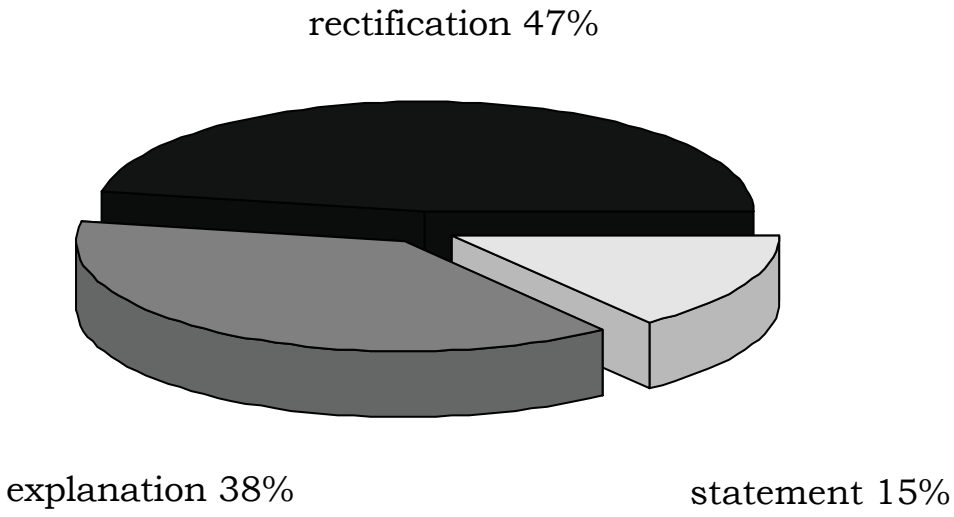

Figure 13. Three main functions of well for caregivers

The figures above also perfectly reflect the nature of the contacts where the recordings were taken. Like in the example above, children used *well* as a means of rectification. Something was no correct, so they politely suggested it.

Main reasons for the production of well – together. Fletcher

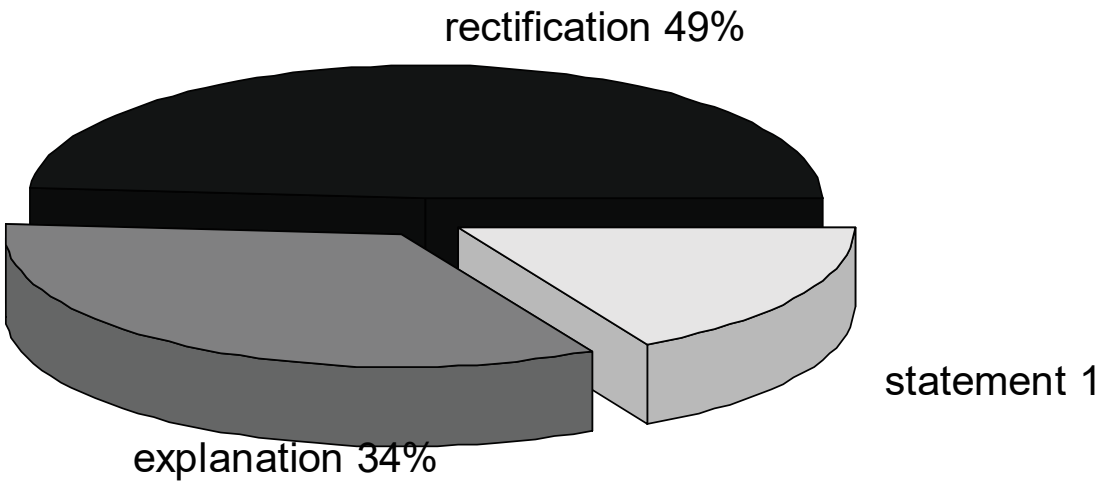

Figure 14. Three main functions of well for all participants together

Social situations when people do not know each other are marked by the necessity to clarify, explain and inform. The study has proven this formula.

Below all the fourteen functions will be ascribed to all participants of the recordings and presented with bar plots.

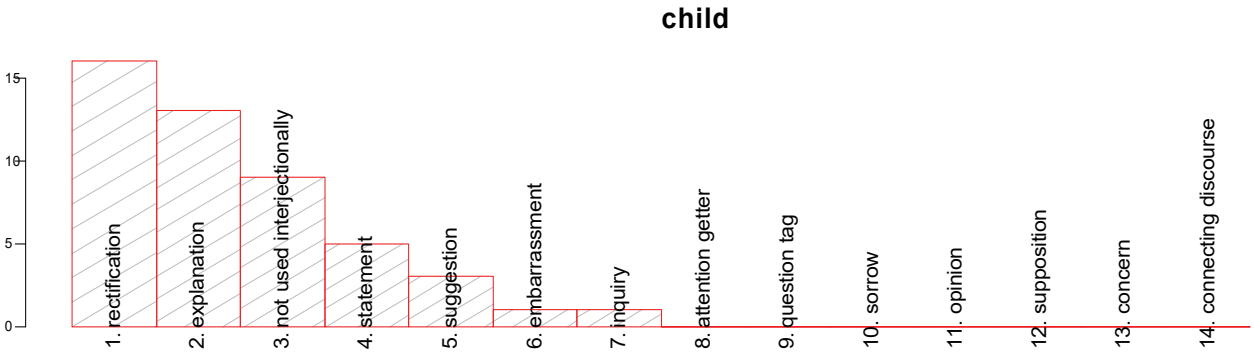

Figure 15. Specific functions of well for the target children

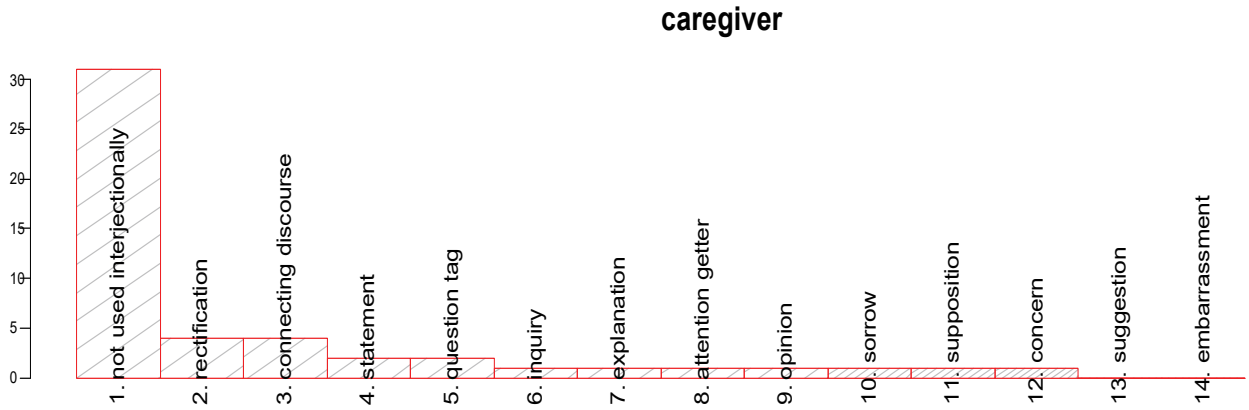

Figure 16. Specific functions of well for the caregiver

As it was mentioned earlier, and as anticipated, rectification was the main reason to use *well*. In the Fletcher corpus, children have proven to be more willing to use well and to express a greater number of functions. The fact that caregivers have overwhelmingly used *well* not as a discourse marker but as an adverb, was dictated by the fact that they wanted to encourage children to perform. They have used phrases such as *very well*, or *very well done* which is typical of situations when adults with a positive attitude want to motivate children.

6. Conclusions

The analysis of the two corpora has displayed certain similarities and differences. In both corpora participants have used *well* in a number of different functions to fit social contexts. In the Wells corpus, adults used *well* more frequently and to account for more functions. In the Wells corpus adults used *well* mainly when suggesting alternative courses of events, inquiring something which is typical of contacts between children and their parents. In the Fletcher corpus, the use of *well* was totally dominated by rectification and explanation, which are common and typical of encounters when strangers come into contacts. In both corpora, in the light of the studies, the social situation was confirmed by the use of the discourse marker *well*.

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