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HEDGING IN GENDERED DISCOURSE: A QUALITATIVE PRAGMATIC ANALYSIS OF FEMALE-FEMALE AND MALE-MALE DIALOGUES

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Abstract: *The current paper analyzes the gendered use of hedges in female-female and male-male interactions. The study uses a qualitative discourse-analytic approach based on the selected dialogues in One of Us Is Back by Karen M. McManus, The Goldfinch by Donna Tartt, and Inferno by Dan Brown, drawing on pragmatic, contextual, and gender-oriented perspectives.*

The results show that the interactions between females often include instances of hedging to facilitate negotiation, to reduce disagreement, to manage potential sensitive evaluations or to achieve interpersonal alignment. Female characters also employ unhedged contradiction, sarcasm and categorical statements, especially when familiarity allows for directness. A particular feature of the selected male–male interactions is the presence of hedging and related mitigation resources in situations where the speaker faces incomplete knowledge, accountability, moral or social vulnerability, dependence on the other speaker, or need to diminish the force of directives. Hedging can then be used by a male to serve protective, evidential and cooperative rather than only ambiguous functions. These findings reflect a contextual interpretation of gendered language that the role of hedging in women's and men's negotiations of intimacy, knowledge, authority, vulnerability, and communicative goal is different.

Keywords: *hedges, gender, mitigation, politeness, female-female dialogue, male-male dialogue*

Introduction

Hedging, as a crucial strategy, is situated between semantics, pragmatics, discourse analysis and sociolinguistics since it allows speakers to avoid the presentation of

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each proposition in its strongest categorical terms. In her important study Salager-Meyer (1994) revealed that the type and frequency of hedges are rhetorical and communicative contexts, and the study of scientific discourse implied that the cautious formulation may signal competence of the discipline or its weakness.

Hedging is relevant to gender research in part because of the seminal work on women's language by Lakoff (1975). The work *Language and Woman's Place* correlated various linguistic features, such as lexical hedges and tag questions, with socially created expectations that would be placed on women's speech. While Lakoff's work was important for beginning a systematic discussion of language and gender, analyses that correlate simple language categories with binary genders have come under more scrutiny than ever in recent years. Modern language and gender theories, however, focus on the situational production of gender and cautions against assuming culturally familiar gender beliefs as universal truths of language. Eckert and McConnell-Ginet (2003) foreground gender as a phenomenon that exists within institutions, interactions, practices and identities, and not as an easily identifiable casual factor that systematically yields linguistic distinctions.

Empirical research serves to refute the simple assumption that females tend to hedge more than males. Dixon and Foster's (1997) study of gender and hedging specifically sought to shift from the generalised pattern of gender differences to a pattern of situated practice; conversational conditions and addressee variables impacted upon the occurrence of hedges, not providing a simple universal speaker-gender pattern. In a similar overall frequency level for the modal auxiliary hedges among women and men, with some types and uses varied.

Literary dialogue is a very fruitful place for this kind of enquiry to take place. Fictional conversation is a form of conversation that is written, chosen and structured. But literature can also symbolize familiar pragmatic situations: situations of uncertainty about knowledge, relational situation, intimate teasing, disagreement, authority, embarrassment, concealment and emotional vulnerability. The narrative point of view is an analytical aspect because it is possible that the narrator might be uncertain about the observations of other characters, or that the narrator might use sarcastic evaluations that are juxtaposed with the characters' dialogue.

The present paper builds on the path taken by mixed-gender literary interactions and thus examines female–female and male–male discourse without making the assumption that the patterns observed in mixed-gendered dialogues inevitably would carry over into same-gendered dialogues. The study has four explicit research questions that are addressed:

RQ1: What linguistic forms are used as hedges in the language of the selected contemporary male–male and female–female dialogues in English fiction?

RQ2: What pragmatic functions do these hedges serve, specifically with regard to epistemic stance, evidentiality, face-saving, politeness, mitigation, sarcasm, self-protection and turn management?

RQ3: What effects do the point of view, interpersonal relationships, knowledge asymmetries, power relations, emotional vulnerability, and communicative context have on the interpretation and pragmatic functions of hedging?

RQ4: How do the studied same-gender dialogues confirm or reject the traditional notions of women's hedging and men's directness in speech?

Literature Review

While hedges have been studied mainly as linguistic devices that influence the precision or categoricality of propositions, more recent studies have shown that they can have interpersonal, epistemic and politeness-related effects. Theories of hedging are generally linked to Lakoff (1973), who proposed that the linguistic expression of hedging causes meanings to become less or more vague. This paved the way for an important link between hedging and the flexibility of conceptual boundaries. On this basis, Prince et al. (1982) suggested a distinction between approximators, which change the propositional part of the sentence, and shields, which modify the speaker's stance on the proposition. Their classification helped to develop an understanding of hedges as linguistic and communicative devices operating on various levels. Thereafter, the idea of hedging was extended and the pragmatic functions of hedging in discourse were investigated. Fraser (1975) studied the linguistic devices used for softening the impact of a speaker's utterances, and Hübler (1983) examined understatement and hedging as means of conveying indeterminacy. In addition, Channell (1994) showed that vague language does not necessarily reflect lack of knowledge but may be used for particular interactional purposes. Likewise, Caffi (1999) studied mitigation as a pragmatic, multidimensional act in which all parties to the interaction control their levels of commitment, interpersonal involvement, and potential impact of their utterances. One of the key aspects of hedging research relates to the connection between hedging and linguistic politeness. Brown & Levinson's (1987) politeness theory could be used to explain how the speakers use their linguistic means to save their own and their interlocutors' face. In this context, hedges can serve as negative-politeness devices, in reducing the imposition in the interaction, in reducing categorical judgments, and in enabling the range of response of interlocutors. They can also serve to reinforce positive politeness by helping to

reach agreement, showing attentiveness, and establishing interpersonal solidarity. The politeness value of a hedge, however, cannot be determined by its linguistic form alone, as the same linguistic form could serve different purposes in different contexts of communication. Furthermore, research on hedging focused on its epistemic aspect. Holmes (1984) studied the functions of such expressions as *you know* and *I think*, and showed that there was a need to pay attention to their contextual meanings rather than considering them as possessing one communicative function. Hedging also attracted attention in academic discourse studies with the work of Hyland (1996, 1998), who examined how hedging devices allow speakers and writers to be cautious, to manage epistemic commitment and to negotiate claims with their audience. While these studies focus on academic and institutional communication, the conclusions reached can serve as a theoretical framework for the analysis of the ways fictional characters negotiate knowledge, certainty, and interpersonal responsibility in hedged utterances. Another important topic of study is the connection between hedging and gender. Lakoff (1975) linked these linguistic elements with women's discourse, defining them in terms of differences in social status and communicative power between the sexes and in terms of the history of these differences. This view led to much debate on gender, language behaviour and power. Subsequent research questioned the notion that hedging always indicated hesitation, uncertainty, and/or lack of confidence. Holmes (1990, 1995) for instance pointed out their multi-functionality of linguistic expressions and showed that interpretation of these expressions is influenced by interpersonal and contextual variables. Coates (1986, 1996) also pointed out that language must be studied in context of real communicative events, and that cooperation, solidarity and social relationships are important in gendered interaction. The difference approach, as represented by Tannen (1990), highlighted the different interactional orientations that can arise from gendered socialization. The problem of treating gender as a fixed linguistic determinant was called into question by dynamic and social constructionist theories, such as those of West and Zimmerman (1987), Butler (1990), and Cameron (1997). Gender is viewed from these angles as socially constructed and negotiated in process over time.

Modern theories of gender and hedging, therefore, increasingly focus on the context. It is not possible to consider specific linguistic forms as feminine or masculine in isolation; instead, researchers need to take into account the interplay of gender, interpersonal relationships, social roles, communicative intentions and situational circumstances. This theoretical perspective is especially important when considering fictional discourse, as it helps clarify how characters' linguistic practices relate to the interpersonal relations, emotional engagement, and

distribution of knowledge and authority that provides a context for their speech. Thus, the communicative function of hedges becomes apparent in their interaction with the discourse they are embedded in.

Methods

This study uses a qualitative, interpretive discourse analytic methodology combining pragmatic and contextual analysis with insight from language-and-gender research. The emphasis is on the context-dependent communicative and pragmatic functions of the hedges, not on recognition of the hedges as separate lexical and grammatical items.

Therefore, hedging is investigated as a discourse phenomenon that is influenced by the interlocutor's communicative situation, the relationship between speakers, their roles and purpose of communicative acts. It is especially suited for the present investigation which is not primarily concerned with the statistical frequency or distribution of the hedging devices in any representative sample of the data, but rather with the exploration of the linguistic forms in the context of particular sequences of interactions.

This methodological approach enables the analysis of how similar hedging expressions can have different pragmatic functions in different contexts of conversation, among others, to mitigate potentially face-threatening acts, express epistemic uncertainty, negotiate interpersonal relations, and manage communicative responsibility. The corpus includes selected same-gender dialogues (female–female and male–male) *The Goldfinch* by Donna Tartt, *Inferno* by Dan Brown, and *One of Us Is Back* by Karen M. McManus. By applying the various interpersonal relations described in these literary works, a variety of communicative situations are presented, such as friendship, emotional intimacy, disagreement, conflict, authority at work, emotional pressure, and unequal access to information. This contextual diversity enables a comparative study of the use of hedging devices by the female and male characters to achieve specific communicative intent.

The study aims to find similarities and differences in the pragmatic functions of hedging used in female–female and male–male interactions in the selected dialogues through close contextual analysis. To avoid the view of hedging as a language marker for women and the view of hedging as a linguistic uncertainty marker, the analysis will explore the interaction between gender and situation, relationships, and communication in the choices made by linguistic actors in the use of hedging. The results are therefore analysed in the context of the chosen fictional discourse and not seen as universal traits of women's and men's speech.

Results and Discussion

The excerpts demonstrate various combinations of epistemic, relational and strategic work. The collaborative interpretation, interpersonal negotiation and criticism control in the close relationship are highlighted in the female–female examples, while the management of self-protection, attribution, information and situational pressure control is highlighted in the male–male examples.

An analysis of selected extracts is presented below.

> *Bayview Crew,* ***maybe****? I pick up my phone and edit the group chat name.* ***It doesn't look half bad****.*
> *"Who's this guy?" Maeve asks, squinting at the screen.* ***"Is he going to introduce—"***
> *"No," I say quickly. "This isn't the Eastland High program. That starts at three o'clock.* ***This is...I have no idea, actually.****"*
> *"A town council meeting," Bronwyn says.* ***Of course she'd know****; she* ***probably*** *watches* ***this kind of thing*** *for fun. "****Looks like*** *they're wrapping up a budget vote."*
> *"****Thrilling. But at least that matters.****" Maeve props her bare feet up on the coffee table a little too aggressively, wincing as her heels slam into the marble top. "****At least*** *it deserves a platform.* ***Which is more than you can say for—****"*
> *"It's local cable, Maeve," I interrupt. "They're not picky about their Programming."*
>
> *(*McManus*, One of Us Is Back, p. 12)*

The current paragraph is a conversation between 3 friends: Addy(f), Maeve (f) and Bronwyn (f), they are watching TV together while discussing the content of the program. The narrative point of view belongs to Addy. This interaction is full of linguistic hedges. Starting off with "*maybe*", which is an epistemic hedge indicating uncertainty and tentativeness. "*It doesn't look half bad*" is a contextual hedge used by the narrator to showcase a polite view on a chosen name for a group chat. It however displays negative politeness, instead of saying "it looks good" positively, the character chooses a negated form, which compliments the choice but leaves a tiny negative impact. "*Is he going to introduce—*" is an example of a syntactic hedge, indicating an assumption or expectation that is not fully verbalized. This sentence can be viewed as a sign of subtle annoyance, threatening the negative face of the speaker, then the following immediate answer "no" is a bald-on-record politeness strategy that is followed by "*this is...I have no idea, actually*", which is a clear sign of a politeness marker executed by an epistemic hedge "*I have no idea*" and a "face-saving" or stance hedge "*actually*". The character does not showcase a clear negative or a clear positive politeness with this

sentence, it is rather neutral, in order to explain the confusion without sounding too arrogant or rude. "*Of course she'd know*" is a contextual hedge, in this context expressing sarcasm by Addy, clearly threatening her negative face, so even if the expression seems certain with a clear meaning, "*of course*" is a politeness hedge and "*would*" (she'd) is a modal hedge giving off a tone of uncertainty. "*Probably*" is a vagueness hedge, in this case forming a mitigating tone with the help of the hedge "*this kind of*" which is a vagueness marker. The sentence containing these hedges is also contextually sarcastic, meaning there is not much politeness intended. "*Looks like*" is a contextual synonym to the word "maybe", which is a hedge itself. "*Looks like*" is also an epistemic hedge twisting more towards the category of evidential hedges. Connecting to the degree of truth, "*looks like*" is used in more certain situations, it is more evidential than "*maybe*", however, it still indicates uncertainty. In this context the speaker used the expression to explain the content on TV, and the hedge shifts the degree of responsibility, softening the statement, making it a polite suggestion rather than a certain truth. This passage has a sarcastic tone, even though contextually the TV content seems to be important for the development of the story. Another instance of sarcastic hedging is "*Thrilling. But at least that matters*", there is an evident hedging device "*at least*" which sets a minimum value and low expectations, but saves the face of the speaker. Even though "*thrilling*" is used sarcastically and isn't necessarily a hedging device, "*at least*" saves the impact of the sarcasm by mitigating both statements. "*Which is more than you can say for—*" is the last hedge in this paragraph, again a syntactic one, an interrupted speech expressed by a quantitative "*more*", the statement is not necessarily polite, but interruption is a sign of impolite behavior, so even though the character is not the one expressing impoliteness, the statement still leaves an impolite tone to the passage.

> *"That's not it," I say.*
> *"**You're sure?**" Maeve asks, holding her phone up higher.*
> *"I told you when you texted me last night. The patterns are nothing alike."*
> *"**Yeah, but I thought you might think differently if you saw the original,**" Maeve says, enlarging her screen. "Plus you were drugged, **so...**"*
> *"I know what I saw, though. Or what I dreamed, and it wasn't that."*
> *"Damn it," Maeve sighs as she closes the picture of the Ramona-house wallpaper. "We're back to square one, then, and Addy got terrorized for nothing."*
> *"**Sorry,**" I mutter, and she squeezes my arm.*
> *"No, no, that's not what I meant. **It's just—ugh, it was a night.**"*
>
> (McManus, *One of Us Is Back,* p. 273)

The line "*That's not it,*" is a direct refutation with no hedge. This bluntness signals confidence or frustration as it directly dismisses her contribution. Maeve replies with "*You're sure?*", which is a syntactic hedge. It softens the challenge and functions as a negative politeness strategy by respecting Phoebe's autonomy while gently encouraging reconsideration. Phoebe responds, "I *told you when you texted me last night. The patterns are nothing alike.*" The phrase "*I told you*" is assertive, confirming past knowledge and indirectly dismissing Maeve's question. "*Nothing alike*" is an absolute with no hedging, reinforcing Phoebe's certainty. Maeve continues with "*Yeah, but I thought you might think differently if you saw the original.*" The phrase "*might think differently*" is an epistemic hedge that lowers the assertiveness of her claim. "*If you saw the original*" adds a soft appeal to evidence. The use of "*yeah, but*" signals soft opposition. Altogether, this is a blend of negative politeness that minimizes imposition and positive politeness that engages and gives room for collaboration. "*Plus you were drugged, so…*" ends in a trailing off. This is a vagueness device, softening the implication that Phoebe's memory might be unreliable. Maeve maintains mitigation by avoiding a direct accusation. Phoebe replies with "*I know what I saw, though. Or what I dreamed, and it wasn't that.*" "*I know what I saw*" defends her credibility. The self-correction "*or what I dreamed*" introduces epistemic uncertainty, acting as a hedging repair that slightly backtracks and acknowledges doubt. "*Sorry"* is meant to mitigate damage and take responsibility. Maeve's response, a physical gesture of squeezing Phoebe's arm, signals emotional support and reassurance. Maeve follows with "*No, no, that's not what I meant. It's just—ugh, it was a night.*" The repetition of "no" and self-correction is a discourse repair used to avoid misunderstanding. The vague phrase *"it was a night"* is an understatement and a coping mechanism, indirectly expressing a stressful or traumatic event. Finally, Cooper says, "*You should've called me.*" This is a mild reproach. The phrase "*should've*" expresses a social expectation and could be face-threatening, but it's softened by the casual tone. It reflects caring and emotional investment.

The analysis now focuses on hedges and their functional aspects in certain male–male dialogues.

> *"Oh,* ***God,****" I said, putting the card down on the table and looking away.*
> *"****For Pete's sake****." "What?" "It's him.* ***With the chest-on-chest.****"*
> *"Oh,* ***him****," said Hobie. He adjusted his glasses, regarded me* ***quietly****.*
> *"****Did he ever cash that check?****" I* ***ran a hand through my hair****. "No."*
> *"What's this proposal? What's he talking about?" "****Look—****" I went to the sink to get a glass of water, a****n old trick of my father's when he needed a moment to compose himself—***

> *"**I haven't wanted to bother you** but this guy's been a **huge nuisance.** I've **started throwing away** the letters without opening them. **If you get another one, I suggest you toss it in the trash**."*
> *"What does he want?"*
> *"**Well—**" the faucet was noisy; I ran my glass; "**well**." I turned, wiped my hand across my forehead. "**It'sreally nuts.** I've written him a check for the piece, **as I said.** For more than he paid." "So what's the problem?" "**Ah—**" I took **a swallow of my water—**"**unfortunately** he has something else in mind. **He thinks**, ah, he thinks we're running an **assembly line** down here, and he's trying to **cut himself in on it.** See, instead of cashing my check? he's got **some elderly woman** lined up, **nurses twentyfour hours a day,** and what he wants is for us to use her apartment to, **uh—"** Hobie's eyebrows went up. "**Plant?**" "**Right,**" I said, glad he'd been the one to say it. 'Planting' was a **racket** whereby fakes or inferior antiques were placed in private homes—**often** homes belonging to the elderly—to be sold to **vultures** clustering at the deathbed: **bottom feeders so eager** to rip off **the old lady in the oxygen tent** that they didn't realize they were being ripped off themselves. "When I tried to give his money back—this was his **counter-proposal.** We supply the pieces. Fifty-fifty split. He's been harassing me ever since."*
>
> (Tartt, *The Goldfinch*, p. 512)

In this passage, Theo provides a highly defensive and evasive account to Hobie regarding a blackmail attempt. The dialogue is dense with linguistic stalling, as Theo attempts to explain a criminal "proposal" while simultaneously concealing the fact that the antiques being sold are actually forgeries. The exclamation *"MY GOD"* serves as a pragmatic hedge of emotional intensity, functioning as a filler to signal distress before delivering information. The phrase *"For Pete's sake"* is a euphemistic hedge used to soften a more profane expression. Theo uses the demonstrative *"him"* as a vague reference hedge to avoid naming the antagonist, while the description *"the chest-on-chest"* acts as a metonymic approximator to identify the man by an object. Hobie's reaction, *"quietly,"* is a manner adverb acting as a hedge to qualify the low intensity of his response. The question *"Did he ever cash that check?"* uses the past tense as a temporal hedge to frame the issue as a lingering, unresolved matter. Theo's physical action of *"ran a hand through my hair"* is a non-verbal contextual hedge, signaling cognitive load or hesitation. The discourse marker *"Look—"* is a pragmatic hedge used to reset the conversation and claim authority over the narrative. The parenthetical note about the "old trick of my father's" identifies the act of getting water as a strategic contextual hedge—a physical stalling device used to "compose himself." Theo's statement *"I haven't wanted to bother you"* is a classic epistemic shield, framing his lack of

transparency as a polite gesture. He describes the man as a *"huge nuisance,"* where *"huge"* is an approximator of degree used to minimize a lethal legal threat into a mere annoyance. The use of *"started throwing away"* implies a habitual action, acting as a frequency hedge to suggest a pattern of dismissiveness. The phrase *"I suggest you toss it"* is a performative hedge that masks a desperate directive as a casual piece of advice. The repetition of *"Well—"* and *"well"* are blatant hesitation markers used to buy time as Theo constructs his lie. The claim *"It's really nuts"* uses the booster *"really"* as a reverse-hedge to invalidate the antagonist's claims as insane. The qualifier *"as I said"* is a reportative hedge used to bolster his own consistency. Theo's *"Ah—"* and the act of taking a *"swallow of my water"* are further pragmatic stalling hedges. The word *"unfortunately"* is an attitudinal hedge, framing the upcoming criminal plot as a matter of bad luck. Theo uses the epistemic shield *"He thinks"* twice to present the man's accusation of an "assembly line" as a delusion. The term *"assembly line"* is a metaphoric approximator for a factory of forgeries. The phrase *"cut himself in on it"* is a vague reference hedge for extortion. The description of an *"elderly woman"* and *"nurses twenty-four hours a day"* provides specific but unverified contextual hedges to ground the story in a plausible setting. The filler *"uh—"* signals a search for a euphemism, leading Hobie to provide the term *"Plant?",* which Theo adopts as a jargon-based hedge to avoid describing the crime himself. Theo's "Right" is a pragmatic minimal stabilizer of agreement. The description of the *"racket"* uses *"often"* as a frequency hedge and *"vultures"* as a descriptive approximator for predatory buyers. The phrase *"bottom feeders so eager"* uses hyperbole as a descriptive hedge to dehumanize the victims and perpetrators alike. The mention of the *"old lady in the oxygen tent"* is a contextual hedge of vivid detail used to evoke sympathy and distract from the illegality of Theo's own position. Finally, *"counter-proposal"* is a formalistic hedge used to rebrand a criminal threat as a professional negotiation. Regarding gender differences, the interaction showcases an inversion of typical power-based speech norms. Theo, though male, adopts a high frequency of "feminine-coded" hesitation markers and epistemic shields because he is in a position of extreme social and legal vulnerability. His hedging is a survival mechanism used to hide guilt. In contrast, Hobie's speech is remarkably direct and unhedged. Hobie occupies a position of moral and paternal authority, allowing him to use blunt inquiries. Theo's reliance on indirectness and emotional appeals demonstrates how speakers in "lower-power" or compromised positions regardless of gender will utilize softening strategies to navigate conflict with an authority figure.

> *"Stay with the bus,* ***please****," Langdon said. "****And do you have a phone?****" The man produced a cell phone from his pocket and handed it to his passenger, who thanked him profusely before realizing that he had no idea whom to call. He had no contact numbers for Sinskey or Brüder, and calling the WHO's offices in Switzerland could take forever. "How do I reach the local police?" Langdon asked. "One-five-five," the man replied. "Anywhere in Istanbul."*
>
> (Brown*, Inferno,* p. 343)

The current conversation takes place during Langdon's attempt to take control of an emergency situation while traveling, as he seeks practical help and realizes the limits of his information and authority. *"Stay with the bus, please,"* Langdon said, using the politeness marker *"please,"* which softens what is essentially a directive. This reflects the use of an introductory phrase that mitigates imposition and reduces the force of the command. In context, the hedge allows Langdon to assert situational authority without sounding domineering, which is important given that he is addressing a stranger. From a gender perspective, the use of politeness markers is often associated with female speech, but here a male character adopts this strategy to maintain cooperation and avoid confrontation, showing how hedging can be context-driven rather than strictly gendered. Brown and Levinson would also view *"please"* as a negative politeness strategy aimed at preserving the addressee's autonomy. *"And do you have a phone?"* is phrased as a question rather than a direct request, functioning as an indirect speech act. In context, the hedge makes the request socially acceptable and less intrusive. From a gender perspective, indirect questioning is frequently linked to female interactional styles, but Langdon's use of it reflects situational vulnerability rather than gendered preference, as he lacks institutional authority. *"How do I reach the local police?"* is another indirect request framed as a question, avoiding an imperative such as *"Call the police."* This maintains politeness and signals uncertainty. From a gender perspective, this again shows a male character relying on hedging and indirectness, contrasting with stereotypes of male directness and reinforcing his temporary dependence on others.

The analysis shows that hedging in female–female and male–male communication has various pragmatic functions that are not solely determined by the communicative context. The interpersonal interaction negotiations between males and between females are particularly oriented to epistemic negotiation, negotiation of disagreement, and negotiation of interpersonal alignment; on the male side male–male interpersonal interaction negotiations foreground negotiation of self-protection, negotiation of responsibility, and negotiation of the cautious disclosure of sensitive information. However, the functions do not apply

exclusively to females or males, and female and male characters use hedging to manage their relationship, to protect face, and to maintain interpersonal relations. The results indicate that the gendered differences in hedging are not only explained by women's tendency to be indirect and men's tendency to be direct but also by the interaction of language choices, interpersonal relationships, communicative purpose, and situational context.

Conclusion

The present study focused on the pragmatic functions of hedging in female–female and male–male communication as portrayed in contemporary English fiction, using selected dialogues from *One of Us Is Back* by Karen M. McManus, *The Goldfinch* by Donna Tartt and *Inferno* by Dan Brown. By using qualitative, context-based discourse analysis, the research showed that hedging is a multifunctional communicative micro-resource, and its meaning is shaped by interpersonal relationships, communicative intentions, epistemic situations and situational pressures. The analysis of female–female interactions reveals that hedges contribute to the negotiation of knowledge, the mitigation of disagreement, and the maintenance of interpersonal relationships. Female characters use epistemic expressions (maybe, probably, looks like), to qualify their judgments and place restrictions on their commitment to specific propositions. In the same way, incomplete statements, self-corrections, and modal constructions allow for reevaluation of content and potentially sensitive judgments. Hedging is often used in conjunction with collaborative interpretation, clarification, and attempts to avoid misunderstandings in the exchanges between Addy, Maeve, Bronwyn, and Phoebe.

However, there are also direct contradictions, categorical statements, interruptions, and sarcasm in these conversations suggesting that indirectness and linguistic tentativeness cannot be entirely the exclusive markers of women's communication.

By contrast, the selected male–male interactions have gained the focus on hedging as a way to manage communicative responsibility, interpersonal vulnerability and situational uncertainty. In *The Goldfinch*, the use of hesitation markers, attributional expressions, indirect formulations as well as discourse repairs helps reveal sensitive information and handle the possibility of criticism, revealing a gradual unfolding throughout the conversation. Theo’s linguistic responses are to his vulnerability and his desire to shape the meaning of events, while Hobie’s more straightforward questions are related to his status as an information-seeking interlocutor. In the same way, in Inferno, Langdon’s communication with the bus driver reflects the use of indirect expressions and

politeness devices to foster cooperation in a crisis of limited information and reliance on someone else. In these examples, the messages conveyed by the male characters are also mitigated and indirect as circumstances demand caution, co-operation or self-protection.

One of the important results of this study is that the differences between female–female and male–male interaction can be attributed to the different functions of hedging in a particular context rather than to a basic dichotomy between female indirectness and male directness. The focus of the selected female–female dialogues is on collaborative interpretation, epistemic negotiation and interpersonal disagreement reduction, whereas the focus of the male–male dialogues is on responsibility management, cautious disclosure and situational pressure regulation. These functions are not specific to male or female, however. The immediate communicative purposes and circumstances do differ, but both male and female characters use hedging to protect their face, limit their commitment to propositions, and negotiate interpersonal relationships. The results thus indicate that a gender-based perspective is insufficient to explain the pragmatic distribution of the hedging strategies. Interlocutors' knowledge and authority, emotional involvement, and communicative goals are crucial to the functioning of specific linguistic devices.

Furthermore, it is important to note that the analysis also reveals that many other phenomena, such as politeness markers, hesitation, discourse repair, and nonverbal behavior, can lead to mitigation but are not necessarily hedges in the strict sense of the word. Overall, the study provides a dynamic and context-sensitive understanding of gendered use of language, and refutes a number of interpretations that link hedging mainly with women's uncertainty or subordinate communication function. The research does not take the view that women's and men's discourse styles are rigidly determined by the type of hedge used, but rather sees hedges as dynamic pragmatic tools in which fictional characters seek information, manage interpersonal relations, assert authority, and express vulnerability.

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Ն. Հարությունյան – *Թերասությունների գենդերային առանձնահատկությունները՝ որպես հաղորդակցական համատեքստով պայմանավորված գործաբանական դրսևորում. կին–կին և տղամարդ–տղամարդ երկխոսությունների որակական վերլուծություն ժամանակակից անգլալեզու գեղարվեստական գրականության մեջ. –* Սույն հոդվածում ուսումնասիրվում են թերասությունների կիրառման գենդերային առանձնահատկությունները ժամանակակից անգլալեզու գեղարվեստական գրականության կին–կին և տղամարդ–տղամարդ երկխոսություններում: Հետազոտության հիմքում ընկած է Կարեն Մ. Մաքմանուսի «Մեզնից մեկը վերադարձել է» (*One of Us Is Back*), Դոննա Տարտի «Կարմրակատարիկը» (*The Goldfinch*) և Դեն Բրաունի «Ինֆեռնո» (*Inferno*) ստեղծագործություններից ընտրված երկխոսությունների որակական դիսկուրսային վերլուծությունը՝ գործաբանական, համատեքստային և գենդերային մոտեցումների համադրմամբ:

Հետազոտության արդյունքները ցույց են տալիս, որ վերլուծված կին–կին երկխոսություններում թերասությունները հաճախ կիրառվում են տարաձայնությունները մեղմելու, զգայուն գնահատողական արտահայտությունների ազդեցությունը նվազեցնելու և միջանձնային փոխըմբռնման հասնելու նպատակով: Միաժամանակ, կին կերպարների խոսքում հանդիպում են նաև հակադրություններ, հեգնանք և կտրուկ արտահայտություններ, հատկապես այն իրավիճակներում, երբ զրուցակիցների մտերմությունը հնարավորություն է տալիս առավել անմիջականորեն արտահայտելու սեփական դիրքորոշումը:

Տղամարդ–տղամարդ երկխոսությունների վերլուծությունը բացահայտում է թերասությունների և դրանց առնչվող մեղմացման միջոցների կիրառումը հատկապես այն իրավիճակներում, երբ խոսողը բախվում է տեղեկացվածության պակասի, սեփական ասույթի նկատմամբ պատասխանատվության սահմանափակման անհրաժեշտության, բարոյական կամ սոցիալական խոցելիության, զրուցակցից կախվածության կամ հրահանգային խոսքային ակտերի ազդեցությունը մեղմելու անհրաժեշտության: Նման համատեքստերում տղամարդ կերպարների խոսքում թերասությունները կատարում են պաշտպանողական, տեղեկության հավաստիության աստիճանի մատնանշման և համագործակցային գործառույթներ:

Ստացված արդյունքները հաստատում են խոսքային վարքագծի գենդերային առանձնահատկությունների համատեքստային մեկնաբանության կարևորությունը: Դրանք ցույց են տալիս, որ կանանց և տղամարդկանց խոսքում թերասությունների գործառույթները տարբերակվում են՝ պայմանավորված մտերմության աստիճանով, տեղեկացվածությամբ, հեղինակության և իշխանական հարաբերությունների բաշխմամբ, սոցիալական ու հուզական խոցելիությամբ, ինչպես նաև հաղորդակցական նպատակներով: Հետևաբար, թերասությունների գենդերային առանձնահատկությունները չեն կարող բացատրվել բացառապես խոսողի գենդերային պատկանելությամբ, այլ ձևավորվում են գործաբանական, միջանձնային և համատեքստային գործոնների փոխազդեցությամբ:

Բանալի բառեր՝ *թերասություններ, գենդեր, կին–կին երկխոսություններ, տղամարդ–տղամարդ երկխոսություններ, մեղմացում, քաղաքավարություն*

Н. Арутюнян – *Гендерные особенности хеджирования как проявление контекстуально обусловленной прагматической практики: качественный анализ диалогов «женщина-женщина» и «мужчина-мужчина» в современной англоязычной художественной литературе.* – В настоящей статье рассматриваются гендерные особенности использования средств хеджирования в диалогах типа «женщина-женщина» и «мужчина-мужчина» в современной англоязычной художественной литературе. Исследование основано на качественном дискурсивном анализе избранных диалогов из романов Карен М. Макманус «Один из нас вернулся» (One of Us Is Back), Донны Тартт «Щегол» (The Goldfinch) и Дэна Брауна «Инферно» (Inferno). Анализ проводится с применением прагматического, контекстуального и гендерно ориентированного подходов.

Результаты исследования показывают, что в анализируемых диалогах между женскими персонажами средства хеджирования часто используются для облегчения процесса согласования позиций, смягчения разногласий, регулирования потенциально деликатных оценочных высказываний и достижения межличностного взаимопонимания. Вместе с тем женские персонажи прибегают и к прямому выражению несогласия, сарказму и категоричным высказываниям, особенно в ситуациях, когда близость отношений допускает более непосредственную форму общения.

Характерной особенностью исследуемых диалогов между мужскими персонажами является использование средств хеджирования и связанных с ними способов смягчения высказываний в ситуациях недостаточной информированности, необходимости ограничения ответственности за высказываемую позицию, моральной или социальной уязвимости, зависимости от собеседника, а также стремления снизить категоричность директивных речевых актов. В подобных контекстах хеджирование в речи мужских персонажей выполняет не только функцию выражения неопределённости, но и защитную, эвиденциальную и кооперативную функции.

Полученные результаты подтверждают необходимость контекстуального подхода к интерпретации гендерных особенностей речевого поведения. Они свидетельствуют о том, что функции хеджирования в речи женских и мужских персонажей варьируются в зависимости от характера межличностных отношений, степени информированности, распределения коммуникативных ролей и властных полномочий, социальной и эмоциональной уязвимости, а также конкретных коммуникативных целей. Таким образом, гендерные особенности хеджирования определяются не только гендерной принадлежностью говорящего, но и совокупностью прагматических и контекстуальных факторов.

Ключевые слова: *хеджирование, гендер, диалоги «женщина-женщина», диалоги «мужчина-мужчина», смягчение высказывания, вежливость*