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HEDGING STRATEGIES IN THE AMERICAN TALK SHOW DISCOURSE: TYPES OF HEDGES

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Abstract. Linguistic hedging is considered as one of the fundamental elements in any communication that makes speech polite, evasive, and euphemistic. In talk show discourse, the host and talk show guests interact and strive to achieve effective and successful communication. Hedging helps to maintain relations between talk show participants, to minimize or avoid conflicts, and get support and mutual understanding of communicants. The communicative effect achieved through hedged statements depends on the used type of hedges. There are two main types of hedges: the first one affects the semantics, while the other affects the pragmatics. The paper focuses on the most frequent type of hedges used in the American talk show discourse and its principal functions. The research data were collected from the scripts of popular American talk show episodes. The most frequently used types of hedges were identified and described by using classification, descriptive and quantitative methods. The preliminary results of data analysis show that both types are frequently used, however, hedges that change the pragmatics of statements are prevailing in the American talk show discourse. Hedging is an extensively used strategy that helps talk show participants harmonize communication and achieve their communicative goals.

Keywords: hedging, indirect communication, American talk show discourse, shields, approximators

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Научная статья

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СТРАТЕГИИ ХЕДЖИРОВАНИЯ В АМЕРИКАНСКОМ ДИСКУРСЕ ТОК-ШОУ: ТИПЫ ХЕДЖЕЙ

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Аннотация. Лингвистическое хеджирование рассматривается как один из фундаментальных элементов любого общения, который делает речь вежливой, уклончивой и эвфемистичной. В дискурсе ток-шоу ведущий и гости ток-шоу взаимодействуют и стремятся к достижению эффективной и успешной коммуникации. Хеджирование помогает поддерживать отношения между участниками ток-шоу, минимизировать или избегать конфликтов, а также получать поддержку и взаимопонимание коммуникантов. Коммуникативный эффект, достигаемый с помощью хеджированных заявлений, зависит от используемого типа хеджирования. Существует два основных типа хеджирования: первый влияет на семантику, в то время как другой влияет на прагматику. В статье основное внимание уделяется наиболее частому типу хеджирования, используемому в дискурсе американского ток-шоу, и его основным функциям.

Ключевые слова: хеджирование, косвенная коммуникация, дискурс американского ток-шоу, щиты, аппроксиматоры

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Introduction

Today, a talk show refers to one of the most modern and popular genres on television. Talk show discourse is an interactive process of verbal communication between the host, the guest, and the audience. Talk show discourse is an intermediate element between institutional and conversational discourses. The characteristic feature of such interaction is the dialogical nature of communication. One of the ways to maintain a dialogue and manage it effectively is to use indirect language.

The development of indirect communication process is determined by the peculiar nature of human thought, i.e. to speak in a vague, unclear, and non-categorical manner. Concurrently, indirect communication is directly related to such a linguistic phenomenon as hedging. In order to facilitate better understanding of hedging, this study aims to identify the most frequent type of hedges used in the American talk show discourse.

Section 2 deals with several approaches to defining the phenomenon of linguistic hedging. Section 3 describes E. Prince's classification of hedging, while sections 4 and 5 focus on the research methods and obtained results, correspondingly. In the final sections, the discussion and conclusion are provided.

Literature review

Although the term hedging was not introduced until the middle of the 1970s, such researchers as L. Zadeh (1965) and U. Weinreich (1966) had already carried out several studies devoted to this phenomenon.

In 1965, American mathematician L. Zadeh described some aspects of his Fuzzy Set Theory. In the light of his theory, L. Zadeh (1965) introduced the concept of a linguistic variable applied to the formalization of natural languages. Linguistic variables allow adequately conveying the approximate verbal representation of things and phenomena in case an exact deterministic description is not provided. Moreover, many fuzzy categories described linguistically are often not less informative than an exact description. The author explains the application of his theory with the examples of wild life objects. According to him, it is clear that the class of animals includes horses, cats, dogs, etc., but it excludes such objects as plants, rocks, etc. However, for example, bacteria and starfish are among

those objects that ambiguously relate to the class of animals [15. P. 338-339].

Subsequently, U. Weinreich (1966) was the first to describe a phenomenon that he called a metalinguistic operator. He argues that the presence of metalinguistic operators is typical for all languages, and they function as the indicators of an exact or vague designatum interpretation. In English, there are such metalinguistic operators as *true*, *like*, *so-called*, *strictly speaking*, etc.

In the 1970s, G. Lakoff (1973) was the first to introduce the term hedging in linguistics and defined this phenomenon. His concept was built on the basis of L. Zadeh's Fuzzy Set Theory. As G. Lakoff stated in his paper, hedges are “words whose meaning implicitly implies fuzziness — words whose job is to make things fuzzier or less fuzzy” [6. P. 471]. Initially, G. Lakoff regarded hedging from the point of view of semantics, and he attributed the following lexical units to hedges: *sort of*, *kind of*, *loosely speaking*, *more or less*, *roughly*, *pretty (much)*, *relatively*, *somewhat*, *rather*, *mostly*, *technically*, *strictly speaking*, *essentially*, *in essence*, *basically*, etc. [6. P. 472].

Later, linguistic hedging started to be considered from the pragmatic point of view. P. Brown & S. Levinson (2000) described a phenomenon of linguistic hedging with knowledge of their theory of politeness and defined hedge as follows:

... a particle, word or phrase that modifies the degree of membership of a predicate or a noun phrase in a set, [and] says of that membership that it is partial or true only in certain respects, or that it is more true and complete than perhaps might be expected [2. P. 145].

The research of linguistic hedging is an integration of such interrelated disciplines as psycholinguistics, rhetoric, pragmatics, etc. This integration indicates the presence of modern scientific approaches to the study of this phenomenon. Thus, the existing fundamental studies [4; 5; 6; 9] serve as a starting point for further profound research. The latest research of hedging focuses on the study of hedges as vague category markers [1; 7], hedging realization in academic, scientific, media, and political discourses [3; 8; 10; 12], the interconnection between hedges and the politeness strategies [13], and others.

Therefore, the term hedging encompasses complex studies in such fields as philosophy, logic, semantics,

and pragmatics. In pragmatics, the notion of hedging is directly related to the phenomena of vagueness, uncertainty, mitigation, and politeness.

Types of hedges

According to E. Prince (1982), all hedges are classified into two types, i.e. shields and approximators. The type of approximators is the propositional hedges that affect the truth value of the proposition, while shields refer to the speech act hedges that affect the degree of the speaker's commitment [11. P. 3].

Approximators are subdivided into adaptors (1) and rounders (2). Adaptors refer to a class or category of a notion that is not equal to its prototype (a little bit, sort of, some, somewhat, almost describable as, etc.). Rounders indicate the range in which a notion is a round-off representation of some data or figures (approximately, something around, about, etc. [11. P. 6-11].

1) Ann baked a cake, but it was a little bit undercooked.

2) He bought about 1.5 kilograms of apricots.

Both of these subtypes occur in the speech acts, where the speaker is trying to match the factual situation with the prototypical one. Hedges used, in such cases, illustrate that the factual situation is close to the modified utterance, but it is not accurate.

Shields in their turn are subdivided into plausibility hedges (1) and attribution hedges (2). Plausibility hedges are defined as such words or phrases that indicate the truth degree of a succeeding proposition from the speaker's point of view (I don't see that, I think, as far as I can tell, I take it, right now, I don't see that, I believe, probably, etc.). Attribution hedges include words or phrases that demonstrate the speaker's indirect relation to the proposition (at least to X's knowledge,

according to her estimates, presumably, etc.) [Prince, Frader, & Bosk, 1982, p. 11-19].

1) I think that this dress is made of cotton.

2) According to the weather forecast, next weekend will be sunny and warm.

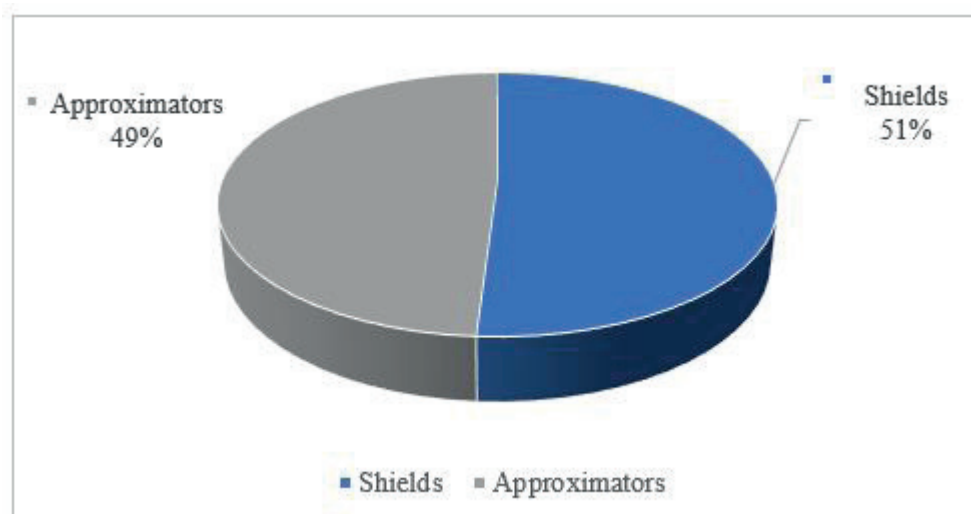
Therefore, within this taxonomy, one type of hedges affects the semantics, while the other type of hedges affects the pragmatics. Unlike approximators, shields do not change the propositional content of an utterance.

Methods

The research data were collected from scripts of "The Tonight Show with Jimmy Fallon", American talk show episodes posted on YouTube. The classification method was used to distribute hedges into types according to their pragmatic features. Moreover, the contextual method was employed to interpret the usage of linguistic hedging within this type of discourse. The quantitative method was used to determine the most frequent type of hedges present in the American talk show discourse.

Findings

The study showed that hedging in the American talk show discourse is viewed one of the fundamental strategies used to maintain and create harmonious communication. Moreover, linguistic hedging is resorted to by both the host and the talk show guests. The analysis of primary data discovered that shields are the most frequently used in the American talk show. However, there is an insignificant variation in the frequency of use of shields and approximations, namely 49 % and 51 % correspondingly (see Diagram 1).



Diagr. 1. The proportion of the types of hedges in the American talk show discourse

It was also identified that plausibility hedges (96 %) are considered as the dominant subtype among the shields. In the talk show, communicants ubiquitously use such hedges as I think, I believe, I would like to, etc. Consider the following dialogue:

(1) — Do you have superstitions? I think you do.

— The only one I really have, to be honest, is when I run a marathon. I'll always have a new pair of socks for each marathon. (The Tonight Show with Jimmy Fallon, 05.03.2021)

The example above demonstrates that plausibility hedges indicate the truth degree of the succeeding proposition from the speaker's point of view rather than from an absolute perspective. Hedges I think, to be honest modify the pragmatics of the utterance that helps the speaker to express his opinion indirectly and subjectively.

Both rounders and adaptors are extensively used in the context of approximators, however, adaptors (76 %) predominate in the American talk show discourse. Adaptors include the following highly frequent hedges: kind of, pretty, just, sort of, etc.:

(2) — You really are.

— You know me. I'm way more, like, reserved and mellow and kind of, you know, turtle-shelly a little bit. (The tonight show with Jimmy Fallon, 13.02.2021)

The example shows that the presence of adaptors affects the semantics of the utterance. In this case, the speaker is able to manage dialogue and correlate the actual situation with the prototypical one, using hedges like, kind of, and a little bit in his speech. In this case, the hedges do not convey the speaker's commitment to the proposition, but they transform the propositional content of the utterance.

Discussion

The study revealed that shields and approximators are widely used in the American talk show discourse. In the given type of discourse, communicators intentionally use hedges to achieve effective and successful communication by changing the pragmatic and semantic content of the utterances. Hence, hedging

is a linguistic strategy that can influence the outcome of communication.

The communication within talk show discourse is considered as one of the types of spoken discourse. Therefore, this research confirms the previously obtained results of hedging use in the English spoken discourse. Thus, the study shows that linguistic hedging is a fundamental device that transforms communication in a more polite and safe way within conversational discourse.

This study of hedging usage in the American talk show discourse helps to expand the existing knowledge concerning the functions of this phenomenon and its communicative and pragmatic features. However, this paper does not focus on linguistic hedging from a cross-cultural perspective, although it may provide a well-founded basis for conducting further contrastive research. Moreover, the prospect of further research is to identify and describe the essential functions performed by linguistic hedging in the American talk-show discourse. In addition, such a study implies identifying the most frequent function performed by hedging in this type of discourse.

Conclusion

In the American talk show discourse, communicants most commonly use shields, among which plausibility hedges are predominant. While both adaptors and rounders are used among the approximators, interlocutors most often regulate their communication with the help of adaptors.

The choice of a certain hedge type is determined by the function that it performs. Linguistic hedging is a powerful pragmatic tool, allowing speakers to influence their interlocutor's behavior. The research showed that hedges utilized in the American talk show discourse can affect the truth degree of the proposition conveyed, mitigate a categorical utterance, and protect the propositional content of an utterance. Moreover, hedges make things fuzzy, can soften the degrees of the speaker's commitment to the statement, and assert common ground.

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