



## The Existence of Pragmatic Markers in Americas' Got Talent Judges' Commentaries

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### Abstract

This study attempts to explain the use of pragmatic markers in Americas' Got Talent judges' commentaries. The aims of the study are to analyze the existence of verbal and visual pragmatic markers and explain their relationship. The verbal pragmatic markers are categorized into four types based on the typology of pragmatic markers proposed by Fraser (1996). They are basic markers, commentary markers, parallel markers, and discourse markers. While the visual pragmatic markers divided into thinking face, pointing with gaze and hand movement and smile following the pragmatic function facial gestures from Bavelas & Chovil (2013). This research employed descriptive method with qualitative approach. The object of the study is judges of Americas' Got Talent season 13 which consist of Simon Cowell, Heidi Klum, Mell B, and Howie Mendel. The study revealed that the judges used the basic markers to express the main message of the comment, commentary markers to express the message contains in the comment toward the main message, parallel markers to express the complement message toward the main message and the discourse markers to express the relation between the main message and the other utterance. The visual pragmatic markers performed also signals certain message related to verbal markers. The judges performed the thinking face to signal the word search, pointing with gaze and hand movement to emphasize the messages convey in utterance and smile to signal pleasure. This research could provide an understanding of EFL learners in using pragmatic markers as a way to improve communication strategy in communication.

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## INTRODUCTION

Pragmatic marker is one of the pragmatic issues which studied continuously from a number variant perspective. Fraser (1996) defined pragmatic markers as non-propositional part of sentence meaning which can be analyzed into different types of signals. Pragmatic markers indicated by words such as *well, you know, I mean, uh, but, look, listen* and many others. Those words also labeled as pragmatic particles (Östman, 1981), discourse markers and include items such as *you know* (Schiffrin 1987), pragmatic expressions (Erman, 2001), discourse operators (Redeker, 1990).

The functions of pragmatic markers were varied, depending on how the speakers use the markers. Fraser (1996) classified the function of pragmatic markers as basic markers, commentary markers, parallel markers, and discourse markers. Sometimes the functions of pragmatic markers depend on gender and age (Erman, 2001). Clark & Fox (2002) found that words like *uh, eh, hmm, oh* function as an interjection in pragmatic markers. Therefore, the pragmatic marker is a bunch of words which have the potential to convey a certain message.

Regarding pragmatic markers function, there are several studies conducted based on pragmatic markers function proposed by Fraser (1996). Feng (2008) presented a typology of pragmatic markers in Chinese and described in a detailed way the semantic, morphological and syntactic properties of each subtype of conceptual and non-conceptual pragmatic markers in Chinese. He found that Chinese non-conceptual pragmatic markers can be grouped into contrastive, elaborative, and inferential. Muhaimi (2011) analyzed the types, functions, and contributions of pragmatic markers in building coherent in written narratives. The finding revealed that the contribution of pragmatic markers based on the types in the narrative text in accordance with the narratives principle segment.

Except in daily communication and written discourse, the use of a pragmatic marker also found in television shows. Americas' Got

Talent is one of the most western popular television shows with the highest number of viewers all over the world, include Indonesia. Kompas.com reported that the Sacred Riana on America's Got Talent 2018 is ranked as the most popular video on YouTube Indonesia with the total audience of 4,9 million only in three days released. In every performance of the show, the judges will give comments to motivate, appreciate or advice the participants. During the show, the judges often used linguistic expressions such as *you know, I mean, well, look, listen, hmm*, and many other which considered as pragmatic markers in their commentaries to signal certain messages to the listeners.

The pragmatic markers' message not only sent verbally but also implicated in audio (the speakers' tone) and visuals (facial expressions). There are so many studies investigated the relationship between verbal, audio and visual cues in representing messages. Doumont (2002) divided communication into verbal and non-verbal. Verbal refers to language (semantic and syntax) while nonverbal refers to vocal communication (tone, rate, and volume of the voice) and visual communication (pictures, gestures and facial expressions). Ekman, Friesen and Ellsworth (1972) more focused discussing visual expressions facial expressions which categorized into surprise, fear, anger, disgust, sadness, and happiness. They believed that the face provides more than one kind of signal to convey more than one kind of message. Subsequently, Bavelas and Chovil (2013) divided the facial gestures in pragmatic function into thinking face, pointing with gaze and hand movement and smile.

The relationship between verbal and visual cues studied both in written and oral discourse. In case of written discourse, Mujiyanto (2016), Pahlevi & Warsono (2018) and Pertama et al (2018) found that visual image plays an important role to encourage the readers to understand the verbal text. Dealing with oral discourse, Saputra & Sutopo (2016) analyzed the relation between verbal and visual expressions in the movie. The result of the study pointed out that verbal expression which signaled surprise,

fear, disgust, anger, happiness, and sadness are registered by changes in the forehead, eyebrows, eyelids, cheeks, nose, lips, and chin.

To sum up, following the classification of pragmatic markers by Fraser (1996) and facial gestures in pragmatic function by Bavelas and Chovil (2013), this research intended to analyze the existence of pragmatic markers in Americas Got Talent judges' commentaries to explain the relationship between verbal and visual pragmatic markers. This study is different from previous studies above since it is not only present the pragmatic markers function in signaling message verbally but also through visual cues.

**METHOD**

To achieve the formulated research question, the researcher selected the videos of Americas' Got Talent (season 13) to be analyzed. The object of the research is the judges' commentaries from the quarter-final to the final round. In collecting the data, the researcher used some documents as the research instrument. The documents were in the form of a table to analyze the commentaries to find the pragmatic markers used and visual expressions presented by the judges. After collecting the data, the researcher classifying the pragmatic markers proposed by Fraser (1996) and identifying the visual expressions based on Bavelas and Chovil (2013). This research focused on the relationship between verbal and visual pragmatic markers in signaling the message conveyed.

**FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION**

After analyzing the judges' commentaries, there are some findings related to verbal pragmatic markers. The researcher identified that there are at least 328 linguistic items of verbal pragmatic markers found in Americas' Got Talent judges' commentaries. The researcher found 11 types of verbal markers based on classification by Fraser (1996). It is identified that 62 verbal pragmatic markers belong to the basic markers, 93 cases went to the

commentary markers, 16 cases fit into parallel markers and 156 cases owned by discourse markers. There are three visual expression and language features relate to verbal expression since this study adopted the facial gestures in pragmatic function by Bavelas and Chovil (2013). From the 11 types of verbal pragmatic markers found, only four types are related to the visual expressions mention about. Visual markers found in other verbal markers were generally inconsistent. The example can be seen as follows

		
I I think what you did was actually fantastic for the show	II It is so hard and you make it look so easy	III You are one funny lady

**Figure 1.** Visual expressions performed in declarative verbal markers

The pictures above present different visual expressions on one type of verbal pragmatic marker, declarative basic marker. The picture I present the thinking face, the picture II present pointing with gaze and hand movement, and picture III present the smile visual expression. Declarative basic marker signals the speaker belief about the statement. Although the messages conveyed in the verbal markers were the same, the facial gestures performed were different so that it could influence on addressees interpretation. This situation also occurs in other verbal markers, so it was difficult to determine the visual gestures appropriately. Therefore, the researcher identified only pragmatic idiom, vocative markers and solidarity markers that associated with the visual pragmatic markers mention.

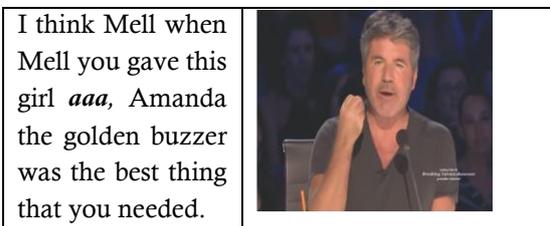
**The relation between pragmatic idiom verbal pragmatic markers and thinking face visual expressions**

It was identified that the expression of thinking face found in pragmatic idiom lexical basic markers. The thinking face performed by the speaker when he/she said the linguistic expressions of pragmatic idiom lexical basic markers.



**Figure 2.** The relation between verbal markers and thinking face markers perform by Mell B(Quarterfinal Week 1: The PAC Dancer)

The figure above shows the visual expression thinking face of Mell B when she used the verbal pragmatic marker *aaa* (pragmatic idiom) in her comment *aaa.. there few things that I think* to PAC Dancer. In this case, she liked the music but not the choreography. At the same time, she looks raised her hand with the palms facing forward to timing. She was looking straight forward with thinking face expression. The visual expressions thinking face above signaled the word search. In similar, the verbal pragmatic marker *aaa*, also conveyed the message that she was thinking about what to say next. The other example also found in Simon Cowell comment below



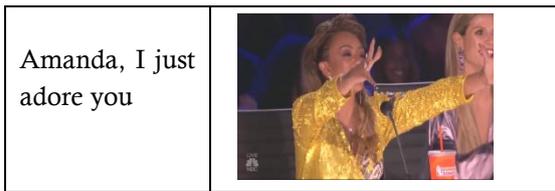
**Figure 3.** The relation between verbal marker and thinking face performed by Simon Cowell (Quarterfinal Week 1: Amanda Mena)

The expression on the figure above presents Simon Cowell’s expression when he commented on Amanda Mena performance. He said “I think Mell when Mell you gave this girl” then broke off with pragmatic idiom *aaa*, while showing his thinking face and continued with “Amanda the golden buzzer was the best thing that you needed”. He brought his right hand to face with the collected finger as an interactive word search and his eyes looking down. Similar to Mell, Simon also employed pragmatic marker *aaa*, as the word search expression. But, in this case, Simon performed his thinking face when said pragmatic idiom *aaa*, signaled the word search to repair the previous utterance.

The finding above shows that verbal markers pragmatic idiom associated with the thinking face which called as a pair of a collateral signal by Goodwin & Goodwin (1998). The pragmatic idiom like *aaa*, *umm*, *uh* and stuff like that called as a collateral signal to timing, delays, rephrasings, mistakes, repairs, intentions to speak, and the like (Clark & Fox, 2002). In similar, Bavelas and Chovil (2013) also proposed thinking face as a collateral signal because the facial gestures in which the speaker pauses, turns his or her head or looks away, often with a blank, puzzled, or thoughtful face also word search acts. Therefore, it can be said that the verbal pragmatic idiom lexical markers (*aaa*, *umm*) improve the thinking face of the speaker. The way of speaker uses verbal marker while thinking is a communication strategy to break the silence.

**The relation between vocative verbal pragmatic markers and pointing with gaze and hand movement visual expression.**

Pointing with gaze and hand movement visual expression generally found almost in every utterance. In this section the researcher found that pointing with gaze and hand movement visual expression more associated with vocative verbal markers which can be seen on the example below



**Figure 4.** The relation between verbal markers and pointing with gaze and hand movement perform by Mell B (Semifinal Week 1: Amanda Mena)

The picture above shows Mell B commented on Amanda Mena’s performance. When she said *Amanda, I just adore you*, she looked to Amanda with up head movement, raised her both hands with open finger and pointed out to Amanda with a smile. In this comment, Mell B used a vocative marker, *Amanda*. The verbal marker signals that Mell B sent the message or spoke to Amanda. While the visual marker is pointing with gaze and hand movement. The speaker pointed her gaze and hand to the addressee or Amanda. So, the way of Mell B said *Amanda* with the presented visual marker signals that she was really sent the message *I just adore you* to Amanda. The relation between vocative markers and pointing with gaze and also found in Heidi Klum comment below



**Figure 5.** The relation between verbal markers and pointing with gaze and hand performed by Heidi Klum(Semifinal: Zurcahro)

The figure above also shows the use of vocative verbal markers and pointing with gaze and hand movement visual expression performed by Heidi Klum. The verbal marker *you guys* signaled that the Heidi sent the message to the addressee (Zurcahro). The visual expression presents the speaker’ gaze and hand pointed to the addressee. She looked at the addressee and pointed with her index finger to

Zurcahro. Therefore, the relation between verbal pragmatic marker *you guys* and speaker gaze and hand movement signals that the utterance ready for Vegas was sending to the addressee (Zurcahro).

The verbal vocative marker actually uses a name, standard title, occupation name or a general noun as the linguistic expression. When a speaker uses a vocative marker in he/she utterance, it explicitly sending the message to the vocative addressed. (Fraser,1996). While the visual marker gaze and hand movement function to accompany the verbal markers in order to emphasize or draw attention. Reciprocal gaze patterns help coordinate turns and addressee feedback (Bavelas and Chovil, 2013). So, when the speaker uses the vocative marker, it should be accompanied by the speaker gaze so that the addressee considers that the message is sending to him/her.

**The relation between solidarity verbal pragmatic markers and smile visual expression**

Similar to pointing with gaze and hand movement, smile visual expression also found almost in every utterance. But, the researcher found that only linguistics expressions of solidarity verbal markers were associated with smile visual-verbal markers. The example can be seen as follows



**Figure 6.** The relation between verbal markers and smile visual markers performed by Howie Mendel (Semifinal: Courtney Hadwin, singer)

The figure above presents that Howie Mendel used solidarity verbal marker *my baby girl* which signals the speaker solidarity (proximity). When said my baby girl, Howie didn’t make any hand movement because the utterance was the end of his speech. He only

looked forward to the addressee (Courtney) and gave a smile which signals pleasure. So, the way of the speaker said *my baby girl* with smile expression signals that the speaker was happy when he said good luck to the addressee which he called *my baby girl*. The last example of solidarity verbal markers also presented as follows



**Figure 7.** The relation between verbal marker and smile by Mell B (Quarterfinal Final: Brian Joseph King)

Mell B also used the solidarity markers *my love* when she commented on Brian performance. The solidarity markers *my love* signals that Mell B was really like Brian. When saying *my love*, Mell looked at the addressee (Brian) and gave a smile which signals pleasure/happiness. Therefore, the smile performed by Mell when saying *my love* signaled that she really like Brian.

The solidarity markers signal the speaker solidarity/proximity with the addressee. The linguistics expression such as *my baby girl*, *my love*, *sweetie*, *sister* signal that the speaker felt emotionally close with the addressee. The smile in the solidarity markers also signals the speaker's pleasure. The speaker presented the smile because she/he felt close with the addressee. The only smile that expresses genuine positive emotion is the "felt" smile (Ekman, 1985). Therefore, the relation between solidarity markers and smile signals the speaker's positive emotion towards the addressee.

The explanation above shows that the visual pragmatic markers played important role in interpreting the verbal pragmatic markers. As stated by Domount (2002) that body language are less controlled by the speaker. It can be said that gestures tell the truth. This situation does not mean that the addressee could notice what

the speaker say is true or false. Since the pragmatic markers are also relevant to the EFL learners' communicative needs, the verbal pragmatic markers could help them to maintain or smooth their communication. In the other hand, the visual pragmatic markers could be the direction for the EFL learners or even the English teacher to respond or give proper feedback.

## CONCLUSION

This research answers the problem the relation between verbal pragmatic markers and visual pragmatic markers. The visual pragmatic markers and verbal pragmatic markers simultaneously not only helped the addressee to interpret the message conveyed by the speakers but also the speaker in sending the message. The verbal pragmatic markers (*aaa*) helped the speakers to break the silence when the speaker was thinking or searching words for what to say next. In the other hand, the pointing with gaze and hand movement supported the speakers to emphasize the verbal message. If the speaker used the vocative markers (*Amanda, you guys*) without looked or pointing at the addressee, the listener would be confused to whom the message was addressed. In similar, the visual expressions smile in solidarity markers helped the addressee to interpret the message. The smile performed when said the solidarity markers (*my baby girl, my love*) emphasized that the speaker really like or love the addressee.

The existence of pragmatic markers as language devices in communication are need to be observed deeply, not only in verbal and visual but also in audio (speakers' tone, volume, and pitch). Therefore, it is better for the future study to analyze the message conveyed in audio pragmatic markers so that it will provide additional knowledge regarding pragmatic markers.

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