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You See!

Graham Ranger¹

Résumé

Le segment *you see* s'emploie comme une incise modale de commentaire, en position initiale, médiane ou finale, où il est possible de considérer, d'une part, qu'il signale le statut argumentatif de la proposition cible, en tant qu'explication ou justification d'une représentation antérieure, et, d'autre part, qu'il fonctionne comme marqueur de politesse, en associant le coénonciateur aux propositions prises en charge par l'énonciateur, désamorçant ainsi les désaccords potentiels avant que ceux-ci ne se manifestent. A cet égard, il fonctionne comme un marqueur de politesse négative (Brown et Levinson [1978]). Quirk *et al* [1985] proposent cependant un emploi triomphal accentué de *you see*. Dans cette étude, je propose une caractérisation énonciative de *you see* qui permet de dériver les interprétations différentes et parfois contradictoires de ce marqueur à partir des opérations métalinguistique dont *you see* est la trace, ainsi que des différences observables dans les configurations contextuelles (parmi lesquelles l'identification des propositions associées ou la position de *you see* par rapport à celles-ci). Il s'avère que *you see* n'est pas en lui-même un marqueur de politesse, mais que les opérations dont il est le marqueur se prêtent à des stratégies qui comprennent aussi bien l'*impolitesse* (les FTA de Brown et Levinson) que la *politesse négative* ou *positive*. Dans certains contextes encore, il semble permettre à un énonciateur peu assuré d'inciter chez son coénonciateur des manifestations de *politesse positive* (backchannels). Notre démarche nous amène à nous interroger sur la contribution que la théorie des opérations énonciatives pourra apporter aux recherches dans les domaines de la politesse ou de la structuration du discours.

Mots-clés : marqueur de discours – incise modale – énonciation – politesse – locution verbale – stratégies discursives – grammaticalisation – pragmatification

Abstract

The segment *you see* is employed as a parenthetical comment clause in initial, median and final position, where it may be said both to indicate the argumentative status of the clause it targets, as an explanation or justification for a previous representation, and to function as a politeness marker, in associating the cospeaker with propositions endorsed by the speaker, thereby defusing potential discord before it manifests itself. It is, in this second function, a marker of negative politeness (Brown & Levinson [1978]). Quirk *et al* [1985] also mention an alternative use of stressed *you see* to express triumph. In this paper I will propose an enunciative characterisation of *you see* which will, it is hoped, enable us to derive different, sometimes contradictory, interpretations of *you see* from the metalinguistic operations of which *you see* is the trace, and from observable differences in contextual configurations, including the identification of the related propositions or the position *you see* occupies relative to these propositions. From our study it emerges that *you see* is not in itself a marker of politeness, but that the operations which *you see* marks lend themselves to strategies including *impoliteness* (a Face Threatening Act – FTA) as well as *negative* and *positive politeness*, in the terms of Brown and Levinson. In some contexts it also appears to allow an

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uncertain speaker to elicit manifestations of positive politeness (backchannels) from the co-speaker. We are led to consider how the theory of enunciative operations might contribute to research in the fields of politeness and discourse structure.

Keywords: discourse marker – parenthetical – comment clause – enunciation – politeness – fixed phrase – discursive strategies – grammaticalisation – pragmaticalisation

0. Introduction

0.1. Description

The following paper will attempt to provide an enunciative characterisation of the parenthetical discourse marker *you see*,¹ as exemplified in the examples below:

- (1) **You see** Grant has got a lot to put up with.
- (2) He's been very kind to me and Lily, as regards putting our minds at rest about Stella. She's secretive, **you see**.

The segment *you see* exists independently, of course, with full lexical meaning, as in (3) below.

- (3) The idea is to cover the complete surface of the roller in the printing ink. **You see how beautifully** evenly it's taken up that ink.

Although I consider that the way in which the discourse marker *you see* functions is closely linked to the properties of its constituent parts, I will not be dealing in any detail with *you see* used as a verb of perception in the scope of the current article.

0.2. Distribution

Perhaps more than many other discourse markers, parenthetical *you see* is almost exclusively limited to spoken texts or to representations of colloquial speech in written texts. A genre-based search for the segment “you see” in the *British National Corpus* yields the following figures:

Genre	Spoken	Fiction	Magazine	Newspaper	Non-academic	Academic
Tokens/ million	765.45	162.99	52.33	17.29	13.76	7.05

This search does not differentiate between parenthetical *you see* and lexical *you see*²; had it been possible to exclude lexical *you see* from the search the bias would undoubtedly have been even more noteworthy. Interestingly, within the category “Spoken”, the four subcategories in which *you see* occurs most frequently are “oral history”, “sermon”, “unscripted speech” and “conversation”. The near absence of *you see* from written corpora together with the problems handling the variables of spoken corpora perhaps contribute to explaining the fact that *you see* has received relatively little attention from linguists.³ Like many aspects of conversation, the uses of *you see* might appear at first sight too anarchic to admit any degree of formalisation independently of their immediate context.

In addition to the heavy bias in favour of spoken contexts, parenthetical *you see* also appears to be more common in British English than in American English. Biber *et al.* give a frequency of c.400 per million for *you see* in British English conversation compared to just

¹ I will be referring to *you see* as a parenthetical discourse marker or comment clause.

² By lexical *you see* I mean, generally, the segment *you see* employed with a direct object complement. The discourse parenthetical *you see* has no explicit complement.

³ Note however Erman [1987] and Brinton [2008].

c.50 per million in American English conversation⁴. This ratio of 8:1 for the use of *you see* in British versus American English is confirmed by Algeo, working on the Cambridge International Corpus (Algeo [2006: 213] quoted in Brinton [2008: 134]).

The comment clause *you see* can occur clause-initially as in (1), clause-finally (2) and clause-medially, in significantly fewer cases. An approximate search of the BNC yields 1181 occurrences of clause-initial *you see* against 1734 occurrences of clause-final *you see*, suggesting that, in British English at least, clause-final *you see* is more common. Remarkably, the same search made on the *Corpus of Contemporary American English*⁵ yields 3234 clause-initial examples against 1078 clause-final, suggesting that the difference between American and British English is not only one of frequency but also of usage.

0.3. Politeness

In their classic study of linguistic politeness, Brown & Levinson [1987: 171] include *you see* among a group of manner hedges for negative politeness that redress potential Face Threatening Acts (FTA's) by enlisting the hearer's support. Quirk *et al.* [1985: 1483n] however, note a triumphant, stressed variant of *you see*:

(4) “**You see!**” I might have said to him but did not (1991 Jacobson, *Hidden in the Heart* [FLOB] quoted in Brinton [2008]).

Given the existence of two counter-oriented strategies in a single marker, it would appear difficult to consider indexical *you see* as inherently polite or impolite. In this paper I will attempt to show that *you see* functions, first and foremost, as an argumentative discourse marker, linking propositions in an inferential relationship. Its role as a politeness marker depends on an interaction between the properties of the marker and a number of contextual factors, including for example how a speaker positions himself and his co-speaker relative to the propositions involved.

0.4. Method

I will be working using the concepts of the Theory of Enunciative Operations (Théorie des opérations énonciatives) as elaborated by Antoine Culioli and fellow researchers over the last forty years or so.⁶

The following study is based on examples drawn from the *British National Corpus* and searches made on the corpus, using the BNC Sampler or the excellent BNC interface at <http://corpus.byu.edu/bnc/>.

I shall begin by proposing an enunciative characterisation of *you see* (1) which I shall then put to the test with a variety of genuine examples from the BNC (2). This should enable us in conclusion to consider to what extent *you see* is indeed a “politeness marker” (3).

⁴ Oddly enough, the figure of c.400 per million is significantly lower than the figure obtained from a frequency search on the <http://corpus.byu.edu/bnc/> website. Biber *et al.* [1999: 1097].

⁵ Freely consultable at this address : <http://www.americanacorporus.org/>

⁶ Many of the articles of Culioli, some of which are in English, are published together in tomes 1-3 of *Pour une linguistique de l'énonciation* (Culioli [1990], [1999a] and [1999b]). Otherwise Bouscaren *et al.* [1992] or Culioli [1995] provide foundational material in English.

1. Towards an enunciative characterisation of *You see*

In the chapter she devotes to “*Comment clauses with see*”, Brinton [2008: 161] notes:

The *see* forms undergo changes characteristic of grammaticalization, including fusion, decategorialization, metaphorization, subjectification/intersubjectification, and loss of referentiality.⁷

This distinction between grammaticalized and lexical forms is by no means uncommon. Hence Biber *et al.* [1999: 1077-1078] differentiate between *see* used as comment clause and *see* used with full lexical meaning:

These expressions typically retain the same interactive function when they occur initially, finally or medially. Hence, when they initiate an utterance, they can usually be regarded as discourse markers, behaving as unanalysable wholes. They contrast, interestingly, with expressions composed of the verbs *know*, *see* and *mean* with a different subject (e.g. *I know*, *I see*, *you mean*), which keep the same meaning whether as main clauses or as comment clauses.

There appears to be a commonly accepted view that, once a sequence has been grammaticalized as a comment clause, with pragmatic functions, the linguist can safely ignore its constituent parts:

[...] the verb phrases, *you see* and *you know* [...] behave as fixed or ossified, unanalyzable expressions when they operate as comment clauses or parentheticals [...]. [Fitzmaurice 2004: 431]⁸

This leads Fitzmaurice, in her 2004 article, to suggest that *see* has moved from *subjective* meanings, expressed in *I see*, to intersubjective meanings, in *you see* and thence to interactive meanings in *you see* or *see* alone. Such a dubious derivational path is justly criticised by Brinton [2008: 155] who points out that

[a]lthough the first-person parentheticals arose roughly contemporaneously with the second-person parentheticals, there does not appear to be any direct connection between the two constructions. In general, *I see* seems to have very different pragmatic functions than *you see*.

In this paper, I accept that *you see* displays some degree of fusion, but I also consider that an understanding of its constituent parts, *you* and *see*, will provide us with useful clues in characterizing the whole. Accordingly, I will look, firstly, at the mode of determination which the verb *see* generally operates on its complement and, secondly, at the scope of *see*, in the parenthetical discourse marker *you see*. This will lead us to propose an enunciative characterisation of the form in question.

1.1. How *see* determines its complement

Once we concede that the way in which the verb *see* functions may tell us important things about the way in which the parenthetical discourse marker *you see* functions, then the

⁷ The various “*see* forms” include *you see*, *as you see*, and *see*.

⁸ My emphasis.

first question to consider is that of how *see* contributes to the determination of its grammatical complement.

In their 1990 enunciative study of verbs of perception in French, Franckel & Lebaud [1990: 57] note:

Voir marque la localisation de X par S_i, par laquelle s'actualise la propriété *être localisable* de X.⁹

In the technical language of this characterisation, X refers to the direct object, or *target* of the process *voir*, while S_i refers to the grammatical subject, or *source*. We can reformulate this description, and many of Franckel and Lebaud's arguments in their chapter on *voir*, to apply to the English verb *see*:¹⁰

In an utterance of the general form S_i *see* X, X is both quantitatively and qualitatively determined by its relation with *see*:

1. X is *quantitatively* determined as *seen* by S_i
2. X is *qualitatively* determined as *visible* (potentially to all)

The first point reflects the fact that S_i *see* X constructs the existence of "X relative to S_i." The second point reflects the fact that the same construction also attributes the stable property of visibility to X, thereby implying X's preexistence.¹¹

(3) [...] You see how beautifully evenly it's taken up that ink.

And so in an example like (3) above, where *you see* is used lexically, as a verb of perception, the construction both instantiates the complement *it's taken up that ink beautifully evenly*, by localizing this proposition relative to *you*, while at the same time attributing to it the stable property of visibility, thus presupposing its existence.

These remarks on lexical *see* tie up well with Brinton's [2008: 160] comment, on parenthetical *you see*, that

[by] using *you see* the speaker not only presupposes but in fact asserts the hearer's knowledge.

For those linguists who consider *you see* as an "unanalyzable whole", a "unitary epistemic morpheme"¹², the question of a complement for *see* is irrelevant: one can simply say that *you see* has been reanalyzed and has broken its ties with its lexical origins. Since, however, we prefer to believe that the comment clause *you see* retains at least some of the features of the process *see*, then our next problem is the identification of the target of *see*.

⁹ "SEE marks the localisation of X by S_i; through this process the property *be localisable* is realized in X." (My translation).

¹⁰ I believe there are important differences between the way in which *voir* and *see* function. In particular, unlike many uses of *voir*, *see* seems to be essentially inchoative. Its frequent association with *can* in English has the effect of neutralizing this inchoative aspect. For the purposes of the current study, however, this difference is unimportant.

¹¹ As the authors put it: « [...] la construction de X comme visible implique que X soit localisé indépendamment de cette construction ». [Franckel et Lebaud 1990: 62].

¹² The term is used by Thompson and Mulac [1991] to describe *I think* but they might equally have applied it to *you see* in the same framework.

1.2. The scope of *you see*

One of the principal arguments of Brinton's *The Comment Clause in English* aims at showing that what she terms the matrix-clause hypothesis is in many cases unsupported. The *matrix-clause hypothesis* is an intuitively appealing argument, according to which comment clauses like *I think*, *I mean*, and *you see* may be derived in the following manner:

1. *You see that she's secretive.* [matrix clause + complement clause.]
2. *You see she's secretive.* [*that* deletion. *you see* a matrix clause or a parenthetical.]
3. *She's secretive, you see.* [*you see* unambiguously parenthetical, *she's secretive* a matrix clause]

The arguments rests on a postulated reanalysis:

The original complement clause being reanalyzed as the matrix clause and the original matrix clause now serving as a parenthetical disjunct¹³. [Brinton 2008: 35-6]

In this view, the complement or *target* of SEE in the comment clause *you see*, would simply be the original complement clause, now reanalyzed as a matrix. However, the matrix-clause hypothesis is convincingly criticized by Brinton on several fronts.

Diachronically, the three steps sketched above invariably receive no empirical support from the data.

Syntactically, transformational accounts of the three steps have been criticized.¹⁴

Semantically, *You see that she's secretive* and *She's secretive, you see* are simply not equivalent. The matrix-clause *you see* takes the complement-clause *she's secretive* as its scope. Here the speaker forces the co-speaker to accept the evidence of a certain state of affairs. In *she's secretive, you see*, however, the comment clause *you see* indicates that *she's secretive* is an *explanation* or a *justification* for something that has come previously. Specifically, in (2), reproduced below, the speaker uses *you see* to qualify *she's secretive* as a justification for the worry they feel, implicit in *putting our minds at rest about Stella*.¹⁵

(2) He's been very kind to me and Lily, as regards putting our minds at rest about Stella. She's secretive, **you see**.

In fact, as we will argue in the next paragraph, the target of SEE in the comment clause *you see* is not a single clause but rather the complex inferential relation between the clause associated with *you see* and a previous assertion.¹⁶

¹³ The matrix-clause hypothesis is introduced in Brinton [2008: 35-37] and discussed at length throughout the book.

¹⁴ For example, "[T]ransformational accounts cannot explain the unacceptability of negative parentheticals" [2008: 37], i.e. *You don't see that she's secretive* (because she does not give this impression), is fine, but **She's secretive, you don't see* is not.

¹⁵ As Blakemore [1987: 89] puts it: "a speaker uses *you see* to indicate that the proposition it introduces is relevant as an explanation for the proposition she has just presented".

¹⁶ The term *assertion* is too limited: *representation* would be more precise, as we will see.

1.3. An enunciative characterisation of *You see*

Now that we have taken into account the mode of determination which SEE operates on its target together with the nature of this target, we can suggest an enunciative characterisation of the comment clause *you see* along the following lines. In using *you see* in a discursive sequence of the general form p1. p2, *you see*:

The speaker S_0 locates an inferential relation $\langle p2 \rightarrow p1 \rangle$ relative to the co-speaker S_0' such that from p2 one can infer p1.¹⁷

Quantitatively, constructs the localisation of $\langle p2 \rightarrow p1 \rangle$ relative to S_0' ;

Qualitatively, this localisation relative to S_0' is an instantiation of a stable, preexisting property, entailing the potential localisation of $\langle p2 \rightarrow p1 \rangle$ relative to any subject.

The segment p2, *you see* operates a form of (post-)determination on both p1 and p2:

p2 is determined as an extra argument pointing anaphorically towards a proposition p1 which might have been insufficiently supported;
p1 is determined by virtue of its relation to p2.

Note that p1 is not necessarily identifiable in the form of a preceding clause. p1 is best thought of a representation which can in all cases be derived from the preceding context.

2. Case studies

In this section, I would like to demonstrate how this characterisation of *you see* can be applied to authentic examples drawn from the *British National Corpus*. These will enable us to illustrate a number of relevant contextual parameters including: the identification of p1, the position of *you see* relative to p2, the genre in which *you see* is used.

2.1. The identification of p1

2.1.1. p1 corresponds to the preceding proposition

(5) “When I arrived last night,” he said, “all the lights were on.” “Were they?” Dad was staring at the blank wall above the TV. “It must’ve been Helga. She’s new, **you see**. I haven’t trained her yet.”

Here things are unproblematical. An initial utterance p1 *It must’ve been Helga* is followed by a second utterance p2 *She’s new*. The comment clause *you see* here postdetermines p2 as the explanation for p1: it is because Helga is new, and untrained, that the speaker can suppose that she must have left the lights on.

Similarly in (6) below, *you see* marks the postdetermination of p2 *she don’t like blood* as the explanation for p1 [*It*] *turned her up proper*.

¹⁷ I am using the broken arrow \rightarrow simply to make it clear that this is not a case of logical implication. p2 implies p1 linguistically, but not logically. Culioli has used the combined symbol $v\rightarrow$ to represent the same relation.

(6) Dalgliesh said: “You’re fond of her?” “She’s all right. She wants lookin’ after, mind you. She’s daft. She hasn’t got the sense she was born with. I keep an eye on her, like.” “I think she relies on you. It was lucky you were together when you found the bodies. It must have been horrible for her.” “Turned her up proper. She don’t like blood, **you see**.”

2.1.2. *p1 corresponds to the utterance of a preceding proposition*

In rectifying or postdetermining contexts there is a well-documented phenomenon¹⁸ whereby certain utterances may postdetermine not the propositional content but the speaker’s endorsement of this content. The following example illustrates this nicely:

(7) “What of the prince himself?” asked Elizabeth Mowbray, curious to know her daughter’s views on the subject. “Think you his regard for her is genuine?” “Oh, he positively adores her, mama --; he is quite enchanted with her. **You see**, I was with her when they met one day in the rose-garden and I watched their faces as they talked together.”

Here, p2 *I was with her... and I watched their faces* is in no conceivable respect the cause of p1 *he positively adores her...* rather, it provides a justification for the speaker’s endorsement of this proposition. We might reformulate this as *I can affirm that he positively adores her because I was with her...*

In a similar vein the explanation in (8) below justifies the use of the term *lads*:

(8) “I’m her neighbour. She’s going to spend the night with me. I’ve sent my sister in to look after the other lads.” “Lads?” “She keeps students, **you see**. This was her boy’s first day at college.”

(8a) → I say “lads” because she keeps students.

(9) is drawn from the spoken part of the *BNC*:

(9) I can remember the first time I ever came across dry ginger one of my school girlfriends was giving me a recipe, which, for which one er fo for erm ginger beer Mm. for Christmas, and it was delicious the way her mother made it so she started it with me writing it down, see, and she told me the ingredients and then she said you brews the ginger I thought brews the ginger? Fancy her saying it! She was my grammar school friend, **you see**. [Mm.] You brews the ginger, so I thought well I’m blessed! And of course it was ages before I knew she meant bruise. [Mm.]

In this spontaneous extract, the speaker explains a misunderstanding between herself and a friend of hers. She had thought the friend had said *you brews the ginger* rather than *you bruise the ginger*. Now, if the use of the term *brew* is understandable, in the context of a recipe for ginger beer, the utterance of *you brews*, although a common dialectal form, would be a grammatical mistake in Standard English. The speaker at first expresses her surprise that her friend should have used such a form (*Fancy her saying it!*), and then justifies this surprise by the fact that she knew the person at grammar school (*She was my grammar school friend, you see*). The link between p2 and p1 is not immediately obvious. The speaker might simply be confirming that she knew this friend well, and therefore could be surprised to hear her speak out of character, or might be indicating the context of the grammar school as an indication of

¹⁸ See for example Ranger [1997] or [1998].

a certain level of normative education which ought normally to exclude such dialectal forms. The point nonetheless remains that *you see* encourages the co-speaker to interpret p2 as an explanation or justification for p1.

2.1.3. *p1 corresponds to a set of cooriented propositions*

We have already indicated that while p2 represents the propositional content associated with *you see*, p1 is not always so easy to identify. In the simplest of cases, p1 is the preceding clause (2.1.1), in other cases p1 can be the speech act associated with the preceding clause (2.1.2). In (10) below, p2 could just as well justify the preceding clause, as the clause before that:

(10) Days ago Carla, 24, said: "I have only met Mick Jagger once and that was in New York two years ago." She says she had nothing to do with the couple's break-up. But a servant at the £2 million mansion near Amboise --; where Jerry, 34, is pondering her future --; claimed: "I have seen Carla Bruni here several times. "She was with Monsieur Jagger between October and November. Jerry doesn't know. We haven't told her. We are all very discreet here, **you see**. But I think she suspects."

The utterance of p2 *we are all very discreet* might just as well justify *Jerry doesn't know* as *We haven't told her*: both propositions construct a similar representation of Jerry's ignorance. Similarly, in (11), p2 *He's perfect* appears to justify not only the clause immediately preceding it but the representation of Mr Millet's desirability which the preceding clauses have illustrated in a variety of ways.

(11) "I think I love him still, I think I'll love him all my life. I've never fallen out of love with him, not when he went home, not when we were in the courts, not now after three years. He's a man that a woman wants to love. You feel very proud when you're with him. He's perfect, **you see**, Mr Millet".

Often then, p1 is not directly expressed in a proposition but is a compound representation derived from a series of related propositions.

2.2. Positional factors

In most of the examples we have studied so far *you see* is placed in final position. Although there is data concerning the relative distribution of initial, medial or final *you see* little work appears to have been done on the role that the position of *you see* might play, either in the way the marker relates p1 and p2 or indeed in the contribution its position might make to politeness.¹⁹

We consider *you see* as a *locator*, that is, a term through which another term, a *locatum*, is determined. The relation is conventionally represented as $\langle x \in y \rangle$, read: *x is located relative to y*. As we have seen, the marker *you see* operates a double determination. Firstly, it determines p2, as an explanation for p1. Secondly, it also retroactively tells us that p1 is determined by p2.

If we symbolize *you see* as *you-see*, then these operations might be represented as follows as two intricate relations where p2 is both located by *you see* and locates p1.²⁰

¹⁹ We shall be returning to this point later.

²⁰ The indices 1 and 2 placed on the algebraic representation represent the intrication of the two relations.

$\langle_1 p1 \in \langle_2 p2 \rangle_1 \in \text{you-see} \rangle_2$

Now this is, so to speak, the final picture, the one the co-speaker reconstructs at the end of the sequence $p1, p2 \text{ you see}$. The path leading there, however, depends upon whether *you see* precedes or follows $p2$.

When *you see* is final, the complex system of determination linking $p1$ and $p2$ is signalled only at the end of the sequence. Until that point, $p1$ and $p2$ are related by juxtaposition alone. After *you see*, $p1$ and $p2$ are both determined retroactively.

When *you see* is initial, the strategy is slightly different, as the speaker announces the status of $p2$ as an explanation or justification for $p2$ before $p2$ is uttered, thereby priming the co-speaker in advance as it were.²¹

In the first case, a proposition is retroactively qualified as an explanation for a previous representation. In the second case, a coming explanation is announced.

This priming effect seems to explain the tendency for “triumphant *you see*” to be in initial position. If a speaker is aiming to force a co-speaker into acknowledging their mistake, then it makes sense for them to do so explicitly, and not as a form of afterthought.

This is not the only effect the position of *you see* entails, as we will see further on.

2.2.1. You see is used initially or medially

(12) [...] So we do the, waxing for the chin, and for the upper lip. So, **you see**, you’ve got other methods, you’ve got waxing, you’ve got bleaching, you’ve got electrolysis. But I would think, possibly, waxing would be the thing that, the treatment that perhaps you might consider.

Here the segment *you see, you’ve got other methods* follows a long development in which the speaker at a Women’s Institute meeting had given examples of different hair-removing techniques. $p2 \text{ you’ve got other methods}$ is presented as the justification for the previous development. She thereby recontextualises and justifies the examples given ($p1$) as part of a larger argumentative movement aiming to reassure potential customers!

$p1$: *examples of plucking, examples of electrolysis, examples of waxing*

you see

$p2$: *you’ve got other methods*

The use of initial *you see* which, as we have shown, announces the coming explanation $p2$ explicitly, is appropriate, it would seem, in this type of expository context.

The following example of *you see* illustrates Quirk et al’s *triumphant* use:

(13) He nodded, and left. “**You see**,” Bernice said triumphantly. “Same words, different meanings. The Doctor could be innocent!” “I know,” Bishop said.

Here initial *you see* announces $p2$ as an explanation for $p1$, $p1$ being an argument that the speaker Bernice has endorsed and which she considers the co-speaker to refuse. The triumphant effect stems not from initial *you see* in itself but from its use in flagging $p2$ as a justification for a $p1$ on which the speaker and the co-speaker were in opposition. In this way the speaker uses independent evident (*you see, p2*) to push the co-speaker into accepting $p1$.

I will not be commenting on medial *you see* which is statistically very rare in comparison to the other two types. The example below features medial *you see* the justification of which is

²¹ Schematically, when *you see* is final, we move from juxtaposition : $p1, p2$ to $\langle_1 p1 \in \langle_2 p2 \rangle_1 \in \text{you-see} \rangle_2$

When *you see* is initial, we obtain firstly $p1$, then, with the announcement of the explanation $p2$ to come,

$\langle_1 p1 \in \langle_2 () \rangle_1 \in \text{you-see} \rangle_2$ (i.e. with an empty slot) and finally $\langle_1 p1 \in \langle_2 p2 \rangle_1 \in \text{you-see} \rangle_2$.

to be found in the use of a cleft construction, with a parenthetical relative clause in which the subject is topicalized.

(14) This is the first visit that I've made to Europe since my escape from Germany in 1940. It was my Brazilian-born wife—; who **you see** is my accompanist—; who insisted we accept engagements in Europe because she wanted to see where I grew up.

2.3. Remarks on genre

I mentioned above in the introductory comments that *you see* is predominantly to be found in spoken corpora and, within spoken corpora, it occurs most frequently in the categories of sermons, unscripted speeches, conversation and oral history. Below I provide cases of *you see* used in these specific genres before asking why the genres in question appear particularly favourable.

2.3.1. You see used in dialogue

In the cut-and-thrust of genuine dialogue, the identification of p1 is sometimes negotiated by the participants:

(15) FA Then I went down to see Andy. You know the one with the ginger hair?
 F9 Ah yeah.
 FA And he come out with the same expression on his face.
 F9 Oh yeah.
 FA Er!
 F9 Oh motorbike! Yeah.
 FA He goes I don't believe it. He goes I now hate you.
 F9 He hasn't been round for a while, Andy, has he?
 FA No well, **you see** Andy's got himself a
 F9 A girl?
 FA a an older woman. Well older she
 F9 Is that the one that rung Patricia?
 FA She's a year older.

Speaker FA agrees with speaker F9's affirmation p1 *He hasn't been round for while, Andy* and then goes on to announce a coming explanation for Andy's absence, *you see*, in the form of p2 *Andy's got himself a an older woman*. Initial *you see* allows the speaker FA to manage the effect his discourse produces on the co-speaker, by promising an explanation, and then briefly withholding it. Final *you see* would not have entertained the suspense in this way.

2.3.2. You see used in sermons or unscripted speeches

(16) [...] you know there are so many people who think it is hard to get saved, who think it is hard to come to Christ and to become a Christian, well the problem is **you see** the devil has blinded their eyes, they've blinded the eyes of men and women, so that they think that they can't do this, but what is actually happened.

In this example from a sermon *you see* qualifies p2 *the devil has blinded their eyes* as an explanation for p1 *so many people think it is hard to get saved*.

(17) Now I want to allow a bit more time for questions so I'll just end if I may with a funny story which, didn't happen to me, it happened to a colleague of mine, erm a young lady, who went to give er a talk like this to group of adults like yourselves and at the end of the meeting the treasurer went up to her and said do we owe you any fee or expenses? No thank you she said. No fee and no expenses. Ah, thank you very much, she said we're very appre very much appreciate the fact that you've given up your time to come and talk to our members **you see** we can't afford to pay for really good speakers whereupon of course she off.

And here, from an unscripted speech, *you see* qualifies p2 *we can't afford to pay...* as an explanation for p1 *we very much appreciate the fact that you've given up your time* [i.e. free of charge].

2.3.3. You see used in oral history

The use of *you see*, which I have characterised as an argumentative marker, is *a priori* harder to account for in narrative contexts (oral history) where the speaker does not appear to have any particular point to prove.

(18) PS269: I had this brother, I had this brother, and he was er he was a lecturer **you see**, and he was supposed to g go to West Bridgford to talk to this Co-op Comrades Circle on the problems of the Saar. Er I I don't know whether you know about the Saar?

PS268: That that the area in Germany you mean?

PS269: That's right.

PS268: Yeah.

PS269: Between France and Germany you see. And he sent me to tell them he couldn't come, you see. Er and i something like this.

PS268: And so you met your wife there?

PS269: aye.

We might at first sight think that p2 *he was a lecturer*, does not constitute a particularly convincing explanation for p1 *I had this brother*. On closer inspection, however, we see that the speaker is asked, in the course of an interview, to relate how he met his wife. He begins his answer with a proposition which might seem irrelevant *I had this brother*. p2 *he was a lecturer* serves to justify the relevance of the utterance of p1 in the context: the speaker mentions his brother because his brother was a lecturer (and this is in turn going to prove important in how he met his wife).

In the following example speaker B makes frequent systematic use of *you see* as his narrative proceeds:

(19) A Did you have any safety Well equipment?

B we we used to have mole skins, mother used to buy mole skins because er they wore very well they did. But er a flannel shirt and mole skins but er er That was while you were in the pit bottom **you see**? And er **you see** the air used to come down our shaft. Our shaft was open all open, the other shaft was all boxed in and there was a huge fan **you see**? Just below the surface of that shaft and that's That used to draw the air down our shaft, all around the workings, **you see**? And back up this other shaft, **you see**?

How are we to interpret this apparent overdependence on the form? I have elsewhere characterised narrative essentially as “thematically and sequentially motivated discourse”²². The thematic relevance of a given proposition in a narrative may not be immediately obvious, but will generally become so thanks to subsequent propositions. And so the sequence p1, p2 *you see* may, in narrative contexts, provide a means for the speaker to ensure that the co-speaker is following their thematic progression, i.e. that they perceive the relevance of p1 given the subsequent proposition p2. Admittedly, in (19), *you see* seems to suffer from a certain degree of overuse but this, I would argue, is perhaps inevitable when a speaker unused to holding the floor continuously does not receive the guarantees of hearer-uptake normal in such contexts. We will be returning to this in the next paragraph and in section 3.

2.3.4. Generic factors favouring the use of *You see*

It comes as no surprise to see that the comment clause *you see* occurs predominantly in spoken English. The distribution of *you see* within the broad category of spoken English is perhaps less predictable. Conversational contexts are the prototypical use, as speakers attempt to talk their co-speakers into accepting their arguments by citing independent supporting factors with *you see*. The subcategories of sermons, unscripted speeches and oral history all share the common feature of placing the speaker in a situation where they hold the floor. These are situations in which the constant dynamic interaction characteristic of conversation is reduced to a minimum. Such situations can be rather unnerving for the speaker who – used to situations of exchange, situations where meaning is negotiated interactively – suddenly finds him or herself in a position of undisputed enunciative control. In these circumstances an uncertain speaker might make use of *you see* to bring things closer to more familiar situations, as a technique for eliciting the continued participation and approval of the co-speaker.

I have tried to show how even the uses of *you see* in contexts of oral narrative can be derived from argumentative uses, since any narrative context entails the thematic relevance of a given proposition to the following discourse, and so *you see* can be used to force the co-speaker to acknowledge the relevance of p1, given the following discourse p2. It might however be objected that this argument is too powerful and indeed in examples like (19) it would seem that, whatever the original justifying function of *you see*, its main function here is as a marker of interaction, as a unaccustomed narrator seeks continuous positive feedback from those listening. It is to these questions that I will turn in section 3.

3. Is *You see* a politeness marker?

3.1. Arguments

The point of the previous sections has been to elaborate a bottom-up description of the marker *you see* which, it is hoped, will enable us to decide whether *you see* is in itself a politeness marker or whether *you see* is a complex marker which, depending on various contextual and situational factors, may be instrumental in politeness strategies.

The factors we have looked at include:

- ✓ The construction which the process SEE operates on its target;
- ✓ The identification of its target as the inferential relation p1 → p2;
- ✓ The position of the marker *you see* relative to p2;

²² Ranger [2010] (to be published).

- ✓ The subjective positions of the speaker and the co-speaker relative to p1.

These factors, we shall see, all contribute to explaining the use of *you see* as a politeness marker, whether this use is polite or impolite.

For the clarity of presentation I have divided this section into five subsections, each of which aims to show how *you see* can participate in different politeness strategies.

3.2. Triumphant *You see*!

Let us begin with Quirk *et al.*'s "triumphant" *you see* as exemplified by (20):

(20) A : she is one wanting er referrals from Mr so she's not going to say oh well you know there's something wrong there, you know?

B : Mm.

A : Is she?

B : No.

A : **You see.** Er er and er I'm not saying that there is necessarily, but even if there was she's not going to because she wants to preserve her, her referrals.

When *you see* is used in this way it appears to function as what Brown & Levinson would term a Face Threatening Act (FTA) and so works as a marker of *impoliteness* as a speaker forces a co-speaker to accept p1.

In an argumentative context, in which a speaker is trying to persuade a co-speaker co-speaker of a given proposition p1, we can imagine, either that the co-speaker is indifferent to p1 or *a priori* opposed to p1. In the first case, the use of *you see* will not constitute an FTA for the co-speaker who is open to persuasion. In the second case, however, when speaker and co-speaker are in (overt or covert) opposition, then in using *you see* the speaker introduces an independent argument p2 which the co-speaker cannot refuse (cf. the construction SEE operates on its target) and which will force recognition of p1 and hence of their previous error.

In (20) speaker A is complaining of pains in her fingers which she suspects have been caused by some sloppy surgical work. Her physiotherapist, however, receives new patients (referrals) from the surgeon in question, and so, by speaker A's reasoning, is not likely to raise problems which might threaten her supply of referrals. This point (p1) is made in the first line of (20) but is met with no more than lukewarm consent by B (*Mm*), suggesting covert opposition. A then forces B into explicit agreement *Is she? No* and then uses B's agreement (p2) to force acceptance of p1.

The reason this use of *you see* constitutes an FTA, is that it highlights the initial *discontinuity* between speaker and the co-speaker as well as explicitly forcing the co-speaker to acknowledge that their original view was mistaken.

The following example nicely illustrates the "I told you so" quality of "triumphant *you see*":

(21) "Aren't you pleased with me? I told you I'd get back. **You see**, you can trust me, after all."

3.3. Negative politeness

The triumphant use of *you see* is relatively unusual. Most of the time we can consider that the use of *you see* corresponds to a form of redressive action which seeks to attenuate the potential damage of an FTA with a combination of both negative and positive politeness.

Negative politeness is defined by Brown & Levinson [1987: 129] as

redressive action addressed to the addressee's negative face: his want to have his freedom of action unhindered and his attention unimpeded. It is the heart of respect behaviour [...]

Let us illustrate how this works with an example:

(5) “When I arrived last night,” he said, “all the lights were on”. “Were they?” Dad was staring at the blank wall above the TV. “It must’ve been Helga. She’s new, **you see**. I haven’t trained her yet.”

Here the speaker Dad begins by affirming *It must’ve been Helga*. Although typical FTA’s are orders, criticism etc., I consider that insufficiently supported assertions can also potentially constitute FTA’s in that they require the co-speaker to accept a given representation on the strength of the locutor’s²³ authority alone. In this respect, they threaten “[the hearer’s] basic want to maintain claims of territory and self-determination” [Brown & Levinson 1987: 70], my emphasis. An insufficiently supported assertion imposes on the co-speaker’s claims to self-determination. In (5), by adding *She’s new, you see*, the speaker redresses this potential imposition by providing his co-speaker with an independent argument p2 in support of p1. This function of *you see* depends essentially on the existence of an independent inferential relationship leading from p2 → p1. The co-speaker’s acceptance of p1 is motivated not only by the speaker’s endorsement but also by an independent chain of inference leading to the same conclusion.

3.4. Positive politeness

In addition to negative politeness, *you see* also incorporates elements of positive politeness.²⁴ Positive politeness, write Brown & Levinson [1987: 70],

is oriented toward the positive face of H [the hearer], the positive self-image that he claims for himself. Positive politeness is approach-based; it ‘anoints’ the face of the addressee by indicating that in some respects, S [the speaker] wants H’s wants [...].

Specifically, *you see* may fulfill requirements of positive politeness by claiming common ground²⁵ between the speaker and the co-speaker.

(22) PS268 : But er did they have er any other sort of job to do though? I mean did they you know deliver political speeches to try and.
PS269 : Oh yes, yes, yes.. This was their role, this was their role, **you see**.

In (22) *you see* localizes the inferential relationship from p2 *this was their role* to p1 *they... deliver political speeches...* relative to the co-speaker. In so doing the speaker encourages his co-speaker to collaborate in his argument, increasing speaker/co-speaker solidarity. This is one important difference between *you see* and a causal marker like *because* for example. The

²³ The term “speaker” refers to the enunciative source while the term “locator” refers essentially to the person talking.

²⁴ In this connection, Kerbrat-Orecchioni [2009: 196] signals the existence of what she terms “les actes mixtes”.

²⁵ See Brown & Levinson [1987: 103].

speaker could have answered *because this was their role*, but in this case he would assume direct responsibility for establishing the inferential link. The segment *you see*, on the other hand, points out a inferential link existing independently of the speaker.

This function of *you see* is linked to the mode of determination the process SEE operates on its target. The inferential relationship $\langle p2 \rightarrow p1 \rangle$ is quantitatively determined as *seen by the co-speaker* and at the same time qualitatively determined as *visible to all*.

3.5. Positional factors

Brown & Levinson recognize that the organization and ordering of wants can contribute to politeness, suggesting that *If you don't mind me asking, where did you get that dress?* may be more polite than *Where did you get that dress, if you don't mind me asking?* They do not develop this, however, commenting:

Presumably, the processes involved here have to do with topicalization and focus, and we shall relatively little to say about this is what follows. [Brown & Levison 1987: 93]

In fact, as we have suggested above, the relation between the position of *you see* and the weighting in terms of negative or positive politeness is a complex one and depends, not only on the position, but also on the relationship between locutors.

In an oppositional context, as we have seen, the use of the explicitly explanatory *you see* in initial position can serve to highlight discontinuities between speaker and co-speaker.

In a classroom context, however, the teacher's use of initial *you see* might be viewed in terms of positive politeness, encouraging the participation of co-speakers with the argumentative progression.²⁶

(23) A: Well if I, if I have ten pounds for example and I want to halve it, what would the answer be? half of ten

B: Mhm, five,

A: what number what number have I divided by.

B: ten

A: No not ten, cos **you see**, ten divided by ten would be one wouldn't it?

Between close friends, in a relationship of linguistic familiarity,²⁷ initial *you see* might be felt as over explicit, and potentially patronizing.

Similarly final *you see* might be interpreted more in terms of negative politeness where social differences between locutors are great (since it is important not to impose one's views on the other), and in terms of positive politeness where differences are minimal (since it is important to see things the same way as one's peers).

3.6. Eliciting backchannels

We saw earlier how, in some contexts of oral narrative, a speaker may make an almost systematic use of *you see* as the narrative progresses (20). Below is another similar example:

²⁶ Interestingly, Erman [1978: 9] quotes Faerch and Kasper [1982] who refer to such expressions as *you see* as "cajolers".

²⁷ That is, in Brown & Levison's terms, in situations where the differences in Distance (D) and Power (P) between locutors are minimal.

(24) A: Oh younger brother, we'd started him up er f he was a plumber. And more y o out of work than in them days. And we'd started him up with a little donkey engine and a saw bench, started him up making bundles of firewood up. And er so while I was in this shop I I sold this chap five hundred bundles of fire wood **you see**? And i thought, right, I think I've just about got time to nip home and fetch that fire wood and pick them up when they **you see** ?

B: **Mm.**

A: Low and behold when I got back they were waiting for me **you see**

Now, it is possible to derive this use from argumentative uses, if we consider that *you see* serves to justify the relevance of an initial representation by reference to a subsequent representation. The first occurrence of *you see* above can be explained in this manner, since the newly introduced event *making bundles of firewood up* is made relevant by the fact that the speaker sells *five hundred bundles of fire wood*. The systematic use made of *you see* by some speakers suggests however that the main point is not that of justifying a previous utterance but rather of enlisting the co-speaker's continued cooperation. Now unless you are an actor, a politician or a university lecturer, it is unlikely that you are accustomed to speaking for long periods without the usual feedback from listeners. Biber *et al.* [1999: 1091] refer to the sort of encouragement a co-speaker might give to the speaker as *backchannels*. In their discussion of *year*, *sure* and *okay* they state:

Functionally, these inserts can be classified as backchannels because of their role in signalling feedback to the speaker that the message is being understood and accepted. Given the interactive nature of conversation, backchannels are important in indicating that speaker and hearer are keeping in touch with one another, and that communication is still in progress.

Further on, they add [Biber *et al.* 1999: 1092]:

Before leaving the topic of backchannels, we draw attention to the expressions *you know*, *you see* and *see* [...] These were discussed in 14.3.3.3 as discourse markers, but functionally, it can now be observed that they tend to occur in declarative utterances preceding backchannels. This is not accidental: these discourse markers can act as monitoring devices, whereby the person who holds the conversational floor can check that other participants are still 'tuned in' to what is being said. They help to elicit backchannels.

In (24) above it is interesting to notice that the second occurrence of *you see* is indeed followed by the backchannel *Mm*, in acknowledgement that the co-speaker is indeed still "tuned in". In connection with this, Erman [1987: 63] finds that turn-final *you see* is almost invariably uttered as a rising tone unit, which would correspond to the quasi-interrogative status it appears to enjoy in these contexts.²⁸

I believe that this final feature of *you see* can also be related to strategies of politeness. For a locutor unused to such activity, speaking continuously can be an unnerving experience and one that, the longer one speaks, contains more and more potential face risks. In eliciting backchannels from the co-speaker, the diffident speaker is essentially encouraging manifestations of positive politeness that confirm continuity between speaker and co-speaker

²⁸ Actually, I believe there are good reasons to derive *you see* not from a matrix clause (*you see that p*) nor from an adverbial *as* clause (*p, as you see*), as Brinton [2008] suggests, but rather from an interrogative (*do you see?*). The arguments in favour of this derivation are beyond the scope of the current paper, however.

and share some of the responsibility of narrative.²⁹

4. Conclusion

I began this paper by posing the question of how the marker *you see* could serve both as a marker of politeness and impoliteness. In order to answer this question I firstly proposed an enunciative characterisation of *you see* according to which *you see* marks the localisation of an inferential relation relative to the co-speaker. Importantly, the existence inferential relation in question is preconstructed by the *see* construction. The speaker is merely bringing it to the co-speaker's attention, so to speak. This characterization was then illustrated with a number of case studies, enabling us to see how the meaning of *you see* might vary in context according to various parameters, including the identification of the target proposition, the position of *you see* relative to the second proposition or indeed the *genre* of text involved. From these studies it emerges that *you see* is not in itself a marker of politeness, but that the operations of which *you see* is the textual trace lend themselves to strategies including *impoliteness* (an FTA) as well as *negative* and *positive politeness*, in the terms of Brown & Levinson. In some contexts they also appear to allow an uncertain speaker to elicit manifestations of positive politeness (backchannel) from the co-speaker.

I think it is worth underlining three main aspects of the approach illustrated here, in opposition with previous existing studies on *you see*:

- ✓ Although *you see* is a discourse marker, I don't consider it as forming a block, an "unanalyzable whole". The way its component parts function can inform and contribute to our understanding of the way it functions as a discourse marker.
- ✓ Importantly, the target of *you see* is not – contrary to the predictions of the matrix clause hypothesis – the clause to which it is appended but rather the inferential relationship between this clause and a preceding proposition or, more precisely, representation.
- ✓ The operations marked by the segment *you see* allow us to explain its diverse uses in various discursive strategies including both negative and positive politeness.

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²⁹ Fitzmaurice mentions how already in 18th century English "Edward Wortley favors the use of the epistemic stance phrase *you see* as a rhetorical device to engage his interlocutor". [Fitzmaurice 2004: 430].

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