The Modality–Illocutionary Force Correlation Through Language Attenuation and Hedged Performatives

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ABSTRACT

This research addresses one issue that relates to correspondence between the modality of an utterance and its illocutionary force represented by two separate yet interrelated notions, viz. attenuation and hedged performative. Although the two notions might sound unrelated, they do correlate in that a hedged performative can be seen as an utterance whose illocutionary force is attenuated/mitigated/hedged. Further, attenuation, which is the gradual lessening or weakening of the illocutionary force or effect of an utterance, has been confused or used synonymously / interchangeably with mitigation, downgrading, hedging, slack regulation, downplay, sugarcoating, fine-tuning, and downtoner. The other notion is Hedged Performative. Although it was introduced by Fraser in (1975), it has neither received due attention nor its communicative function has been subject to an in-depth study. The aim of this article is twofold: to explicate both notions and to establish a link between them in terms the discursive / argumentative strategies that are adopted by interlocutors to moderate the strength of speech act / illocutionary force and reduce the predicted negative impact of performatives.

KEY WORDS: Attenuation, Hedged Performative, Illocutionary force, Modality, Mitigation.

1. INTRODUCTION

Attenuation is generally understood as the gradual lessening or weakening of the force or effect of an utterance. Certain lexical items and particular linguistic forms and constructions have the ability to attenuate the force of an utterance. They can, therefore, be classified as attenuators. Attenuation is sometimes used synonymously or interchangeably with mitigation, downgrading, hedging, slack regulation, downplay, sugarcoat, fine-tuning, and downtoner.

Attenuation or mitigation "…is an interesting pragmatic concept which has attracted some attention. It can usefully be considered in relation to the more general communicative strategies for modifying the strength or force of speech acts, namely, attenuation and boosting" (Holmes 1984, p.345). Holmes (1984) and Fraser (1980) equate mitigation with attenuation as they are used to moderate the expected illocutionary force of the performative.

Similarly, Caffi (2007, p.40) regards mitigation as synonymous with attenuation and downgrading and that mitigation "…is one of the two directions of modulation, namely the rhetorical stylistic encoding of an utterance, its expressivity, opposed and complementary to the direction reinforcement" (Caffi 1999, p.882). According to Urbanová (2003, p.64), the modification of the illocutionary force or semantic indeterminacy comes in two forms, viz. "…attenuation, primarily oriented towards the elimination of conflict in communication, and accentuation, primarily directed towards the establishment of solidarity and mutual agreement".

The present article aims to address the modality–illocutionary force correlation problem represented by two separate yet interrelated notions, viz. attenuation and hedged performative (henceforth. HP/HPs). Although the two notions might sound unrelated, they do correlate in that HPs are basically utterances whose illocutionary force is attenuated/mitigated/hedged. This article, however, is not concerned with modality as a conceptual framework, but rather with how the illocutionary force of a speech act can be modifies by the use of a modal or marginal modal auxiliary verb. Therefore, speech act theory and modality theories fall outside the scope of the present article.

2. METHODOLOGY AND RESEARCH DESIGN

This research attempts to shed light on two very significant yet neglected notions within pragmatics that have been ignored / dominated by / confused with other notions. The first is attenuation that has come to be overshadowed by other notions and terms, viz. mitigation, downgrading, hedging, slack regulation, semantic indeterminacy, downplay, sugarcoating, fine-tuning, and downtoner. The other notion, HP, has been inaccurately confused with other terms such as hedging, illocution, and performatives. The aim of this article is twofold: to explicate both notions and to establish a link between them in terms of the modality–illocutionary force correlation. The first step is to provide background information on the notion of attenuation, its definition, types and functions, its power to weaken the illocutionary force, and its relation with politeness. The second step is to tackle HPs and explicate their structure, function, and relation to both performative utterances and to hedging. The third step is to establish that missing link between the two notions in terms of the weakening, lessening, downgrading of the commitment to the utterance proposition.

3. PREVIOUS WORKS

Few researches have been conducted on attenuation and HPs. Schneider (2010) examined parenthetical HPs in three languages: English, French, Italian, and Spanish to estimate the effect of modal verbs on the illocutionary force of the utterance. In another study, Panther and Thornburg (2019), "focused on the ways in which the modal verb alters the illocutionary force of the following 'performative' verb, with conceptual framing and metonymic inferencing being key in their approach" (Depraetere and Kaltenböck 2023, p. 208). Depraetere and Kaltenböck (2023) analyzed the function of the two HPs *must* and *have to* in spoken American English. They adopted a corpus-based approach to inspect the use of HPs in discourse. Briz and Estelles in their work 'On the Relationship between Attenuation, Discourse Particles and Position' (2010), attempted to provide proof on "the direct correlation between the meaning of discourse particles and their situation with respect to discourse units". Thus, "Changes in position bring corresponding changes in meaning and, more importantly for our purpose, they may trigger or inhibit attenuation" (p.289). Jucker in 'Speech act attenuation in the history of English' (2019) proposed a new method to describe speech acts and suggested that "the diachronic development of speech acts is both a gradual process with limited short-term effects that lead to more substantial differences and a process of attenuation, i.e. a progressive weakening of

its illocutionary force". It also provided a framework of how "…this new theoretical framework of speech act attenuation can be applied to other speech acts, such as promises and greetings" (p.45). Urbanová's work 'On expressing meaning in English conversation: semantic indeterminacy' (2003) was the first to fully account for attenuation. She provided a taxonomy of attenuation that consists of twelve types and two broad functions. In their work, 'Commissive Modality of International Legal Discourse: An Implicit Mitigation of the Bindingness', Kravchenko et al., (2022) they focus on discursive modality and it correlation with illocutionary force and categorize "five classes of commissives in relation to speech acts: direct commissives, hedged direct commissives, indirect commissives, indirect implied commissives, hedged indirect implied commissives" (p.1039). In his work, 'How to Encode and Infer Linguistic Actions' (2016), Panther discusses "how much of a linguistic message is explicitly coded and how much content is implied by the speaker and has to be inferred by the addressee". He isolates two speech act types "(i) explicit performative utterances in which the illocutionary act performed by the speaker is overtly named, and (ii) hedged performatives in which the illocutionary verb is hedged by a modal or attitudinal expression" (p.177).

The present work is different from previous studies in that it tries, for the first time to establish a link between attenuation and HPs by expounding that an HP is one way to attenuate the illocutionary force of an utterance.

4. ATTENUATION

The term attenuation has received scant attention in pragmatics, discourse analysis, and communicative / discursive strategy research. One reason for this is that it has commonly been confused with or used interchangeably with such terms as mitigation, hedging, downgrading, sugarcoating, etc. on defining this notion, Urbanová (2003, p.64) finds that attenuation, which is sometimes dubbed mitigation, downgrading or hedging, is "a procedure which results in the weakening of the illocutionary force in situations which would otherwise lead to a loss of face (either for the speaker or for the listener) and which would thus make communication untenable mainly due to the infringing of the Politeness Principle" (2003, p58); and as "…a strategy which is abundant in informal English conversation. Although the repertoire of attenuation devices is relatively limited in scope, it allows of a subtle differentiation of meaning in relevant contexts".

Attenuation is redefined again by Urbanová as "a discourse tactic which is closely connected with tact, modesty and generosity. In general it complies with the requirement for acceptability of human speech

behaviour. Negative meanings are not conveyed by means of attenuation, unless rendered with a tinge of irony, sarcasm or contradiction" (2003, p.60). Besides, "attenuation modifies either the logical or the emotive meaning in conversation. It can convey either detachment or involvement, thus providing alternatives in the interpretation of the utterance meaning". Additionally, "…oscillation of meaning is a noticeable feature of attenuation devices, which makes them pragmatically utilizable in a large number of specific contexts" ((2003, p.65).

Briz and Estelles (2010, pp. 289-290) define attenuation as a term that "…accounts for a particular argumentative strategy aiming to get other people's agreement or acceptance (including social acceptance)". Attenuation "…consists in downgrading of what is said and of the fact of saying it: of what is said, because utterances containing this strategy become blurred or less explicit, of the fact of saying it, because attenuation allows speakers to soften the strength of their actions and intentions". Attenuation, thus, refers to "a particular argumentative strategy aiming to get other people's agreement or acceptance (including social acceptance). It consists in a downgrading of what is said and of the fact of saying it". What is said is attenuated as "utterances containing this strategy become blurred or less explicit"; while in the other, "attenuation allows speakers to soften the strength of their actions and intentions". Attenuation is therefore, "…verbal tactics used to reach the intended attenuation".

According to Urbanová, (2003, p.58), in any real language exchange "the need for sharing and avoidance of conflict play a significant role in the consequent modification of the illocutionary force of individual speech acts". Moreover, "the semantic interpretation of attenuation proceeds with regard to the Cooperative Principle and the Politeness Principle, drawing on Palmer (1990), Coates (1987), Holmes (1984, 1995) Brown-Levinson (1987) and Kempson (1990)". Still, "some imbalance can be observed in that they place notions of intensification or emphasis under the heading of attenuation; routinely, though, these have the opposite impact, referred to as 'accentuation', and are complementary to attenuation markers" (Kačmárová 2006, p.10).

In her work 'mitigation', Caffi (2007) equates mitigation with attenuation or downgrading and recognizes that mitigation reduces obligations for the interlocutors, which involves the (re-)allocation and (re-)adjustment of the rights and duties triggered by the speech act, and, crucially, the weighing of their intensity and urgency.

4.1 Types and Functions of Attenuation

Urbanová (2003, pp.60-64), who was the first to fully account for attenuation, provides a taxonomy of attenuation that consists of twelve types and two broad functions:

1. Negative politeness: this type "reflects the need to avoid face-threatening acts, such as refusal, disagreement, objection, dislike, disapproval, criticism, disregard etc." (2003, p.61) as in: I think / don't it's workable. I mean it would somehow be a bit irresponsible.

2. Assumption/consideration: "Utterances in conversation tend to be interpretive, not descriptive." Further, "Epistemic models are means which enable speakers to make assumptions. Apart from making a judgement, the use of epistemic modals also contributes to shaping the opposite meaning, i.e. disclaiming the responsibility for the judgement" (2003, p.61) as in: I suppose, I probably, I presume, presumably he's, perhaps it is.

3. Unspecified reference: "Hints expressed by means of markers such as sort of, kind of, something like that, and the frequent occurrence of the prop-word thing meaning anything are typical components of informal English conversation" (2003, pp.61-62).

4. Detachment, reservation: "Mitigation complies with the wish of the speaker not to be on record, not to show commitment very openly in public" (2003, pp.62-63)

I just thought, I would have thought I think / don't think it's…

5. Depersonalization: is "detachment expressed in an impersonal way by means of the expression one" (2003, p.63), as in:

"Or one wonders whether it's that way round or whether it's the other way round. I mean one hears talk of biological needs but physiological almost denies any question of gender."

6. Self-evaluation: is "represented by comments on the speaker's behaviour in a situation which is embarrassing, or otherwise difficult to cope with. The speaker's intention is to express an apology or to make an excuse" (2003, p.63), as in:

"Having had this glass of sherry I was a bit woozy. And I don't know where I got this from. I mean I'd reached the point where I thought (well) if they if what would I do if they offered me this thing."

7. Non-commitment: in this type, "the speaker does not have a sufficient amount of reliable information when making a judgement; he/she feels the need to signal the lack of information using pragmatic markers such as perhaps, probably, I think, conditionals etc." (2003, p.62).

8. Conversational gambit: in this type, the expression I mean which "…is used as a transition element. This expression can be considered a pragmatic marker proper, which is used as a conversational gambit opening a new topic, or suggesting a different viewpoint" (2003, p.63).

9. Afterthought: "Remarks which amplify the meaning expressed previously can have a mitigating function" as

in "The interview was it was all right I mean I handled it like a competent under graduate" (2003, p.63).

10. Positive politeness: "The expression sort of is used in requests which show interest and curiosity on the part of the speaker. In face-to-face conversation it is polite to show insight into the speaker's problems" (2003, p.64).

11. Sarcasm: it is the use of words that imply the opposite of what is said, as in "was (sort of) you know expressing great animate - animated interests in in these theories about diet and eggs" (2003, p.64).

12. Contradiction: a combination of statements, ideas, or features which contradict one another, as in "She is not a bit the way she is at college" (2003, p.64).

As for the functions of attenuation in discourse, Urbanová provides two coexisting functions: "referential function affective function". The first function can be seen in terms of "lack of commitment to truth conditions", or "lack of competence to make a judgement", while the other function, affective function, can be viewed in terms of "adherence to social norms" or "disclaiming the validity of a judgement for social reasons" (2003, p.58). These two functions of attenuation "coexist and their split would be felt as artificial (Coates 1987, p.130)" (quotaed in (Urbanová 2003, p58). Furthermore, "Pragmatic means are context-sensitive: the same pragmatic means can be interpreted as means of attenuation in certain contexts, while in others as accentuation devices. I think is a transparent example" (Urbanová 2003, pp.58-59) [Original Emphasis]. In terms of the two proposed functions 'referential' and 'affective' "…certain context-situated meanings such as assumption, conversational gambit, lack of specification are more **referential**"; while, "negative politeness, detachment, self-evaluation, non-commitment, depersonalization, sarcasm and contradiction are primarily **attitudinal**" (Urbanová 2003, p.64).

4. 2 Attenuation as Weakening the Illocutionary Force

While Caffi (1999) extends the notion of mitigation as "weakening of the commitment to the proposition, degree of (in)directness of the illocution, endorsement of a social role, emotive involvement, topical salience, etc.), which constitute the system of an encounter", Fraser points out that "…mitigation does not refer to "any weakening of the force of the act being performed, but is related to speech acts whose effects are 'unwelcome' to the hearer". On that point, Caffi (2006, p.171) adds that "in everyday language, 'mitigation' as an action noun can refer both to the action of mitigating, and to the fact of being mitigated".

As for the notion of 'semantic indeterminacy, Kačmárová (2008, p.132) argues that, it is "that aspect of meaning which manifests the modal nature of an utterance, gives the utterance a particular evaluating accent and implies subjectivity"; and that "the illocutionary force of the utterance is modified through indirectness, impersonality, attenuation, accentuation, and vagueness". As for the correlation between attenuation and semantic indeterminacy, Kačmárová (2008, p.134) finds that Urbanová (2003) "introduces attenuation and accentuation through language means with a high level of subjectivity; they bring the effect of weakening or strengthening the intensity of the phenomenon".

Slack regulation can designate loose interpretations, "well-known cases where looser (rather than stricter) meanings are constructed can be found in Lakoff 1973". The following examples illustrate this point:

(1) A bat is sort of a bird.
(2) In a manner of speaking, a chicken is a bird.
(3) Roughly speaking, a shark is a fish.

The above three examples are clear cases of attenuated meaning as the meanings are "…weakened in some way. This raises the issue of how attenuation can occur in the first place" (Anderson 2016, p.4).

The meaning of discourse particles directly interacts with their situation with respect to discourse units. "Changes in position bring corresponding changes in meaning" and, thus, "…they may trigger or inhibit attenuation". Moreover, there is enough evidence on "the existence of some discourse particles whose core meaning is mitigating, and some others where an attenuating meaning arises in particular contexts". The former are "prototypically attenuating, but their position with respect to discourse is determinant for them to finally work as such"; the latter, however, "…may develop a contextual, peripheral attenuating meaning if their position in discourse is changed" Briz and Estelles (2010, p. 289).

As for adverbs of modality, Downing and Locke (1992, p. 554) claim that a lot of English speakers "…tend to insert in their conversations what may be called adverbs of 'modality', such as just, rather, quite, probably, almost, never, always, not at all, generally, usually. These modality adverbs are then "…not used in their normal, positive sense, but instead, to attenuate the force of what the speaker is saying."

Such modality markers "add to the interpersonal character of communication and modify the illocutionary force at the very moment of speaking" (Kačmárová 2006, p.10). The effect these markers contribute is "quantity, intensification, modality, attenuation, medium intensification, emphasis, self-justification, emphasis" (Downing and Locke 1992, p.554).

4.3 Attenuation as Politeness

Holmes (1984, p.346) asserts that mitigation is a strategy used to "reduce the anticipated negative effect of

a speech act". Interlocutors, for instance, may mitigate the force of a criticism, but they do not speak of mitigating their praise. As Vine (2010, p.339) comments, "mitigation is oriented towards interpersonal goals". Gladwell (2008) indicates that mitigated speech refers to "any attempt to downplay or sugarcoat the meaning of what is being said" (p.194). Schneider (2010, p.255) points out that in verbal interaction, mitigation facilitates the management of interpersonal relations because it makes an utterance as acceptable as possible to the interlocutor without the speaker having to give up his or her standpoint. In other words, mitigation manages the interaction 'smoothly' and lessens the risks that the interlocutors may face on various levels. Schneider (Ibid.) calls mitigation expressions 'fine-tuning-devices' that achieve a compromise between what the speaker wants to say and what the interlocutor is willing to accept.

Mitigation/attenuation is often viewed as part of the wider issue of politeness. Brown and Levinson (1987, p.42) treat mitigation as a synonym of politeness. Caffi (2007, p.48) maintains that in politeness research, the notion of mitigation has so far mainly been used with reference to the set of strategies interlocutors employ to attenuate the impact of what Brown and Levinson (1987) call 'face-threatening acts' (FTAs). According to Mey, "expressions that take the edge off face-threats are often called 'mitigation devices'" (1993, p.73). Moreover, Caffi (1999, p.882) explicates that mitigation is employed in order to smooth interactional management by reducing risks for participants at various levels, e.g. the risk of self-contradiction (on a discourse level), the risk of refusal, conflict, or losing face (on a social level), etc., thus agreeing with the core idea of being polite.

Coates (1987, p.122) emphasizes that "...it is important for speakers to avoid making outright assertions: each speaker must allow room for further discussion and for the modification of points of view". In this regard, Labov & Fanshel (1977, pp.345-6) concede that mitigating devices do indeed mitigate conflict. They propose the notion of mitigation, as opposed to that of 'aggravation', that is employed by interlocutors to mitigate or modify their speech to avoid being offensive. As Ohbuchi, Chiba & Fukushima (1996, p.1036) maintain, conflicts represent threats not only to the interlocutors' resources or relationships but also their faces. Leech (1983, p.113) postulates that "the function of the tact maxim is a negative one: it is a means of avoiding conflict". Therefore, mitigation and politeness can be seen on a par in terms of attenuating interpersonal conflicts.

In conclusion, Fraser's (1990) 'face-saving view' which is based on Goffman's notion of 'face' has as its backbone the implication that both negative and positive polite strategies can be seen as attenuating tactics.

4.4 Hedged Performatives

Although the concept of HPs was introduced by Fraser in (1975) "…the use of HPs in English has not been addressed in much detail despite their frequency and pivotal role, particularly in spoken discourse" (Depraetere and Kaltenböck 2023, p. 207). Likewise, although the term is "…frequently referred to in the literature, have never been the subject of an in-depth functional study"; and "There are very few detailed analyses of the communicative functions and use of HPs" (Ibid, p. 208).

A HP is a structure whose performative power / illocutionary force is moderated by some devices such as "a full or marginal modal auxiliary" (Jucker & Taavitsainen, 2008, p.253). An HP is an amalgamation of a performative verb that is preceded by a modal or marginal modal auxiliary. While the notion of HPs was hosted by Lakoff (1972, p.213), it was Fraser (1975), however, "who developed the concept more fully and coined the term". Fraser defined a hedged performative as "an utterance in which the illocutionary force, that is, what he calls the performative nature of the utterance, is hedged" Depraetere and Kaltenböck (2023, p. 209).

Fraser's (1975, p.188) instances of HPs consist of the first person singular pronoun (I) + a modal / marginal-modal auxiliary or a lexical verb (wish, want to) or periphrastic forms (would like to, be going to, and intend to) + a performative verb. For Fraser (1975, p.188) certain utterances are strongly performative whereas other utterances are weakly performative, i.e., the "performative use is quite dubious, and, in some cases, their grammaticality is open to question on the performative reading". (I have to confess... .; I must say; I have to say…. .).

Building on this notion, Fraser (1975) introduced the term HP, and stipulated that "…certain performative verbs when preceded by a specific modal result in an attenuated illocutionary force of the speech act designated by the verb". The examples below as cases of attenuated illocutionary force:

(4) I should apologize for losing your book.

With regard to their position, HPs have a tendency to occur in a left-periphery position without a that-complementizer.

On the issue of confusing HPs with hedges, Lakoff (1973, p. 472) provided a list of hedging expressions in English which ranges from "sort of, kind of, loosely speaking, more or less, roughly, pretty (much), relatively, somewhat, rather, mostly, technically, strictly speaking, essentially, in essence, basically, principally, particularly, par excellence, largely, for the most part, very, especially, exceptionally, quintessentially, literally, often, anything else, almost, typically/typical, as it were, in a sense, in a real sense, in a way, in a manner of speaking, details aside, so to say, practically, a true, a real, a regular, virtually, all but technically, practically, actually, really,

all but a, anything but a, (he as much as...), -like, -ish, can be looked upon as, can be viewed as, pseudo-, crypto-, in name only, etc", and postulated that certain performative verbs used in certain syntactic constructions can reduce the performative power of an utterance as in:

(5) I suppose John has left.

where the degree of truth is reduced and the force of the assertion is weakened by the mere use of I suppose. Fraser (1975, pp.190-193) lists eight speech act types, according to which performative verbs can be categorized: asserting (e.g., announce, accuse, admit, declare, suggest); evaluating (e.g., assess, regard); speaker attitude reflecting (e.g., agree, commend, accept, blame, deplore, wish); stipulating (e.g., nominate, postulate); requesting (e.g., ask, appeal, demand, implore, pray); suggesting (e.g., suggest, propose, advise, warn, advocate); exercising authority (e.g., approve, adopt, forbid, credit, abolish, permit, reject); and committing (e.g., swear, promise, guarantee, assume, commit, vow).

For Jacker & Taavitsainen (2008, p.72), HPs are cases "…where the request force was semantically modified through the choice of performative verb". Some verbs such as beg, plead, crave and beseech "do not conventionally express the same power dynamics as verbs such as demand, order, command or ask". Rather, they "share the inherent property that the speaker is requesting from a position of powerlessness, relative to the hearer" (Fraser 1975, p.197). Quirk et al (1985) refer to HPs as "…a type of indirect speech act which involves an indirect performance of a speech act, even though a performative verb is present", as in (I can swear that; I am happy to inform you….). Moreover, Brown and Levinson (1987, p. 146) put forward that HPs are the most significant tools of satisfying the speaker's wants.

4.5 HPs as Attenuation

As Fraser (1980) states, "some of the expression which Lakoff (1972) called 'hedges' can be used to mitigate" (p.349). Depraetere and Kaltenböck find that the term HP is highly problematic in that it can erroneously be conceived of in such a way "that the construction as a whole serves as a hedging device in context". To eliminate this sort of confusion, they adopt "the term "downtoner" rather than "hedge" when referring to the discursive function of the HP as a whole" (2023, p. 2011). Conversely, Depraetere and Kaltenböck (2023, p. 208) argue against the typical conception of HPs as hedges (downtoners) and claim that they "…do not necessarily function as hedges (downtoners) in discourse. They can, in fact, adopt the opposite function in the sense that, while they may be used as downtoners, they may also serve to emphasize".

HPs are used to lessen the threatening force which is characteristic of direct performatives (Leech 2014, p.205).

In the same vein, Danet (1980, p.525) stresses that HPs can serve the purpose of attenuation which is "rhetorical devices, which soften the impact of some unpleasant aspect of an utterance on the speaker or the hearer".

(6) "I must advise you to remain quiet".

(7) "I wish to forbid you to leave". (Fraser 1975: 187-8)

Furthermore, Fraser divides hedged performatives into 'strongly performative' and 'weakly performative'. Utterance (6) is an instance of strongly performative in that "it is easily seen as counting as the act denoted by the performative verb in the sentence. Meanwhile, the second example is a case of weakly performative in that its performative use is not clear" (1975, p.188, cited in Itan, 1995, p.16).

Leech (2014, pp.147-8) regards HPs as a pragmatic modifier that tends to moderate directives that contain pure performative that "…makes the illocutionary force of the utterance quite explicit", and thus the "…degree of (pragma linguistics) (impoliteness) depends very much on the meaning of the performative verb, for example: (I demand) is highly impositive, (I asked) is less so and (I beg/ entreat) is less so again". The "softening of the performative may be combined with other mitigating devices, such as the downtowners just, perhaps, and not . . . quite" as in: "Councillor [name] could I just perhaps request that you perhaps don't make it quite so easy for any future break-ins" (Leech 2014, p.165).

There are certain ways and devices that can be adopted by interlocutors to shield themselves against some potential interactional threats. The first one is **indirectness of speech acts (**Fraser 1990, pp. 345-349)**.** Furthermore, an indirect request would be "I would appreciate it if I were left alone", to indicate that what I state to be my obligation to do. It should be noted, however, that not all instances of indirect speech acts counts as mitigation. "An important aspect of the indirect performance of speech acts for mitigation is the following: as the specification of the intended act becomes less explicit, the active participation of the hearer in using both the contextual cues (including past conversations, knowledge of the world, identity of the speaker, etc.) as well as relevant conversational principles of interpretation increased" (Fraser 1980, p.346). The second way or device is the use of **parenthetical verbs.** On this point Urmson (1952, p.484) indicates that the claim which would be otherwise implied by a simple assertion can be modified / weakened through some parenthetical verbs. **P**arenthetical verbs such as predict, suppose, conclude, guess, and expect can serve as attenuation strategy.

Moreover, Urmson (1952, p.484) further notes that, "apart from questions of nuance of meaning the adverbs are more impersonal-admittedly suggests that what is said would be regarded by anyone as an admission whereas I admit shows only the way that the statement is to be regarded here".

Qianbo (2016, p.76) believes that hedges such as you know, if you like, if you want, etc., attenuate the performative force of utterances especially when the intended effect of disagreement, complaint, refusal, or request speech act.

CONCLUSIONS

This research has tackled two pragmatic notions that relate to the weakening of the communicative effect of utterance: attenuation and hedged performative. Based on the thorough discussion of these two notions, the following points can be drawn:

Attenuation is discourse / verbal tactic or an argumentative strategy allowing speakers to moderate the strength of their intended actions. It is adopted by interlocutors to avoid of conflict by disclaiming the responsibility for the judgement, avoiding making outright assertions, and reducing the predicted negative impact of performatives.

As for the correlation between attenuation and politeness, both positive and of negative politeness strategies can be seen as attenuating strategies. Moreover, both politeness and attenuation can be seen as reducing interpersonal conflicts and weakening 'face-threatening acts.

While attenuation has been confused with mitigation and hedging, the latter are strategies and devices as well, while attenuation is a strategy only.

Although the two notions have been kept separate, they are strongly interrelated as both are communicative strategies work on moderating the performative / illocutionary force of the speech act. A hedged performative can be seen as an utterance in which the illocutionary force is attenuated.

A hedged performative is not a hedge; it is a special structure whose performative verb is being hedged. HPs allow speakers/writers to lessen the precision of their claims so as to soften the possible loss of self-face by blurring their intent.

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