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A Pragmatic Investigation of Hedging in Selected English and Kurdish Parliament Debates

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Abstract

While there has been ample research that has addressed hedging in academic discourse and everyday conversation; studies that investigate hedges in relation to political debates are tremendously few. The purpose of the study is to pragmatically investigate hedging devices in political discourse to find out how hedging devices are manipulated in Salar Mahmoud's answers to different questions raised by the researchers in an interview concerning the economic crises in Kurdistan Regional Government on the one hand and a UK Parliament debate banning Donald Trump from Britain on the other hand. The study reveals that hedging pragmatically can be seen in the observance of the maxims presented by Paul Grice(1989) by being not ambiguous, being relevant, saying only what the speaker believes to be true and giving enough information adequate to the questions raised.

Introduction

1. Pragmatics: An over view

According to Levinson (1983:5-27) the definition of pragmatics that describes it as "the study of language is hardly sufficient to fully understand the scope of this linguistic discipline. He continues to discuss various possible definitions that would include all of the study questions of pragmatics.

One possible definition of pragmatics is " the study of, implicature, presupposition, speech acts, and aspects of discourse structure" even though this list-based definition has its drawback such as the fact that it does not provide any criteria for the inclusion or

exclusion of other phenomena that might be possible to study by pragmatics.

Pragmatics is concerned with the study of meaning as communicated by the speaker and interpreted by the listener or reader. It has more to do with the analysis of what people mean by their speech than what the single words mean in those utterances Yule (1996:3). Cruse (2006:136) claims that most linguists draw a distinction within the study of meaning between semantics and pragmatics, but there are several ways of drawing the distinction. The main ones are:

1. Semantics deals with truth conditional aspects of meaning; pragmatics deals with non-truth conditional aspects.
2. Semantics deals with context-independent aspects of meaning; pragmatics deals with aspects where context must be taken into account.
3. Semantics deals with conventional aspects of meaning, that is, where there is an established connection between form and meaning. Pragmatics deals with aspects of meaning that are not looked up but which are worked out on particular occasions of use.
4. Semantics is concerned with the description of meanings; pragmatics deals with the uses made of those meanings. This is sometimes expressed by saying that semantics takes a formal approach and pragmatics a functional approach.
5. Semantics is the study of the “toolkit” for meaning: knowledge encoded in the vocabulary of the language and in its patterns for building more elaborate meanings, up to the level of sentence meanings. Pragmatics is concerned with the use of these tools in meaningful communication. Pragmatics is about the interaction of semantic knowledge with our knowledge of the world, taking into account contexts of use Griffiths(2006:1).

On can conclude that pragmatics studies the meaning in context. That is; the meaning of the linguistic items as it is used according to situation. The hidden meaning in somebody’s uttering usually depends on the implicit knowledge belonged by hearers, the relationship between the speaker and the hearers, and the situation when the utterance occurred.

2. Grice's Cooperative Principle (1975)

In his William James Lectures at Harvard University in 1967, H. Paul Grice posited a general set of rules contributors to ordinary conversation were generally expected to follow. He named it the Cooperative Principle (CP), and formulated it as follows:

Make your conversational contribution such as is required, at the stage at which it occurs, by the accepted purpose or direction of the talk exchange in which you are engaged (Grice, 1989: 26).

At first glance, the Cooperative Principle may appear an idealistic representation of actual human communication. After all, as Grice himself has learned from his detractors, many believe “... even in the talk-exchanges of civilized people browbeating disputation and conversational sharp practices are far too common to be offenses against the fundamental dictates of conversational practice.” Further, even if one discounts the tone of an exchange, “much of our talk exchange is too haphazard to be directed toward an end cooperative or otherwise” (Grice, 1989: 369).

However, Grice never intended his use of the word ‘cooperation’ to indicate an ideal view of communication. Rather, Grice was trying to describe how it happens that – despite the haphazard or even agonistic nature of much ordinary human communication – most discourse participants are quite capable of making themselves understood and capable of understanding most others in the course of their daily business.

Grice identified the Cooperative Principle as a ‘super principle’ or a ‘supreme principle’ (1989: 368–369) that he generalized from four conversational ‘maxims’ he claimed discourse participants ordinarily follow. With a nod to Kant, Grice identifies the maxims as:

1. Quantity (give as much information as is required, and no more than is required)
2. Quality (do not say what is false or that for which you lack adequate evidence)
3. Relation (be relevant)
4. Manner (be clear, be orderly, and avoid ambiguity Barber and Stainton (2010 : 100) .

2.1 Failures to Fulfill Maxims

Grice describes four ways in which maxims may go unfulfilled in ordinary conversation. The first three ways are fairly straight

forward. One might violate or infringe a maxim. This infringement is often done with the intention of misleading; for example, one might say, 'Patricia was with a man last night' as a way of making Patricia's routine dinner out with her husband seem clandestine.

One might opt out, making it clear that one refuses to cooperate in a conversation for some reason; for example, one may be legally bound not to provide information one has. Or, one might encounter a clash of maxims, facing the choice of violating one maxim or another. For example, one may not be able to give all of the information required (quantity) because one does not have adequate evidence for the information (quality) (Jacob L. Mey, 1998: 153)

Most interesting is the final possibility for the nonfulfillment of a maxim: flouting or exploiting a maxim for the purpose of implicating information (implicature). This case is the one in which even an apparently uncooperative response illustrates discursive or linguistic cooperation Barber and Stainton (2010 : 101).

2.2 Problems with Grice's Theory

Thomas (1995:87-92) shows that there are some problems associated with Grice's theory, the main problems are:

1-Sometimes an utterance may have more than one possible interpretation. Grice did not discuss the possibility that more than one possible implicature might be intended and if it were the case how do we know which is the intended one?

2-There are different types of non-observance, such as 'flouting, violating, infringing, opting out and suspending a maxim'. Grice does not explain how an interlocutor is supposed to distinguish between them.

For example:

(1) John: you can't refuse just to come and have dinner with me.

I don't want to refuse. Said Jane.

John was unable to determine the status of Jane's utterance, whether it is an intentional

infringement or a deliberate flouting of a maxim, if it is a flouting so what is she implying?

3-Grice's four maxims are different in nature. The maxim of quality is the most straightforward; its operation is generally yes/no. The maxims of quantity and manner can be observed to a greater or lesser degree.

4-Some times the maxims overlap and are difficult to distinguish from one another. The maxims of quantity and relation, in the example below seem to overlap:

(2) Polonius: what do you read my lord?

Hamlet: words, words, words.

Hamlet gives less information than required by the situation and also fails to observe Polonius's goal, therefore; flouts both the maxim of quantity on one hand and the maxim of relation on the other hand.

5-There should be mechanisms for calculating implicature as Grice argued, but it is not always clear how this operates.

3. An overview of Hedging

Hedging is a rhetorical strategy. By including a particular term, choosing a particular structure, or imposing a specific prosodic form on the utterance, the speaker signals a lack of a full commitment either to the full category membership of a term or expression in the utterance or to the intended illocutionary force of the utterance For example, in (3) The pool has sort of an L-shaped design.(4) Peter's house is almost 100 feet wide. Which are instances of content mitigation; there is an attenuation of the commitment to the pool having a true L-shaped design and to Peter's house being 100 feet in width. Analogously, in (5) I think that I must ask you to leave now. (6) It seems that no one wants to go. Which are instances of force mitigation, the speaker indicates that there is not a full commitment to requesting the hearer to leave, both by virtue of the *I think* as well as the modal *must* Fraser (2007 : 201-202) .A hedge has later been defined by Brawn and Levinson (1978: 145) as "a particle, word or phrase that modifies the

degree of membership of a predicate or a noun phrase in a set; it 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". Hedges are thus linguistic devices – lexical items, syntactic structures, prosodic features – which are used to bring about hedging, though almost none of these are used solely in this capacity. According to Boncea (2009:8-15) Hedges therefore, are most commonly realized under the form of: - Modal auxiliaries - Lexical-modal verbs - Adjectival, adverbial and nominal phrases - Approximates of degree, quantity, frequency and time - Discourse epistemic phrases - If clauses - Negative constructions - Compound and multiple hedging's noun phrases can also be proven to have hedging powers.

Modal auxiliaries: may, might, can, could, should, would, must, particularly in their epistemic senses. Modal verbs reflect the speaker's attitude and help them express ideas indirectly, which makes modal verbs perfect candidates as hedging devices. Moreover, they allow speakers to be fuzzy about an informational content, avoid face threatening acts and formulate illocutions so as not to offend the hearer.

Lexical verbs with modal meanings, mainly the speech act verbs used to perform acts like evaluating, assuming or doubting rather than merely describing: the epistemic seem and appear, also believe, assume, suggest, estimate, tend, think, argue, indicate, propose, speculate, suppose etc. When used epistemically as hedging elements these verbs express the speaker's strong belief in the truth of the utterance or, on the contrary, the speaker's unwillingness to vouch for understanding the utterance as more than a personal opinion.

Adjectival, adverbial and nominal modal phrases:

- (modal) adjectives have hedging power when they are used epistemically to diminish the strength of the nouns they determine and

they usually form a predicate with the verb to be: (It is) possible, probable, un/likely.

-Modal nouns render epistemic certainty or, on the contrary, doubt: assumption, claim, doubt, possibility, probability, estimate, suggestion, and likelihood.

-Modal adverbs. They fulfill an epistemic function similar to that of modal verbs, and, though they are not predicative in English, some of them can form predicates on their own in Romanian: perhaps, possibly, probably, and practically, likely, presumably, virtually, apparently. Approximates of degree, quantity, frequency and time can occur under the form of adjectives and/or adverbs the purpose of which is to weaken the meaning of the speech part they accompany: somewhat, somehow, a lot, much, little, about, approximately, roughly, hardly, scarcely etc. Such hedges are employed when the exact amount is not known or is irrelevant, when the speaker wishes to render fuzziness about quantity in the cases when undecided numbers or amounts are used etc.

-Discourse epistemic or evidential phrases. They are used to mark the source of knowledge as indirect or hearsay (People say, It has been said that), the author's doubt and hesitation regarding the truth of what follows (I dare say, To tell the truth, I have a notion) or, on the contrary, a high degree of certainty and commitment about the utterance (Upon my word, To our knowledge, To be sure, I can tell you, It is our view that, We feel that).

-If clauses render hypothetical meaning, so they imply uncertainty along with any other epistemic markers which may occur inside an "If clause" to enhance the speaker's distrust in the truth of the utterance. If clauses are the preferred option in rendering hypothetical meaning with actions which are deemed possible only if certain conditions are met. The reason why they play an important role as hedges is that speakers can use "if clauses" to invoke potential barriers in the way of their future or past actions which could help them disclaim responsibility for the absoluteness of

their statements. Typical conditional clauses may contain explicit or implicit conditions: If true..., If anything..., unless..., should one...etc

4. The Adopted Model

The model adopted in this study is based on Grice's conversational maxims:

The maxim of quantity:

1. Make your contribution as informative as required;

2. Do not make your contribution more informative than required

Do not say what you believe to be false;

Do not say that for which you lack adequate evidence.

3. The maxim of relation: Make your contribution relevant .

4. The maxim of manner Be perspicuous , and specifically -Avoid obscurity

Avoid ambiguity. - Be brief. (avoid unnecessary prolixity) - Be orderly.

5. Data Analysis

The data contains two interviews by an English Parliament taken from the internet and one Kurdish parliament interviewed by the researchers. The analysis is based on the adopted model of analysis that has been mentioned previously.

Speech number one:

UK Parliament Debates Banning Donald Trump from Britain

"The UK has banned entry to many individuals for hate speech. The same principles should apply to everyone who wishes to enter the UK," the petition reads.

"If the United Kingdom is to continue applying the 'unacceptable behaviour' criteria to those who wish to enter its borders, it must be fairly applied to the rich as well as poor, and the weak as well as powerful."

<https://www.breitbart.com/europe/2016/01/18/uk-parliament-to-debate-banning-trump-from-britain/>

Analysis

Modal verbs reflect the speaker's attitude and help them express ideas indirectly, which makes modal verbs perfect candidates as hedging devices. Moreover, they allow speakers to be fuzzy about an informational content, avoid face threatening acts and formulate illocutions so as not to offend the hearer.

The value of *must* is certainly arrived at by logical inference on the basis of available information and the modal functions as a hedge in the speech above.

The speaker is thus partially absolved of blame in case of being proven wrong later on. These instances of *must* are translated as *trebuie*. The presence of the "If clause" and of the "epistemic adverb" perhaps is notable because they are also hedges by the hypothetical understanding they assign to the sentence: the speaker is not willing to take the states of affairs as certain but rather as an assumption. "If clauses" render hypothetical meaning, so they imply uncertainty along with any other epistemic markers which may occur inside an "if clause" to enhance the speaker's distrust in the truth of the utterance. Pragmatically; and depending on the theory of cooperative principle presented by Grice, we can say that here, in the speech above , the speaker observes all the maxims presented by CP .

The speaker is very clear and orderly, he is informative and says what he believes to be true, and also he is relevant.

Speech number two

An interview with a Kurdish Parliament, Salar Mahmood , A (45) aged Kurdish Parliament he graduated at University of Sulaimania , college of language and humanities , Kurdish Department at the Academic Year (1999-2000). His career as a parliament starts from 2019 till 2017, and now he is a Councilor, of the Presidency of Republic of Iraq.

The researchers: *The crises that the region faces now can be solved in a near future or not?*

The parliament: *There are many crises that have not been solved yet, there are many crises that developed because of ISIS and the most dangerous crises are that of economical aspect of life that affects the life of Kurdish people as a whole. In spite of all these , one can say that the bad way of managing and administering the whole region leads to these crises*

As I believe *these crises can't be solved easily since there is no true wish and energy to do so.*

The researchers: *Depending on your own knowledge, for how long these crises will continue?*

The parliament: I think *it will continue till 2020. Because we can't depend on other sources to increase our incomes and face the crises easily.*

The researchers: *Do Economists can help with this?*

The parliament: *There are many projects presented by different organizations in the region so as to help the region face the crises.*

We believe that *those projects will not be taken in to consideration. If those seminars , workshops That had been presented so as to offer help to face crises , taken in to consideration, I believe that at least a part of the crises has been solved but there is no true wish to do so.*

The researchers: *What are the steps that the government will follow so as to face the crises?*

The parliament: *Many ways have been followed, we believe that those ways and methods can't solve the crises, for example: decreasing the incomes and salaries of the employers which is not a good mechanism and affects the life of people as a whole. As we think this can't solve the crises.*

Analysis:

Mainly the so called speech act verbs used to perform acts like evaluating, assuming or doubting rather than merely describing: the epistemic seem and appear, also believe,

assume, suggest, estimate, tend, think, argue, indicate, propose, speculate, suppose etc. When used epistemically as hedging elements these verbs express the speaker's strong belief in the truth of the utterance or, on the contrary, the speaker's unwillingness to vouch for understanding the utterance as more than a personal opinion.

Here, the parliament used (we think , I believe , we believe As I believe) introduces the speaker's personal opinion, contrary to the hearsay mentioned before, aimed at providing just personal interpretation of some available information.

Pragmatically; and depending on the theory of cooperative principle presented by Grice, one can say that here, in the speech above , the speaker observes all the maxims presented by Grice by being not ambiguous , being relevant, saying only what he believes to be true and giving enough information adequate to the questions asked by the researchers .

6. Result Analysis

In pragmatics, a hedge is a mitigating words, sounds or construction used to lessen the impact of an utterance due to the constraints on the interaction between the speaker and the addressee.

They are adjectives , adverbs , and sometimes contain clauses . Focusing on the analysis, the selected speeches have been analyzed in terms of one pragmatic model which is CP.

The analysis presented here shows that hedging pragmatically can be seen in the observance of the maxims presented by Grice by being not ambiguous , being relevant, saying only what he believes to be true and giving enough information adequate to the questions asked by the researcher .

7. Conclusions

Through the theoretical backgrounds of hedging, its form and functions on one hand and investigating Grice's Cooperative

Principle on the other hand the detailed analysis leads to the following conclusions:

- Hedging is a rhetorical strategy. By including a particular term, choosing a particular structure, or imposing a specific prosodic form on the utterance, the speaker signals a lack of a full commitment either to the full category membership of a term or expression in the utterance or to the intended illocutionary force of the utterance.
- As far as CP is concerned; H. Paul Grice posited a general set of rules contributors to ordinary conversation were generally expected to follow. He named it the Cooperative Principle (CP), and formulated it as follows:
Make your conversational contribution such as is required, at the stage at which it occurs, by the accepted purpose or direction of the talk exchange in which you are engaged.
- The analysis presented here shows that hedging pragmatically can be seen in the observance of the maxims presented by Grice

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