



COMMUNICATIVE AND FUNCTIONAL FEATURES AND CONTEXTUAL FACTORS OF NON-CATEGORICAL STATEMENTS

Nigora Abdulkhayevna MUKHAMEDOVA

Senior teacher

"Teaching English Language Methodology №3"

Uzbek State University of World Languages

Abstract. *Non-categoric statements - those open-ended, flexible expressions that avoid strict judgments - play a key role in modern communication. This article explores their communicative and functional features across everyday discourse, academic contexts, and digital communication. The study examines how speakers use non-categorical phrasing to maintain politeness, reduce interpersonal tension, express uncertainty, adapt to shifting social norms, and navigate culturally sensitive situations. Contextual factors such as power dynamics, communicative intentions, social distance, and digital platform constraints significantly shape how these statements are produced and interpreted. The findings highlight that non-categorical statements function as strategic linguistic tools that enhance nuance, manage ambiguity, and support cooperative interaction in diverse communicative environments.*

Keywords: *non-categoric statements, pragmatics, communication strategies, contextual factors, linguistic ambiguity, interpersonal interaction*

Introduction

Non-categoric statements are linguistic expressions that avoid making absolute or definitive claims. These structures frequently include hedges ("maybe," "I think," "kind of"), modal verbs ("might," "could," "may"), vague quantifiers ("a bit," "somewhat"), or indirect constructions ("it appears that..."). They play an essential role in human communication, particularly in interactions where certainty is limited, social relations must be protected, or cultural norms favor indirectness.

In modern communication – especially in intercultural and digital environments – speakers often rely on non-categorical expressions to maintain flexibility, avoid conflict, and negotiate meaning. Scholars such as Lakoff (1973), Hyland (1998), and Brown and Levinson (1987) highlight that hedging and indeterminacy are not mere "weak language" but socially and pragmatically strategic. Despite their ubiquity, the communicative and contextual dynamics surrounding these statements remain under examined.

This study expands the understanding of non-categoric statements by analyzing their communicative functions, linguistic features, and contextual factors across spoken, written, and digital communication. The goal is to clarify why speakers choose non-categorical language and how listeners interpret it in different environments.

Methods

This research adopts a qualitative, multi-layered methodological approach combining:

1. Literature Review

A comprehensive review of research on hedging, pragmatics, modality, politeness theory, and discourse markers was conducted. Key theorists include Lakoff (1973) on hedges, Brown and Levinson (1987) on politeness, Palmer (2001) on modality, and Tannen (1984) on conversational style.

2. Discourse Sampling

Informal data collection was carried out through examples sourced from:

- everyday spoken English conversations,
- academic writing samples,
- professional communication (emails, workplace meetings),
- social media interactions (Twitter, Instagram captions, messaging apps).

These examples were analyzed to observe patterns of non-categorical language use in naturally occurring contexts. No personal-identifiable data was collected.

3. Functional-Pragmatic Analysis

The examples were interpreted using frameworks from:

- **Speech act theory** (Searle, 1979),
- **Conversation analysis** (Pomerantz & Heritage, 2013),
- **Interactional sociolinguistics** (Gumperz, 1982).

This enabled examination of speaker intent, interpersonal negotiation, and pragmatic function. The method is descriptive and explorative, aiming to map rather than quantify patterns of non-categorical communication.

Results

1. Communicative Features of Non-Categorical Statements

Hedges reduce the commitment level of a statement. Examples include:

- lexical hedges: *"maybe," "sort of," "apparently," "in a way"*
- adverbial mitigation: *"slightly," "possibly," "arguably"*
- syntactic softeners: *"I think," "it seems like," "from what I can tell"*

These devices protect the speaker by decreasing assertiveness (Lakoff, 1973, Hyland, 1998).

Epistemic modal verbs indicate degrees of certainty and knowledge:

- *might, may* → weak possibility
- *could, would* → hypothetical
- *should* → expectation based on reasoning
- *must* → high-certainty deduction

These help the speaker position their knowledge relative to reality (Palmer, 2001).

Speakers use approximations to express uncertainty or avoid commitment:

- *"around," "roughly," "a few," "some people say"*

This adds flexibility and reduces precision where it is unnecessary.

Sometimes ambiguity is intentional. Strategic ambiguity allows speakers to:

- avoid conflict,
- maintain diplomatic relationships,
- protect institutional image,
- escape accountability (Eisenberg, 1984).

Political discourse frequently uses this pattern (*"We are considering all possible options"*).



2. Functional Roles of Non-Categorical Statements

2.1 Managing Uncertainty

Language naturally reflects incomplete knowledge. In science, business, and everyday life, speakers use hedges to maintain intellectual honesty and signal interpretive limits (Holmes, 1988, Hyland, 1998).

For example:

- *"The data suggests..."* rather than *"The data proves..."*.

2.2 Maintaining Social Politeness

Politeness theory shows that people avoid threatening each other's "face" (Brown & Levinson, 1987). Non-categorical language softens requests, corrections, or disagreements:

- *"Maybe check this part again?"*.
- *"You made a mistake."*

This reduces interpersonal tension.

2.3 Negotiating Power Imbalances

Speakers with lower social status (students, employees, younger people) often hedge to avoid sounding authoritative (Holmes, 1995). Conversely, people in power may also use hedges strategically to appear cooperative.

2.4 Expressing Stance and Identity

Non-categorical language helps speakers signal:

- humility,
- emotional caution,
- openness,
- tentative reasoning.

This builds positive social identity and fosters trust.

2.5 Supporting Collaborative Dialogue

In conversations, softened statements encourage others to join in, disagree, or expand ideas without confrontation (Tannen, 1984).

3. Contextual Factors Influencing Non-Categorical Language

3.1 Cultural Context

High-context cultures (Japan, Korea, Arab countries) emphasize indirectness and prefer non-categorical expressions to preserve harmony (Hall, 1976). Low-context cultures (Germany, USA) value clarity but still use hedging in sensitive contexts.

3.2 Social and Power Dynamics

Power differences shape how much hedging speakers use.

- Subordinates use more hedges to show respect.
- Superiors may use hedges to appear non-threatening.

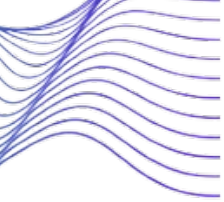
3.3 Gender and Social Norms

Research indicates women often hedge more than men in certain contexts, not due to uncertainty but to promote cooperation and politeness (Holmes, 1995).

3.4 Digital and Online Communication

Online environments amplify non-categorical phrasing due to:

- lack of tone,



- uncertainty of interpretation,
- fear of miscommunication,
- desire to avoid argument escalation (Tagg, 2015).

Examples include:

- “*idk but maybe...*”
- “*kind of feels like...*”

3.5 Emotional Sensitivity

In emotionally charged topics (criticism, persuasion, sensitive feedback), people increase their use of non-categorical language to avoid damaging relationships (Goffman, 1967).

Discussion

The analysis underscores the multifunctionality of non-categoric statements. They serve as powerful communicative tools that allow individuals to navigate uncertainty, negotiate interpersonal relationships, protect face, and adapt to cultural norms. These linguistic forms are not signs of indecision or weakness but sophisticated strategies for shaping meaning and maintaining social cohesion.

In a globalized world where people increasingly interact across cultures and digital platforms, the importance of non-categoric expressions is growing. They help manage ambiguity, reduce conflict, and create space for collaborative thinking – especially in environments that are emotionally or socially complex.

Future research can further explore:

- cross-linguistic differences in hedging strategies,
- generational variations (e.g., Gen Z indirectness online),
- AI communication and non-categorical language,
- The relationship between personality traits and hedging use.

Overall, non-categoric statements act as essential linguistic mechanisms for flexibility, politeness, and nuanced meaning-making in human communication.

REFERENCES

1. Brown, P., & Levinson, S. C. (1987). *Politeness: Some universals in language usage*. Cambridge University Press.
2. Coates, J. (1983). *The semantics of the modal auxiliaries*. Croom Helm.
- Eisenberg, E. (1984). Ambiguity as strategy in organizational communication. *Communication Monographs*, 51(3), 227–242.
3. Gumperz, J. (1982). *Discourse strategies*. Cambridge University Press.
4. Holmes, J. (1988). Doubt and uncertainty in ESL textbooks. *Applied Linguistics*, 9(1), 21–44.
5. Hyland, K. (1998). Hedging in scientific research articles. Palmer, F. R. (2001). *Mood and modality* (2nd ed.). Cambridge University Press.
6. Pomerantz, A., & Heritage, J. (2013). Preference. In *The handbook of conversation analysis* (pp. 210–228). Wiley-Blackwell.
7. Searle, J. R. (1979). *Expression and meaning: Studies in the theory of speech acts*. Cambridge University Press.