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**STOP-SHORT UTTERANCES AS MARKERS OF UNDERSTATEMENT**

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Attributing understatements to a predominantly English linguistic pattern of behaviour is documented in many works dealing with the English way of life. Among such books are those aimed specifically at teaching English as a foreign language as well as more general publications on English society.

However, the study of understatement as a socio-cultural problem is not the only one in the specific tradition of the studies dealing with the topic. For linguists the problem of the linguistic structure of understatements is more interesting. The linguistic interpretation of the term understatement in this country lies within the sphere of traditional stylistics and is linked with the stylistic device aposiopesis.

In pragmatics, on the contrary, an understatement is not a stylistic strategy but strategy pertaining to the content since it operates within and on the sentence proposition. To language means used to form understatements refer grammatical devices of detensification of predicates like: word-negation of predicates and grading of predicates by using adverbs [2].

We as well, shall not be concerned here with an understatement as a stylistic device. We shall rather be viewing understatements in the light of the theory of discourse and its pragmatic perspective as it tends to focus specifically on aspects of what is “unsaid or unwritten (yet communicated) within the discourse being analyzed” [3, p.84].

Proceeding from the definition of understatement as a sentence strategy saying less than one means we can conclude that grammatical categories and classes suitable for forming understatements must, even in their immediate semantic function, be somehow down-toning if they are to be compatible with the basic definition.

Having analysed stop-short utterances incomplete due to the fact that the content to be verbalized can harm the hearer we have established that the utterance structure in this case is hearer-motivated and the literal utterance content is influenced by hearer-motivation as well.

The literal meaning apparent in the structure is not identical with what is actually meant. What is meant can be reproduced in a different utterance, or in the continuation of the same one, in which the hearer-motivated restrictions of the original utterance are not considered.

Thus, the structure of a stop-short utterance is similar to the structure of understatement which is generally described in terms of a paraphrastic relationship between two utterances: the one that is actually uttered and is hearer-motivated and the one that is meant and is content-motivated. Despite their difference, the two readings can be interpreted as paraphrases since the difference disappears, when they are interpreted as originating from the speaker.

One more important point should also be mentioned here. The fewer and the lighter the adequacy conditions are made by an utterance, the greater the chance of them being fulfilled. The smaller is the liability commitment on the part of the speaker, the less likely it is that the utterance will be negated by the hearer.

To sum it all up, the linguistic conditions for forming understatements lie in indirect nomination of the signified by the speaker caused by his desire to minimize the threat to the face. Where face means public self-image of a person and refers to that emotional and social sense of self that everyone has and expects everyone else to recognize. So, the understatement as a sentence strategy of saying less than one means occurs where the general question of the emotional acceptability of the content of an utterance becomes acute. Its aim is to make utterances more acceptable and thus to increase their chance of ratification by the hearer.

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