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Well-prefaced turns in English conversation: A conversation analytic perspective

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Abstract

This paper presents evidence that the discourse particle *well* functions as a generalized procedural alert that the turn it prefaces will privilege its speaker's perspectives, interests or project relative to the expectations for action established in the prior turn or sequence. Using data from a corpus of 748 well-prefaced turns, a range of contexts that enrich and specify this function are identified including (i) responses to questions, (ii) topic shift and topic closure, and (iii) 'my side' corroborations of descriptions and judgments.
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1. Introduction

This paper offers an empirical analysis of turn-initial *well* considered from the perspective of conversation analysis. *Well* is the fourth most common turn initial item in spoken English, exceeded in frequency only by *yeah*, *oh* and *and* (Norrick, 2009). It also participates in a canonical ordering – a 'linear syntax' (Hakulinen, 1993) – of turn-initial objects, in which *oh* always occurs before *well*, and *well* normatively precedes address terms (vocatives), and other attention getting imperatives such as *look* and *listen*. There is clear evidence that turn initial objects like *well* are primarily addressed to the relationship between a prior and a current turn. Evidence comes from cases where *well*-prefaced turns encounter forms of repair initiation (e.g., "huh?", "pardon?") (Drew, 1997) that result in turn repetition. Under these circumstances in which the previous prior turn is replaced by the repair initiation, the task that the original turn-initial *well* was deployed to implement is no longer in point, and the turn-initial object is dispensed with (Schegloff, 2004). Thus *well*, together with several other turn-initial particles that are similarly dispensed with in this context, is used to manage highly local 'short range' sequential relationships between one turn at talk and its immediate prior.

Well is also one of the most researched particles in the English language. A succession of distinguished researchers from Robin Lakoff onwards (Lakoff, 1973; Wierzbicka, 1976; Svartvik, 1980; Owen, 1981; Carlson, 1984; Pomerantz, 1984; Davidson, 1984; Quirk et al., 1985; Schourup, 1985, 2001; Schiffrin, 1987; Bolinger, 1989; Fraser, 1990; Jucker, 1993, 1997; Aijmer and Simon-Vandenberg, 2003; Schegloff and Lerner, 2009; Defour, 2010; Defour and Simon-Vandenberg, 2010) have made significant contributions to the subject from the perspectives of linguistic and historical pragmatics and conversation analysis. Some of the main functionalist contributions to the topic are summarized in Table 1 that, it should be noted, is far from complete or exhaustive.

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Table 1
Summary of some major contributions to the pragmatic functions of *well*.

Pragmatic functions educed for Well-prefaced turns	Proposed by:
Well-prefaced turns will have an indirect, 'insufficient' or otherwise 'complex' relation to a prior	Lakoff, 1973; Svartvik, 1980; Carlson, 1984; Quirk et al., 1985; Schiffrin, 1987; Jucker, 1993; Schegloff and Lerner, 2009
Well-prefaced turns will involve disagreement or disaffiliation in relation to the prior	Pomerantz, 1984; Davidson, 1984; Bolinger, 1989; Jucker, 1993
Well-prefaced turns will be expanded	Schegloff and Lerner, 2009; Heritage and Clayman, 2010.
Well-prefaced turns will initiate a new departure (including within narratives)	Wierzbicka, 1976; Svartvik, 1980; Carlson, 1984; Quirk et al., 1985; Schourup, 1985; Bolinger, 1989; Jucker, 1993, 1997
Well-prefaced turns involve 'resuming'	Kim, 2011, 2013

As Table 1 suggests, the literature exhibits a considerable range of opinion on the conversational role of *well*, in large part because of the real diversity of its functions, and the difficulties associated with bringing them under a common description. At the same time, this literature offers little information on the relative frequency of different usages of *well*, or on the interrelations among these usages. Absent this information, it is difficult to arrive at descriptions that integrate the primary usages, and that trace their interconnections.

In offering a conversation analytic perspective on *well*, this paper begins from a sequential perspective informed by the notion of progressivity. The latter notion was first advanced by Schegloff (1979), and is nicely captured in the following statement:

"Moving from some element to a hearably-next-one with nothing intervening is the embodiment of, and the measure of, progressivity. Should something intervene between some element and what is hearable as a/the next one due -- should something violate or interfere with their contiguity, whether next sound, next word or next turn -- it will be heard as qualifying the progressivity of the talk, and will be examined for its import, for what understanding should be accorded it." (Schegloff, 2007: 15)

From this point of view, we may distinguish between two forms of movement from one turn to the next. In 'unmarked' movement, next turns are congruent with the understandings, expectations and projections that were established in the previous turn, or sequence of turns. In 'marked' movement, there are departures from some of these understandings, expectations and projections (Heritage, 2013). Turn-initial particles are often implicated in these departures because, as Schegloff (1996) notes, they represent a first possible opportunity to indicate that a departure is underway. Turn-initial *well* is undoubtedly one of these departure-indicating particles.

This paper has two aims. First, to use a large collection of *well*-initiated utterances to identify, explicate, and quantify the primary contexts in which turn initial *well* is produced in conversation. Second, to offer a unified functional account of the use of *well* in these contexts. The central claim of the paper is that, at its most general, *well*-prefacing functions as an alert that the talk to follow will privilege its speaker's perspectives, interests or projects in the ensuing talk, regardless of whether these perspectives etc. are supportive, antithetical, or neutral with respect to those of others. This privileging may embrace actions, occupancy of turn space, epistemic stances, or simple point of view. Regardless, prefacing a turn with *well* projects that the turn as a whole will privilege its speaker's desires and preferences, circumstances, knowledge, or experience as the basis for the action to follow.

In the remainder of this paper, we examine this conception of *well*-prefacing in relation to three major contexts: (i) responses to questions, (ii) topic shift and closure, and (iii) the articulation of 'my side' experiences.

2. Data

The present study is based on a collection of 748 *well*-prefaced turns collected from a corpus of transcribed conversational data, comprising 23.75 h of ordinary conversation, containing approximately 310,000 words. These were primarily telephone conversations, drawn equally from British and American English. The study was initially conceived to investigate *well*-prefacing in relation to the conversation analytic notion of preference. Research assistants were instructed to identify responses to questions that included *well* in turn-initial, or virtual turn-initial position (Heritage, 1998). In order to evaluate the preference hypotheses, we also coded an additional sample of 115 responses to questions that were not *well*-prefaced. For this aspect of the study, we treated the category of 'question' broadly to include interrogative and declarative requests for information, and interrogatives that implemented other social actions such as invitations, requests and so on.

Subsequently the study was expanded to include all *well*-prefaced turns in the corpus. Because they were a prominent feature of the corpus, we particularly examined *well*-prefaced turns that occurred in the context of initiating actions, in particular, implementing topic shifts and topic closures. The remaining *well*-prefaced turns comprised a miscellany of some 350 cases. Investigation of these cases, showed a number of sub-classes consistent with the thesis of this paper.

By far the largest of these involved what are here termed ‘my side’ responses, in which an initial description of some state of affairs is met by a *well*-prefaced description of something comparable lodged in the respondent’s epistemic domain (Labov and Fanshel, 1977; Kamio, 1997; Heritage, 2012a). A number of smaller sub-classes (containing 20–30 cases), with family resemblances to this ‘my side’ function were identified but, for space reasons, are not elaborated upon here.

In identifying *well*-prefaced turns, we included compressed variants of *well* (e.g., *w’l*), and variants incorporating other or ‘lax’ vowel sounds (e.g., *wull*). While these variants may be significant at a finer level of analytic granularity (Local and Kelly, 1986), they are not addressed in the present investigation. For the purposes of this study, other pre-*well* turn-initial objects such as inbreaths and *uh* (Deppermann, 2013; Schegloff, 1996; Kendrick and Torreira, 2015) were similarly set to one side.

3. Well-prefaced responses to questions

In the present corpus nearly a quarter of all *well*-prefaced turns (23.3%/174 cases) occurred as responses to questions. This location is by far the most extensively researched in conversation analysis and pragmatics, and the following discussion aims to delineate major lines of argument in the literature and to evaluate them by reference to quantitative evidence. Three main proposals have been advanced in this connection: (i) basic preference arguments, (ii) arguments that concern the non-straightforwardness or weak coherence of responses, and (iii) suggestions that *well* is a harbinger of response expansion.

3.1. Well-prefaced responses as alerts that the response will be rejecting or dispreferred

The preference argument is primarily a conversation analytic one (Levinson, 1983; Heritage, 1984; Sacks, 1987; Schegloff, 2007; Pomerantz and Heritage, 2013). The basic observation is that turn-initial *well* is a harbinger of rejecting or negatively valenced responses. The essential argument has been that *well* is one of the first moments that the producers of first actions can see that they will encounter a negative response. At the same time the *well* also postpones its emergence, conveying the second speaker’s reluctance to move forward, and creating the opportunity for the first speaker to revise the first action to address an anticipated problem. Although this argument is frequently attributed to Pomerantz (1984), the most cited cases are actually described by Davidson (1984), and are illustrated in (1), and (2). In both of them, taken from Davidson (1984), the *well*-prefaced turns are understood as on the way to rejection, but the prior speaker in each case anticipates rejection in a different way. In (1) the offerer adds a putatively more attractive destination to the offer (line 5), though unsuccessfully (line 7). In (2) the inviter anticipates rejection by offering an account that centers on her interlocutor’s inability to accept (line 6).

(1) [NB:IV:10]
 1 Lot: ↑I mean uh: you wanna go 'd the store er anything over
 2 et the Market[Ba:sket]er anything?
 3 Emm: [.hmhhh].thhh].hhh .h]h=
 4 -> =W'l ↑HO[NEY]AH
 5 Lot: -> [or]Ri]chard's?
 6 (0.2)
 7 Emm: I've bou↑:ght EVrythi:ng?

(2) [NB:II:2:458-465]
 1 Emma: Wanna come down'n 'av a bite a'lu:nch with me:?=
 2 =I got s'm bee:r en stu:ff,
 3 (0.2)
 4 Nan: -> Wul yer ril sweet hon:, uh::m
 5 (.)
 6 Emma: -> or d'yuh'av sump'n else (t')
 7 Nan: [l e t- I: ha(v)]

(3) below illustrates a closely related phenomenon: Alan’s question (line 3), strongly built to prefer a *No* response, is designed to clear the way for an extended conversation.

(3) [Kamunsky 1]
 1 ALA: Karen Baxter?
 2 KAR: Yea?
 3 ALA: Yer not busy are yuh?
 4 (0.3)
 5 KAR: -> Well yeah, I a:m.
 6 ALA: Well this'll be qui:ck I mean it's nothing

Karen's "Well yeah, I a:m." response frustrates that objective and is *well*-prefaced, inducing Alan to indicate that the conversation will be brief.

Beyond the general claim that *well* is associated with rejection and disagreement contexts, its exact function remains obscure. On the one hand, it may straightforwardly index a stance of reluctance to engage in face-threatening actions (Brown and Levinson, 1987) while, on the other, offering structural opportunities for the parties to avoid their realization (Schegloff, 1988, 2007). While not of course mutually exclusive, these accounts are not fully disentangled.

3.2. *Well-prefaced responses as alerts that the response will be indirect or non-straightforward*

The notion of preference arising from Sacks' (1987) classic paper on the preference for agreement and contiguity embodies the argument that, among other things, responsive agreement with the polarity of a question is the joint responsibility of questioner and answerer. It is the questioner's responsibility to frame a question in such a way that the respondent can supply the relevant information in an aligned and 'agreeing' way and, in light of Grice's maxim of quantity (Grice, 1975), do so in a reasonably compact fashion, for example by a type-conforming interjective response (Raymond, 2003; Heritage and Raymond, 2012; Stivers et al., 2009). In this context, *well*-prefacing may function as a harbinger of non-straightforward or expanded responses.

This view was first canvassed by Lakoff (1973), who observed that *well*-prefaced responses to questions are often insufficient as answers, and developed by Schiffrin with the notion that *well*-prefaced responses are not "fully consonant with prior coherence options" (1987: 103). Using data from sociolinguistic interviews, Schiffrin showed that *well*-prefacing is more common in response to WH-questions than their more restricted polar counterparts, and is more common when the sought after information is not provided in both classes of questions (Schiffrin, 1987: 105–7).

In a further strand of this line of argument, Schegloff and Lerner, 2009 argue that, in the case of responses to WH-questions, *well*-prefaces function as a general alert indicating that the response will not be straightforward. While a lack of straightforwardness may be variously motivated and take a variety of forms (Schegloff and Lerner, 2009:102), it is significant that, as they observe, when the first turn constructional unit of a response could otherwise be treated as a straightforward answer to the question, the *well* serves as an alert that the recipient should not treat it that way:

- (4) [Heritage: I:3:4]
 1 Ile: A:nd um then I've just got tih go tih the hospital trolley,
 2 .hh uh: fro:[m tu:
 3 Lis: [I think I've broken me a:nkle.
 4 Ile: ((nasal)) Oh:: w't'v you do:ne,
 5 (0.2)
 6 Lis: -> We:ll I fell down the step- eh e-haa ↑as (.) a matter of
 7 fact it wasn' any'ing tih do with Kizzy, .hhhh I: came ou:t
 8 of the bah:throom en down those two little steps in
 9 (the[hall]) 'n kicked meself on my a:nkle.
 10 Ile: [Mm::,
 11 Ile: *Oh::.[()].
 12 Lis: [↑Very badly[e n I -] [I t h : o u]:ght=
 13 Ile: [It's prob]a'ly[a ↓brui:se]

In this case, as Schegloff and Lerner observe, the initial unit of Lisa's response ("Well I fell down the step", line 6) might, in the absence of the initial *well*, be hearable as a "simple straightforward answer." However "the *well* alerts the recipient not to analyze it that way" (Schegloff and Lerner, 2009:102).

3.3. *Well-prefaced responses as alerts that the response will take more than one turn constructional unit*

An implication of some of the observations of the previous section is that turn-initial *well* can function as a general alert that the turn constructional unit it prefaces is not to be taken at face value as an answer to a question. Rather it is to be treated as an initial component of an expanded turn that will take additional units to complete. In this context, Schiffrin (1987) observed that *well* frequently prefaces responses to questions in which the answer proper is deferred, or provided in the form of a narrative.

The deployment of *well* in the context of narrative or expanded responses to questions is comparatively frequent. In the following two cases, for example, following a recipient's 'go ahead' in response to a story preface (Sacks, 1974; Mandelbaum, 2013), the intending story teller launches her story with *well*:

- (5) [Field C85:4:2]
 1 Les: °Oh:..° hh Yi-m- You ↓know I-I- I'm boiling about
 2 something hhhheh[heh hhhh
 3 Joy: [Wha::t.
 4 Les: -> Well that sa↓:le. (0.2) at- at (.) the vicarage.
 5 (0.6)
 6 Joy: Oh ↓ye[:s,
 (6) [Frankel TCI]
 1 Shi: In any eve::nt?hhhhh That's not all thet's ne:w.
 2 Ger: W't e:lse.
 3 Shi: -> .t.hhhhh W'l Wendy'n I hev been rilly having problems.
 4 Ger: M-hm,
 5 Shi: ((voice becomes confiding)) .hh En yesterday I talk'tih

The same phenomenon is to be found in extended responses to news interview questions (Clayman and Heritage, 2002), and in extended responses to doctors' opening questions (Heritage and Clayman, 2010), as in (7) where a patient responds to a routine opening question with an extended narrative:

- (7) [Vomiting and Diarrhea]
 1 Doc: How can I help,
 2 Clr: -> .hhh Well- (0.3) all of a sudden yesterday evening, having been
 3 perfectly fit for (.) you know, ages, [.hh
 4 Doc: [Ye:[s,
 5 Clr: [My husband was taken
 6 ill: (wi') th'most awful stomach pains, and sickness, h[h
 7 Doc: [Ye:s,
 8 Clr: .hh An' it's gone on a:ll night. He has vomited once. hh!
 9 .hh[h
 10 Doc: [Righ[t,
 11 Clr: [An' also had some diarrhea,hh!
 12 Doc: Right,=
 13 Clr: =Uh: a:nd hh! You know he seems >t'be< almost writhing in
 14 a:gony, h .hhh eh-hhh! `h[h (He's had) 'is appendix ouhht! hhh=
 15 Doc: [°(Ri-)°
 16 Clr: =.hhh!
 17 Doc: Ye:s,
 18 Clr: Uhm: (.) an:d (.) you know he just feels he ought to see a
 19 doctor, hhh [`hh

In an unpublished analysis of 100 responses to doctors' opening questions Heritage and Robinson (nd) found a linear relationship between *well*-prefacing and response expansion: brief (one unit) responses were *well*-prefaced 11% of the time, moderately expanded responses 33%, while narrative responses were *well*-prefaced 57% of the time.

Similarly it can be suggested that *well*-prefaced responses to offers and requests are built to convey that the first (*well*-prefaced) turn constructional unit (TCU) response is not intended to be the last, but is intended to be prefatory to an upcoming rejection, as in (2) above. Consider also the response in (8):

- (8) [Heritage 2:4]
 1 Edg: [I mean] can we do any shopping for her or
 2 something like tha:t?
 3 (0.7)
 4 Mic: -> Well that's most ki:nd Edgerton .hhh At the ↑moment
 5 no:. Because we've still got two bo:ys at home.

Without the *well* in line 4, Michael's appreciation of Edgerton's offer might be understood as an acceptance, rather than as an appreciation that is being produced prefatory to a rejection in an expanded response to the offer.

Taken as a whole, these observations suggest a turn-taking explanation that may account for *well*-prefacing. The turn-taking system for conversation initially allocates one and only one TCU to an incoming speaker (Sacks et al., 1974). Thus in cases where, for whatever reason, a respondent anticipates producing an expanded turn, a turn-initial signal may alert the recipient to the likelihood of expansion while simultaneously flagging that the first turn constructional unit is not to be

responded to at face value. *Well* may function as just such an alert. Given that rejections often take more than one TCU to accomplish, this turn-taking perspective intersects with accounts that link *well*-prefacing to delay and dispreference, and to non-straightforwardness more generally. If this view were to prevail, however, it would have to apply over the full range of *well*-prefaced utterances, while the preference and non-straightforwardness accounts are limited to second position responses to various classes of first actions.

3.4. Quantitative evidence

Considering these three arguments, it is evident that they overlap and may be difficult to disentangle. However the notion that *well* generally projects turns of two or more TCUs can be rejected outright. In the 748 *well*-prefaced turns making up our primary data, 51.5% were expanded (containing more than one TCU), while 48.5% were unexpanded (containing just one TCU). *Well* cannot therefore be a reliable global signal of expanded turn construction.

However, in the more local context of responses to questions, *well* is indeed a reliable alert of an expanded turn. In our data comprising a total of 287 questions (172 polar and 115 question-word questions), 62% of *well*-prefaced responses to polar questions were expanded, and this figure rises to 73% in response to WH-question. In contrast the majority of responses to questions that were not *well*-prefaced were unexpanded (79% of responses to polar questions, and 72% of WH-questions).

Turning to the hypothesis that *well*-prefaced responses to polar questions index dispreferred responses, or responses that otherwise run counter to the polarity of the question, the evidence is similarly compelling. 72% of dispreferred responses to polar questions were *well*-prefaced, while 74% of preferred responses were not so prefaced. This result is highly compatible with Kendrick and Torreira's (2015:268) finding that "when a response includes a turn-initial "well", the probability that it will be a dispreferred action is 0.78."

Clearly both turn expansion and preference are associated with *well*-prefacing. Table 2 presents the results for polar questions, and a simple logistic regression analysis of these two elements as predictors for *well*-prefacing confirms that both factors independently increase the odds that a turn will be prefaced by *well*. In the case of turn expansion the odds of *well*-prefacing are increased by a factor of 9.3 ($p < .001$; 95% confidence interval 4.1–21.4), and in the case of dispreferred responses the odds of *well*-prefacing are increased by 9.2 ($p < .001$; 95% confidence interval 4.1–20.6).

To summarize the findings thus far, it seems reasonable to identify a cluster of characteristics that co-occur when *well*-prefaced turns emerge in response to questions. These characteristics overlap in terms of usage, and they have in common that they agentively assert the respondent's perspective as the primary point of departure for the response often, but not always, involving resistance to the project of the questioner. This account holds regardless of whether the questioner (i) is in search of acceptance of a proposal, or agreement to a proposition, or (ii) expects simple and straightforward responses or, relatedly, (iii) anticipates the single TCU responses that the turn-taking system for conversation provides for by default. In the current data set, only 2% of *well*-prefaced responses to polar questions were neither dispreferred nor expanded, while 23% were both dispreferred and expanded.

3.5. Other forms of departure

In the cases so far described, respondents depart from the expectations associated with questions in terms of preference, polarity, brevity and type-conformity. However question responses may exhibit agency in relation to questioners' projects in other ways, resisting the terms of the question with transformative answers (Stivers and Hayashi, 2010), rejecting the presuppositions or the askability of the question (Stivers, 2011), or its answerability. These forms of response are also quite frequently *well*-prefaced.

Transformative answers: In the following cases, respondents address the questions that are put to them, but do not do so in the terms that the questions were framed. In (9), for example, in a call to a plumber on behalf of an elderly mother-in-law, the plumber asks for the caller's name. However, perhaps to establish her as the responsible party, Lesley gives her

Table 2
Distribution of *Well*-prefacing when responses to polar questions are expanded or dispreferred.

Responsive Action	Not <i>Well</i> -prefaced	<i>Well</i> -prefaced	
Dispreferred	26%	72%	$\chi^2 (1, N = 172) = 41.3, p < .001$
Expanded	21%	62%	$\chi^2 (1, N = 172) = 29.0, p < .001$

mother-in-law's name instead of her own. This response reshapes the agenda of the previous question to her own purposes and is *well*-prefaced:

(9) [Field 1:6:2-9]
 1 Les: Could you:r husband call on my mother in law please
 2 (0.4)
 3 Les: a:nd uh have a look at he:r um: (1.0) .h uh her bathroo:m,
 4 (0.7)
 5 Sut: .hh Uh w'dju give me your name please,=
 6 Les: -> =Well her name is Missiz Nan Field.h
 7 (4.1)
 8 Les: And she lives at fifteen Applewood Close:.

And, in (10), Lesley responds to Mum's polar question about the age of an acquaintance with a number ("ninety" (line 2)), rather than a type-conforming interjection ("yes"):

(10) [Field(X):1:1:1:44-6]
 1 Mum: She's ↑(quite'n) old lady wasn't she.
 2 Les: Well she's ninety.
 3 Mum: Mm: ye:s

In this way, Lesley builds her response as if to a question-word question rather than the polar question that initiated the sequence – a classic form of transformative answer, as described in [Stivers and Hayashi \(2010\)](#). Transformative answers constituted 18% of *well*-prefaced responses to questions.

Resisting the relevance of a question: Speakers may deploy *well*-prefacing in contexts where they find that the question is inappropriate. In the following case, Amy has news that Kathryn Kuhlman, a well-known American motivational speaker of the middle 20th century, is coming to Los Angeles. She begins by checking whether Kuhlman is known to her recipient, and the following sequence ensues:

(11) [SBL 2:2:4 8:55]
 1 Amy: yea- Well, ↑tell me. (.) Do you- does the name
 2 (.) Kathryn Kuhlman mean anything to you?=
 3 Bea: -> =Well I should say so.
 4 Amy: Wul do you know that she's in Los Angeles? n'
 5 giving uh: ((continues))

Bea's *well*-prefaced response, while confirming that she does indeed know of Kuhlman, also conveys resistance to the idea that Amy could doubt her knowledge of the person in question, thus contesting whether the question should have been asked in the first place ([Stivers, 2011](#)).

Resisting the answerability of a question: Speakers may deploy *well*-prefacing in contexts where they have no answer to a question, as in (12) below where May asks her co-worker Pru about a newsworthy event at the local department store where they both work, using a question form that clearly presumes that Pru will be able to answer.

(12) [Trio 2: 12-16]
 1 May: What happened et (.) wo:rk. Et Bullock's this evening.
 2 Pru: -> .hhhh Wul I don' kno:::w::.
 3 (.)
 4 May: My-Loretta jus ca:llled'n she wz goin:g went by: there et
 5 five thirdy you know on'er way ho::me.

Pru's *well*-prefaced non-answer response, with its stress on the word "know", clearly contests the answerability of the question from her point of view.

Finally, as noted by several scholars (see [Table 1](#)), *well*-prefacing is frequently associated with less-than-adequate or approximate responses:

(13) [NB:IV:4:R: 190-193]
 1 Emm: =°°↓Oh:..°° .hhh W'l ↑HONEY uh:(p) uh:: (.) ah: you gonna
 2 take off what about eight ih'clo:ck tihni:ght yih think
 3 Lot: -> Well I'm'on'try tih get off ez early ez I ca:n.

(14) [Field U/88:1:3:46-56]
 1 Gor: hUh:m (0.2) .p.hhhh hu-You going to- (0.3) the music-
 2 (0.3) workshop.
 3 Ken: Yes[: I am:.
 4 Gor: [.hhhhhh .g this ↓morning. u-What time'r you going,
 5 (.)
 6 Ken: -> Well [ih just about to leave to (pick Rebecca ↓up.)
 7 Gor: [.tlk
 8 (0.6)
 9 Gor: .tlkUh:m .p.hhh D'you think you c'd pick me up.h
 10 (0.6)
 11 Ken: No,

However it is also noticeable that these responses privilege the respondents' perspectives and quotidian contingencies, rather than the questioners' needs or concerns, as the basis from which the response is constructed.

In this section on responses to questions, the data clearly show that *well*-prefaced responses privilege the perspectives, interests and concerns of respondents and recurrently, though not invariably, block, obstruct or hinder the objectives of questioners. The responses do not align with the polarity of questions; they are expanded relative to expectations about concise responses; they transform questions' agendas, contest their relevance and answerability, or respond in indefinite, limited or unsatisfactory ways. All in all, the statistics confirm that *well*-prefacing is a reliable predictor that a response to a question will privilege of the respondent's perspective and consequently exhibit a poor fit with the preceding question's agenda, presuppositions, epistemic stance and preference. Also notable is the overlap between the various classes of *well*-prefaced responses to questions: In the context of polar questions, for example, nearly a quarter of *well*-prefaced responses were both dispreferred and expanded, and three quarters of the transformative answers were either dispreferred, or expanded, or both.

4. *Well*-prefaced turns and topic shifts

Nearly 30% (225) of all the *well*-prefaced turns in the corpus were associated with topic shifts or topic/conversation closure. At the minimum, topic shift and topic closure have the commonality that the speaker initiates a departure from the previous topic. This finding clearly resonates with earlier observations by Svartvik (1980), Carlson (1984); Quirk et al. (1985), Bolinger (1989), and Jucker (1993) among others, all of whom have made reference to the association between *well*-prefacing and departures to new topics or activities. Topic shifts toward a matter of the speaker's own topical preference are *prima facie* evidence for the claim that *well*-prefacing functions as an alert of an action in which speakers privilege their own perspectives, interests and projects, rather than an expansion built from the prior sequence, turn or topic.

4.1. Topic shifts

The following is a brief selection of the 118 cases of topic shift in the corpus. In (15), after daughter Virginia (aged 14) has renewed her request for an increase in her allowance (a recurrent topic in this family dinner conversation), and her mother has resisted the request (lines 3–4), another participant (Prudence) – a guest at the family dinner table – launches a new topic, with a *well*-prefaced proposal to “change the subject”:

(15) [Virginia: 565-575]
 1 VIR: ↑please let me have ten dollars, ↑please?
 2 PRU: eh-huh! 'h[h
 3 MOM: [↑0:::h!Here we go again.I'm gonna have indigestion
 4 'fore [I ever get through here.
 5 PRU: [egh-hgh! ((cough))
 6 PRU: -> W'll why'on' I change thuh subject an' tell ya about thuh
 7 wedding.

In (16), the conclusion of a discussion of department stores is followed by a small silence (line 7), whereupon Emma launches an entirely distinct topic (line 8):

(16) [NB:II:I:199-208]
 1 Emm: Ah non't like th- I don't like the May Comp'ny but they do
 2 have good bedspreads.
 3 (0.3)
 4 Lot: Ye:ah down the ba:sement. y[ihkno]:w=
 5 Emm: [Yeah.]
 6 Lot: =They- they really do:.
 7 (0.5)
 8 Emm: -> Well the ↑kids sure hadda lotta fun down here 'at wz
 9 a(w) beautiful weekend fer the:m:. M[y-
 10 Lot: [Oh:: ye:ah].

In (17), after Joyce concludes a description of another event, her brother Stan initiates his reason for calling her (Schegloff, 1986):

(17) [Joyce and Stan: 88-94]
 1 Joy: Sos::, (l.1) yihknow, (.) h[e jus' folded [up his stuff] an'=
 2 Stn: [Right, [·h h h h]
 3 Joy: =[whatever.
 4 Stn: [hhh
 5 Joy: [Turned it [in.
 6 Stn: -> [·hhhh [Well the main reason I called you up Jess was to
 7 as:k yer uh:: advice on two little matters:uh.

While in the previous cases, the *well*-prefaced turn begins a new topic after the previous one is exhibiting signs of exhaustion, this is not an invariant feature of *well*-prefaced new topic starts. In (18), just as Jenny is expanding on her dinner provisions for her children (lines 1–8), Vera unilaterally, and in interjacent overlap (Jefferson, 1986), renews reference to the fact that her son and daughter-in-law unexpectedly curtailed their visit to her home, refusing lunch – a matter that concerns her greatly (Raymond and Heritage, 2006):

(18) [Rah 14: 217-228]
 1 Jen: I'm'nna do s'm spaghetti'n: (.) n-eh::m meatballs f'tea
 2 fuh this lot now,
 3 Ver: Oh lovely.
 4 Jen: Cz they didn't have u they only had fish fingihs'n chips
 5 fih dinner,
 6 Ver: °eeYes.°
 7 Jen: B't thez no thing in to:wn.=
 8 Jen: =Mahrks'n S[pencihs shelves w' c l e a :u h.]
 9 Ver: -> [Well they wouldn't stay fer a meal.]
 10 Ver: .h Actually theh w'suppose teh: when they ra:ng e when
 11 Bill said'e wz takin me out fer a meal yihknow they never
 12 mentioned it tihday but any rate ah didn' ↓want one.

In these cases, the topic shifts embody motivations that are clearly self-attentive, and involve agentive departures from the ongoing topic, steering the topic in each case toward something that the speaker wants to address. These topic shifts are frequently self-oriented. Indeed *well* very commonly prefaces topic shifts that initiate talk focusing on the speaker's own experiences or concerns. No less than 74% of the topic shift cases examined for this project have this self-attentive character, while only 19% are other-attentive and directly inquire into the recipient's experience or circumstances (Bolden, 2006).

4.2. Topic closure

Topic closure is essentially a sub-set of topic shifts in which speakers initiate a shift out of a topic, but without initiating a new one. A significant proportion of the topical closures in the corpus also initiate a process of conversational closure as their outcome. In the data to hand, 107 (14%) *well*-prefaced turns involve efforts to close conversational topics. In (19) Michael's wife has slipped a disk and Edgerton has called to offer assistance. After a brief discussion of the wife's condition, Michael moves to close the topic with the summative and shift-implicative phrase "there we are" (Drew and Holt, 1998) which Edgerton reciprocates (lines 4 and 5):

(19) [Heritage 0II:2:4: 72–83]

- 1 Edg: =ukhh huukhh uhk >Oh she's had it be fore.<
 2 Mic: Oh yes but not for te(h)n y(h)ea(h) [r(h)s.
 3 Edg: [Oh::: Lo:rd.
 4 Mic: Yes there we are.
 5 Edg: The: [re we are.
 6 Mic: [.tch
 7 (.)
 8 Edg: Ye[:s:,
 9 Mic: [(and it's fl[attening)
 10 Edg: -> [Well Michael anyway there it i:s, and ah:
 11 an:d as I sa:y we uhm (.) we we: we would like to help if:
 12 Edg: uh if she ever needs ah::: she's (in need). You know?=
 13

Very shortly thereafter (line 10), Edgerton moves to pre-closings (Schegloff and Sacks, 1973) by recapitulating the reason for the call (Schegloff, 2011). This turn is prefaced by *well*, an address term (“Michael”) that is also agentive (Clayman, 2013), and a re-doing of the summative and shift-implicative “there we are” as “anyway there it is” – all of which implement pressure toward the closing of the call.

In other cases *well*-prefaced turns are more directly implicated in the pre-closing moves that normally project exit from the conversation as a whole. In (20), after a classic sequence of topic attrition/hold moves (Jefferson, 1981; Sorjonen, 2001; Heritage, 2012b) at lines 7–10, Emma moves toward a summative assessment (line 11), and then an explicit move toward closing (line 13). Both turns are *well*-prefaced:

(20) [NB:II:3: 122–136]

- 1 Lot: En Ru:th uh: this friend a'mi:ne oh: .hhh well it (.
 2 e-eh sh- I let 'er stay et the. 'waiian hou:se: >over the
 3 week<. So we're goin uh: (.) e:-eh t'morruh morning ou:t.
 4 (.)
 5 Emm: Oh: good. Gunnuh rent a boa:[t? er]
 6 Lot: [Ye:::]ah=
 7 Emm: =Ah[hah?]
 8 Lot: [Ye:]ah.
 9 (.)
 10 Lot: Uh hu[h,
 11 Emm: -> [W'l: good honey .t.h[hhhhh]
 12 Lot: [Ye:ah,]
 13 Emm: -> ↑WELL MAYBE AH'LL SEE YUH NEXT ↓week.
 14 Lot: hh hhuh↑hu[h↓h]uh huh]
 15 Emm: [e h]HAH HAH] TI:]ME goes o:n:,
 16
 17

In (21) Emma's extended description of fishing, attracts a minimal and pallid response from her interlocutor (line 6), whereupon Emma's *well*-prefaced turn initiates a direct shift into the closing sequence of the conversation:

(21) [NB:III:4: 59–69]

- 1 Emm: .hhh God they got two liddle fish en (.) en ↑Stevie
 2 lies out on that do:ck ah:ll day on 'iz stomach fishin'
 3 hones'tih God I wish'e gotta big one so Bud fih-rigged it
 4 up tihday with a smaller hook enna leader with a .hh.hh
 5 yihknow small li:ne.
 6 Lot: Ye:ah.
 7 Emm: -> .hhhh Well ah won't KEEP yih honey,
 8 Lot: Oh ↑that's oka:y, uh [(I'm just)
 9 Emm: [Have fun fishin ah hope yih catch a
 10 big one,
 11 Lot: Yeah.
 12 (0.2)
 13 Emm: Al[right,]
 14 Lot: [Okay] honey,
 15 (.)
 16 Emm: [Bye bye,
 17 Lot: [Bye bye

And finally in (22), *well* prefaces the pre-closing move (lines 1/3) that directly leads to terminal “goodbyes” (Schegloff and Sacks, 1973).

```
(22) [NB:VII: 434-439]
1 Mar:  -> We[ll]
2 Edn:   [O:]k[AY, hhhhhih]
3 Mar:  -> [I'll see y]'Edn[a
4 Edn:   [A:ri['oney]=
5 Mar:   [Ba:h,]=
6 Edn:   =Bye:,
```

This section has argued that *well* frequently functions as a harbinger and first alert of topical shifts and closures. These actions are taken at the speaker's initiative, on occasion boundarying the progression of prior talk in favor of the speaker's incipient interactional project. Inherently driven by the speaker's motivations and objectives, *well*-prefaced turns in topic shifts both terminate the expansion of previous talk, and shift the action in a direction that serves the speaker's agenda.

5. *Well*-prefacing and the 'my side' perspective

In this section, we develop the claim that *well*-prefacing functions as a 'my side' alert. Here the proposal is that when a first speaker's characterization of some state of affairs is matched by a second speaker's corroborative description that is specifically founded in the second speaker's experience, knowledge or *umwelt*, the second speaker's turn will tend to be *well*-prefaced. 92 cases (12%) of all the *well*-prefaced turns in the data set have this 'my side' character. These cases generally involve agreement between the speakers, and in these sequences the 'my side' alert frequently concerns the epistemic basis of the agreement: the fact that incipient speakers will be addressing the prior speaker's observations, but with content drawn from their own distinctive epistemic or experiential domain. For example, in (23), Lesley and her elderly mother are commenting on poor spring weather (lines 1–2) through juxtaposed accounts of garden flowers. Mum's depiction of a few daffodils and crocuses (lines 8/11), is matched by Lesley's *well*-prefaced description of snowdrops and (battered) crocuses:

```
(23) [Field 1:8:28-40]
1 Mum:   Terrible weather fer this time a'the ye[a:r,]
2 Les:   [I kn]o::w,
3       (0.3)
4 Les:   I [mean flowers are not coming out are the:y.
5 Mum:   [Mm:.
6 Mum:   ^No::: No:.
7       (0.7)
8 Mum:   Got couple of daffodils out in the ga[:rden] ( )
9 Les:   [Oh I ]haven't,
10      (. )
11 Mum:  Hm:. .h An' s'm crocuses [b't[ not a lot at a:l[l].
12 Les:  -> [h [Yes [h Well we
13      have snowdrops'n the cro:cuses look all battered,
```

Here each woman contributes a separate, epistemically independent, but corroborative, description of depleted garden flowers as a means of agreeing about the weather.

In a similarly commiserative sequence, two women compare the impact of an economic recession on their husband's salaries. While Lesley's husband anticipated a salary cut, she reports that he only lost his bonus, while – in a *well*-prefaced response – Joan juxtaposes her husband's “actual” salary cut (Clift, 2001):

```
(24) [Field X(C)2-1-2: 189-199]
1 Les:   And so::, oo-wih- We were gonna take (.) cuts in
2       sal↑ary to tell you the[tru:th,
3 Joa:   [°(Oh)° [Cr:i:key.
4       (. )
5 Les:   .h But actually:- e-they haven't exactly cut the
6       salar[ies but there's no: bonus or: nothin:[g extra.
7 Joa:   [ Yea:h [No,=
8 Joa:  -> .h Well theh- Fred has actua↑lly ↓taken a cut in
9       salary because it (comes ↓off) iz ↓sala[ry.
10 Les:   [ihYes:
```

In these two sequences a first speaker's observation is met by a *well*-prefaced responsive observation that matches, parallels, or corroborates it. In each case the second, *well*-prefaced, assertion is drawn from the second speaker's experience that, regardless of its parallelism or corroboration, is epistemically independent of the previous speaker. Topically coherent with the prior, it nonetheless offers something additional that is separate and distinct from the experience described in the prior.

This separateness and independence of outlook can be mobilized for interactional purposes other than simple corroboration or parallelism. In (25) Margy mobilizes her 'my side' experience of a lunch party that she hosted, to reciprocate Emma's compliment at lines 1–2 (Pomerantz, 1978):

(25) [NB:VII:37–41]

1 Emm: =Oh honey that was a lovely lunch_n I shoulda ca:lled you
 2 s:soo[:ner but I:]l:[lo:ved it.Th wz just deli:ghtfu[: l.]=
 3 Mar: -> [((f)) Oh:::] [°()] [Well]=
 4 Mar: -> =I wz gla[d y o u] (came).]
 5 Emm: ['nd yer f:] friends] 'r so da:rli:ng,=

Here the *well* prefaces a report of Margy's distinctive point of view on the party – pleasure at Edna's attendance. And in a related case a similar *well*-prefaced mobilization of independent perspective is used to fashion a compliment. Here Emma, who has a foot injury, is commenting on how kind the people in her apartment building have been. This is met with her interlocutor's *well*-prefaced description of her as a “thoroughly nice person to be nice to.”

(26) [NB:II:4:162–169]

1 Emm: SO EVRYBUDDY'S BEEN NI:CE IN THE 'PA:RTMEN'
 2 Emm: jist like with my le:g ih[hhh HIH HUH ↑HUH]
 3 Nan: [Yee::aa::ah:,h]
 4 Nan: -> ↑Well you (.) people should ↓be nice tih you Em↓ma yer a:
 5 thoroughly nice person tuh be nice ↑TO:↓:.

In these cases the *well*-prefaced turn is unambiguously occupied with actions that are supportive and solidary with the previous speaker. These cases clearly contrast with preference accounts in the literature that focus on *well*-prefacing as a harbinger of disagreement and disaffiliation, and mandate an account of *well*-prefacing that reaches beyond preference.

However, any turn that asserts a separate and independent experience, circumstance, or point of view may open the way for intimations of competition or one-upmanship. In the next case two sisters are comparing notes about the weather:

(27) [NB:II:5:210–217]

1 Lot: GO:D it's bee:n hotter'n he:ck down here.yihkno:w?
 2 (0.2)
 3 Emm: It's so smoggy yer (.) ↓eye:s burn en it's (.) ↑Well it's
 4 en aLE:RT.,
 5 (0.3)
 6 Lot: -> .t.h.hh Wul Thu:rsdee: u-there wz smo:g dow:n he:re an:'
 7 yihknow I ca:n't sta:nd smog. I get deathly sick.=
 8 Emm: =I know it. I w'sick too.

Here 'common ground' is established about the smog, but the two women are somewhat competitive as to who is the more challenged by its effects.

In the next slightly more complex case two teachers find that they share a common past in the English county of Kent. Lesley's announcement that she and her husband went to “Maidstone Grammar School” is met with an acknowledgment (line 8), and, at line 10, Robbie's *well*-prefaced response that her grandfather was a headmaster at Plaxtol, a village 13 miles from Maidstone:

(28) [Field 5/88:1:5: 947-969]

1 Les: .hhhh Oh::.. No:w. Which part'v Kent d'you
 2 come ↓from.
 3 Rob: Sevenoa:ks.
 4 Les: .tlk .hhhh Oh:::: ↓do you e=
 5 Rob: =Ye:s?
 6 Les: Oh:: uh-my husband'n I both went to
 7 Maidstone grammar ↓school.
 8 Rob: Good hea↓vens.
 9 (0.4)
 10 Rob: -> Well my grand↓father was a headmaster in: eh
 11 the Kent area, he wz in [Plaxtol?
 12 (): [()]
 13 Les: Oh yes:
 14 (.)
 15 Rob: And ehm (.) my mother went to- ((continues))

Once again 'common ground' is established, but the two women are somewhat competitive as to who has the more extensive ties with Kent, and there is a slight overtone of status competition in this sequence. Moreover, control over the topical development of the sequence (as between Lesley's or Rob's connections to Kent) may also be at stake in this proffering of 'my side' perspectives.

As suggested, these separate and independently founded "my side" responses can serve as an avenue into topic shifts that take the respondent's experience as the foundational basis for the next sequence. Here we find a clear echo of Jefferson's (1984) work on topic shifts. In the example below, Lottie (line 7) describes her limited access to "that Palm place" place described by Emma (lines 1–3), and subsequently exploits this as an opening to describe her experience of "the Desi Arnaz place" (line 12). This shift is marked in the transcript with *->.

(29) [NB:IV:10: 910-923]

1 Emm: En then Tillie in I ev staye'd't that ↑Pa::lm place. that
 2 ↑Sun: .hh Go::l' place where the pa::lm ub (.) and uh
 3 the:: (0.2) e-grapefruit ARE 'n yih DRI:VE way BA:CK i:n?
 4 (0.3)
 5 Emm: Ah think you saw that tih the left as you went tuh Indio,
 6 (0.7)
 7 Lot: -> .hhhhhhhhh We:ll see I wen'on down duh Indio: eh wz
 8 da::r[k.h
 9 Emm: [Ya:h,
 10 Lot: .kh So I di:n'pay much attention to i[t yihkno:w,
 11 Emm: [°Mm: hm°
 12 Lot: *-> .hhhh But we wen' in: uh the De:si Arne:z place onna way
 13 ba:ck en: uh e-had (.) uh: they had'n a:fter dinner dri:n
 14 Lot: God there wasn'a sou:l ih We w'r the only ones et the bar en . . .

In this case, Lottie's "my side" response at line 7, while addressed to Emma's description, is also incipiently involved in a stepwise topic shift (Jefferson, 1984) that is completed at line 12 with a full shift to a description of Lottie's experiences at "the Desi Arnaz place" (note the contrastive stress on "we" with which Lottie initiates this move).

[My side-My side] sequences represent approximately 12% of all the *well*-prefaced turns in the data set. Taken as a whole, a wide variety of motivations are associated with these sequences. These range from a simple desire to corroborate the experience and opinions of the other person from a personal and independent standpoint, through various forms of what might be termed epistemic jostling involving whose experience might be central in the talk to follow, through more unobtrusive attempts at step-by-step topic shifts of the kind first identified by Jefferson, one of whose central examples (Jefferson, 1984: 198–200) was itself *well*-prefaced. Across all these cases however, the independent "my-side" basis of the responsive talk that *well*-prefacing introduces appears to be absolutely central.

6. Discussion

Taken as a whole, the three main classes of *well*-prefaced turns outlined above represent 489 cases, or 65% of all the observations that make up the data base for this paper (see Table 3). Other smaller clusters of cases with adjunct relationships to these main classes are also discernable.

Table 3
Primary sequential positions of well-prefaced turns.

Sequential Position	N	%
Responses to polar questions	106	14
Responses to WH-questions	66	9
New topic starts	118	16
Topic/Conversation closings	107	14
'My side' perspectival shifts	92	12
Miscellaneous sub-categories	259	35
Total	748	100

The results of this study confirm older claims reaching back to at least [Wierzbicka \(1976\)](#) that connected *well*-prefacing with new departures in interaction, and with observations that associate *well*-prefacing with insufficient or disaffiliative responses to questions that go back to the same period ([Lakoff, 1973](#)).

Examining these materials as a whole, we encounter a familiar dilemma for students of turn-initial particles with multiple functions ([Hansen, 1998](#); [Fischer, 2006](#)). On the one hand, we could treat each major environment of occurrence as a homonymous subset, and argue that the alert that turn-initial *well* delivers is a distinctive one, depending on whether it is produced in response to a question, at a topical juncture, or in response to a descriptive 'my side' evaluation of some state of affairs. However, such an approach, in Fischer's words, "does not account for our intuition of the relatedness of those meanings" and it leaves their learnability and contextual coloring unexplained ([Fischer, 2006](#): 3).

However, reviewing the findings presented here, some common denominators across the cases may be discerned. The most important concerns the agentive position taken by the speakers of *well*-prefaced turns vis à vis prior turns, sequences and courses of action:

- *Well*-prefaced responses to polar questions are frequently aligned against the polarity or preference of the question, privileging the perspective of the respondent over the questioner.
- *Well*-prefaced responses to both question word questions and polar questions are frequently expanded.
- *Well*-prefaced responses to questions are frequently opposed to the terms of questions, including assumptions about whether they should be asked, or can be answered.
- *Well*-prefacing is commonly associated with topic shifts, the majority of which are self-attentive, and with topic closure.
- *Well*-prefacing is commonly associated with 'my side' responses to descriptions and evaluations in which the speaker's perspective, while frequently corroborative or supportive, becomes a new point of departure for subsequent talk.

Taken together, these results point strongly toward the conclusion that *well*-prefacing projects actions that involve moving away from the erstwhile conversational projects and/or sequential constraints of previous turns at talk. At the same time, the preface also indexes the likelihood that the upcoming turn will be primarily self-attentive, that is, expressive of, built from, and focused on the speaker's experiences, interests and projects, and only secondarily to those of interlocutors. Indeed, *well*-prefacing may be most concisely understood as a generalized alert that in the subsequent turn the current speaker's perspective or project will be privileged over that of interlocutors.

Examining the inner connections among the cases and their organization suggests a complex labyrinth of interconnections that are difficult to tease apart. Some of the primary relationships are indicated in [Fig. 1](#).

[Fig. 1](#) presents two primary clusters of *well*-prefaced usages, one associated with responsive or second position, and the other associated with actions involving forms of, broadly speaking, initiating actions. As can be seen, this figure follows [Hansen \(1998\)](#) and [Fischer \(2006\)](#) in suggesting an overlapping set of family resemblances among the functional uses for which *well*-prefaced turns are ordinarily deployed. Many of the environments and functions described here exhibit strong degrees of overlap within the empirical cases. In particular:

- There is extensive overlap between all the core characteristics of *well*-prefaced responses to questions, particularly those involving dispreference, transformation, expansion and insufficiency.
- 'My side' responses are fairly frequently associated with step-wise topic shift.

While these overlapping characteristics can sometimes complicate the task of coding the data, they simultaneously suggest a mechanism by which *well*-prefacing has developed a branching set of contexts of use that, while both procedurally coherent and learnable, are nonetheless difficult to bring under a coherent functional description.

In conclusion, it may be suggested that while earlier accounts of *well*-prefacing have tended to focus on the role of *well*-prefaced utterances in disappointing the expectations encoded in previous turns at talk, this paper provides evidence that

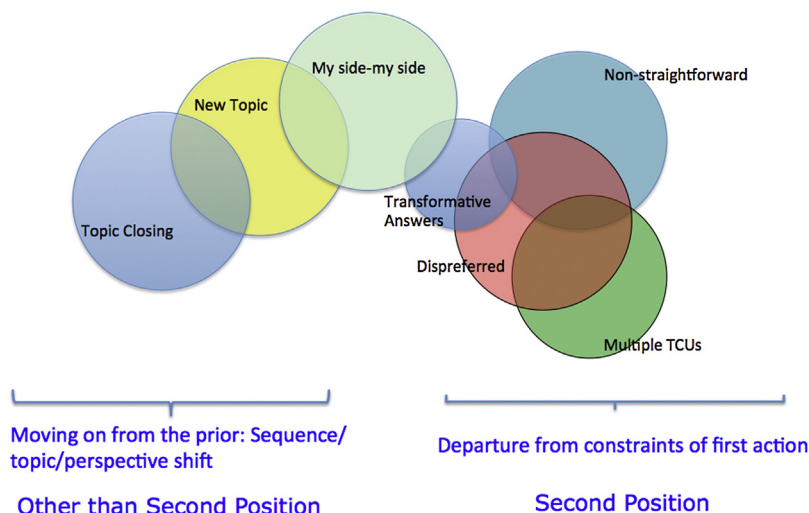


Fig. 1. Clustering of action types that are *Well*-prefaced.

a correlative focus on the agentive ‘my side’ projects of *well*-prefaced turns may yield a more complete and coherent view of how the preface functions. Looking at what the *well*-prefacing speaker is ‘aiming for’ rather than simply ‘resisting’ or ‘failing’ to do helps to shed light on observations that are otherwise quite anomalous. For example, *well*-prefaced affirmative assessments, such as “W! good honey” (Ex. 20, line 11), which are quite frequent in the data (22 cases), cannot be easily analyzed in preference terms, but can be understood (as in Ex. 20) as agentive moves toward closings. Or again, it appears that suggestions, which my-sidedly propose a course of action for the recipient (Couper-Kuhlen, 2013), are frequently prefaced with *well* – a frequency that may also be understood in ‘my side’ terms.

As many authors have noted, *well* is an exceptionally complex and elusive discourse particle. Much remains to be done. This paper has only addressed the functioning of *well* in turn-initial position, and in only some of the contexts involved. But *well* also occurs in unit-initial position in second or subsequent turn constructional units within turns. It remains to be seen whether some of the principal functions of *well* described here for the beginnings of turns extend to its role within the body of the turns themselves.

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