

The main functions of linguistic hedging in conversational discourse: a corpus-based study

Vlasyan Gayane¹, Petrova Elena²

¹Chelyabinsk State University, VlasyanGR@yandex.ru, ²Chelyabinsk State University

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For human beings, conversational discourse is the primary source of interaction and a natural way of meeting social needs in a society. One of the common forms of conversational discourse is everyday dialogue. It constitutes the bulk of most people's daily linguistic activity and refers to the main driving force of various linguistic changes.

Conversational discourse refers to the cooperative work of interlocutors. Within this kind of interaction, the listener ongoingly interprets the speaker's communicative intentions expected to be responded to by the former. In conversational discourse, dialogue is a complex and multifaceted phenomenon. All interactants pursue their own communicative goals to achieve effective and successful communication. In the context of everyday conversation, successful interaction is achieved through a pragmatic strategy such as linguistic hedging.

Hedging is an essential element of any communication that allows the speaker to formulate non-categorical statements, get the interlocutor's support, and, thus, avoid conflicts. Hedged statements help to maintain relations between interlocutors making their speech evasive, fuzzy, polite, and euphemistic. All hedges are divided into two types: the first type of hedges affects the semantics, while the second one affects the pragmatics (Prince, Frader, & Bosk. 1982).

This study focuses on the fundamental functions of linguistic hedging that are conditioned by the specificity of conversational discourse. Spoken dialogues extracted from the British National Corpus (BNC) served as research data. Based on collected dialogues, the main functions of hedges in conversational discourse were defined and described by utilizing qualitative and descriptive methods.

The preliminary results of data analysis show that in conversational discourse hedging is used (1) to modify the truth degree of a proposition, (2) mitigate a categorical statement, (3) attenuate the speaker's responsibility for the statement, and (4) save the face of the speaker and/or the listener. Thus, the first function focuses on altering the semantic content of a statement, while the other three functions are centered on changing the pragmatics of a statement. Moreover, hedging refers to an intently used strategy that allows interlocutors to maintain and harmonize their communication.

References

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