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HEDGING AND ITS LINGUISTIC MANIFESTATION IN SPOKEN AND WRITTEN DISCOURSE: CORPUS RESEARCH

ЛІНГВІСТИЧНА РЕАЛІЗАЦІЯ ХЕДЖИНГУ У РОЗМОВНОМУ ТА ПИСЕМНОМУ НАУКОВОМУ ДИСКУРСІ: КОРПУСНІ ДОСЛІДЖЕННЯ

ЛИНГВИСТИЧЕСКАЯ РЕАЛИЗАЦИЯ ХЕДЖИНГА В РАЗГОВОРНОМ И ПИСЬМЕННОМ НАУЧНОМ ДИСКУРСЕ: КОРПУСНЫЕ ИССЛЕДОВАНИЯ

The article studies the concept *hedging* by focusing on problems concerning definition, the history of its origin and classifications of hedge-markers. The study aims to look at the way *hedging* works in context rather than in isolation. It also strives to contribute to the research on hedges considering them within the framework of P. Brown and S. Levinson's politeness theory as face-saving strategies both in spoken and academic written discourse. Its objective is to find and offer the ways of making verbal and non-verbal communication more effective through providing interlocutors in discourse with both the knowledge about hedges and the opportunity to develop their skills in using them as a communicative strategy.

Hedging as analyzed in the present article builds upon the corpus approach framework and is accounted for through sociolinguistic criteria. The major findings refer to examining both the rate and range of hedge markers used by learners of English and Ukrainian at varying proficiency levels. The article claims that hedges can belong to any part of speech and lists as examples nouns, verbs, adjectives. Recently, so-called lexical bundles referred to as word clusters have attracted the attention of corpus linguists. Clusters are understood as word chains consisting of 2-5 components, which are located in contact and are reproduced in speech as integral phrases. These include both recurrent complete sentences and structurally incomplete word-combinations. In this context, it should be emphasized no linguistic items are inherently *hedgy*, but can acquire this quality depending on the communicative context.

The article explores the ambiguity of cross-cultural hedge correspondences.

Keywords: hedging, theory of politeness, corpus research, lexical bundles, spoken discourse, academic written discourse.

Досліджено концепт *хеджінгу* в лінгвістиці, висвітлено питання щодо трактування його визначення, історії походження та класифікацій хедж-маркерів. Концепт *хеджінгу* розглянуто в рамках теорії ввічливості П. Брауна, С. Левінсона як стратегію збереження обличчя співрозмовника в текстах розмовного та академічного писемного дискурсу. Стаття ставить своєю метою знайти і запропонувати засоби більш ефективного вербального й непрямого спілкування шляхом надання співрозмовникам дискурсу знань як про

особливості функціонування засобів хеджингу, так і можливостей розвинення навичок щодо їх використання у якості комунікативної стратегії.

Феномен *лінгвістичного хеджингу*, як проаналізовано в цій статті, базується на структурі корпусного підходу і враховує цілу низку соціолінгвістичних критеріїв. У дослідженні вивчено рівень та діапазон маркерів *хеджингу*, що використовуються в англійській та українській мовах у різних типах дискурсу. Визначено, що засоби *хеджингу* можуть належати до будь-якої частини мови; наведено приклади вживання іменників, дієслів та прикметників у цій функції. Проаналізовано так звані “лексичні пучки”, кластери слів, що останнім часом привертають увагу вітчизняних та зарубіжних корпусних мовознавців, що опікуються проблемами стратегій та тактик у різних типах дискурсу. Під кластерами розуміють об’єднання кількох (2–5) однорідних слів-компонентів, яке можна розглядати як самостійну одиницю, що має певні властивості. У мові кластери відтворюються як цілісні фрази. До них належать як повторювані повні речення, так і структурно неповні словосполучення. У цьому контексті слід підкреслити, що жодні мовні одиниці за своєю суттю не є хеджинговими, але можуть набути цієї якості залежно від комунікативного контексту.

У статті досліджено двозначність міжмовних відповідностей *хеджингу*.

Ключові слова: хеджинг, теорія ввічливості, корпусний аналіз, лексичні кластери, дискурс.

Исследовано понятие *лингвистического хеджинга* с акцентом на вопросах трактовки его дефиниций, истории возникновения и классификации хедж-маркеров. Механизм выбора средств *хеджинга* исследован в рамках теории вежливости П. Брауна и С. Левинсона как стратегия сохранения лица собеседника в интерактивном взаимодействии. Цель исследования – найти и предложить способы интенсификации вербального и невербального общения, предоставляя участникам дискурса как знания о средствах *хеджирования*, так и возможность развить навыки его использования как коммуникативной стратегии.

Анализ *хеджинга* строится на основе корпусных исследований с учетом социолингвистических критериев. Основные результаты относятся к изучению диапазона хедж-маркеров, используемых в английском и украинском языках на разных языковых уровнях. Феномен *хеджирования* в лингвистике манифестируется с помощью множества языковых средств: имен существительных, глаголов, прилагательных. В последнее время в центре внимания корпусных лингвистов оказываются лексические пучки, называемые кластерами слов. Под кластерами понимаются словосочетания, состоящие из 2–5 компонентов, которые расположены контактно и воспроизводятся в речи в виде цельных словосочетаний. К ним относятся как рекуррентные полные предложения, так и структурно неполные сочетания знаменательных и служебных слов. В этом контексте следует подчеркнуть, что ни одно лингвистическое явление не является по своей сути средством *хеджирования*, но может приобретать это качество в зависимости от коммуникативного контекста.

В статье исследована неоднозначность межъязыковых соответствий средств *хеджинга*.

Ключевые слова: хеджинг, теория вежливости, корпусный анализ, лексические кластеры, дискурс.

Introduction. “If you hedge against something unpleasant or unwanted that might affect you, you do something that will protect you from it. If you hedge a problem or a question, you avoid answering the question or committing yourself to a particular action or decision” (Collins Cobuild Advanced Dictionary of English, 2017, p. 617). Like Collins Advanced Dictionary, many corpus linguists studying the phenomenon of hedging have always referred to it as a kind of communicative strategy through which “speakers can avoid taking full responsibility for the content or the message expressed and keep their faces” (Biber, 2016; Brown&Levinson, 1987; Crystal, 1988; Goffman, 1955; Larina, 2009; Luuka&Markannen,1997). However, there have been scholars, who, like Skelton, explored hedging as a linguistic term and were concerned with its linguistic manifestation, ranging from morphological devices to syntactical constructions (Con-

rad, et.al., 2009; Farr, et.al., 2004; Goffman, 1955; Korpusnaia lingvistika, 2008; Lakoff, 1972; Mariukhin, 2010; Petrova, 2011). The Dictionary of Stylistics defines hedges as “qualification and toning – down of utterances and statements ... in order to reduce the riskiness of what one says” (Wales, 2001, p. 198). Modern corpus English grammars, such as the Longman Grammar of Spoken and Written English (1999) and the Cambridge Grammar of English (2011), pay significant attention to using hedging tools in a range of speakers’ communication strategies. The attempts to regard hedging as one in a range of different categories have led to incomplete descriptions of this phenomenon.

The purpose of this research is to consider the history of the origins and definition of the term *hedging* in the course of development of corpus linguistics, and define the properties of the main hedge groups. Taking into account the pragmatic value of hedging considering it as a face-saving strategy, the article strives to look at the way hedging works in different contexts and examine both the rate and range of hedge markers used by learners of English and Ukrainian at varying proficiency levels. It also contributes to the research on hedges both in spoken and academic written discourse. Its objective is to find and offer the ways of making verbal and non-verbal communication more effective through providing interlocutors in discourse with both the knowledge about hedges and the opportunity to develop their skills in using them.

The study mostly applies descriptive and comparative approaches. The methodology involves the theoretical findings of the corpus native and foreign linguists such as Lofti A. Zadeh, (1976); E. Goffman, (1955); D. Lakoff, (2009); P. Brown & S. Levinson, (1987) on hedge markers and their application in different types of discourse.

Recent researches and publications. The concepts of ‘hedge’ and ‘hedging’ were borrowed by discourse analysis from logic and semantics in the 60s and 70s of the XXth century and were further developed in the mainstream of linguistic pragmatics. Although it was Lofti A. Zadeh and Uriel Weinreich who considered the phenomenon of ‘hedging’ in early 60s of the XXth century within the “Fuzzy Sets” theory (Zadeh, 1976), naming it “metalinguistic operator” (Weinreich, 1997), George Lakoff (1955) is regarded to be a linguist who first introduced the term “hedging” referring to it as the “words whose meaning is to make things fuzzy” (p. 465), metaphorically transferring the properties and effects of a hedge to a linguistic phenomenon (Lakoff, 1972; Mariukhin, 2010). Studying the logical properties of the words *rather*, *largely*, *sort of*, *kind of*, *strictly speaking* as utterances whose meaning imply vagueness, Lakoff arrived at the concept ‘hedging’. Lakoff was not concerned with the communicative value of hedges, and considered them as a semantic phenomenon. The researcher emphasized the connection between hedges and performatives, which allowed W. Fraser (2008) to later develop the concept of *hedged performatives* (p. 34). Subsequently, the term *hedging* moved to the field of pragmatics and discourse, where it acquired a new meaning: *hedging* began to be understood as linguistic elements that completely or partially help the speaker avoid taking responsibility for the content of the message expressed.

In the context of verbal communication, hedge markers ensure the speaker’s liability for the incorrect proposition. For example, *I think, his feet were sort of blue*. Instead of a direct statement Цей препарат допоможе вам одужати, hedge markers are used to make a statement more vague Я вважаю, що цей препарат міг би допомогти вам одужати швидше. Thus, in both written and oral discourse, hedging acts as a speech “insurance” and allows not only to individualize the statement, but also to establish the boundaries of responsibility for the validity of the proposition, to limit the degree of

reliability or validity of the judgment, and to avoid absolute interpretation [Knight, et. al., 2013; Mariukhin, 2010; O’Keeffe, et. al., 2007).

The theory of politeness by P. Brown and S. Levinson (1987), considers *hedging* as a pragmatic category, which presumes use of certain words and collocations as means saving the interlocutors’ “faces” in interpersonal communication. The problems of interpersonal communication, which are covered in modern linguistics, are largely based on the ideas and methods of Irving Goffman – American sociologist – who introduced the concept of ‘face’ as the most important positive social value. In the process of communication, interlocutors are concerned with saving their own face and the face of their partner, which makes communication more effective. To save the face, communicators use interpersonal rituals, including presentation and avoidance rituals (Brown & S. Levinson, 1987). So, face-saving in the course of indirect communication is in accordance with the principles that provide distancing between communicators, their desire to “hedge”, separate from other communicators. Thus, basing on the doctrine of fuzzy sets, fuzzy logic and the theory of linguistic politeness, the concept of hedging in linguistics got developed. Researchers claim that speech barrier claims a new interpretation in the field of communicative linguistics (Larina, 2009, p. 118).

Corpus linguists also look at *hedging* from a sociolinguistic standpoint (Knight, et. al., 2013; O’Keeffe, et. al., 2007). This makes it possible to study this phenomenon in different types of discourse, or different subgenres: academic, news, everyday life, etc., that is, to focus on the register peculiarities of hedging (Biber, 2016; Farr, et. al., 2004; Gray & Biber, 2015). For example, F. Farr et al. (2004) tracked the frequency of hedging in different contexts of the Irish English Corpus – conversations between family members, comments from teachers about student work in the classroom, listeners’ calls during radio broadcasts, exchange of replicas (seller – buyer) at the store counter and friends’ conversations (p. 7). The distribution of hedge markers *just, really, actually, probably, I think, a bit, kind of, sort of, you know, I suppose* across corpus subgenres has shown significant contextual dependence. The lowest frequency of hedge markers is in the ‘seller – buyer’ communication, that is associated with no need to save ‘face’ in the dialogue between strangers. Communication between family members, where roles are fixed and face saving is secondary, is another group with the least frequent use of hedging. The highest frequency is observed among teachers, which, possibly, correlates with the need to reduce the authoritarian tone of the teacher’s comments on the students’ work (Farr, et. al., 2004).

R. Carter et al. (2011) believe that the hedging strategy is implemented through the so-called *pragmatic markers*. According to the scholars, English is characterized by vagueness and even long-windedness of presentation (O’Keeffe, et. al., 2007). Compare the hedged utterance *And I was up all night like Wednesday and I just I think I’m just a bit kind of dazed from the whole experience* with non-hedged one *And I was up all night Wednesday and I’m dazed from the whole experience*. As you can see from the above sentences, they contain 6 instances of markers (*like, just – 2 times, I think, a bit and kind of*), which are intended to soften the tone of the statement and reduce the threat to the listener’s ‘positive’ face. It should be noted that the scientific literature also uses the concept of *downtoners* regarding hedging (O’Keeffe, et. al., 2007), which reduces the directness of the statements.

Hedging in linguistics is extremely diverse and involves various types of linguistic means: discursive words, word-formation elements, quotation marks (Mariukhin, 2010), as well as extralinguistic means. So, recently, the so-called clusters have attract-

ed the attention of corpus linguists. Clusters are understood as word chains consisting of 2–5 components, which are located in contact and are reproduced in speech in the form of integral phrases. These include both recurrent complete sentences and structurally incomplete combinations of significant words (Petrova, 2011). In recent studies, based on corpus data, grammatically incomplete chains of contact words are often distinguished using exclusively frequency indicators. In the corpus grammar LGSWE (1999), whose authors follow only the quantitative approach, such three- and four-component word chains, occurring with a frequency of 10 and 20 times per million uses, are assigned as the term *lexical bundles* (*in the, of the, do you, one of the, I think it's, the end of the, a bit of a*) (Gray&Biber, 2015). The frequency of use of lexical bundles (or clusters), according to a number of scientists, raises the need for further understanding of their pragmatic functions in communication (Biber, 2016a; Biber, et. al., 1999b; Conrad&Biber, 2009; Salazar, 2014). Some of the clusters identified in this way are only the result of the high frequency of their components, such as the definite article, etc. At the same time, some of the clusters can perform the functions of hedging. For example, the chain *a bit of a* performs a pronounced pragmatic function of a downtoner: *It was a bit of a problem / mess / nuisance*. Corpus studies confirm that, as a rule, the cluster is used in combination with negatively connotated nouns, mitigating their negative impact (Biber, et. al., 1999; Carter&McCarthy, 2011; Conrad&Biber, 2009; Korpusnaia lingvistika, 2008; Longman Dictionary of Contemporary English, 2003; O'Keeffe, et. al., 2007).

Previously, traditional grammars did not consider such elements as important components of the typology of speech means. Moreover, the presence of such inclusions in speech was considered as insufficient thinking processes, underdeveloped speech skills. However, a comparative analysis of the frequency of clusters and individual words suggests that some clusters occur in speech more often than individual words.

One should consider a corpus study of hedging cluster *something of a*, the idiomatic expression *mixed blessing* on the material of Cambridge Grammar of English (CGE) (2011) and Longman Dictionary of Contemporary English (LDCE) (2003). As a result of our own research of the *something of a* cluster by CGE genres, it turned out that the cluster occurs in this corpus 1,155 times. It is important to note that the frequency of the cluster exceeds, for example, the phrasal verbs *rule out, exclude*, as well as the noun *prosperity*. Such a high frequency of the cluster indicates the presence of important pragmatic functions assigned to this chain of words. Therefore, it is possible that the lexical pragmatics will be incomplete if we do not take into account such formations that were revealed as a result of the corpus, statistical analysis of the language.

Further research on CGE (2011) showed that the cluster acts as a hedging agent and softens the harshness of negatively connotated nouns: *something of a disappointment* – деяке розчарування; *something of a stigma in being an unemployed professional* – вельми ганебно мати професію і бути безробітним; *something of a predicament* – дещо скрутне становище; *something of a return to "normal"* – деяка подібність повернення до "норми" (нормальної ситуації). The most frequently used collocations with *something of a* are nouns *stigma, dilemma, shock, disappointment, challenge, surprise, mystery, problem, misnomer, reputation, puzzle*. However, corpus studies have shown that the cluster is more frequent in academic written discourse compared to spoken one (Carter&McCarthy, 2011; Longman Dictionary of Contemporary English, 2003).

It is no less interesting to study the speech uses of the idiomatic expression *mixed blessing* using corpus examples. First, it should be noted that the expression that unites

the positive and negative aspects of a phenomenon characterizes the desire of native speakers to give a balanced, unbiased description of events, avoiding categorical assessments.

Corpus statistics (Biber, et. al., 1999; Korpusnaia lingvistika, 2008; Longman Dictionary of Contemporary English, 2003) show that the expression is used with the verb *to be* without modifiers – *to be and mixed blessing* – in less than 50 % of cases. In other cases, the expression is used with various modifiers that are intended to reduce directness, avoid responsibility, maintain willful uncertainty. Among them are combinations with verbs, including modal ones, which also often act as hedging means: *may be, was seen as, appears more of, can be viewed as, has proved, could prove, turned out, to be a rather a mixed blessing*. The most frequent collocates of expression are the modal verbs *may* and *can, as well as see, consider, prove, feel*. The cluster of *something of a mixed blessing* is statistically important, the cases of gradation are *more of* and *less of a mixed blessing*. There is also the use of two hedging tools at the same time: *appears more of a mixed blessing, viewed as a very mixed blessing*.

According to various sources, including modern corpus grammars (Biber, et. al., 1999; Carter&McCarthy, 2011; Collins Cobuild Advanced Dictionary of English, 2017; O’Keeffe, et. al., 2007) the most common linguistic means of expressing hedging include:

- modal verbs and verbs with modal meanings – *believe, guess, feel, recon, suppose, think, imagine*, especially in combination with the pronoun *I*;
- nouns – *there is a possibility, the thing is*, etc.;
- adverbs – *quite, really, relatively, necessarily, just, only, of course, actually, kind of, sort of, maybe*;
- Indirect questions – *And would you have thought you were very close to him?* instead of, *And were you very close to him?*;
- double negation – *It’s not that I am not afraid*;
- a determinative subordinate clause evaluating the whole situation – *You got them to do this cross-group reporting, which was a good idea, but the time was the problem*;
- onliness traits such as self – corrections, repetitions, hesitation, false starts, i.e. edits that usually occur in the authentic process of generation
- unprepared speaking – *And will you, would you like to go sort of on a sun and sea holiday with him this year?*

Conclusions. Hedge researchers argue that there are no unique tools in language to prevent speech conflicts. However, such hedging tools are the most effective to harmonize the speech interpersonal interaction, because they can ensure that the addressee’s opinion is likely to be accepted, and reduce misunderstanding between communicators. Depending on the speech situation, the addressee chooses the most appropriate hedge markers (words, phrases, utterances). It is not necessary to draw a conclusion about universal linguistic means by means of which hedging can occur. The main thing is that hedging is used to make the statement acceptable to the recipient and, at the same time, save the recipient’s ‘face’. Hedging makes an indirect effect on the communicator’s consciousness, and contributes to the effective communication, capable of fully achieving the perlocutionary effect.

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