

Pragmatic Marker Combinations: An Investigation of the Co-Occurrence with the Pragmatic Marker *Well*

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Abstract

This research examined the use of pragmatic marker combinations (PMCs) that co-occurred with the pragmatic marker (PM) *well* by both Chinese and Thai advanced-level learners of English as a foreign language (EFL). In total, 40 Chinese and 40 Thai participants were involved in this research. Dyadic English conversations were collected for the analysis. The results first illustrated that nine PMs co-occurred with the PM *well*. The Chinese and Thai participants used five of them, namely *I think*, *because*, *I mean*, *OK*, and *um*. The Chinese participants also used the PMs *yeah* and *yes* with the PM *well*, whereas the Thai participants used the PMs *like*, *actually*, and *if* with the PM *well*. The PM *well* mainly functioned as a planner, either in combination with another PM that had the same function or with another PM that had a different function to facilitate turn-taking in conversation. The research findings revealed the patterns of using the PMCs co-occurred with the PM *well* by both Chinese and Thai participants.

Keywords: pragmatic marker combinations, pragmatic marker, discourse marker, *well*, Chinese EFL learners, Thai EFL learners

1. Introduction

Studies on the use of English pragmatic markers (PMs) by speakers of English as the first language (L1) and speakers of English as a second or foreign language (ESL or EFL) have been conducted for decades (Pan, 2024, 2025). The pragmatic roles of different PMs were attested by their polyfunctionality in both spoken and written forms (Ferrante 2021). In addition, the co-occurrence of the PMs used by L1 English speakers in spoken interactions has been investigated in recent years (Crible & Degand, 2019, 2021; Cuenca & Crible, 2019; Haselow, 2019). Studies of pragmatic marker combinations (PMCs) not only promote the examination of PMs but also allow researchers to reconsider the polyfunctionality of PMs.

This research contributed to the studies of PMCs that EFL learners used, since very little research has focused on EFL learners' use of PMCs in spoken interactions. The PM *well* is a central PM that "has been recognized in previous studies of varying approaches" (Huang, 2019, p. 574). Given the polyfunctionality of the PM *well*, it is worth investigating the functions of the PMCs that co-occurred with it. What motivates the other PMs to co-occur with the PM *well* in spoken interactions can reveal its significant role in oral communication. Hence, the in-depth analysis of the PMCs that co-occur with the PM *well* can deepen the understanding of both the PM *well* and the PMCs that EFL learners use in spoken interactions.

Accordingly, this research aimed to examine the PMs that co-occurred with the PM *well* used by EFL learners with Chinese and Thai linguacultural backgrounds in spoken interactions, as well as to explore the motivations for the co-occurrence of the PM *well* with the other PMs that both Chinese and Thai EFL learners used in spoken interactions. The two research questions (RQs) are presented below:

RQ1: Which PMs co-occur with the PM *well* in both Chinese and Thai EFL learners' use in spoken interactions?

RQ2: What are the motivations for the co-occurrence of the PM *well* with the other PMs that both Chinese and Thai EFL learners use in spoken interactions?

2. Literature Review

2.1 PMs and Discourse Markers

The terms "the PM *well*" (Rühlemann & Gries, 2021) and "the discourse marker *well*" (DM; Fleckenstein, 2022) were both used in different studies, resulting in some confusion in this field (Xiao et al., 2021). Accordingly, the question is why these types of markers, such as *well*, are called both PMs and DMs.

DMs are "sequentially dependent elements that bracket units of talk" (Schiffrin, 1987, p. 31). The DMs in the early research were based on written language, such as *and*, *but*, *so* (Fraser, 1990). The primary function of these markers is to connect two sentences at the textual level (Pan & Aroonmanakun, 2022). Subsequently, several studies have revealed that certain words in oral communication, such as *well* and *you know*, not only connect two discourses but also have interactional and cognitive functions (Aijmer, 2011; Sakita, 2013). The focus of the study changed from the discursive to the interactional level. For example, the marker *well* can express different types of stances at

the interactional level (Sakita, 2013), since “[s]tance is perhaps best conceived of as an interactional process” (Fleckenstein, 2022, p. 84). Accordingly, the term “PM” has been used in recent research to highlight the pragmatic functions of these markers in spoken interactions (Ament et al., 2020; Vine & Holmes, 2023).

The distinction between PMs and DMs can also be identified based on the frameworks of their functions. The framework proposed by Fung and Carter (2007) has been used in various studies of DMs. The four functional categories of DMs are referential, structural, interpersonal, and cognitive. Much of the early research on DMs focused on their referential functions, such as contrastive functions (Fraser, 1990). In contrast to Fung and Carter’s (2007) framework, PMs “are not only devices associated with discourse and textual functions but also signals guiding the addressee’s interpretation in the communication situation” (Xiao et al., 2021, p. 620). The central functions of PMs include the latter three functional categories in Fung and Carter’s (2007) framework.

In contrast, the referential functions should not be included in the pragmatic functions of PMs since they are “proposition-based” (Pan, 2024, p. 5). Crible and Blackwell (2020) noted that DMs are a hyponym of PMs, as DMs primarily pertain to coherence, whereas PMs are used for interactional purposes. Hence, the term “PM” was used in this research, following Xiao et al. (2021) and Pan (2024), to include DMs that were regarded as hyponyms of PMs.

2.2 PMCs

Although previous studies have used the term “discourse marker combinations” (DMCs; Crible & Blackwell, 2020; Crible & Degand, 2021), the term “PMCs” was used in this research based on the understanding of PMs in spoken interactions (Lohmann & Koops, 2022). The focus of studying PMCs was the motivation for the co-occurrence of the PMs. Cuenca and Crible (2019) illustrated three types of co-occurrences of PMs using spoken interactions from L1 English speakers. The juxtaposition type refers to the condition in which both PMs in a PMC have different scopes and functions, such as *and if*, and *but*. The addition type is that both PMs in a PMC pertain to the same utterance but have different functions. This type aligns with several studies’ findings that a PM with a broader functional sense “will often pair with more specific markers to nuance the discourse relation the markers are cueing” (Blanchard & Buysse, 2021, p. 466), such as *but nevertheless*. The combination type refers to PMs that pertain to the same utterance and serve a single function, such as *well I mean*.

Although this framework has been used in previous research, it was primarily employed to investigate the co-occurrence of DMCs with DMs that had referential functions, such as the DMC *and so* (Koops & Lohmann, 2022). As the PM *well* has different pragmatic functions at the interactional level (Aijmer, 2011; Pan, 2023), Haselow’s (2019) framework was used in this research. Haselow (2019) divided the functions of PMs into three domains from a communicative perspective: discourse structure, interactions, and cognition, as Table 1 illustrates.

Table 1. Functions of PMs adapted from Haselow (2019)

Domains	Explanations	Communicative tasks	Examples
discourse structure	indicating the relationship of the discourses	1. indicating a type of relationship to the preceding utterance 2. starting a new discursive action	<i>so, anyway, and</i>
interaction	generally organizing different types of turn-taking	1. reaching the attention of the hearer 2. taking the turn 3. response to the prior speaker’s utterance	<i>listen, yeah, OK</i>
cognition	for the interpretation of an utterance	1. indicating an interpretive cue for a following utterance 2. indicating a common ground between the interactants	<i>well, you know, I think</i>

As shown in Table 1, the domain of the discourse structure focuses on the functions of PMs at the discursive level in spoken interactions, in which different types of relationships between a previous and following utterance can be revealed using different PMs, including *and*. The domain of the interaction indicates the different types of turn-taking in verbal conversations, which are essential in dialogic activities (Sakita, 2013). The domain of cognition highlights the cognitive functions of PMs at the interactional level, enabling interactants to interpret different utterances, such as *I think*, which indicates a personal stance (Pan & Aroonmanakun, 2022). This framework is suitable for this study because the PM *well* is used primarily at the turn-initial of an utterance for different functional purposes in dialogic activities within the three domains in Haselow’s (2019) framework. Moreover, compared with Cuenca and Crible’s (2019) framework, Haselow’s (2019) framework places greater emphasis on the use of PMs in oral communication.

2.3 Well as a PM

The polyfunctionality of the PM *well* in oral communication has led to its functions frequently having been the focus of previous studies, as presented in Table 2.

Table 2. Functions of the PM *well*

Domains	Functions	Examples
discourse structure	1. as a planner to plan the next utterance	<i>Well</i> , my mom will tell me.
	2. marking a self-correction	<i>Well</i> , here we are four years later (Quinci and Musacchio 2023: 330).
	3. marking a new topic	<i>Well</i> , I have chosen second one a country that you visited and that impressed you (Öztürk and Köse 2021: 239).
	4. indicating more explanation or information	<i>Well</i> , I got more and went home before the raining.
	5. indicating a conclusion	<i>Well</i> , that's all.
	6. marking a quotation	<i>Well</i> , that's not me (Huang 2019: 582).
interaction	1. indicating a start of a series utterances for attention	<i>Well</i> , let me tell you something.
	2. indicating a request	<i>Well</i> , can I try?
	3. indicating a dispreferred response	<i>Well</i> , that will be very interesting, but bad for this E8 theory (Quinci and Musacchio 2023: 330).
	4. indicating an incomplete response	<i>Well</i> , she teach me (Pan 2024: 19).
	5. indicating an unexpected response	<i>Well</i> , I got it ten years ago.
	6. indicating an agreement or a reinforcement	<i>Well</i> , I agree with that.
cognition	1. as a face-threat mitigator	<i>Well</i> , maybe we don't talk about it.
	2. as a stance marker to express different stances of the speaker	<i>Well</i> , I don't like that.

The examples in Table 2 were either retrieved from the data collected in this research or from previous research if no example could be found in the data collected in this research. The functions of the PM *well* match the domains of the functions of PMs that Haselow (2019) proposed. In the domain of discourse structure, the PM *well* not only marks different types of turn-taking, but also functions as a planner, enabling the speaker to plan the next utterance (Öztürk & Köse, 2021; Quinci & Musacchio, 2023). Given that PMs have different pragmatic functions, PMs are “largely devoid of a particular function is untenable” (Haselow, 2019, p. 15). PMs such as *well* and *uh/um* have been regarded as planners at the discoursal level (Tübben and Landert 2022). In the domain of interaction, the PM *well* indicates speakers' different types of responses to the preceding utterance produced by the prior speaker. In the domain of cognition, the PM *well* is a mitigator and reflects the speakers' stances (Sakita, 2013).

The PM *well* used by EFL learners with different linguacultural backgrounds had fewer functions than when it was used by L1 English speakers (Huang, 2019; Öztürk & Köse, 2021). EFL learners used the PM *well* in the domain of discourse structure more often than in the other two domains, although EFL learners with specific linguacultural backgrounds, such as Swedish EFL learners, used the PM *well* significantly more often than did L1 English speakers (Aijmer, 2011). Huang (2019) found that the Chinese EFL learners mainly used the PM *well* for speech management at the discoursal level, while its other functions were rarely used. Few Thai EFL learners used the PM *well* as a mitigator, and they lacked awareness of this function of the PM *well* (Pan, 2023). In addition, Pan and Aroonmanakun (2022) found that Thai EFL learners with higher English proficiency used the PM *well* more often than those with lower levels of English proficiency, indicating that the use of PMs was influenced by English proficiency. By contrast, rare research has investigated whether EFL learners use the PM *well* with any other PMs in spoken interactions. The functions of the use of the PMCs that co-occur with the PM *well* by EFL learners remain unknown. The investigation of the PMCs co-occurred with the PM *well* by EFL learners can reveal how EFL learners use the PMCs with the PM *well* in spoken interactions, as well as the functions for which they use the PM *well*.

3. Methodology

3.1 Participants and Data Collection

Forty Chinese (CH) and 40 Thai (TH) advanced-level EFL learners were involved in this research, totaling 80 participants. Each participant's L1 was the official language of their country, namely Chinese and Thai. They had studied English in their own countries for 13 to 15 years before the data collection and had not studied English in an English-speaking country. All participants had an advanced level of English proficiency according to the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR; Council of Europe, 2020). Each participant submitted their valid score for an international English exam to confirm that they were advanced-level EFL learners. Advanced-level Chinese and Thai EFL participants were chosen for this research for the following reasons: First, despite the lack of studies of the PMs that Asian EFL learners use in spoken interactions, several recent studies have examined Chinese and Thai EFL learners' use of the PM *well* in spoken interactions (Huang, 2019; Pan, 2023, 2024), and the functions of the use of the PM *well* by Chinese and Thai EFL learners have been revealed. Hence, it is worth continuing to examine whether both Chinese and Thai EFL learners use the PMCs that co-occur with the PM *well* in spoken interactions. Second, EFL participants with advanced English proficiency were selected because previous research found that PMs, including the PM *well*, were primarily used by EFL learners with high levels of English proficiency (Xiao et al., 2021). Moreover, neither the Chinese language nor the Thai language has translation equivalents of the PM *well* (Huang, 2019; Pan, 2023). Both Chinese and Thai EFL learners must study the PM *well* to be able to use it in spoken interactions. Given these circumstances, it is reasonable to examine the Chinese and Thai EFL participants' use of the PM *well*, as their L1s would have little influence on it.

Following the use of real-time dialogic activity for the study of PMCs (Haselow, 2019), each participant was asked to pair with another participant of the same nationality to collect dyadic, face-to-face, real-time conversations. Each pair was requested to audio-record any conversations in which they used English to communicate in their daily lives. Since this step was assumed to be challenging for the participants, who did not use English in their daily lives, each pair was allowed to spend a certain amount of time discussing any topics they wished and to audio-record their English conversations as data for this research. Each pair was requested to speak as naturally as possible. The English language was used as the primary language during the conversations, but a small amount of code-switching was allowed when unavoidable. Each pair was requested to record a conversation lasting approximately 30 minutes. The researcher finally received 20 pairs of dyadic English conversations from the Chinese participants, with an average of 27.4 minutes per conversation, and 20 pairs from the Thai participants, with an average of 32.1 minutes per conversation. The participants discussed a variety of topics, including their social lives, hobbies, plans, and assignments. The ELAN program (2024) was used to transcribe the spoken data following the Extensible Markup Language (XML) format, as presented in the appendix. The ELAN program was used because it allowed the researcher to annotate the PMs and PMCs according to different layers. The Corpus of PM Combination (CPMC) was built in written format, comprising samples from Chinese participants (96,302 English tokens) and Thai participants (107,926 English tokens).

3.2 Data Analysis

The bottom-up approach, based on corpus-driven analysis, was primarily used to study PMs and PMCs and was adopted for this research (Crible & Degand, 2021; Pan, 2024). First, based on the definition of the PMs and the findings of previous research, two raters who had studied PMs before identified all instances of the PM in the CPMC. The PM *well* should be syntactically independent without any propositional sense, as in example (1). Hence, any occurrence of the word *well* combined with an adverb or an adjective in the CPMC was excluded, as example (2) shows. There were no discrepancies in the two raters' identification of the PM *well*.

- (1) CH02: **Well**, I'm not gonna judge that.
- (2) CH04: Oh, he's **well** by the way.

Second, both raters identified the PMCs co-occurred with the PM *well*, as in examples (3) and (4).

- (3) TH06: **Well I think** this picture looks OK, cause the color is shining [shining].
- (4) TH18: **Well because** he didn't tell you in advance, so I wouldn't think he's right.

Following previous research (Crible & Degand, 2021), this study focused solely on PMCs with two PMs. The PMCs with more than two PMs, such as in example (5), were excluded because they were redundant due to disfluency. There were no discrepancies in the two raters' identification of the PMCs containing the PM *well*.

- (5) TH05: **Um [um yeah uh well]** I don't know about it.

Third, based on Haselow's (2019) framework, both raters identified the functions of the PM *well* and each PM co-occurred with the PM *well* in a PMC using the bottom-up approach assisted by the contexts of the PMCs. Cuenca and Crible's (2019) types of PMCs were also used to assist in identifying the functions of the PMs within a PMC, as the scope and prosody of the PMs influence the identification of their functions. The inter-rater reliability for identifying the functions of the PMs in the PMCs was high at 0.811. Both raters discussed any discrepancies until a final agreement was reached.

4. Results

4.1 PMs That Co-Occurred with Well

Overall, the Chinese participants produced 156 instances of the PM *well* and the Thai participants produced 229 instances of the PM *well*. In total, 46 out of 156 instances of the PM *well* (29%) co-occurred with another PM when used by the Chinese participants, and a total of 62 out of 229 instances of the PM *well* (27%) co-occurred with another PM when used by the Thai participants. Table 3 presents the relevant information about the PMCs that included the PM *well* as used by the Chinese and the Thai participants in this research.

Table 3. PMCs with PM *well* used by Chinese and Thai advanced-level EFL participants

PMCs with PM <i>well</i>	CH		TH		Total	
	RF	P (%)	RF	P (%)	RF	P (%)
<i>well I think</i>	12	26	18	29	30	28
<i>well yeah</i>	7	15	-	-	7	6
<i>well because</i>	6	13	8	13	14	13
<i>well yes</i>	6	13	-	-	6	6
<i>well I mean</i>	5	11	6	10	11	10
<i>OK well</i>	5	11	5	8	10	9
<i>um well</i>	5	11	15	24	20	19
<i>well like</i>	-	-	4	6	4	4
<i>well actually</i>	-	-	3	5	3	3
<i>well if</i>	-	-	3	5	3	3
total	46	100	62	100	108	100

Note: RF refers to the raw frequencies. P (%) refers to the proportions.

According to Table 3, nine PMs that co-occurred with the PM *well* were used by both Chinese and Thai participants; these were *I think*, *yeah*, *because*, *yes*, *I mean*, *OK*, *um*, *actually*, and *if*. With regard to the PMCs co-occurred with the PM *well* that were used by the Chinese participants, seven types of PMCs co-occurred with the PM *well* were found, five of which were in the pattern of *well*+PM and two were in the pattern of PM+*well*; the use of the pattern of *well*+PM (36 instances, 78%) exceeded the use of the pattern of PM+*well* (10 instances, 22%). The Chinese participants predominantly used the PMC *well I think*, with 12 instances (36%).

Compared to the Chinese participants, the Thai participants used eight types of PMCs with the PM *well*. Six of them were in the pattern of *well*+PM, while two of them were in the pattern of PM+*well*. The use of the pattern of *well*+PM (42 instances, 68%) also exceeded the use of the pattern of PM+*well* (20 instances, 31%). As was the case for the Chinese participants, the PMC *well I think* was predominantly used by the Thai participants with 18 instances (29%). Unlike the Chinese participants, the PMC *um well* was used at the second highest frequency by the Thai participants, with 15 instances (24%).

As such, both Chinese and Thai participants used the pattern *well*+PM more often than they did the pattern PM+*well* in the dyadic English conversations. Five types of the PMCs that included the PM *well* were used by both Chinese and Thai participants; these were *well I think*, *well because*, *well I mean*, *um well*, and *OK well*. The Chinese participants used the PMCs *well yeah* and *well yes*, whereas the Thai participants did not use them. The Thai participants used the PMCs *well like*, *well actually*, and *well if*, while the Chinese did not.

4.2 Functions of PMCs that included *well* used by Chinese and Thai participants

Table 4 presents the functions of both PMs in the PMCs that were used by both Chinese and Thai participants.

Table 4. Functions of each PMC used by both Chinese and Thai participants

PMCs	Functions	CH		TH		Total	
		RF	P (%)	RF	P (%)	RF	P (%)
<i>well I think</i>	planner in combination	8	24	6	12	14	16
	attention + stance	4	12	12	23	16	19
<i>well because</i>	planner + causal clause	4	12	4	8	8	9
	attention + causal clause	2	6	4	8	6	7
<i>well I mean</i>	planner in combination	2	6	4	8	6	7
	attention + explanation	2	6	2	4	4	5
<i>OK well</i>	mitigator in combination	1	3	-	-	1	1
	response + stance	3	9	4	8	7	8
<i>um well</i>	response + request	2	6	1	2	3	4
	planner + stance	2	6	4	8	6	7
	mitigator in combination	2	6	2	4	4	5
	planner in combination	1	3	9	17	10	12
total	all functions	33	100	52	100	85	100

According to Table 4, the Chinese and Thai participants used the PMC *well I think* with different functions. The Chinese participants mainly used it to as a planner to consider the up-coming utterance, as in both examples presented below.

- (6) CH11 (00:07:46)
 - <CH11 key="question">
 - 1 How did you know that your friend was angry to you?
 - <CH12 key="response" key="PMC">
 - 2 **Well** <pause / 1.8s> **I think** <pause / 2.5s> his face <pause / 1.7s>and his frown eyebrows.
- (7) CH36 (00:25:31)
 - <CH36 key="question">
 - 1 Did you ever like think of this issue?
 - <CH36 key="response" key="PMC">
 - 2 **Well** <pause / 1.2s> **I think** <pause / 1.7s> I know <pause / 1.8s> I know!

Both examples above show that the use of certain PMs as planners does not always reflect the disfluency of EFL learners, but rather the planning of their up-coming utterances due to the spontaneous nature of real-time conversations (Huang, 2019). Both participants in (6) were discussing some incidents that occurred with their friends. The utterance in Line 2 in (6) shows that CH12 was buying more time by inserting the PMC *well I think* to answer the prior question. In (7), both participants were discussing different aspects of their future lives. CH36 also used the same PMC to think about the prior question before providing an answer. Both examples of the use of the PMC *well I think* revealed longer pauses between the two individual PMs, as the unfilled pause indicated the participants' thought processes (Tübben & Landert, 2022). In addition, the longer pauses occurred during the responses, reflecting that the participants were still thinking about how to respond the prior question. As both the PMs *well* and *I think* have the same function of allowing the speaker to plan the up-coming utterance (Pan & Aroonmanakun, 2022), this PMC combines the functions as a combination type for planning (Cuenca & Crible, 2019).

Compared to the Chinese participants, the Thai participants mainly used this PMC to attract the hearer's attention and to indicate their

personal stance, as both examples below demonstrate.

- (8) TH29 (00:16:54)
 <TH29 key="declaration">
 1 It might be do bad to you if you run too much.
 <TH30 key="declaration" key="PMC">
 2 **Well** <tone up> **I think** I will run less, you are right.

- (9) TH34 (00:08:19)
 <TH34 key="question">
 1 You like this photo?
 <TH33 key="response" key="PMC">
 2 **Well** <long pronunciation> **I think** it's really cool, very modern and nice.

Unlike in examples (6) and (7), a longer pause was not found in these situational contexts. In (8), TH29 suggested that running excessively might affect TH30's health. TH30 used the PM *well* with a rising tone to indicate that there could be a variety of utterances in response to the one in Line 1 in (8). Subsequently, the use of the PM *I think* led to a personal stance about the issue of running, as TH30 stated "I will run less" accompanied by the comment "you are right." In (9), TH33 lengthened the pronunciation of the PM *well* to gain TH34's attention. The use of the PM *I think* was inserted immediately after the drawn out *well* to display the personal evaluation of the photograph, accompanied by the statements "it's really cool" and "very modern and nice." The PM *well* in this situation played a role at the interactional level to begin a response to a prior utterance and to attract the hearer's attention to the speaker's up-coming utterances. The PM *I think* follows the PM *well* with the cognitive function of allowing the hearer to interpret the up-coming utterance as a personal stance (Haselow, 2019; Pan, 2024).

Apart from using the PMCs *well I think*, the Thai participants also used the PMCs *um well* (nine instances, 17%) and *well I mean* (four instances, 8%) as planners, as both examples below demonstrate.

- (10) TH03 (00:22:18)
 <TH03 key="question">
 1 Then what u wanna do with it?
 <TH04 key="response" key="PMC">
 2 **Um** <pause / 2.6s> **well** <pause / 1.7s> put it there, just be it.
- (11) TH29 (00:25:37)
 <TH29 key="declaration">
 1 It's just too hard for me to apply for it.
 <TH30 key="question">
 2 How come?
 <TH29 key="response" key="PMC">
 3 **Well** <pause / 2.5s> **I mean** <pause / 2.1s> the tuition fee, the documents, yeah.

In (10), TH03 was asking what TH04 would do with an old book that would never be read again in Line 1. The use of the PMs *um* and *well* with unfilled pauses reflect TH04's thought processes regarding what to do with the book and how to answer the prior question. In (11), TH30 was asking why TH29 thought that it was difficult to apply to a university in Line 2. TH29 used the PMs *well* and *I mean* with unfilled pauses to plan the reasons that they could provide. Hence, both the PMCs *um well* and *well I mean* combined the functions of both PMs as the combination type, as was the case for the PMC *well I think* (Cuenca & Crible, 2019).

By contrast, the PM *well* was also used as a planner in the PMC *well because* used by both Chinese and Thai participants. However, the PMs *well* and *because* served different functions, as both examples below demonstrate.

- (12) CH23 (00:29:24)
 <CH23 key="question">
 1 Why didn't you do something else there?
 <CH24 key="response" key="PMC">
 2 **Well** <pause / 2.2s> **because** there's not much to do, and you would do the same.
- (13) TH17 (00:06:49)

- <TH17 key="question">
- 1 How did you get along with him?
- <TH17 key="response" key="PMC">
- 2 **Well** <pause / 3.2s> **because** he still is my stepbrother, and he's family.

As both examples show, the PM *well* was used with unfilled pauses and with some degree of hesitation in the tone. It is noted that the PM *well* in both examples was used initially when the speakers were attempting to answer prior questions. Following the unfilled pause, CH24 in (12) used the referential PM *because* to provide the reasons in answer to the prior question in Line 1. In (13), in which both participants were discussing their relationships with family members, TH17 used the referential PM *because* to indirectly answer the prior question in Line 1, stating that TH17 was supposed to get along with TH17's stepbrother because he was family. Hence, the referential PM *because* in both examples mainly indicated a causal relation with the prior questions.

In addition to the frequently used functions of the PMCs that included the PM *well* by the Chinese and Thai participants, the function of the PMC *OK well* as a response to a prior question or utterance and as an indication of personal stance was used most often by the Chinese participants (three instances, 9%) and the Thai participants (four instances, 8%), as both examples below illustrate.

- (14) CH01 (00:26:40)
- <CH01 key="question">
- 1 Can you come to meet me again tomorrow, here?
- <CH01 key="declaration">
- 2 We need to talk about that assignment.
- <CH02 key="response" key="PMC">
- 3 **OK well** I love the idea last time.

- (15) TH06 (00:27:46)
- <TH06 key="question">
- 1 Should we finish this task today?
- <TH05 key="response" key="PMC">
- 2 **OK well** we really should do it well.

In (14), the PM *OK* was used firstly to respond to both the prior request in Line 1 and the external modification of the request in Line 2, followed by the PM *well*, indicating a personal stance toward the assignment the participants mentioned at that moment. In (15), the PM *OK* was also used to reply to the prior question in Line 1. The PM *well* was used to illustrate a personal stance toward the task that both participants were discussing in the previous context in (15). In both of the above examples, the PM *OK* was used in the domain of interaction to provide a response to the prior speaker's utterance or question; the PM *well* indicated the current speaker's stance toward the subject matter in the on-going discussion in the domain of cognition, thus enabling the hearer to understand the speaker's attitudinal orientation.

4.3 PMCs That Included Well that Were Only Used by the Chinese or the Thai Participants

Table 5 presents the functions of both PMs in the PMCs that were used by the Chinese and Thai participants, respectively.

Table 5. Functions of both PMs in the PMCs produced either by the Chinese or by the Thai participants

PMCs	Functions	CH	
		RF	P (%)
<i>well yeah</i>	indicating an agreement in combination	5	38
	planner in combination	2	15
<i>well yes</i>	indicating an agreement in combination	3	23
	planner in combination	3	23
total	all functions	13	100
PMCs	Functions	TH	
		RF	P (%)
<i>well like</i>	attention + exemplification	3	30
	attention + elaboration	1	10
<i>well actually</i>	attention + elaboration	2	20
	planner + elaboration	1	10
<i>well if</i>	planner + conditional clause	2	20
	attention + conditional clause	1	10
total	all functions	10	100

Based on Table 5, the Chinese participants used the PMCs *well yeah* and *well yes* with the same functions; the function of indicating

agreement in combination was used the most frequently in both PMCs, as two the examples below demonstrate.

- (16) CH16 (00:24:57)
 <CH16 key="declaration">
 1 Um I guess people like change, but they don't change themselves.
 <CH15 key="declaration" key="PMC">
 2 **Well yeah** <strong voice>.
 <CH15 key="declaration">
 3 You get it!
- (17) CH32 (00:12:26)
 <CH32 key="declaration">
 1 I think I like the version of me now, not before.
 <CH32 key="declaration">
 2 I did many stupid things before, and now I can see why people hate me.
 <TH31 key="declaration" key="PMC">
 3 **Well yes**.
 <TH31 key="declaration">
 4 We all learn to grow up now.

Based on the contexts of both examples, the use of the PMCs *well yeah* and *well yes* was to interact with the prior speaker to convey agreement with a previous utterance. In (16), CH15 used a strong voice to produce the PMC *well yeah*, indicating absolute agreement with the prior utterance in Line 1. In (17), TH31 also produced the PMC *well yes* immediately after the completion of CH32's utterance in Line 2 to indicate agreement. In both examples, the external utterances followed the use of these two PMCs for further reinforcement or elaboration (Lohmann & Koops, 2016). Hence, both individual PMs in the PMCs *well yeah* and *well yes* combined their functions to allow the entire PMC to indicate agreement.

By contrast, the Thai participants used the PMC *well like* with the function of ensuring the hearer's attention and providing exemplification most often, as the example below demonstrates.

- (18) TH19 (00:23:37)
 <TH19 key="declaration">
 1 I'm curious what did you do alone on the island?
 <TH20 key=" declaration" key="PMC">
 2 **Well** <tone up> *like* swimming, playing the water, enjoy the beautiful scene of course.

In response to the prior speaker's curiosity, TH20 firstly used the PM *well* in a rising tone to ensure the hearer's attention, which was immediately followed by the insertion of the PM *like* to lead to different examples to answer the prior question (Pan, 2024). The functions of the PMs *well* and *like* cannot merge as an entity in this PMC, as the example above demonstrated. Hence, the PMC *well like*, as well as the PMCs *well actually* and *well if*, which were only used by the Thai participants, were the juxtaposition type (Cuenca & Crible, 2019).

5. Discussion

According to the results presented above, the functions of the PM *well* occurring in the PMCs used by both Chinese and Thai participants are presented in Table 6.

Table 6. The functions of *well* in the PMCs used by the Chinese and Thai participants

Functions	PMCs	CH	TH	Total
		RF	RF	RF
planner in combination	<i>well I think</i>	8	6	14
	<i>well yes</i>	3	-	3
	<i>well I mean</i>	2	4	6
	<i>well yeah</i>	2	-	2
	<i>um well</i>	1	9	10

as a planner	<i>well because</i>	4	4	8
	<i>well if</i>	-	2	2
	<i>well actually</i>	-	1	1
as a planner in total	all	20	26	46
for attention	<i>well I think</i>	4	12	16
	<i>well because</i>	2	4	6
	<i>well I mean</i>	2	2	4
	<i>well like</i>	-	4	4
	<i>well actually</i>	-	2	2
	<i>well if</i>	-	1	1
for attention in total	all	8	25	33
indicating stance	<i>OK well</i>	3	4	7
	<i>um well</i>	2	4	6
indicating stance in total	all	5	8	13
agreement	<i>well yeah</i>	5	-	5
	<i>well yes</i>	3	-	3
agreement in total	all	8	-	8
as a mitigator	<i>well I mean</i>	1	-	1
	<i>um well</i>	2	2	4
as a mitigator in total	all	3	2	5
indicating request	<i>OK well</i>	2	1	3
indicating request in total	all	2	1	3
all functions in total	all PMCs	46	62	108

Table 6 illustrates that the PM *well* in the PMCs used by both Chinese and Thai participants had six main pragmatic functions. The planning function, including the entire PMC as a planner and the PM *well* in a PMC as a planner, was used most often by both Chinese and Thai participants, with 20 instances (43%) and 26 instances (42%), respectively. As the examples and previous research illustrated, EFL learners' use of PMs to plan upcoming utterances did not reflect disfluency, but rather their thought processes (Crible & Degand, 2021; Rühlemann & Gries, 2021) because of the indeterminate nature of real-time spoken interactions (Haselow, 2019; Pan, 2024). As such, EFL learners should be guided to use different PMs and PMCs in English conversations for planning upcoming utterances. EFL learners also need to understand that the use of PMCs in English conversations can inform cognitive processes rather than serve as fillers (Tübben & Landert, 2022).

In addition, in the PMC *well I think*, the Thai participants used the PM *well* to catch hearers' attention and the PM *I think* to indicate their stances more often than the Chinese participants did. This phenomenon suggests that the Thai participants focused more on the interactional level in conversation by using the PM *well* in the PMC *well I think* than the Chinese participants did (Pan, 2024). As Haselow (2019, p. 6) proposed, PMs that are positioned at the beginning of PMCs, such as *oh*, *yeah*, and *well*, are intended to interact with the prior speaker, reflecting "the temporal logics of communicative tasks to be performed at a particular moment in turn production." Hence, Chinese EFL learners should be guided to understand that the use of certain PMCs can catch hearers' attention and indicate their own stances at the same time.

Moreover, both Chinese and Thai participants used the PMCs *well I mean* and *OK well* with the same functions at similar frequencies based on Table 4. The functions of the PM *well* in these two PMCs were the same with similar frequencies used by both Chinese and Thai participants based on Table 6, namely the function of catching hearer's attention of the PM *well* in the PMC *well I mean*, and the function of indicating speaker's stances of the PM *well* in the PMC *OK well*. As such, when the PM *well* was used as the second PM in a PMC by both Chinese and Thai participants, it was mainly used to indicate stances.

Compared to the Thai participants, the Chinese participants rarely used three PMCs co-occurred with the PM *well*: *well like*, *well actually*, and *well if*. The Thai participants tended to provide more information in spoken interactions. In contrast, the Chinese participants did not rely on the PMCs co-occurred with the PM *well* to illustrate more details. Accordingly, Chinese EFL learners need to be aware of the PMs that provide more information and use them with other PMs for different purposes. By contrast, the Chinese participants used the PMCs *well yeah* and *well yes* to indicate agreement and as a planner while the Thai participants did not use them. The Thai participants used PMs *yes* and *yeah* to indicate agreement without using the PM *well* based on the data collected in this research. This suggests that the Thai participants tended to use individual PMs for mutual agreement in spoken interaction, whereas the Chinese participants tended to use two individual PMs, including the PM *well* to indicate agreement (Pan & Aroonmanakun, 2022; Xiao et al., 2021). Compared to the Chinese participants, the Thai participants used the PMC *um well* as the planner more often. The Chinese participants used the individual PM *um* as the planner in spoken interactions (Huang, 2019). This indicates that the Thai participants had the linguistic knowledge to use the PMC *um well* to plan the utterances in spoken interactions.

The present research showed that the Chinese and Thai participants did not use certain PMCs that co-occurred with the PM *well* that were frequently used by L1 English speakers, such as the PMCs *oh well*, *and well*, and *well you know* (Haselow, 2019; Lohmann & Koops, 2016, 2022). This difference reflects the different uses of the PMCs co-occurred with the PM *well* between the Chinese and Thai advanced-level EFL participants and L1 English speakers. The Chinese and Thai advanced-level EFL participants had their own patterns of using the PMCs that co-occurred with the PM *well* in spoken interactions, as illustrated above. Conversely, this difference may have been due to different reasons. For example, Lohmann and Koops (2016) and Haselow (2019) used an existing corpus of telephone conversations and spontaneous, naturally occurring conversations, whereas the participants in this research were asked to record their dyadic English conversations deliberately. Although the participants were given complete freedom, many pairs chose to discuss specific topics, indicating that the data were intentionally produced for this research (Ament et al., 2020; Fung & Carter, 2007).

6. Conclusion

As the findings mentioned above show, the PMCs assisted the speakers in planning their upcoming utterances and in interacting with previous speakers. Hence, it is worth continuing to examine the use of PMCs by EFL learners with different linguacultural backgrounds. The findings of this research deepened the understanding of how these PMCs were used by Chinese and Thai advanced-level EFL learners, as well as the use of the PM *well* in spoken interactions. Based on the use of the functions of the PM *well* in the PMCs produced by the Chinese and Thai advanced-level EFL participants, the functions of the PM *well* in the domains of interaction and cognition should be involved in EFL teaching and learning pedagogy. Since this research only focused on the PM *well* in the PMCs produced by the Chinese and Thai advanced-level EFL learners in spoken interactions, more studies should be conducted in future to reveal the different uses of the PMCs by EFL learners with different L1s and levels of English proficiency.

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No additional data are available.

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Appendix

XML conventions

<>	XML format for decoding information
[repetition of the same word
<pause />	longer pause
“ ”	the type of the utterance
key=	exhibition of the annotation