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ANALYZING PRAGMATIC HEDGES FROM POLITENESS PRINCIPLES PERSPECTIVES IN THE PROLOGUE OF THE HOLY WOMAN AND EPILOGUE OF UNMARRIAGEABLE

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Abstract:

Pragmatic hedges play a significant and widespread role in moderating the directness and tone of conversation in the process daily language use and interpersonal communication. These linguistic tools are used to soften statements, introduce uncertainty, or provide a buffer in potentially confrontational situations. Hedges, therefore, possess a distinctive pragmatic value by reducing the force of information in sentences, weakening their assertiveness, and subtly shifting the topic of conversation. This paper adopts the Politeness Principle, as proposed by Geoffrey Leech, as its theoretical framework to explore the pragmatic functions of hedges in language. The analysis is focused on the use of hedges in the prologue of the Holy woman and epilogue of Unmarriageable, employing a qualitative research methodology. Through this lens, the study investigates how hedges are employed by characters to navigate social interactions and manage communication effectively. The findings reveal seven main functions of hedges i.e. softening the situation, giving emotional expression, implying confidence and subjective judgment, rhetorical question, cultural framing, and respect of autonomy. These politeness strategies help to maintain a harmonious and respectful communication environment, play a role in saving face and protecting one's self-image, contribute to politeness by rendering expressions more euphemistic and less direct and finally, enhance the appropriateness and acceptability of words in specific social contexts. These functions underscore the crucial role of hedges in ensuring that narrative communication remains tactful, sensitive, and effective in various interpersonal settings.

Key Words: Hedges, Politeness, Epilogue, Prologue, Principle

Introduction:

Language as a tool of vocal symbols enables people to express personally or in a group their thoughts, ideas or emotions in another manner or in other words, phrases and expressions (Weidong, 2013). Such verbal symbols may be explicit/ obvious, or implicit/ veiled, which gives the speakers the freedom of how they want to express themselves. In most day to day interactions with people, it is apparent that the language used by the speakers is characterized by some mechanisms for meaning grounding and one such mechanism is hedges. A hedge is an embedded figure of speech that is used to decrease the force of what has been said so that it is polite. Some of the functions of hedges include reducing the volume of assertiveness in presenting a given idea, toward a milder, or possibly a more cautious, level; expressing uncertainty; being polite or even sensitive to the listener (Liu, 2020).

Hedging is that process that influences indirectly the tone, politeness, or efficiency of the communication and may be seen as an activity constantly taking place in everyday conversation. Thus, hedges are used by the speakers to soften the impact of the conversation. Hedging has been discussed extensively in the pragmatics text within the last couple of years specifically with reference to conversational rules and social conversation to understand how main strategy employed in the operation of turn taking, politeness and face management (Ariel, 2012, Dontcheva Navratilova, 2017, Holmes, 2013, Kranich, 2015).This is especially necessary when self-expression seems desirable, though it might disrupt social cohesion. It is within this

framework that hedges emerge within the field of pragmatics as they enable the speaker to navigate and negotiate their interaction in a way that is polite, appropriate to role and rank, and that follows the normal pattern of a conversation(Liu, 2020).

Despite numerous studies on hedges in different type of communication, majority of studies has been centered on hedges in the novels, informal and business language. Still, it is possible to note that the analysis of hedges in literary texts and in the framework of the given approach has not been elaborated yet in the context of Pakistani novels including The Holy Woman (2002) and Unmarriageable (2019). As a result, the present paper is framed as an attempt to contribute to this debate by examining the pragmatic functions of hedges in above mentioned novels in particular with the focus placed on the ways, in which hedges contribute to the proper narrative flow. In this paper, the indication of an increased level of hedges used by characters in the novels will be used to examine the significance, contribution, role and implication of hedges within a novel with regards to aiding the plot progression, character development plus the portrayal of tonalities and feeling subtleties. It has been conventional to draw on politeness theories, especially those drawn from the work like Brown and Levinson (1987) to explain how one can use linguistic resources such as hedging in order to fulfill his or her verbal obligations in the context of interpersonal gossips. These strategies assist people in control of face during communication which is the visible public aspect of them.

In the same manner, through reading The Holy Woman (2002) and Unmarriageable (2019), one can easily pinpoint use of hedges to as a way of dealing with politeness, social relations and emotions. For instance, sensitive display of hedges is noticeable in the inequalities and in the prologue of The Holy Woman or the epilogue of Unmarriageable; all these concerns pertain to narrative aspects of the growing body of linguistic data tendered by South Asian women fictions. In both of these works, set in two different cultures in Pakistan, hedges are used by characters in order to have their say without appearing to overpower or take a hostile tone against the other.

In the prologue of The Holy Woman (2002), hedges may be used to express a woman's virtue and humility or a man's self-effacing or tentative nature when speaking about himself or narrating incidents. This can make the reader more self-aware and less arrogant engaging the reader in the story with empathy. Therefore, just as in the epilogue of Unmarriageable, where the answers are softened by hedges and can be interpreted as opening up further perspective or allowing the reader to keep on pondering on the story. These types of hedge uses are not mere stylistic options but they can also provide the useful pragmatic interpersonal functions as well as modulating features that affect the resulting social and emotional contours of the narrative. This paper will thereby focus on explaining how hedges operate as alarmingly effective social and interpersonal relationship negotiating strategies as well as what concerns with the flow and construction of the broader contextualize of the two prologues or epilogue analyzed here. Finally this research study is determined to meet following research objective.

- To analyze pragmatic hedges employed in the prologue of The Holy Woman and the epilogue of Unmarriageable.

Literature Review:

Hedges, on the other hand, relate to those words which deliberately create ambiguity regarding the meaning of other words. The term hedges first proposed by Lakoff (1975) .It is meaning criteria and fuzzy concept as a logic research study. To Lakoff, hedges are those words whose function or role is to soften things or make things less hard, or make things semantically vaguer or less vague. Lakoff (1973) has listed three types of politeness, hesitancy and equality or

familiarity. According to Lakoff (1973) to maintain "formality" the interacting individual should not even express himself in a word and must avoid entering preferred, opinions, attitudes, beliefs or emotions into the current interaction. He then notes that in working with "hesitancy," the addresser should allow the addressee to select his/her options. Finally, Lakoff (1973) says that the final step towards attaining 'equality' is to pretend that the speaker and the audience are of the same status. According to Watts (2003), different people have a different perception of what the word civility means.

Yule (1972) also focuses on hedges which are also considered in the current paper. He considers hedges as conversational implication; which can convey the literal meaning of what people say when they converse with each other. Hubler (1983) says that hedges are used by the people to bring accessibility in their utterances so that hearers are willing to talk to the speakers by making the utterances more accessible. To summarize, according to Mauranen (1997) hedges are the expressions which contribute uncertainty in the making a meaning of an utterance. As Brown and Levinson (1987) proposed that politeness is the great skill that people want to achieve. Thus hedges are considered as a politeness in interaction among humans. The definitions above on hedges are different, but as mentioned earlier they share the same meaning. In fact, there is no standard definition to hedges, as different linguistic scholars analyze hedges qualitatively from different aspects like discourse, semantics, pragmatics etc. On hedges, what these linguists have studied has really moved linguistics to a great step forward. In the existing linguistic vocabulary, a large number of words are existing that fulfill the criteria and definition of hedges for instance model verbs, adverbs, impersonal phrases, adjectives and so on (Liu, 2020).

Previous works on hedges might go as far back as the 1960s. Zadeh (1972) introduces the first concept of fuzzy set theory in hedges. He analyzed English hedges by keeping in view the logical and semantic points such as very much, more or less, highly, and slightly. It is Lakoff (1975) who is the first scholar using hedge/hedging. He defines hedges as lexical units whose primary function is to fuzz things up, or to un-fuzz them. Grand et al. (1982) classify hedges in two categories depending with the strength of the link between the speaker's intentions and truth value of a proposition. His classification of hedges is universally acknowledged to be used by the further studies. Brown and Levinson (2011) define hedges as politeness strategy in verbal face-threatening acts by inserting them within the framework of Negative Politeness, in which they play the role of mitigated threats of their communicative partners so that the interlocutors would not refuse their requests or threats to one's face. Zuck (1986) and Fraser (1990) have carried out a research on hedges with particular discourses in the context and they have endeavored to identify the pragmatic functions on hedges and their research outcome by analyzing distributive features.

According to Scheffler (2004), fuzziness pervades descriptive words at the basic and the primary reason for conflict with standard logic. He also explains that either there is something fundamental about human brain or it is deeply penetrated in the nature. Tieping (1979) does the research on fuzzy linguistics which can be considered as the starting point in fuzzy linguistics He defines it as a language which has a vague expression of epitaxial. Ziran (1985) has looked at the use of hedges in face-to-face conversations. Hedges have also been discussed doing a pragmatic research by Zhi'an and Yongping (1995). Na Dong (2003) has put forward the concept of hedges and classified the hedges. Durik et al. (2008) have studied the effects of hedges in persuasive arguments by describing data statements that use the colloquial language are argued to pose but do not necessarily threaten persuasive attempts. Guoli and Hong (2009) have done work on the

analysis of the relationship between the pragmatic functions of hedges and the politeness principles.

Qiqiu (2012) has attempted to define and explore hedges in sociolinguistics on the Internet. Yingjie (2012) and. Haiyan (2013) also has done the pragmatic functions of hedges in friends. Carrying out a pragmatic analysis of the hedges in how I met your mother under politeness principles, Jingjing (2017) has pragmatically explained it. Haiyun (2018) has provided a classification of hedges and differentiated pragmatic functions of the hedges of daily use. Holmes (2018) confirms that hedges can be used as a form of positive politeness by showing desire to maintain group solidarity and avoid conflict. Locher & Graham (2018) investigated hedges in online discussion, showing that hedges serve both to soften statements and managed report in text based communication. Schneider & Bangerter (2020) studied how hedging studied align with politeness theory in workplace settings by suggesting that hedges are often employed to preserve face in hierarchical interactions.

Zhang (2020) explored hedging in Chinese-English communication, explaining how hedges like "seems" and "I guess" can serve as both politeness strategies and tools for hedging responsibility, depending on cultural context. Kaufmann and Bhatia (2021) explored hedging interacts with power dynamics in professional settings, suggesting lower status people use hedging more frequently to maintain politeness, while higher-status individuals tend to use directions or strategic hedging to maintain authority. Liu (2021) extended Brown and Levinson's (1987) framework by analyzing hedging in intercultural communication by showing that cultural norms are heavily influenced how hedges are used to maintain face in different context. Vassallo and Gotz (2022) conducted an analysis of hedging in academic English, concluding that hedging markers allow scholars to distance themselves from their claims, enhancing politeness and presenting their work as open to discussion. Recently, Tao and Liu (2023) have analyzed gender differences in hedging across different speech acts, finding that women tend to use more hedges than men, often as a means of aligning with politeness norms or mitigating perceived threats to face.

Theoretical Framework:

The Lee ch's Politeness Theory (1983) has brought forward six maxims politeness principle and it is a great contribution to linguistic scholars. It has particular relevance in the study of politeness as well as in human everyday interaction. Leech identifies that there are six categories of politeness principle namely: tact-maxim, generosity-maxim, approbation-maxim, modesty-maxim, agreement-maxim, and sympathy. Tact Maxim includes efficient notion of the speaker that is to cater for the least possible cost for the hearers or the maximum possible benefit for self. The Generosity maxim includes sub-categories: reducing self-Interest claim and maximizing costs to self. Approbation maxim is a very simple maxim that deals with avoiding the criticism of others as far as possible and promoting others as much as possible. If the thoughts are linked to valuable speakers' intentions to take the expensive actions, the approbation maxim will have a great effect. Modesty maxim is a maxim which covers two sub-branches it either requires the least compliment to the self of the speakers, or it gets the most description about the self from the speakers. There are two sub-branches about agreement maxim: reducing the difference, or the lack of similarity, between self and other as much as possible. It also highlights if the speaker makes declarative actions, he/she should do his best to convey his utterance meaning which should be equivalent or close to the value of the hearer's hearer. Sympathy maxim can be defined as to reduce antipathy between self and other and increase empathy between self and other (Jingjing Bi, 2017).Finally this article addresses following research question.

- What types of pragmatic hedges are employed in the prologue of The Holy Woman and the epilogue of Unmarriageable?

Research Methodology:

This research is qualitative in approach mixed with the textual analysis of the prologue of the Holy Woman (2002) written by Qaisra Sharaz and epilogue of Unmarriageable written by Soniah Kamal (2019). The selected discourse from fictional literature is minutely studied by the researchers and all the hedges are separated from the discourse and discussed separately expressing the function and politeness principles of hedges and in a second step, place them in the framework of Leech's Politeness Theory. Stream of both literary texts will be analyzed with the purpose of identifying cases when pragmatic hedges, as the linguistic feature that decreases the force of an utterance, is used. The study presented in this paper does not involve any participants thus issues relating to issuance of consent are not relevant. A proper citation as well as referencing of the literary texts prevents misinterpretation of the texts by obeying the intent of authors' concerns regarding participant consents those are not applicable. However, the research will adhere to ethical guideline by:

• Ensuring proper citation and referencing of the literary texts.

This research is therefore confined to a discourse analysis of two particular chapters from the books namely: The Holy Woman and Unmarriageable may not capture the whole picture of pragmatic hedges used in the novels. It is also limited by the theoretical paradigm adopted from Leech's Politeness Theory though other theoretical lens may provide another perspective.

Data Analysis:

Prologue of the Holy Woman

Here are described the hedges found in the prologue of the Holy Woman following the sequence of narrative. A hedge is a word or phrase use to soften or limit the impact of discourse by making it less direct or assertive. This is used for politeness, uncertainty, or to avoid making strong claims. It is explored how these hedges align with the goals of maintaining face, mitigating imposition, and achieving effective communication through the lens of politeness principle theory suggested by Leech (1983).This Politeness principle emphasizes strategies that minimize social friction in discourse by maintaining respect reducing face threatening acts and preserving interpersonal harmony. Here are hedges how they function in the context of narrative.

1. *"The stranger's eyes halted in their track."*

Function: Softening a direct statement.

Politeness Principle: This hedge serves to mitigate the directness of the gaze being described, implying a moment of pause without asserting the intensity of action. It allows room for interpretation, which maintains a neutral stance, reducing the impact on face of the stranger (avoiding overstatement).

2. *"His mouth curved into a full smile as he noted that she still hadn't made any effort to cover her hair."*

Function: Indirect Suggestion

Politeness Principle: The phrase "still hadn't made any effort" hedges the criticism, suggesting a lapse in effort rather than an outright fault. This softens the impact of the statement, preserving the woman's face by avoiding a direct judgment about her neglect.

3. *"The stranger was both intrigued and amused at the woman's open show of defiance."*

Function: Mixed emotions

Politeness Principle: By using "both intrigued and amused" the stranger's feelings are presented in a way that prevents committing to a stronger emotional reaction. This mitigates

the potential for offense by leaving room for multiple interpretations, thus maintaining face for the woman.

4. *"The smile now shot to his eyes."*

Function: Indirect emotional expression

Politeness Principle: The phrase "shot to his eyes" softens the intensity of the emotional reaction, presenting it as a sudden but not overwhelming change. This reduces the face-threatening nature of a potentially intense emotional display, maintaining a sense of control.

5. *"He stood up straight"*

Function: Suggestive not forceful.

Politeness Principle: While not a hedge in the traditional sense, "stood up straight" implies a conscious, restrained action. It avoids describing the emotion in explicit terms, leaving the focus on the action itself, which helps to prevent any potential direct confrontation.

6. Zarri Bano's young brother, Jaffar, stood in front of her and whispered in her ear."

Function: Indirect in Communication

Politeness Principle: "Whispered in her ear" is a softening device, implying intimacy and confidentiality while avoiding direct or commanding language. This respects the woman's face, as it avoids making the conversation feel intrusive or confrontational.

7. *I wish you would make sure that your scarf manages to stay in place on your head when you are outside in a public place."*

Function: Politeness through indirectness

Politeness Principle: The phrase "I wish you would" softens the command, making it a request rather than an imperative. It shows respect for women's autonomy, thus mitigating any potential face-threatening act that could arise from a direct order.

8. *"It is not good for a woman to be seen like this."*

Function: Subjective judgment

Politeness Principle: This phrase "It is not good" is hedged by its subjective tone, expressing an opinion rather than an absolute truth. This respects the woman's face by framing the judgment as a cultural or personal view rather than an objective fact.

9. *"Men especially the Badmash men, give the women looks when they are as beautiful as you,"*

Function: Contextual hedging.

Politeness Principle: The phrase "Especially Badmash men" is a hedging qualifier that makes the statement more general implying that all men behave this way. This makes the observation less absolute, making it less likely to offend the woman from over generalization.

10.*"It gives a very bad impression. Now not of only but of us and our father you; me and our father."*

Function: Softened judgment.

Politeness Principle: In the framework of British modal verbs, "It creates a very bad Impression" is a shivering kind of calumniating and also is a hedged evaluation. The phrase is also less direct than the bald on record assertive that makes an accusation directly and thus face-threat it reduces the possibility.

11. *"Only naughty women do that sort of thing."*

Function: Indirect categorization.

Politeness Principle: That sort of thing softens the judgment because it does not mention the

actions directly. This inflexion softens the condemnation and shields the woman face and face and saves her from direct moral reproach.

12." Have you quite finished, dearest Jafar"?

Function: Indirect Categorization

Politeness Principle: This sort of thing "softens the judgment by avoiding direct reference to the action. This indirectness mitigates the harshness of condemnation and protects the woman's face from an outright moral judgment

13. "I am not going to be lectured at by my baby brother."

Function: Passive aggressive distancing.

Politeness Principle: This hedges direct confrontation by avoiding an outright rejection or confrontation. This passive nature of the statement allows the speaker to express frustration without directly challenging the other person's face.

14. "So what if my dupatta fell down for a few seconds."

Function: Minimization pf Significance.

Politeness Principle: "For a few seconds" is a hedge that downplays the significance of the incident, reducing the perceived severity of the act. This minimizes any potential threat to the woman's face by framing the situation as trivial.

15. "Have you never seen hair before"?

Function: Rhetorical question as a hedge softens.

Politeness Strategy: This rhetorical question softens the challenge by framing it as a playful remarks rather than a direct reproach. It distances the speaker from a confrontation and reduces the threat to both parties' faces.

16. "It doesn't seem right."

Function: Uncertainty Hedging

Politeness Principle: "Does not seem right" introduces an element of doubt or uncertainty, making the judgment less absolute. This protects the speaker from making a definitive claim that might damage someone's face.

17. "It is not good for our izzat."

Function: Cultural framing hedge

Politeness Principle: This hedging phrase "not good" expresses disapproval in a less direct manner, acknowledging the cultural context rather than imposing an absolute moral judgment. This reduces the threat to the woman's face by framing the criticism as a cultural value rather than personal fault.

18. "Oh NO! Surely it can't be him."

Function: Expression of uncertainty as a hedge to soften the disbelief.

Politeness Principle: "Surely" introduces doubt and reduces the certainty of the claim. This hedge softens the disbelief, allowing the speaker to express surprise without making a definitive, face- threatening statement.

19. "I am ready to go home, Nalu."

Function: Soft Preference

Politeness Principle: "I am ready" implies a preference rather than a demand. This softens the request and avoids imposing urgency, respecting the listener's autonomy and avoiding a face threatening demand.

20. "There are too many men over there."

Function: Vague discomfort

Politeness Principle: "Too many" is a vague term, allowing the speaker to express discomfort without specifying the reason behind it. This hedging reduces the force of the statement and avoids directly criticizing the situation.

21. *"Yes, young Sahiba."*

Function: Polite formal response.

Politeness Principle: This is a straightforward acknowledgment, but its formal tone softens any emotional intensity, respecting the other person's face and maintaining politeness.

22. "Unfortunately, her eyes immediately met his."

Function: Softening of an unwanted encounter.

Politeness Principle: The word "Unfortunately" softens the situation, expressing regret without outright condemning it. It allows the speaker to express discomfort without challenging the other person's face.

23. "Embarrassed, she hastily lowered hers as the car sped by."

Function: Indirect description to avoid face threat for softening.

Politeness Principle: "Hastily lowered" suggests urgency but not force, showing the woman's reaction without overtly emphasizing her emotional state. This phrasing softens the intensity of her response, respecting her face.

24. "Father, she is very attractive."

Function: Straightforward but hedged evaluation.

Politeness Principle: While not heavily hedged, the phrase remains a neutral evaluation, framed as an observation rather than an overt judgment or request. It respects the object of the comment by keeping the evaluation non –committal.

*25. "Well, don't forget, my son, they have two daughters- and it is the elder one we are interested in.***"**

Function: *Hedged goal statement.*

Politeness Principle: "It is the elder one we are interested in " softens the directness of the goal by implying it rather than asserting it outright, thereby reducing face-threat for both parties."

26. *"We don't want to end up the wrong girl."*

Function: Softened Concern

Politeness Principle: "We don't want to end up" is a soft strategy for the description of the significant concern about engagement relations of Sikander with any girl. But his parents are determined to find out a suitable match.

27. *"Of course." He responded."*

Function: Hedged Agreement.

Politeness Principle: "Of course" is a hedged agreement that implies no objection but also does not fully show enthusiasm or conviction.

28. "One way or other, I am going to have this woman."

Function: Soft determination

Politeness Principle: "One way or other" softens the determination, as it implies that Sikander is considering different approaches, but it is not a direct and immediate plan for his matrimonial decision.

29. "He had a strange feeling that, in the last few minutes, his life had suddenly and forever become entwined with the beautiful woman dressed in black."

Function: Hedge that conveys uncertainty

Politeness Principle: *"He had a strange feeling"* is a hedge that conveys uncertainty or lack of full clarity regarding his emotions, making the statement forceful.

Epilogue of Unmarriageable

1."Not as clean as she liked."

 Function: Hedge reducing the force of utterance.

 Politeness Principle: This hedge from the epilogue of Unmarriageable **"***Not as clean as she liked."* reduces the force of statement. It suggests dissatisfaction instead of directly stating that the window was dirty but in a way it does not impose a harsh judgment. It convoys a mild critique without threatening the "face" of the person responsible for the cleanliness.

 2. "She wondered if she should go plumper."

 Function: Hedge introduces uncertainty

 Politeness Principle: By using "wondered if" the speaker introduces uncertainty and leaves for interpretation. This reduces the pressure on the listener by framing the decision as a tentative thought rather than a firm statement.

 3. "He was sure this business is the one to turn them from Wannabes to VIPs."

 Function: Uncertainty

 Politeness Principle: The uncertainty in this statement hedges the potential failure of the business. By implying confidence without fully asserting the outcome, it helps avoid to direct failure or disappointment, thus protecting the "face" of the speaker and the group involved.

 4. "This time our business idea is foolproof. Touchwood".

 Function: Softening the situation

 Politeness Principle: Touchwood" is a well-known superstition, which softens the certainty of the statement. It permits the speaker to express hope or confidence while acknowledging the possibility of misfortune, thus maintaining humility and reducing face-threat.

 5."Was not going to tell wick.".

 Function: Soften the commitment

 Politeness Principle: This phrase suggests intentions but leaves open the possibility of change. It softens the commitment**,** allowing flexibility and reducing any potential conflict that could arise if the speaker were to change their mind.

 6."It wasn't even as if it was his fault alone."

 Function: Soften the criticism

 Politeness Principle: Minimizing blame is a typical hedge in the politeness strategy, softening the criticism. This reduces the potential for direct confrontation or offense, ensuring that the person at fault retains some face and is not publically shamed.

 7. "They would have to learn to resist him"

 Function: Uncertainty about future action.

 Politeness Principle: The phrase implies uncertainty about future action which softens the certainty of the statement. By saying "would have to" implies that it is an obligation rather than choice, yet this is presented in ales forceful manner, keeping the dynamics flexible.

 8. "She would have an extra-sharp word with the maid."

 Function: Softening the situation

 Politeness Principle: "Would have" is a softener, presenting the action as a plan rather than an immediate directive. It hedges the strength of the statement, avoiding the impression of direct confrontation with the maid.

 9. "Perhaps the best mother"

 Function: Soften the situation

Politeness Principle: "Perhaps" hedges the statement, reducing the force of the judgment. By introducing doubt, the speaker is careful not to make an absolute evaluation, leaving room for other perspectives and softening potential offense.

10. *"May be she would make the pilgrimage to Harrogate this year."*

Function: Lack of commitment

Politeness Principle: The word "maybe" suggests a lack of commitment and creates uncertainty. It softens the statement, making the action less definitive and more tentative, which maintains flexibility and avoids any firm expectations.

11. *"It was behind him now"*

Function: Vagueness and uncertainty

Politeness Principle: This hedge the time frame and context. The vagueness of "behind him" softens the directness of the conclusion, making it less conferential and more natural.

12. **"*What a handsome man she'd managed to marry"*

Function: Softening admiration with uncertainty

Politeness Principle: The word "managed" introduces a layer of uncertainty, implying that the woman had to work for or struggle with the situation. This softens the admiration, and by framing it as an achievement, it reduces the potential for seeming overly boastful or proud.

13. He 'd asked her what wedding present she was giving him."

Function: Soften criticism

Politeness Principle: By not directly stating the speaker's opinion on Wick's behavior, this phrase softens any criticism. It suggests his actions may not have been ideal, but the hedge prevents outright condemnation, keeping the focus on the behavior rather than harsh judgment.

14. *"They would be rich and famous yet"*

Function: Soften the prediction

Politeness Principle: "Yet" introduces uncertainty about future, softening the prediction. By u using a future –oriented hedge, the statement retains some optimism while acknowledging that the outcome is not guaranteed.

15. *"May be"*

Function: Classical Hedge

Politeness Principle: "May be" is a classic hedge used to express uncertainty. It creates space for ambiguity, allowing the speaker to present an idea without committing to it, and it keeps the conversation open ended.

16. *"She would have to learn resist him."*

Function: Soften the command.

Polite Principle: The indirectness of "would have to" softens the command by suggesting that it is a process rather an immediate expectation. It reduces the imposition of authority, representing the autonomy of person being addressed.

17. *"Not to worry Wick."*

Function: Action of reassurance.

Polite Principle: This phrase acts as a reassurance, softening any potential critique or complaint. The speaker uses it to comfort Wick, avoiding confrontation and preserving his face by diminishing the negative tone of the conversation.

18. *"Then she turned away from the window"*

Function: Indirect softening

Politeness Principle: The action is described without any clear intention, leaving the character's emotions or motivations unclear. This indirectness softens the character's decision making process and avoids imposing clear judgment.

19. "What a handsome man she'd managed to marry, Lady thought for the millionth time".

Function: Soften of apparent pride

Politeness Principle: The phrase "for the millionth time" adds a self-respecting tone, which s softens the apparent pride in the statement. It implies that the speaker is aware of the repetition and does not take herself too seriously, thus mitigating the potential of arrogance.

20. *"If I 'm happy loving myself just the way I am, then who are you to put conditions on accepting and loving me?"*

Function: The introduction of uncertain sense.

Politeness Principle: The conditional structure here introduces a sense of uncertainty or vulnerability. The phrasing softens the challenge by presenting it as a hypothetical scenario rather than a direct confrontation. It tempers the force of the speaker's statement making it more diplomatic.

21. *"I still can't believe it"*

Function: Introduce Uncertainty

Politeness Principle: This statement hedges the speaker's disbelief, introducing uncertainty. It suggests that the speaker's emotional reaction is still in flux, avoiding the directness of a more firm conclusion.

22. *"What wedding present she was giving him."*

Function: Minimize Force in utterance

Politeness Principle: This is more of a question than an assertion, which makes the statement less forceful. It avoids presenting a fact and instead opens the space for negotiation or further discussion.

23. *"She'd been beaming so hard for the last year, her teeth ached"*

Function: Exaggeration

Politeness Principle: The exaggeration of "so hard" is softened by the subsequent reflection on the consequence. It introduces humor and self-awareness, mitigating any potential self-centeredness by showing the character's own understanding of her behavior.

24. *"She was convinced each day anew."*

Function: Subtle hedge softening character's certainty

Politeness Principle: By suggesting that the conviction was renewed daily, this phrase introduces a subtle hedge that softens the character's uncertainty. It acknowledges the possibility of doubt, making the statement less absolute.

25. *"Her father was controlling"*

Function: Soft Criticism

Politeness Principle: The use of "was" in this statement makes it a past evaluation, softening the criticism. It presents the criticism as a reflection rather than a direct, current fault, reducing its immediacy and impact.

26. *"Wick had turned out to be an even bigger flop with finances than her father."*

Function: Soften Criticism

Politeness Principle: The comparative phrasing softens the criticism of Wick by comparing him to Mr. Binat. This not only reduces the directness of the negative evaluation but also dilutes the harshness by making the criticism relative.

27. *"The puppies leapt off her rug, barking madly."*

Function: Softens the tone

Politeness Principle: While seemingly a minor detail, this phrase introduces a distraction that softens the tone of the surrounding context. The playful imagery of the puppies contrasts with and downplays any more serious judgments, allowing for more flexibility in the emotional tone of the narrative.

28. "She thought"

Function: The ambiguous situation

Politeness Principle: The use of "she thought" or "she wondered" indicates that the character's belief or conclusions are not firmly held. This creates space for ambiguity and reflection, preventing the statement from being a rigid, face-threatening declaration.

Discussion:

These above mentioned hedges from the prologue of *the Holy Woman* are found twenty nine and epilogue of the *Unmarriageable* are observed are twenty eight. These hedges, in the selected narratives serve various functions, like (1) softening the situation,(2) emotional responses and expression, (3) rhetorical questions, (4) indirect description, (5)cultural framing, (6) vague and discomfort meanings,(7) dissatisfaction,(8)implying confidence, (9) respecting the autonomy ,(10) indicating uncertainty, and(11) avoiding definitive statements. Each one helps to create a more nuanced, layered narrative. In examining the use of hedges in the selected text from perspective of Leech's politeness principles theory (1083), it can be argued that they function to soften statements, express uncertainty, and avoid directness, all while aiming to preserve social harmony, reduce face –threatening acts, and mitigate imposition. The hedges highlighted in the prologue and epilogue play a crucial role in maintaining the characters' "face" (their social identity and self- image) and in moderating how they communicate with others.   Words like maybe, perhaps, if, would, and could are used throughout to soften statements. Several uses of indirect speech and tentative language ("she would" vs. "she will", "she was convinced" vs. "she is convinced").Words like managing, perhaps, and might add a layer of indirectness or conditionality. Self-deprecating language like "for the millionth time" can hedge against sounding too arrogant.

In the narrative each of these hedges creates an air of uncertainty or indirectness, allowing for room for interpretation, vulnerability, or potential shifts in perspective. The hedges used in the selected narrative function to soften the impact of characters' statements and actions. It is also viewed the atmosphere of uncertainty, vulnerability and politeness. Hedges, as linguistic tools, are often employed to soften the emotional responses and they express uncertainty to avoid definitive statements by creating more nuanced layered narrative. This research is aligned to Liu, (2020) that hedges play a significant role as a kind of fuzzy language in communication. Further, the findings are according to Leech's politeness principle theory (1983) that concludes hedges as a central component in communication strategies mitigating imposition, preserving social harmony, and reducing face threatening acts. Leech (1983) further suggest in the theory that speakers often navigate the complexities of social interactions by balancing the need to convoy information with the desire to protect to protect both their own and interlocutor's face. It is also parallel to a concept derived from the Goffman (1967) theory of face work. In the context, hedges play a critical role in reducing the potential for confrontation or misunderstanding by minimizing the directness of statements and allowing speakers to maintain a degree of flexibility. It is further confirmed that both negative and positive politeness strategies are found in both narratives but the quantity of the hedges was higher in the Holy Woman which demonstrates the language of the novel is softer than Unmarriageable. This research is parallel Jegarlooei &

Allami (2018) in the sense that female counter are more inclined towards politeness performance than male. Ajmal et al. (2023) have also confirmed that both male and female gender has employed hedges but there is a notable variation in frequency that is also equal to present study. Further, it is parallel to the findings of Singh et al. (2024) in politeness strategies but viewing the gender side, in the Holy Woman it is opposite because in the prologue male characters present slightly more politeness strategies than female i.e. fifteen from twenty nine. Furthermore, the hedges findings are aligned to Singh et al. (2024) in epilogue of Unmarriageable where females are presented more in politeness strategies i.e. eighteen twenty eight.

Hedges function in communication by signaling uncertainty which serves multiple purposes in maintaining politeness as it was argued by Brown & Levinson (1987) in their face-threatening act theory, language use that imposes on the interlocutor's face cab lead to social discomfort or conflict. It is stated that by using hedges, speakers can reduce the risk of threatening another person's social identity and self-image. For example, *"I still can't believe it"* or *"perhaps"* help soften assertions, indicating that the speaker is not imposing an absolute view but instead offering an opinion that is open to challenge. This linguistic strategy creates space for negotiation and fosters cooperation, rather than conflict, aligning with the core goals of Leech's politeness maxims (1983), especially the maxim of tact which emphasizes minimizing the imposition on others.

Moreover, hedges also convey the intentions of speakers to avoid definitive statements that might limit future discourse or result in social consequences. Holmes (1995) observes that hedges are integral to manage the interpersonal dynamics, especially in uncertain and sensitive contexts. For instance, in a scenario where a speaker might be unsure of the accuracy of the information such as *"May be"* hedging allows to communicate tentatively without directly asserting the correctness of the claims. This cautious approach not only reduces potential social friction but also reflects the speaker's concern for the interlocutor's face by avoiding the imposition of incorrect or potentially offensive information. The use of hedges can also be seen as a way to express empathy or solidarity, especially Brown & Levinson (1987) concept of positive politeness which focuses on strategies that enhance social relationships and show appreciation for others' social identities.

Finally, from discourse analysis perspective, the employment of hedges is not merely about avoiding imposition but also about creating a balanced, interactive communication process. Cutting (2002) highlights how hedges allow for a greater range of interactional possibilities, enabling speakers to negotiate meaning, adjust their stance, and express relational nuances without committing to a particular position. This flexibility is essential in maintaining conversational equilibrium, which is at the heart of the politeness principle theory (Leech, 1983), ensuring that communication remains respectful and cooperative.

Conclusion:

In conclusion, hedges are integral to the softening of statements, the expression of uncertainty, and the avoidance of directness, all of which are pivotal in preserving social harmony and managing face in interaction. They function not only as a linguistic markers of politeness but also as essential tools for managing the dynamics of social relationships and mitigating the potential for conflict, thus contributing to a more collaborative and flexible communication process as the data shows in the prologue of the Holy Woman (2002) and epilogue of the Unmarriageable (2019).This is consistent with the goals of politeness principle and face work theories, which stress the significance of balancing informativeness with respect for social identities.

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