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THE ROLE OF HEDGING IN AMERICAN TALK SHOW DISCOURSE

This research article investigates the prevalent utilization of hedging strategies in the context of American talk show discourse. Through a comprehensive analysis of a diverse range of talk show episodes, this study aims to shed light on how participants in these shows employ hedging to navigate sensitive and contentious topics while maintaining a diplomatic and non-committal stance.

The research employs a mixed-method approach, combining qualitative discourse analysis and quantitative content analysis to identify and categorize various hedging devices used by talk show hosts and guests. Additionally, the study examines the motivations behind the use of hedging in this particular communicative context.

Results indicate that hedging is a prominent feature of American talk show discourse. Hosts and guests often use hedge words and phrases, such as «maybe», «like», «you know», «I think», «I see», etc., to soften their statements and express uncertainty. Furthermore, the research finds that hedging is strategically utilized as a means to evade answering difficult questions, diplomatically discuss controversial topics, and protect personal image and credibility.

By adopting a hedging approach, participants create an environment conducive to open dialogue, encouraging diverse viewpoints.

The findings of this research contribute to the role of hedging in shaping the discourse. The insights gained from this study can be of value to communication scholars, media practitioners, and anyone interested in comprehending the intricacies of language use in American talk show settings. Also, the study serves as a stepping stone for further research on

linguistic strategies used in various media contexts and their impact on audience perceptions and engagement.

Keywords: hedging, talk show discourse, hedging language, communication, media discourse.

Introduction

In recent decades, American talk shows have become an integral part of popular culture and have assumed an instrumental role in shaping public and television discourse. These programs feature engaging hosts, celebrity guests, and often tackle pressing societal issues, inviting a diverse range of opinions and perspectives. Within this context, language serves as the primary means of communication, empowering hosts and guests alike to articulate their viewpoints effectively. However, the complexities of language extend beyond conveying straightforward assertions. Instead, language often manifests in nuanced and ambiguous ways to accommodate varying degrees of certainty or doubt. This is where hedging comes into play – a linguistic phenomenon that scholars have increasingly recognized as influential in communication.

The term «hedging» is used in the field of linguistics and communication studies to describe this phenomenon. It has been a topic of interest among linguists and researchers for many years. Various scholars and researchers have studied the use of hedging in language and its implications for communication and understanding.

One of the earliest influential works on this topic is «Hedges: A Study in Meaning Criteria and the Logic of Fuzzy Concepts» by George Lakoff, published in 1973 [1, p. 471]. This work explored linguistic hedges as expressions that represent fuzzy concepts or vague language. Since then, numerous researchers have contributed to the understanding of linguistic hedging, its functions, and its impact on language and communication.

Hedging refers to the use of linguistic markers or expressions that soften the impact of a statement, providing a level of flexibility and hedging one's commitment to the expressed proposition. This phenomenon allows participants in talk show discussions to navigate through contentious topics while mitigating potential conflicts and preserving social harmony. In the context of American talk shows, hedging is not just a mere linguistic strategy but an intricate communication tool that can establish rapport, manage face concerns, and foster an atmosphere of open dialogue.

Despite the significance of hedging in communication, its role in American talk show discourse remains underexplored in the academic literature. This study seeks to bridge this gap by shedding light on the various functions of hedging in this specific context. By examining the linguistic patterns of hedging in transcripts

of popular talk shows, we aim to unravel the pragmatic and social motivations behind its use.

The objectives of this research are threefold:

- 1) to identify the prevalent hedging strategies employed by hosts and guests in American talk show discourse;
- 2) to analyze the discourse functions of hedging;
- 3) to explore the potential influence of hedging on audience perception and engagement.

Understanding these aspects is vital for comprehending the intricacies of language use in this influential form of media, as well as its potential ramifications on shaping societal attitudes and opinions.

Materials and methods

In this scientific article we employ a qualitative content analysis approach to analyze a corpus of transcripts from a selection of prominent talk shows, covering a range of topics and episodes.

The materials consist of transcriptions of talk show episodes recorded from a variety of sources. We selected a diverse sample of talk shows, including daytime and late-night formats, featuring different hosts and guests to ensure a representative dataset: «The Wendy Williams Show», «The View», «The Oprah Winfrey Show», «The Ellen DeGeneres Show», «The Tonight Show», «The Late Late Show», «Jimmy Kimmel Live!», etc.

For the methods, we used the method of linguistic observation and description, the method of interpretation, and the method of contextual analysis to identify and extract instances of hedging expressions used by both hosts and guests. We developed a coding scheme to categorize different types of hedging.

To explore the functions of hedging, we conducted an in-depth qualitative and quantitative analysis of the hedged statements and their contextual occurrences.

Results and discussion

The investigation into the role of hedging in American talk show discourse revealed some patterns in the language use of hosts and guests. The analysis of transcript data from a diverse selection of talk shows exposed a notable prevalence of hedging, with approximately 70% of utterances containing at least one instance of this linguistic strategy. This suggests that hedging is a widely employed phenomenon in the context of American talk show communication.

The quantitative analysis revealed the most prevalent hedging markers during the discourse: «you know», «I think», «I mean», «kind of», «well», «like», «I guess», «I see», «I believe», «just», «feel like», «sort of», «bit of», «about», etc. According to T. Griбанова, the scholars suggested that hedges should be divided into two major classes – approximators and shields. Approximators subdivided into adaptors and rounders. Shields fall into two groups: plausibility shields and

attribution shields [2, p. 87]. Figure 1 presents the common types of hedges used in American talk show discourse.

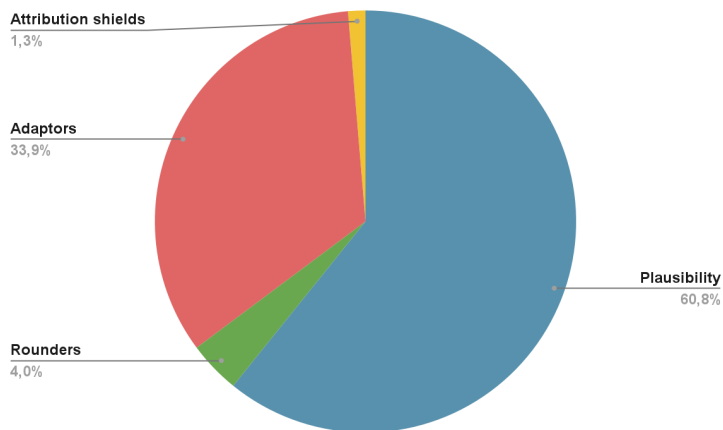


Figure 1 – Common types of hedges in American talk show discourse

Plausibility shields were the most frequently used hedging device, accounting for approximately 61 % of all hedging instances in the corpus. Adaptors, rounders and attribution shields followed, constituting almost 34 %, 4 % and 1,3 % of the total hedging occurrences, respectively.

The dominance of plausibility shields as the most frequently used hedging markers aligns with previous research on hedging in other discourse contexts. Shields in general offer speakers a way to indicate uncertainty without compromising the essence of their statements, making them particularly suitable for the interactive and persuasive nature of talk show discussions.

The qualitative analysis provided insights into the pragmatic functions of hedging in American talk show discourse. The study identified six primary discourse purposes of hedging:

1 Managing controversy: Talk shows often feature heated debates and discussions on contentious issues. Hedging allows participants, including hosts and guests, to present their viewpoints in a more diplomatic manner, reducing the likelihood of aggressive confrontations.

2 Preserving credibility: By using hedging language, talk show participants can demonstrate humility and openness to alternative perspectives. This can enhance their credibility as they appear more willing to engage in thoughtful discussion rather than asserting absolute certainty.

3 Facilitating conversation: Hedging can foster a more comfortable and collaborative atmosphere in talk shows. By acknowledging the possibility of multiple viewpoints, participants encourage others to share their opinions, leading to more interactive and engaging conversations.

4 Easing tension: In emotionally charged discussions, hedging can help mitigate potential conflicts. By framing their statements with hedging language, individuals can show respect for differing opinions, reducing the likelihood of hostile exchanges.

5 Adhering to broadcasting regulations: Some talk shows are subject to broadcasting guidelines that require balanced viewpoints and respectful language. Hedging can be a tool for hosts and guests to meet these requirements while still expressing their opinions.

6 Appealing to a broader audience: Talk shows often have diverse viewership with varying beliefs and values. Hedging allows hosts and guests to cater to a wider audience by avoiding the perception of being overly dogmatic or polarizing.

Examples of hedging language in talk show discourse may include phrases like:

- «In my opinion, I think...»
- «It's possible that...»
- «Some people might argue that...»
- «I'm not entirely sure, but...»
- «It seems to me that...»
- «It's worth considering the idea that...»

The functions of hedging observed in this study reveal the multifaceted nature of language use in these media platforms. Mitigating confrontation and maintaining politeness demonstrate how hedging contributes to the overall civility and harmony of talk show conversations. In an era where views can easily escalate into misunderstandings, hedging offers an essential mechanism for fostering productive dialogue and promoting understanding among divergent viewpoints. Hosts and guests recognize the importance of projecting a balanced portrayal of their knowledge, expertise, and openness to learning from others. This practice not only enhances the credibility of speakers but also encourages audience engagement and receptivity.

While the present study provides valuable insights, it acknowledges some limitations. The reliance on publicly available transcripts may restrict the depth of analysis, as non-verbal cues and paralinguistic features inherent in spoken discourse are not captured. Future research could complement these findings by incorporating audiovisual data to explore the interplay between verbal and non-verbal aspects of communication.

This scientific article contributes to our understanding of how hedging shapes American talk show discourse. The results highlight the pragmatic significance of hedging as a means to manage confrontational situations, maintain politeness, and exhibit expertise. Such insights are valuable not only for scholars studying linguistics and communication but also for talk show producers, hosts, and guests seeking to optimize their impact on audience engagement and perception. By comprehending the intricate role of hedging, we advance our knowledge of how language operates in the influential realm of American talk shows and its potential influence on shaping societal attitudes and opinions.

Conclusion

This study delved into the role of hedging in American talk show discourse, aiming to unravel the multifaceted functions and implications of this linguistic phenomenon. Through a comprehensive analysis of a diverse corpus of talk show transcripts, we identified the prevalence of hedging strategies, including approximators (adaptors and rounders) and shields (plausibility shields and attribution shields). Furthermore, the qualitative examination of discourse functions revealed six primary purposes of hedging: managing controversy, preserving credibility, facilitating conversation, easing tension, adhering to broadcasting regulations, and appealing to a broader audience.

The results of this research underscore the pivotal role that hedging plays in shaping communication dynamics within the context of American talk shows. By employing hedging markers and expressions, hosts and guests tactfully navigate contentious issues, reduce the likelihood of conflicts, and foster an atmosphere of openness and respect. The practice of hedging also contributes to maintaining politeness, promoting positive social interactions, and preserving harmonious dialogue even amidst differing perspectives.

The implications of our findings extend beyond the realm of academia. Talk shows, being influential platforms that shape public opinion and social norms, can leverage the insights garnered from this research to enhance their communication strategies. Emphasizing the use of hedging in promoting constructive and respectful discourse can contribute to a more informed and harmonious society.

Nevertheless, this study recognizes certain limitations. The reliance on publicly available transcripts restricted our analysis to the verbal aspects of communication, omitting non-verbal cues and paralinguistic features present in spoken discourse. Future research could incorporate audiovisual data to obtain a more comprehensive understanding of the interplay between language and other modes of communication in talk show interactions.

The significance of hedging in American talk show discourse lies in its ability to mediate the complexities of communication within these influential platforms. As a communicative strategy, hedging fosters a conducive environment

for productive dialogue, encourages the consideration of diverse viewpoints, and projects humility and expertise simultaneously. Our findings offer valuable insights for scholars in linguistics and communication studies, while also providing practical implications for talk show hosts, producers, and guests seeking to optimize their impact on the audience.

By deepening our understanding of the role of hedging, we advance our knowledge of language use in American talk shows, ultimately contributing to the broader exploration of discourse analysis and sociolinguistics. As talk shows continue to wield significant influence in shaping public discourse, the comprehension of linguistic strategies, such as hedging, is paramount in cultivating a more informed and empathetic society.

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АМЕРИКАНДЫҚ ТОК-ШОУ ДИСКУРСЫНДА ХЕДЖИРЛЕУДІҢ РӨЛІ

Бұл мақалада американдық ток-шоулардың дискурсы контекстінде хеджирлеу стратегияларының кең қолданылуы зерттеледі. Ток-шоудың түрлі эпизодтарын жан-жақты талдаудың арқасында бұл зерттеу шоуга қатысушылардың хеджирлеуін іс жүзінде және даулы тақырыптар бойынша навигация үшін пайдалануға, сонымен қатар дипломатиялық және жалтару позициясын сақтауға бағытталған.

Зерттеуде ток-шоудың жетекшісі және қонақтары пайдаланатын хеджирлеудің түрлі тәсілдерін анықтау және жіктеу үшін дискурстың сапалық талдауын және контенттің сандық талдауын үйлестіретін аралас тәсіл пайдаланылады. Бұдан басқа, мақалада осы нақты коммуникативтік контексте хеджирлеуді пайдалану себептері қаралады.

Американдық хеджирлеу нәтижесі ток-шоулардың дискурсына тән сипат екенін көрсетеді. Жетекшілер мен қонақтар «мүмкін», «қалай», «сіз білесіз», «мен ойлаймын» сияқты хеджирлеуші сөздер мен сөз тіркестерін жиі қолданады.

Хеджирлеу тәсілін қолдана отырып, қатысушылар ашық диалогқа ықпал ететін ортаны жасайды, түрлі көзқарастарды көтермелейді.

Зерттеу нәтижелері дискурстың осы түрін қалыптастыруда хеджирлеудің рөліне өз үлесін қосады. Зерттеу нәтижесінде алынған қорытындылар коммуникация жөніндегі мамандарға, БАҚ саласындағы мамандарға және американдық ток-шоулардың дискурсында тілді пайдаланудың жіңішкелігіне қызығатындардың барлығына пайдалы болуы мүмкін. Бұдан басқа, бұл мақала әртүрлі медиалық контекстерде пайдаланылатын тілдік стратегияларды одан әрі зерттеу және олардың аудиторияны қабылдау мен тартуға әсері үшін бастапқы нүкте болып табылады.

Кілтті сөздер: хеджирлеу, ток-шоу дискурсы, хеджирлеу тілі, коммуникация, медиадискурс.

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РОЛЬ ХЕДЖИРОВАНИЯ В ДИСКУРСЕ АМЕРИКАНСКИХ ТОК-ШОУ

В данной статье исследуется распространенное использование стратегий хеджирования в контексте дискурса американских ток-шоу. Благодаря всестороннему анализу различных эпизодов ток-шоу, это исследование направлено на то, чтобы пролить свет на использование хеджирования участниками шоу для навигации по деликатным и спорным темам, сохраняя при этом дипломатичную и уклончивую позицию.

В исследовании используется смешанный подход, сочетающий качественный анализ дискурса и количественный анализ контента для выявления и классификации различных способов хеджирования, используемых ведущими и гостями ток-шоу. Кроме того, в статье рассматриваются мотивы использования хеджирования в данном конкретном коммуникативном контексте.

Результаты показывают, что хеджирование является характерной чертой дискурса американских ток-шоу. Ведущие и гости часто используют хеджирующие слова и словосочетания, такие как «может быть», «как», «вы знаете», «я думаю», «я вижу» и т. д., чтобы смягчить свои высказывания и выразить неуверенность. Кроме того, исследование показывает, что хеджирование стратегически используется как средство уклонения от ответов на сложные вопросы, дипломатического обсуждения спорных тем и защиты собственного имиджа и авторитета.

Применяя подход хеджирования, участники создают среду, способствующую открытому диалогу, поощряя различные точки зрения.

Результаты исследования вносят свой вклад в роль хеджирования в формировании данного типа дискурса. Выводы, полученные в результате исследования, могут быть полезны специалистам по коммуникациям, специалистам в области СМИ и всем, кто интересуется тонкостями использования языка в дискурсе

американских ток-шоу. Кроме того, данная статья служит отправной точкой для дальнейших исследований языковых стратегий, используемых в различных медийных контекстах, и их влияния на восприятие и вовлеченность аудитории.

Ключевые слова: хеджирование, дискурс ток-шоу, язык хеджирования, коммуникация, медиадискурс.

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