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SQUIBS AND DISCUSSION

good a name as any. Since the first 10% would always go to the same person—one's uncle—there would be no need to specify 'one's uncle' each week. What would be of interest would be the identity of the fellow employee who got the other 10%, inasmuch as it would be a different person every week. *Thork*, then, could mean 'give to one's uncle and', with the "variable recipient" coming after the *and*. If the police visited a person on Saturday to check on his compliance with the law for that week, he might well say something like (2).

Now it is highly unlikely that our planet will ever be afflicted with the contagious allergies or the lunatic dictator I have described. And so we can probably rest assured that *flimp* and *thork* will never find their way into our dictionaries. But there is no a priori reason why this is so. Given the appropriate circumstances it is conceivable that we would coin such words, or even a word like *blarchoon* meaning 'to save 67 white mice from a burning condominium and then eat a double cheese pizza without the permission of'. In short, there are improbable words, some more improbable than others; but there are no impossible words.

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WELL*

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My dictionary¹ defines *well* as an interjection "expressing surprise, etc., or introducing renewed narrative". It thus suggests that *well* has two meanings, one roughly synonymous with *oh*, the other quite distinct. I show below that it is possible to give

* Deirdre Wilson not only suggested this interesting topic, but also commented helpfully on earlier drafts. Her cogent criticisms and pertinent counterexamples provoked successive improvements. I am very grateful to her. I owe thanks, too, to Dr. Kate Green, a native speaker of pristine naïveté who read my first thoughts on this and encouraged me to believe I was on the right track.

¹ *Chambers Twentieth Century Dictionary*, Edinburgh, 1972.

a unified account of *well*, narrow enough to distinguish it from *oh*, broad enough to capture the diversity of its use.

The only concentrated attempt I know of to say what *well* means is Robin Lakoff's.² She discusses its use in answering questions, and claims it is used under two conditions: (A) "when the answer sought can only be obtained by the questioner by deduction from the response given" and (B) "when the reply is directed to a question other than the overt one" (1970, 460). As evidence for (A) she adduces:

- (1) What time is it?
 Well, I just told Bill that it was noon.
 the sun just came up.
 *three o'clock.
 *don't worry, "Star Trek" won't be on for 45 minutes.
 *none of your business.
 *it's three o'clock so you can't eat dinner yet.

However, (1) does not constitute evidence for (A). There is no difference in deducibility or directness between *the sun just came up* and "Star Trek" *won't be on for 45 minutes*. In either case the right time can be deduced by someone who knows the right things; in neither case is it stated.

As evidence for (B), Lakoff cites (2)-(4):

- (2) Did you kill your wife?
 Well, yes.
 (3) Private Snurg, did you kill the Vietcong quadruple agent?
 Well, yes.
 (4) How tall is Harry?
 Well, 6'3".

According to (B), the answers in (2)-(4) are "directed to a question other than the overt one". Unfortunately, this will do no better than Lakoff's condition (A). These replies *are* direct replies; and (B) lets in the last three starred answers of (1), and (5), or any assertion whatever which does not answer the question asked.

- (5) Do you like flowers?
 Well, the Bermuda triangle has claimed a hundred lives.

A remark Lakoff makes about (2) gives us a better idea of what she must mean: "*well* here operates as a signal that the rest of

² Lakoff (1970). Deborah James also discusses *well*, as one of a number of interjections (James (1972; 1973)). Her interesting comments on it are brief, and entirely subsidiary to the main thrust of her argument.

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the answer is not to be taken as a complete answer giving all the information necessary'' (p. 463). By *necessary* she means, I take it, 'that the answerer assumes the asker wants to know'. Thus, in (2) the answerer assumes the asker wants to know if he's a guilty man, in (3) if he did his duty, and in (4) if Harry's the man for the job.

In the (B) examples, then, *well* signals that its speaker thinks the answer is not quite what is wanted. In fact, that seems to be true of the (A) cases as well. The following generalization captures every use of *well* so far: when a speaker prefaces an answer with *well*, he signals that he is aware that what immediately follows is not just what he assumes the asker wants to be told. There is a further, pragmatic, condition: it is inappropriate to draw attention to the inadequacy of the answer and to the asker's interests without the desire to fulfil them; the *well* is addressed to those interests.

With these two generalizations about the use of *well*,³ it is possible to account fully for the pattern of acceptability in (1)-(4), and for (6)-(9).

- (6) What time is it?
Well, three o'clock by my watch.
three o'clock as far as I know.

Here the answerer is aware that certain knowledge of the time is called for, and cannot provide it.

- (7) What time is it?
Well, three o'clock so you can't eat dinner yet, but you could have a banana.

The *well* ceases to be odd here when the answerer goes on to offer food, which is what the asker wanted.

- (8) Does water boil at 100° Fahrenheit?
Well, no, 100° Centigrade, actually.
(9) Does water boil at 100° Centigrade?
?Well, yes.

If the asker wants to know the temperature at which water boils, the *well* in (9) is ruled out, but if the asker wants to know who is in the right, it is acceptable. In fact, (9) shows that it need not be the asker's interests the *well* signals. Any party to the discourse may want to hear that water does not boil at 100° Centigrade—including, as (10) shows, the speaker himself.

- (10) Does water boil at 100° Centigrade, or doesn't it?
Well, yes (gulp), I got Fahrenheit and Centigrade mixed up.

³ By calling the second condition "pragmatic", I imply that the first is semantic. Since everyone agrees that, for example, *No* and *Well, no* do not mean the same, and since that condition deals with how they differ, I think "semantic" correctly designates it.

The first condition I gave above must be generalized still further: *well* may preface an answer if what immediately follows is not just what some party to the discourse wants to be told.

Although we have now fully accounted for the question-answering use of *well* discussed by Lakoff, *well* may precede an answer without any implication of inadequacy or incompleteness. Now consider (11):

- (11) Does water boil at 100° Centigrade?
Well of course!
Well yes!

The meaning difference between *well yes* in (9) and (11) is carried solely by intonation. Characteristically, in (9) *yes* has a low rise but in (11) a high fall. In general, "all statements associated with tone groups containing falling nuclear tones . . . sound definite and complete"; in contrast, those associated with rising tones sound indefinite and incomplete.⁴ The suggestion of incompleteness discussed above and noted by Lakoff and by James⁵ clearly derives from intonation. In question answers, *well* is simply a signal that its speaker is aware of what some party to the discourse wants to be told.

As further evidence that *well* need carry no suggestion of incompleteness, consider (12) and (13).

- (12) Well, we're at the top.
that's it then.
we never stood a chance anyway.

Here *well* signals a hope or fear, knowledge of which is presumed shared by the parties to the discourse.

- (13) Well, fancy that.
how nice to run into you after all this time.
well, well.

Here *well* indicates an expectation, which has been contradicted. To take in these uses of *well*, the condition for its use must be stretched to the limits of vagueness. *Well* signals (draws attention to) some expectation, hope, fear, or other nominalization of an intensional verb, to which parties to the discourse are presumed to have access. As before, a pragmatic condition attaches: it is appropriate to use *well* only if what follows it is addressed to the same "intension".

Further evidence that I have correctly characterized the use of *well* is manifold. Particularly striking is its capacity to function alone as question or injunction, by drawing the listener's attention to an expectation he is already aware of.

⁴ O'Connor and Arnold (1970). I am grateful to Prof. O'Connor for discussing these points with me.

⁵ See footnote 2.

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Another source of confirmation is the contrast with *oh*. Notice the contexts which permit or exclude one rather than the other.

(14) $\left\{ \begin{array}{l} \text{Oh} \\ * \text{Well} \end{array} \right\}$, I've been forgetting to say . . .

(15) $\left\{ \begin{array}{l} \text{Oh} \\ * \text{Well} \end{array} \right\}$, by the way . . .

(16) $\left\{ \begin{array}{l} * \text{Oh} \\ \text{Well} \end{array} \right\}$, once upon a time . . .

(17) $\left\{ \begin{array}{l} ? \text{Oh} \\ \text{Well} \end{array} \right\}$, so we'll meet at three.

Clearly, only *well* may introduce an anticipated topic, and only *oh* a new one. It would be extremely odd to begin a lecture with *Oh* . . . , but quite natural to begin it with *Well*

Consider also the occasions when we may use *well* to perfect strangers. If a stranger and I together witness someone behaving badly we may turn to each other and say "Well!" or "Well really!", or I may address a misbehaving stranger thus. Here the speaker signals that we all know how we're supposed to behave. Or in a bus queue (this is England) one person may turn to another and say "Well! even for the 31 an hour's wait must be a record." And note that two strangers witnessing a landslide may exclaim "Goodness!", "Wow!", etc., but not normally "Well!". However, under two special circumstances *well* would be permissible here: if they had both narrowly escaped the landslide, one might say to the other "Well! that was a near thing", thus signaling their shared fear; or if everyone knew that the council was supposed to have shored up the cliff they might also say "Well!"

Well, this note is too brief to do justice to all the wealth of *wells*. But I believe the reader will find that all varieties of the interjection *well* carry the implication that there is an intension to which parties to the discourse are supposed to be privy.

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SOME SUBJECT SENTENCES

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1. Jan Koster's carefully argued proposal that "subject sentences don't exist" (Koster (1978)) cannot be taken literally. Consider English gerunds, as studied in Wasow and Roeper (1972). An example is (1):

- (1) His singing operas constantly annoyed me.

Wasow and Roeper give arguments showing that *his singing operas constantly* and similar structures are sentences. These gerund clauses exhibit the subject-like properties of the "extraposition" structures on which Koster concentrates plus a few others: they can appear in passive *by*-phrases (2) and to the left of subordinate clause VPs (3), and they undergo Subject-Auxiliary Inversion (4):

- (2) I was annoyed by his singing operas.
(3) I knew that his singing operas annoyed you.
(4) Did his singing operas annoy you?

If one takes these tests to be sufficient for the diagnosis of a subject-of relation, as I am willing to do, then one must conclude that NPs in English have a sentential expansion and that such an expansion must be allowed to occur in subject position. It was pointed out by Emonds that "nongerund clauses will appear only in extraposition and in topicalized NP positions" (1976, 127); the main difference between his analysis and Koster's will then be the requirement that topics be NPs—but see Bresnan and Grimshaw (1978, fn. 4) for data that any analysis must take into account.

Without considering the issue of competing analyses, note that, if NPs can be expanded as N^m -S, for some m , Koster's account is observationally insufficient. He argues for a topic \bar{S} binding a deleted *wh*-word in COMP; it would also be necessary to prevent nongerund subject sentences, which are going to be generated anyway, from appearing in the surface. An ad hoc restriction to that effect can be added to the grammar, but such an addition may not be straightforward in some languages. In Standard French there are no topicalizations of the *This book*