

On Pragmatic Functions of Hedges in Interpersonal Communication based on TV Interview Programs

-- Taking the Interview Program - “Artistic Life” as an Example

Zhengkui Wang

School of Basic Teaching Department, Southwest Petroleum University, Nanchong, 637001, China

Abstract

Hedges, as a symbolic feature of natural language, are widely used in interpersonal communication and have many pragmatic functions. Interpersonal communication refers to the process that an individual transmits some information to other individuals through certain language, text or body movements, expressions and other means of expression. As a typical form of interactive communication between hosts and guests, the use of hedges in TV interview programs is also very common. Then we can see the pragmatic function of hedges in interpersonal communication from TV interview programs. This paper will take “Artistic Life” interview program as the corpus to discuss the pragmatic function of hedges in interpersonal communication.

Keywords

Hedges; Interpersonal Communication; Pragmatic Functions; Interview Program.

1. Introduction

People have an inherent preference for clearly understood languages. However, in actual communication, language will inevitably become vague to a certain extent, which is the basic feature of natural language. In order to achieve different pragmatic functions, people will deliberately say some ambiguous words. Pragmatics generally believe that the appropriate use of hedges can help speakers make the discourse more objective and credible, and better achieve communicative purposes. On the other hand, it can also make their own discourse more polite and appropriate. In addition, it can also release responsibility for themselves or save face. Interpersonal communication refers to the process that an individual transmits some information to other individuals through certain language, text or body movements, expressions and other means of expression. As a typical form of interactive communication between hosts and guests, the use of hedges in TV interview programs is also very common, so we can understand the pragmatic function of hedges in interpersonal communication from TV interview programs. This paper intends to use interview program --“Artistic Life” as corpus to discuss the pragmatic function of hedges in interpersonal communication.

2. Definition and Classification of Hedges

2.1. Definition of Hedges

Hedges were first proposed by Lakoff, a famous American cognitive linguist. In 1972, he pointed out in his article entitled “A Study in Meaning Criteria and the Logic of Fuzzy Concepts” that hedges are some words that “make things fuzzy or less fuzzy [1].” He also pointed out that “hedges may interact with the appropriateness of discourse and the rules of dialogue.” In 1973, he formally put forward the problem of conceptual ambiguity in natural language in “hedges

and semantic standards” and analyzed hedges from the perspective of semantics [2]. Later, Brown and Levinson defined fuzzy restrictions as: “Segmentation, words, or phrases under certain conditions that can partially change the true value of the topic [3].” After that, the linguistic circle has studied hedges from the perspectives of semantics and pragmatics, but there has been no consensus on the classification of hedges. Among them, Prince and his colleagues (Prince et al., 1982) have made a classification of hedges of relatively high degree of recognition according to whether hedges can change the truth condition of discourse.

2.2. Classification of Hedges

Linguists have studied hedges from different perspectives, but there is no consensus on the classification of hedges. Among them, Prince and his colleagues classify hedges according to whether hedges can change the truth condition of discourse or whether they can change the original meaning of discourse structure. According to this criterion, hedges can be divided into two categories: approximators and shields [4].

2.2.1. Approximators

Approximators can change the condition of truth or the original meaning of discourse structure. Based on the change of the degree or scope of the original discourse meaning, the variable hedges can be divided into the degree of change (adaptors) and the scope of change (rounders). Among them, adaptors are suitable for fuzzy hedges with semantic differences. It can vaguely express the actual situation is close to the typical situation in the degree. It can make some ambiguous and imprecise words closer to the reality and avoid being too absolute. Some representatives of adaptors are -- “sort of, kind of, somewhat, quite, really, almost, to some extent, some, very, almost, basically, almost, generally, quite and so on.” For example, “to some extent, I agree with you.” Interestingly, adaptors can not only make the original meaning more vague, but also make the original meaning more clear and accurate. For example, the sentence “I have a height of 170cm” is more accurate, if adding “basically” into “I have a height of 170cm” I become more vague ; the concept of “good grades” is vague, but adding “very” to “I have good grades” is much less vague. Rounders (scope change hedges) refer to hedges that limit the scope of meaning change in the original discourse. Some representatives of Rounders are -- “more or less, around, about, roughly, nearly and so on”. For example, nearly half of the students received scholarships. These rounders can make the listener understand within a certain range, and also make the discourse more objective.

2.2.2. Shields (Moderation Hedges)

As the name implies, the Shields does not change the meaning of the original discourse. It makes the original discourse tone tend to be detente by indicating that the discourse comes from the speaker or the third party’s views on the discourse. According to the speaker or the third party, the shields are further divided into two types: direct mitigation (Plausibility Shields) and indirect mitigation (Attribution Shields). Plausibility Shields indicates the speaker's subjective conjecture or suspicion of something. The typical Plausibility Shields types are “I think, I believe, I think, probably, as far as I am concerned, as far as I know, in my opinion, I’m afraid to wait,” such as: “as far as I know, many people get good results in this exam.” It can be seen that the Plausibility Shields significantly eases the tone and promotes the harmony of the relationship between the two sides of the discourse.

The Attribution Shields are different from the Plausibility Shields. It refers to the third party’s view to indirectly express the speaker’s attitude. Typical Attribution Shields are -- “it is said that, As is known to all, according to somebody.” For example, “As is known to all, Xiao Wang is a practical and capable young man”. Attribution Shields are more objective and more sufficient than Plausibility Shields, so Attribution Shields can not only moderate tone, but also enhance the objectivity of discourse. Overall, the classification of hedges can be represented in the following table:

Table 1. The classification of hedges

Hedges			
Approximators		Shields	
Adaptors	Rounders	Plausibility Shields	Attribution Shields
To avoid absoluteness, and increase appropriateness, accuracy.	To determine the scope of understanding, and increase objectivity.	To relax tone, and maintain harmony.	To relax tone, and improve objectivity.

3. The Pragmatic Functions of Hedges in Interpersonal Communication from the Perspective of “Artistic Life”

3.1. Hedges Can Maintain Cooperation

American philosopher Grice believes that in all language communication activities, in order to achieve specific goals, there is a tacit understanding between the speaker and the hearer, a principle that both sides should abide by, namely, the principle of cooperation in conversation. According to his cooperation principle, the two sides of the conversation should abide by four maxims: the maxim of quantity, the maxim of quality, the maxim of relation and the maxim of manner. However, in actual communication, people do not fully comply with the principle of cooperation. They will deliberately violate certain maxims to achieve compliance with other maxims, and hedges just conform to this feature. The use of hedges seem to violate certain maxims, but in essence, it is to comply with other maxims at a deeper level, so as to achieve compliance with the principle of cooperation.

(1) Zhu Jun: I know you are now producing “Film Legend,” How many sets have been made?

Cui Yongyuan: More than 100 sets have been completed.

(2) Zhu Jun : I have been an artist for more than four years, and interviewed more than 200 guests...

In these two dialogues, Cui Yongyuan uses “more than one hundred sets” to answer Zhu Jun’s question, and Zhu Jun says “more than two hundred” which are both rounders. According to the above analysis, rounders determine the scope of understanding and increase objectivity. However, this seems to be contrary to the quantitative maxim in the cooperative principle, i.e., what he said does not reach the required level of detail. However, in essence, when Cui Yongyuan does not know the exact amount of his “Film Legends” sets and Zhu Jun does not know the exact number of his interviewees, they both use “more than 100 sets” and “more than 200 sets” as rounders to comply with the quality maxim in the cooperative principle, that is, do not say what he thinks lacks sufficient basis or is not true. If there is not rounder - “more than” to limit the scope of understanding, the principle of cooperation will not be observed. Therefore, hedges can make people abide by the principle of cooperation, maintain the communication between the two sides, and maintain the cooperative relationship between the two sides of the conversation.

3.2. Hedges Can Make the Discourse more Polite and Save the Face of Both Sides

Leech found that people also violate some of the maxims of the cooperative principle for politeness in communication, and then the politeness principle was proposed to make up for the deficiency of the cooperative principle. Politeness principle widely exists in different cultures and languages, which restricts people's language and coordinates the relationship between people. Therefore, politeness is an important factor that can not be ignored in order to achieve good communication effect. In communication, hedges are an important means to abide by the politeness principle. hedges can make the discourse more relaxed, euphemistic

and appropriate, and often reflect the strategic, modest and approval criteria in the politeness principle. Brown and Levinson (1978) proposed the Face-saving Theory (FST), and face refers to the “public self-image” that every social member intends to earn for himself in front of the public. Brown and Levinson believed that many speech acts are essentially threatening face, and politeness is to reduce the threat posed to face by some communicative acts. In social interaction, we should leave more face to each other and earn more face for ourselves. That is to say, the use of politeness strategies can preserve the face of both communicators and meet people’s face needs, and hedges can just play such a role.

(1) Zhu Jun: Your son takes after his mother, so he should be very handsome.

Chen Kaige : He is quite handsome.

(2) Zhu Jun: Why don’t you say you want to be a good brother ? You think she has gone away...

Chen Kun: Now I have many good sisters and many people who helped me. I would be a good brother. Previously I was immature, so I have no chance to be a good younger brother of my sister, but I can become more people's good brother.

In the first dialogue, Chen Kaige' s answer --“Quite handsome” uses the adaptor - “Quite”, and in the second dialogue, Chen Kun’s answer also uses the adaptor -“Quite, More,” which makes the answer more appropriate and polite, reflecting the strategic criteria and approval criteria in the politeness principle.

Journalist: In many people’s opinion... You have been very successful. How do you evaluate yourself ?

Zhu Jun: I don’t think so. I cannot say that I have achieved a complete success...

In the third dialogue, reporters use “in the eyes of many people.” This attribution shield is used to ease tone, enhance objectivity, in line with the principles of politeness strategy guidelines, while Zhu Jun also use “I think” - this plausibility shields to express their humility, reflecting the principles of politeness strategy guidelines, humility and approval criteria.

3.3. Hedges Can Weaken the Power of Speech, Make Discourse Polite and Smooth, and be Used for Self-protection

Hedges, especially shields, can ease mood, maintain harmony, and weaken the power of speech, making the discourse polite and smooth, and Self-protection.

(1) Zhu Jun : Can your personality be understood as outwardly and warm inwardly?

Zhang Yimou : That’s how others judge me, I think it might be true. In the film, I can...

In this dialogue, Zhu uses an attribution shield“can be understood as” to weaken the power of speech and ease the tone, making the problem difficult to be denied. Zhang Yimou also used “others judge me” this attribution shield and “I think” this plausibility shield to ease tone, a good response to Zhu Jun ' s ' cold and hot ' evaluation, a good protection of their own.

(2) Zhu Jun: I heard that there was an art worker who you criticized him for drinking too much liquors. Are you so mean with praise?

Zhang Yimou: No, what you have heard is baseless.

Zhu Jun: It is said that there is a source.

In this dialogue, Zhu jun use “I heard” as an attribution shield to ease the tone, weakened the criticism of Zhang Yimou’s verbal power, making his evaluation of Zhang Yimou’s stingy praise more indirect and relaxed, better protecting themselves, avoiding mistakes in the evaluation of others. It can be seen from the above analysis that hedges can weaken the power of speech, make the discourse more stable and smooth, avoid disputes to some extent, and protect themselves effectively.

4. Conclusion

From the above analysis of the pragmatic function of hedges combined with ' artistic life ' dialogue, it can be seen that hedges have various pragmatic functions in interpersonal communication. In addition to improving the objectivity and credibility of the discourse, hedges can maintain the cooperative relationship between the two sides of the conversation. Secondly, hedges can make the discourse more polite and save the face of the two sides of the conversation. Finally, hedges can weaken the power of speech, make the discourse stable and comprehensive, and be used for Self-protection. However, hedges should also be used in the appropriate context. When they should not be vague, they should not be vague. We should avoid the abuse of hedges and use hedges appropriately, which can better achieve communicative intentions and improve communicative efficiency.

References

- [1] G. Lakoff: Hedges: A Study in Meaning Criteria and the Logic of Fuzzy Concepts, Journal of Philosophical Logic, (1972) No.8, p.183-228.
- [2] G. Lakoff: "Hedges and Meaning Criteria" In P. McDavid et al(eds.). Lexicography in English (New York Academy of Sciences, America 1973).
- [3] P. Brown, S. Levinson: Politeness: Some Universals in Language Use (Cambridge University Press, England 1987).
- [4] Z. R. He: Hedges and Linguistic Communication. Journal of Foreign Languages, (1985) No.5, P.29-33.