

Discourse Markers Closing Conversations in American TV Series: A Pragma-conversational Analysis

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Abstract

Background: Discourse markers (DMs) are essential linguistic expressions used to structure discourse and manage interpersonal relationships during conversations. Their role in closing conversations, particularly in maintaining politeness and smooth interaction, has been underexplored, especially in the context of American TV series. **Aims:** This study aims to investigate the use of discourse markers in closing conversations in American TV series. Specifically, it examines the types of DMs used by American speakers to end conversations politely, focusing on their connection to closing strategies, such as making positive comments, offering excuses, and suggesting future interaction. The study also seeks to develop a model for analyzing these markers within pragma-conversational analysis. **Methods:** The research adopts a pragma-conversational analysis framework to examine the use of DMs in closing conversations. The study analyzes twenty conversations randomly selected from the first season of the American TV series *Firefly Lane*. The data is categorized into implicit and explicit DMs, and the relationships between these markers and closing strategies are explored. **Result:** The study finds that implicit DMs, such as “thank you,” “anyway,” and “great,” are associated with positive politeness strategies, while explicit DMs, such as “goodbye” and “bye,” are linked to negative politeness. The research also highlights the dominance of implicit markers in maintaining the smooth flow of conversation, especially in formal contexts. **Implication:** his study contributes to our understanding of the pragmatics of conversation closure, showing how discourse markers facilitate polite interactions. The findings suggest that the appropriate use of DMs enhances relational harmony in both media discourse and everyday communication. The research also provides insights into how media representations of conversation reflect broader social norms related to politeness and interaction.

Keywords: Discourse markers, Closing Strategies and Techniques, Pragma-conversational analysis

Introduction

In recent years, the study of discourse markers (DMs) has garnered significant attention in the field of pragmatics due to their role in structuring conversations and managing interpersonal relationships (De Janasz et al., 2009; Eisenberg et al., 2021). Discourse markers are defined as linguistic expressions that help organize discourse, indicate structural relationships, and communicate the speaker's intentions (Schiffrin, 1987; Fraser, 1999). These markers are commonly used in everyday conversations, including in the media, to signal various functions such as turn-taking, topic shifts, and, importantly, conversation closure (Wood, 2015). However, the role of DMs in closing conversations, especially in ensuring politeness and maintaining smooth interaction, remains an underexplored area in pragmatics.

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The objective of this research is to investigate the use of discourse markers in closing conversations in American TV series, particularly focusing on their relationship with strategies such as positive comments, excuses, and future interaction. By examining how these markers function in the context of conversation termination, this study aims to offer a deeper understanding of how DMs contribute to polite conversation closure in both formal and informal settings. Specifically, this research will analyze the use of implicit and explicit discourse markers in American spoken discourse, providing insights into their connection to politeness strategies and the broader implications for pragmatics and conversation analysis.

Discourse markers are often described as small words or phrases that function to organize discourse, guide the conversation, and signal various conversational intentions (Gee, 2014; Schifffrin, 1987; Schourup, 1982; Yule, 1996; Verdonik, 2022). According to Schifffrin (1987), DMs serve both structural and interpersonal functions, marking boundaries between different parts of the conversation, managing turn-taking, and signaling the speaker's attitude toward the interaction. Fraser (1999) further elaborates on this definition by suggesting that DMs are primarily procedural, rather than conceptual, markers, which means their function is to help participants interpret the message rather than contribute to its content. This perspective positions DMs as essential for managing social dynamics within conversation, contributing to the overall flow of talk.

The use of DMs in closing conversations has been recognized as a significant area of study within conversational analysis (Antaki, 2008; Reed, 2012). According to Sacks, Schegloff, and Jefferson (1974), conversation closure involves specific structural moves that signal the end of the interaction. Discourse markers are integral to this process, as they guide the interlocutors through the final stages of the exchange. The literature on DMs and conversation closure identifies various strategies, including positive comments, expressions of gratitude, and proposals for future interaction, which help close the conversation politely without abruptness (Cutting, 2008; Holmes, 1995).

Swan (2005) outlines several strategies for closing conversations, emphasizing the use of discourse markers such as “well,” “anyway,” and “so” to signal the end of an exchange. These markers not only indicate the speaker's intention to exit the conversation but also serve as politeness strategies, ensuring that the interaction ends on a positive note. The use of positive politeness strategies, such as expressing gratitude or appreciation, is common in American English, and these strategies are often employed through implicit DMs like “thank you,” “anyway,” and “great” (Brown & Levinson, 1987).

Brown and Levinson's (1987) theory of politeness has been widely applied to understand how DMs function in managing social relationships during conversation closure. According to their framework, politeness strategies can be classified into positive and negative politeness. Positive politeness involves strategies that emphasize solidarity and commonality, whereas negative politeness seeks to minimize imposition and respect autonomy. Discourse markers play a crucial role in both strategies, helping speakers navigate the delicate balance between maintaining rapport and signaling the end of an interaction (Brinton, 1996; Cook, 2004; Maschler, 2009; Sperber and Wilson, 1995).

Research by Holmes (1995) and Cutting (2008) highlights the role of DMs in facilitating positive politeness during conversation closure. For instance, DMs like “thank you,” “anyway,” and “great” are often associated with positive politeness, as they help to soften the closure and maintain social harmony. On the other hand, DMs such as “goodbye” and “bye” are linked to negative politeness, signaling a more direct and formal exit from the conversation. The use of implicit DMs, which rely on contextual cues and shared knowledge, tends to promote a more indirect and polite closure, whereas explicit DMs often indicate a more straightforward and formal end (Fraser, 1999).

While much of the research on discourse markers has focused on natural, face-to-face conversations, there has been a growing interest in how DMs are used in media discourse, particularly in TV series and films. TV series offer a rich corpus of conversational data that mirrors real-life interactions, making them an ideal context for studying discourse markers. Research by Fu et al. (2024) examined DMs in political interviews, emphasizing their role in managing conversational flow and politeness. However, few studies have specifically focused on the use of DMs in the context of conversation closure within TV series, particularly American TV shows like *Firefly Lane*.

Studies on media discourse suggest that DMs are employed in TV series to structure interactions and maintain the flow of conversation, with particular emphasis on maintaining politeness and signaling conversation closure (Huang, 2007; Wood, 2015). In American TV series, DMs often serve to close conversations in ways that reflect cultural norms of politeness. The use of DMs such as “goodbye,” “take care,” and “see you” mirrors the conventions of social interactions in everyday life, offering a reflection of how politeness strategies are employed in scripted exchanges.

Although there has been considerable research on the role of DMs in managing conversations and politeness, the specific function of DMs in closing conversations within TV series remains underexplored. Much of the existing literature focuses on face-to-face communication or interviews, with limited attention to how DMs function in fictional discourse, particularly in American TV series. Furthermore, while previous studies have examined the use of positive and negative politeness strategies in conversation closure, there is a lack of research on the interplay between implicit and explicit DMs in this context. This study seeks to fill these gaps by focusing on the pragmatic functions of DMs in closing conversations in *Firefly Lane*, providing insights into how these markers facilitate polite exits in media discourse.

Based on these considerations, this study addresses the following research questions:

1. What are the most frequently used discourse markers for closing conversations in American TV series?
2. How do these discourse markers relate to closing strategies such as positive comments, excuses, and future interaction?
3. What is the role of implicit and explicit discourse markers in facilitating polite conversation closure?

The answers to these questions will not only contribute to the field of pragmatics but also

offer insights into how TV series mirror and shape real-world conversational practices. The study's findings will provide a framework for understanding the strategic use of DMs in maintaining politeness and the smooth flow of communication in both media and everyday interactions.

Methods

This study employs a qualitative research design, specifically using a pragma-conversational analysis framework, to investigate the role of discourse markers (DMs) in closing conversations within the context of American TV series. By analyzing conversations from *Firefly Lane* (Season 1), the study explores the use of implicit and explicit DMs in relation to conversation closure strategies such as positive comments, excuses, and future interaction. The chosen methodological approach enables an in-depth examination of how discourse markers function in real-world discourse and provides a comprehensive model for analyzing their role in politeness and interaction management.

Data Collection

The data for this study were collected from *Firefly Lane*, a popular American TV series that portrays conversations in both formal and informal settings. A purposive sampling technique was used to select twenty conversation exchanges from the first season of the series. These conversations were selected to represent a variety of contexts, ranging from intimate, casual exchanges to more formal, professional dialogues. The selected conversations were analyzed for the presence of discourse markers used to close the conversation politely, with a focus on markers that indicated a transition toward conversation closure or the finalization of the interaction.

Data Analysis

The analysis is based on the pragma-conversational framework, which merges elements of pragmatics and conversational analysis. The framework allows for the identification of discourse markers and their relationship to conversation-closing strategies. As proposed by Coppock (2017), the study adopted a model that categorizes closing strategies into four types: positive comment, excuse (or *reason*), *imperative to end*, and *future interaction*. These strategies are further divided into techniques such as *giving phatic talk*, *offering well wishes*, *providing a justification*, and *indicating a desire for future communication*.

Discourse markers were categorized into two types: implicit and explicit. Implicit discourse markers, such as “thank you,” “anyway,” and “great,” are those that are not directly associated with the closure of the conversation but rather imply it through contextual cues and shared understanding. Explicit discourse markers, like “goodbye” and “bye,” clearly signal the end of the interaction and are associated with a more direct and formal closing.

Each conversation exchange was transcribed, and the discourse markers within those exchanges were identified. These markers were then mapped to the strategies and techniques outlined in the theoretical model. The relationships between DMs, conversation-closing strategies, and politeness mechanisms were analyzed to determine how speakers use these markers to manage conversational flow and maintain politeness during the closure phase.

Coding and Categorization

To ensure the reliability and consistency of the analysis, all discourse markers were coded according to their type (implicit or explicit) and the closing strategy they corresponded to (positive comment, excuse, imperative to end, or future interaction). The coding process was conducted in two stages:

1. **Stage One** involved identifying all discourse markers used in the selected conversations. This was done manually by reading through each transcript and marking the markers as either implicit or explicit.
2. **Stage Two** involved categorizing the discourse markers into specific closing strategies. This stage utilized the adapted model of discourse markers and closing strategies developed by Coppock (2017), with additional strategies suggested by this study, such as the *future interaction* strategy.

Each DM was assigned to one of the four strategies based on the context in which it appeared. For example, DMs such as “anyway” or “so” were categorized under the *positive comment* strategy, while “goodbye” and “see you” were placed under the *imperative to end* strategy.

Results

A. Statistical Analysis

The results of this study are presented in the form of figures, which are organized in alignment with the components of the adapted eclectic model. The figures are arranged in the following order: strategies, techniques, discourse markers, and the mechanisms of conversation closure.

Strategies of Closing Conversations

The data in this study were analyzed with respect to four primary strategies used in closing conversations: positive comments, excuses, future interactions, and the imperative to end. These findings are visually represented in Figure 1 below, which further illustrates the proportional use of each strategy.

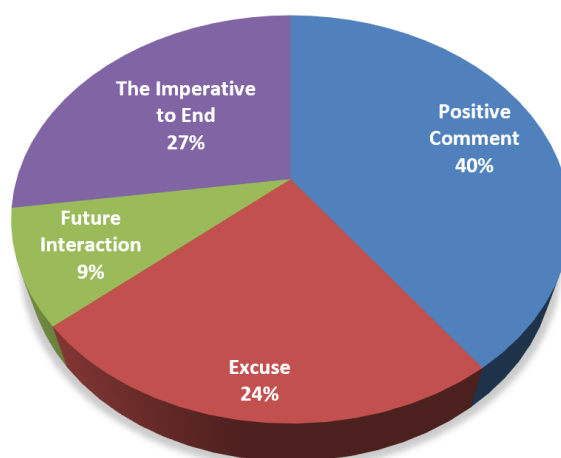


Figure 1. Strategies of Closing Conversations.

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Figure 1 shows the frequency of strategies used for closing conversation which include: positive comment (40%), excuse (24%), imperative to end (27%), and future interaction (9%). Notably, the positive comment strategy is the most prevalent, suggesting that it is the most common approach for closing conversations in American discourse. This strategy, which includes expressions such as compliments, acknowledgments, or appreciation, is often used to ensure that the conversation ends on a polite and positive note. It reflects the cultural tendency to maintain rapport and express goodwill during the closing phase of an interaction.

The excuse strategy, which accounts for 24% of the occurrences, is commonly employed to justify the termination of the conversation. This strategy is typically associated with a polite explanation or reason for ending the exchange, such as “I need to get going” or “I have to work.” The imperative to end strategy follows closely, with 27% of the data, indicating its frequent use in signaling the end of a conversation. This strategy tends to be more direct, often using phrases like “goodbye” or “see you,” and is typically the final action in a conversation, often preceded by the other strategies.

The least common strategy identified is future interaction, accounting for just 9% of the occurrences. This strategy involves suggesting or implying a future meeting or continuation of the conversation, such as “let’s catch up soon” or “I’ll follow up with you.” The relatively low percentage of its use may be attributed to the challenge of interpreting it as a clear indicator of conversation closure. While it signals an intention to reconnect, it is less definitive in ending the current exchange compared to the other strategies, which are more explicit in their function of signaling the conversation’s conclusion.

The patterns observed in these strategies highlight the nuanced ways in which American speakers manage conversation closure, striking a balance between politeness, clarity, and future engagement.

Techniques of Closing Conversations

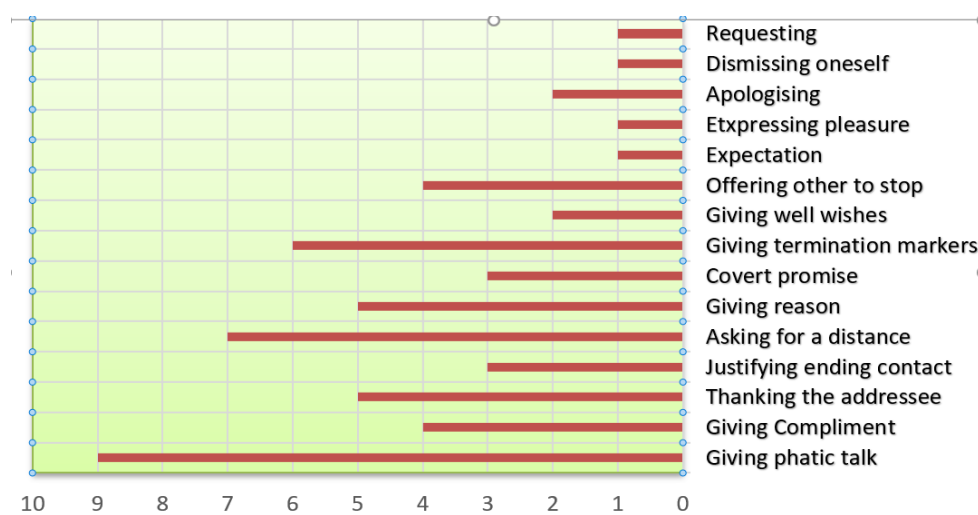


Figure 2. Techniques of Closing Conversations.

Figure 2 describe the distribution of conversation-closing techniques which include *giving phatic talk* (16.67%), *asking for a distance* (12.96%), *giving termination markers* (11.11%), *giving*

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reason (9.26%), *thanking the addressee* (9.26%), *offering others to stop* (7.41%), *giving compliments* (7.41%), *justifying ending contact* (5.56%), *covert promise* (5.56%), *giving well wishes* (3.70%), *apologizing* (3.70%), *dismissing oneself* (1.85%), *expressing pleasure* (1.85%), *expecting* (1.85%), and *requesting* (1.85%).

Among these, *giving phatic talk* is the most prevalent technique, accounting for 16.67% of the occurrences. This technique is often associated with indirectness, which is a key feature of positive politeness strategies. It allows the speaker to maintain the flow of conversation while signaling the impending end without explicitly closing it. Phatic expressions like “you know” or “I see” function as social lubricants, creating a smooth transition toward the conclusion of an exchange without disrupting the politeness of the interaction.

The next most common techniques, *asking for a distance* (12.96%) and *giving termination markers* (11.11%), are associated with negative politeness. These strategies are designed to respect the autonomy and personal space of the hearer, thereby minimizing the imposition of closing the conversation. Asking for a distance, such as “I have to go now,” creates a polite separation, while termination markers like “goodbye” or “see you” signal the end more explicitly, acknowledging the necessity of concluding the conversation while maintaining respect for the other party’s autonomy.

Other techniques, such as *dismissing oneself*, *expressing pleasure*, *expecting*, and *requesting*, each account for 1.85%. These techniques are less frequent but still play a role in conversation closure. *Dismissing oneself* typically involves a direct statement like “I should leave now,” which is often used when the speaker needs to exit without further elaboration. *Expressing pleasure* or *expecting* often comes in the form of phrases such as “I’ve enjoyed this” or “Let’s do this again,” signaling a desire for future interaction or gratitude, even in the face of the conversation's conclusion.

The overall distribution of these techniques underscores a preference for both indirect and direct strategies in conversation closure, reflecting the balance between positive and negative politeness. Techniques related to indirectness and positive politeness dominate, while more explicit closure strategies, although essential, are used less frequently.

Discourse Markers of Closing Conversations

The analysis of discourse markers (DMs) used to close conversations reveals a strong preference for implicit discourse markers (IDMs), which account for 91% of the total occurrences, compared to explicit discourse markers (EDMs), which make up only 9%. This significant difference highlights the tendency for American speakers to use more indirect forms of politeness when closing conversations. IDMs are typically associated with positive politeness strategies, which aim to preserve social harmony and avoid imposition. In contrast, EDMs align with negative politeness strategies, often signaling a more direct and formal conclusion to the conversation.

The most frequent IDMs identified in this study include expressions like “that’s great,” “of course,” “thank you,” “anyway,” “great,” and “yeah.” These markers are commonly used in both formal and informal contexts, helping to maintain the flow of conversation while signaling that the speaker is preparing to exit in a polite manner. On the other hand, EDMs such as “goodbye,” “bye,”

“all right,” “okay,” “all the best,” and “well, I better book it” are typically more direct and are closely linked to the formal closure of conversations, especially in situations where the speaker wishes to end the conversation explicitly.

Interestingly, IDMs are more commonly found in formal American discourse, reflecting the cultural preference for indirectness and politeness in more structured social settings. However, both IDMs and EDMs are used interchangeably in informal conversations, where the speaker may feel more at ease using either indirect or direct markers depending on the context and the relationship with the interlocutor.

The Mechanism of Closing Conversations

The sequence of conversational phases leading to the closure of a conversation in American TV series is not rigid, but certain phases dominate the closing process. The ‘signal the end’ phase emerges as the most prevalent, accounting for 89.5% of the instances observed. This phase typically marks the initial stage of closing a conversation, often facilitated by DMs such as “Well,” “Anyway,” and “So.” These markers are used to signal that the speaker is transitioning toward the end of the conversation while maintaining a smooth conversational flow. The use of these DMs reflects the cultural preference for gradual and indirect conversation closures, ensuring that the speaker does not abruptly cut off the interaction.

The subsequent phase, *future connection*, is used in 52.6% of the cases. This phase reflects the speaker’s intention to continue the relationship or interaction later, often with phrases like “Let’s catch up soon” or “I’ll follow up with you next week.” This strategy highlights the importance of maintaining social bonds, even as the conversation concludes. The inclusion of a potential future interaction softens the closure, indicating that the end of the conversation does not necessarily signal the end of the relationship.

Following this, the ‘goodbye rituals’ and ‘summarize the interaction’ phases both account for 26.3% of the occurrences. The ‘goodbye rituals’ phase typically includes expressions like “Goodbye,” “Take care,” or “See you,” which mark a clear and explicit termination of the conversation. The ‘summarize the interaction’ phase involves restating key points or acknowledging the pleasant nature of the conversation, such as “Well, that was fun,” which helps to end the interaction on a positive note while reaffirming the social bond.

The least common phrases are ‘apologizing’ and ‘giving compliments,’ each representing 5.3% of the cases. These phases are more context-dependent and may be employed when the conversation has been abruptly interrupted or when the speaker wishes to express regret for the termination of the interaction. Compliments, on the other hand, may be used to ensure that the conversation ends on a positive note, especially when the speaker wants to acknowledge the other person’s contributions.

B. Descriptive analysis

Situation 1

General Context:

Kate and Tully go for a job interview. This is a face-to-face, formal conversation aimed at

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persuading the receptionist.

Dialogue:

- Kate* : Kate Mularkey for Kimber Watts.
Receptionist : Your appointment was at three o'clock.
Kate : Yeah. I had a small emergency.
Receptionist : You'll have to wait until the other applicants are done.
Kate : Yeah, that's fine. That's great. Thank you so much. I'll wait.

Analysis:

1. "Yeah, that's fine." (*Implicit / Positive Comment / Giving Phatic Talk*)
2. "That's great." (*Implicit / Positive Comment / Giving Compliment*)
3. "Thank you so much." (*Implicit / Positive Comment / Thanking the Addressee*)
4. "I'll wait." (*Implicit / Excuse / Justifying Ending Contact*)

In this exchange, Kate uses implicit discourse markers (IDMs) to facilitate a polite and smooth closure of the conversation. She begins with the 'positive comment' strategy, which is the most dominant in this interaction. The techniques within this strategy include *giving phatic talk*, *giving a compliment*, and *thanking the addressee*. First, Kate uses "yeah" to signal her agreement, which serves as a mild response to the receptionist's statement, showing understanding without demanding further interaction. The phrase "that's great" serves as a compliment, acknowledging not only the receptionist's message but also reinforcing a positive social interaction. The final part of this technique is "thank you so much," where Kate expresses gratitude, reinforcing politeness and appreciation for the receptionist's assistance.

These DMs are considered part of a positive politeness strategy, as they are designed to maintain the conversational flow and ensure that the interaction concludes on a friendly and cooperative note. By using these markers, Kate signals that she is content with the situation and that she respects the ongoing process, which is crucial in a formal setting like an interview. The polite tone is maintained throughout, making the conversation appear smooth and harmonious.

After these positive interactions, Kate transitions into the 'excuse' strategy by saying "I'll wait." This statement serves to justify her continued presence in the situation and gives a polite reason for the conversation's continuation. The phrase "I'll wait" also subtly signals the end of the conversation by providing a clear, neutral reason for why she is not immediately leaving. This is a form of positive politeness because it softens the act of closing the conversation with a reasonable explanation, thereby avoiding the abruptness that might arise from simply stating the need to leave.

The Mechanism of Closing the Conversation

In this conversation, the mechanism for closing the dialogue follows a sequence of four distinct stages:

1. Agreement with the Interlocutor (Signal the End Phase):
Kate begins by affirming the receptionist's statement with "yeah, that's fine"—a mild expression that signals her understanding and acceptance of the situation, creating a sense of

closure without being overly direct.

2. Giving a Compliment:

Next, Kate uses “that’s great” to offer a positive remark, reinforcing a cordial and respectful tone. Compliments in this context contribute to maintaining politeness and social harmony.

3. Thanking the Addressee (Expressing Gratitude Phase):

“Thank you so much” serves to express appreciation, an essential component of positive politeness. This step is crucial in reinforcing the social bond and ensuring that the conversation ends on a respectful note.

4. Giving Justification (Excuse Strategy):

Finally, Kate justifies the continuation of the conversation with “I’ll wait.” This technique not only signals the speaker’s willingness to stay in the current interaction but also offers a socially acceptable reason for the temporary pause in the conversation, ensuring that the conversation closure is not perceived as abrupt or disrespectful.

By following these steps, Kate effectively closes the conversation while adhering to politeness strategies that align with both positive politeness (through compliments and expressions of gratitude) and negative politeness (through justifying the need to end the conversation). This sequence of actions ensures that the conversation ends in a way that minimizes imposition and maintains a cooperative atmosphere.

Situation 2

General Context:

An intimate conversation between Max and Tully in a friendly, informal environment.

Dialogue:

- Tully* : “The only thing I like after midnight is a box of warm, fresh Krispy Kreme doughnuts. Got any on you?”
- Max* : “You know, I usually do, but, um, I mean, I could just go get some, come right back.” [BEEPS. Elevator door opens.]
- Tully* : “Goodbye, Max.”
- Max* : “Tully Hart. You have a good night.” [CLATTERS.]

Analysis:

1. “Goodbye, Max.” (*Explicit / Imperative to End Strategy / 'Giving Termination Marker' Technique*)
2. “You have a good night.” (*Explicit / Imperative to End Strategy / 'Giving Well Wishes' Technique*)

In this exchange, both speakers employ the imperative to end strategy, signaling the conclusion of the conversation in an explicit and direct manner. Tully's use of “Goodbye, Max” is a clear termination marker that directly signals the closure of the conversation. Given the informal and intimate context, this phrase is used to end the interaction definitively. The use of Max's name also serves as a form of mitigation, softening the directness of the closure and reinforcing the personal connection between the two speakers. This strategy, while direct, maintains politeness by ensuring that the conversation ends with a clear yet socially acceptable farewell.

Max follows with a similar approach, but with a slightly less direct technique—“You have

a good night.” This phrase functions as a well-wishing expression, which is commonly used in informal and friendly interactions to wish the other person well as they part ways. While still a part of the imperative to end strategy, the use of well-wishing in this case is a softer, more socially considerate way to bring the conversation to a close. It conveys warmth and care, which is typical in intimate relationships or casual exchanges among friends.

The Mechanism of Closing the Conversation

The mechanism of conversation closure in this scenario involves several stages:

1. Signal the End Phase:

Max signals the transition toward closure by pressing the elevator button. This physical action complements the conversational markers and indicates his readiness to end the exchange. In this context, the signal the end phase is initiated by the speaker’s physical behavior, which aligns with the verbal markers used to signal closure.

2. Goodbye Ritual

Tully explicitly uses the DM “Goodbye” to signal the end of the conversation, marking the goodbye ritual phase. This is a standard practice in informal settings, particularly among close acquaintances or friends, where the closing is more relaxed but still marked by the use of a familiar and expected phrase.

3. Well Wishes:

Max concludes with “You have a good night,” offering a well-wishing technique. This not only serves as a polite closure but also reinforces the warmth and camaraderie between the two speakers. Well wishes are often used in intimate and friendly conversations, contributing to the overall positive tone of the interaction as it ends.

In sum, the conversation closure follows a clear pattern where both speakers utilize explicit discourse markers to ensure the conversation is politely ended. The use of imperative to end strategies, along with the addition of well-wishing, indicates a smooth, friendly closure. This structure reflects the cultural tendency to provide closure in a polite yet straightforward manner in informal, intimate contexts.

Situation 3

General Context:

A formal interaction with a shop assistant.

Dialogue:

Tully: : Oh, I fell down, sir. I’m a klutz..
CASHIER: : Is there something you want to tell me, Kate Mularkey?
KATE : No, sir. She’s a big klutz. Big.
Tully : All right. Bye, then.
Tully: : Bye

Analysis:

1. “All right” (*Explicit / Imperative to End Strategy / 'Asking for a Distance' Technique*)
2. “Bye, then.” (*Explicit / Imperative to End Strategy / 'Giving Termination Marker' Technique*)
3. “Bye.” (*Explicit / Imperative to End Strategy / 'Giving Termination Marker' Technique*)

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In this exchange, Tully and Kate use the imperative to end strategy to bring the conversation to a close. Tully's use of "All right" signals a transition towards the end of the conversation. This is categorized as the 'asking for a distance' technique, which is an implicit way of establishing boundaries between the speakers. By saying "All right", Tully gently signals that the conversation has reached its natural conclusion and establishes a polite emotional distance by signaling her intention to exit the interaction.

Following this, Tully directly closes the conversation with "Bye, then." This phrase serves as an explicit termination marker, clearly indicating that the conversation is over. The addition of "then" here functions to soften the directness of "Bye", maintaining the politeness while still conveying the finality of the conversation. The informal nature of the dialogue is reflected in the use of the less formal "Bye", which aligns with the casual tone of the interaction.

Similarly, Kate follows suit by using "Bye" as well, a simple yet clear termination marker. This use of the imperative to end the strategy is consistent with the earlier markers and ensures that the conversation ends in a socially acceptable and polite manner.

The Mechanism of Closing the Conversation

The mechanism for closing this conversation follows a straightforward sequence:

1. Signal the End Phase:
Tully's use of "All right" marks the beginning of the conversation's conclusion, signaling a shift in the interaction.
2. Goodbye Ritual:
Tully uses "Bye, then", establishing the goodbye ritual phase, which is typical in informal interactions.
3. Termination Marker:
Finally, the speakers' "Bye" provides closure, confirming that the conversation has ended.

This sequence is typical of informal settings, where speakers use simple, direct discourse markers to end a conversation while maintaining politeness. The shift from 'asking for a distance' to 'giving termination markers' reflects the need to close the conversation swiftly yet politely in a casual environment.

Situation 4

General Context:

A tense atmosphere at home with participants Cloud (mother), Kate (daughter), and Tully.

Dialogue:

Cloud (Beau Garrett) : Tully, you should have called..
Tully Hart : I'm really busy.
Cloud (Beau Garrett) : Too busy for mimosas? Hogwash.
Tully Hart : Well, I am.
Kate Mularkey : Well, I'm gonna go do my homework.

Analysis:

In this interaction, Tully uses the discourse marker (DM) "well" to signal the beginning of the conversation's closure. "Well" functions as a typical signal to end phase, indicating a shift in

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the conversation. It serves to prepare the interlocutors for a transition, particularly when the speaker is signaling that they are about to leave the conversation. This DM is associated with the ‘excuse’ strategy, where the speaker provides a reason for needing to exit the conversation, which in this case is “I’m gonna go do my homework.”

By using “Well” to begin the closure and following it with “I’m gonna go do my homework,” Tully engages in positive politeness by offering an excuse. This softens the impact of leaving the conversation and minimizes the face-threatening act (FTA) of abruptly ending the exchange, allowing Tully to exit without seeming rude or dismissive. The reason she gives is socially acceptable in this context, which helps to preserve the social harmony, especially in a family setting where the interaction may have some underlying tension.

Although Tully does not use a ritual goodbye or final check (e.g., “goodbye” or “okay?”), the excuse strategy helps conclude the conversation quickly, especially in a situation where there is existing tension. The ‘reason-giving’ technique here is a way to politely disengage without drawing attention to the awkwardness of the situation.

The Mechanism of Closing the Conversation

The closure mechanism in this scenario is slightly more abrupt, likely due to the tense atmosphere:

1. Signal the End Phase:
Tully begins with “Well”, indicating her intent to end the conversation.
2. Excuse / Justification:
Tully then provides the excuse “I’m gonna go do my homework,” which justifies the end of the conversation. By offering a socially acceptable reason, Tully avoids any direct confrontation.
3. No Goodbye Ritual:
Tully does not use a formal goodbye ritual, reflecting the tension and the need for a quick exit.
4. Final Check / Closure:
The conversation is concluded swiftly, without the need for further exchange, which suggests that Tully is seeking autonomy in this tense situation.

In this context, the ‘excuse’ strategy is effective as a polite method to quickly close the conversation, thereby avoiding further escalation of tension. The absence of a formal farewell indicates the desire to end the interaction with minimal emotional investment, which aligns with the awkwardness of the exchange.

Situation 5

General Context:

A friendly interchange with a sad tone, where Tully confesses something to Kate.

Dialogue:

Kate : But it's not your fault.
Tully : It doesn't matter. Okay? We can't tell anybody. I shouldn't have even told you.
Now it has to be our secret, okay?

Kate : Okay
Tully : Okay, well, I better book it.
Kate : Yeah, me too. It's late.

Analysis:

1. “Okay.” (*Explicit / Imperative to End Strategy / 'Asking for a Distance' Technique*)
2. “Well, I better book it.” (*Implicit / Future Interaction Strategy / 'Covert Promise' Technique*)
3. “Yeah, me too. It's late.” (*Implicit / Excuse Strategy / 'Giving Reason' Technique*)

In this exchange, the closure process begins with Tully using the explicit discourse marker (EDM) “Okay.” This phrase directly signals her intention to exit the conversation and indicates the ‘imperative to end’ strategy. By using “Okay,” Tully establishes a boundary, signaling that the conversation is coming to an end. This phrase can be interpreted as a form of ‘asking for a distance,’ a technique that marks a polite disengagement while maintaining the conversational flow. The use of “Okay” here functions to provide closure without abruptly cutting the conversation off, allowing for a smoother transition to the next phase.

Tully then follows with “Well, I better book it.” This statement is an implicit ‘future interaction’ strategy, particularly using the ‘covert promise’ technique. The phrase “I better book it” suggests that Tully needs to leave, but it is framed as a reason to leave rather than an explicit farewell. This technique hints at future engagement without directly committing to a specific plan, which in this case implies that the interaction may continue at a later time, but not immediately. The use of “well” further softens the tone, ensuring the statement doesn’t sound too abrupt or final. This can be understood as Tully seeking autonomy while still leaving room for possible future interaction.

Kate responds with “Yeah, me too. It's late.” Here, she uses an implicit discourse marker (IDM)—“yeah”—to express agreement with Tully’s need to end the conversation. This is part of the ‘excuse’ strategy, with Kate providing a socially acceptable reason for her own departure, saying “It's late.” This is a typical positive politeness strategy because it gives a reason for ending the conversation, which mitigates any potential face-threatening act (FTA). By using “It's late” as a reason, Kate shows respect for the other person's time and, in this case, uses it as a way to ensure the conversation ends politely while maintaining social rapport.

The Mechanism of Closing the Conversation

The closing mechanism in this situation follows a clear, though informal, progression:

1. Signal the End Phase:
Tully initiates the end of the conversation with the DM “Okay”, marking the transition to the closure phase. This is a typical strategy used in informal interactions to ease into the conclusion without abruptly halting the exchange.
2. Covert Promise (Future Interaction):
Tully uses “I better book it” as an excuse, suggesting the need to leave but leaving open the possibility of future engagement. This is an implicit strategy that softens the exit while acknowledging the emotional and practical context.
3. Reason (Excuse Strategy):

Kate follows with “It’s late”, which provides a clear, socially acceptable reason for ending the conversation. This technique falls under positive politeness because it addresses the need for closure while maintaining respect and minimizing any discomfort or abruptness.

In conclusion, the use of both explicit and implicit discourse markers in this conversation highlights the speakers' attempts to maintain politeness while signaling the end of the interaction. The sequence of signal the end, covert promise, and excuse strategies demonstrates how American speakers balance directness and politeness when closing conversations in informal, friendly contexts. The technique of providing a reason for ending the conversation, coupled with the use of well-wishing, allows the speakers to part ways amicably, reflecting the social norms of positive politeness.

Discussion

The results of this study provide valuable insights into the role of discourse markers (DMs) in closing conversations in American TV series, specifically *Firefly Lane* (Season 1). By analyzing the use of implicit and explicit discourse markers, this study sheds light on the various strategies and techniques employed by American speakers to politely end conversations. The findings reveal that implicit discourse markers, such as “thank you,” “anyway,” and “great,” are primarily associated with positive politeness strategies, whereas explicit discourse markers, such as “goodbye,” “bye,” and “okay,” align with negative politeness strategies. These results contribute to our understanding of how DMs function within conversation-closing mechanisms and offer a model for analyzing politeness in spoken discourse.

The results indicate that American speakers in the selected TV series prefer using implicit discourse markers to close conversations, with the *positive comment* strategy being the most frequently employed. This is consistent with previous research on politeness in discourse, which suggests that speakers often aim to preserve social harmony by using indirect, positive strategies in everyday interactions (Brown & Levinson, 1987). DMs like “thank you” and “anyway” facilitate the smooth continuation of conversation before it reaches closure, allowing speakers to exit without abruptly ending the interaction. Explicit DMs, on the other hand, such as “goodbye” and “bye,” serve as clear markers of termination and are more direct, aligning with negative politeness strategies designed to minimize the imposition of the conversation's end (Fraser, 1999).

Additionally, the results show that both implicit and explicit DMs can be used in tandem, with speakers often starting with a positive comment or excuse before moving to a more explicit marker like “goodbye.” This progression from indirect to direct markers suggests that American speakers use a layered approach to conversation closure, balancing politeness and directness. This finding aligns with Sacks, Schegloff, and Jefferson’s (1974) theory of conversation closure, which highlights that speakers may employ various strategies in succession to ensure that the conversation is ended smoothly and without creating tension.

The findings of this study corroborate previous research on the role of DMs in maintaining conversational flow and politeness. Schiffrin (1987) and Fraser (1999) have both emphasized the importance of DMs in structuring discourse, with particular attention to their role in managing conversational transitions. The current study extends these findings by focusing specifically on the use of DMs in the context of conversation closure, an area that has been less explored in previous studies. The study also aligns with the work of Holmes (1995), who found that speakers tend to

use positive politeness strategies, including indirect DMs, to soften the end of an interaction. However, this study provides new insights by categorizing DMs into implicit and explicit types and relating them directly to politeness strategies, which is a unique contribution to the literature.

Furthermore, the study confirms the significance of *future interaction* as a strategy for closing conversations, a finding that is consistent with previous studies that highlight the importance of future-oriented statements in maintaining social bonds (Wood, 2015). The use of phrases like “I’ll follow up with you next week” or “let’s catch up soon” suggests that speakers view the conversation as a part of an ongoing relationship, which reinforces the social nature of discourse markers in polite conversation closure.

The findings of this study have several implications for the field of pragmatics and media discourse analysis. Firstly, the identification of common discourse markers and strategies in American TV series contributes to our understanding of how conversational politeness is constructed in fictional media. This is important because TV series often reflect and shape real-life communication practices, and understanding the linguistic strategies used in these contexts can provide insights into broader social norms and cultural expectations regarding politeness.

Moreover, the study’s findings have practical implications for language learning and teaching. Given the prominence of English in global communication, understanding how DMs function in conversation closure can help non-native English speakers develop more effective communication strategies (Ruiz-Garrido, et.al, 2010). By incorporating the strategies identified in this study into language education, instructors can help students navigate the subtleties of conversational endings, enabling them to participate in social interactions with greater confidence and politeness.

Despite its contributions, this study has several limitations. Firstly, the sample size was limited to twenty conversations from a single TV series, which may not be representative of all American TV series or of conversations in real-life interactions. Future studies could expand the sample size and include data from different genres of TV series to provide a more comprehensive understanding of discourse marker usage in conversation closure across various contexts.

Secondly, while the study focused on the use of DMs in English, it did not explore potential cross-linguistic variations in the use of discourse markers. Studies comparing the use of DMs in different languages or cultures could provide valuable insights into how politeness strategies vary across linguistic and cultural contexts. Additionally, the study primarily focused on the pragmatic functions of DMs, without exploring the social or cultural factors that might influence their use, such as power dynamics or the relationship between speakers. Future research could investigate these factors to provide a more comprehensive understanding of the role of discourse markers in communication.

Future research could build on this study by exploring the use of discourse markers in conversation closure in other media forms, such as films, radio shows, or podcasts. Comparing the use of DMs in scripted versus unscripted formats could yield interesting insights into how the formality or informality of the medium influences discourse strategies. Additionally, longitudinal studies that track the use of DMs in conversation closure across multiple seasons of a TV series or in real-life conversations could provide further understanding of how these markers evolve over time.

Conclusion

This study examined the role of discourse markers (DMs) in closing conversations in *Firefly Lane* (Season 1), revealing that implicit DMs (e.g., “thank you,” “anyway”) are primarily associated with positive politeness strategies, while explicit DMs (e.g., “goodbye,” “bye”) correspond to negative politeness. These findings underscore the significance of DMs in sustaining conversational flow and regulating politeness during conversation closure, reflecting broader social norms in American English. The implications suggest that DMs play a crucial role in both maintaining politeness and signaling the end of interactions, providing practical insights for language learners to improve their communication skills. However, the study's limitations, such as the small sample size and focus on a single TV series, call for caution in generalizing the findings. Future research could address these limitations by expanding the sample size, incorporating a variety of TV series, and exploring cross-linguistic and cross-cultural variations in DM use. Additionally, investigating the integration of non-verbal cues with DMs in conversation closure could further enrich our understanding of the pragmatics of communication.

Originality Statement

The authors declare that this article is their own work and to the best of their knowledge it contains no materials previously published or written by another person, or substantial proportions of material which have been accepted for publication in any other published materials, except where due acknowledgment is made in the article. Any contribution made to the research by others, with whom the authors have worked, is explicitly acknowledged in the article.

Conflict of Interest Statement

The authors declare that this article was conducted in the absence of any commercial or financial relationships that could be construed as a potential conflict of interest.

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