

A STUDY OF PRAGMATIC FEATURES OF EPISTEMIC ADVERBS WITH COGNITIVE NON-FACTIVE VERBS IN ENGLISH

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Abstract - This paper is meant to examine in detail a specific type of modal realization as expressed through the combination of cognitive non-factive verbs with epistemic adverbs. The main point we would like to focus on in this paper is the harmony of cognitive non-factive verbs and epistemic adverbs in pragmatics based on the scale of certainty. With 200 English utterances collected from different sources such as novels, short stories and the internet, the paper has investigated the collocations of cognitive non factive verbs and epistemic adverbs to find out the usage of these collocations in daily conversations with specific communication purposes such as politeness, vagueness, mitigation. It is hoped that this will open the path for a number of interesting questions related to the special status of the relationship between cognitive non-factive verbs and epistemic adverbs, which is very useful for learners of English in using these collocations effectively in communication.

Key words - cognitive non-factive verbs; epistemic adverbs; collocations; politeness; vagueness; mitigation.

1. Introduction

Nowadays, the study of collocations has become an issue of so much interest that a lot of linguists have concerned about. In recent years, important advances have been made in the field of lexicology based upon the study of occurrence and collocation. In fact, most everyday words not only have an independent meaning or meanings but also are collections of a rich repertoire of multi-word patterns that make up the text. Especially in epistemic modality, there are many ways in which modality can manifest itself and there is rich potential for the association of diverse modal elements within the sentence as Palmer [7, 45] suggests “*Modality is not, then, necessarily marked in the verbal element, nor is there any obvious reason why it should be, apart from the fact that the verb is the most central part of sentence*”

2. Review of previous studies related

English has a variety of lexical means to express modality including modal nouns, adjectives, adverbs and lexical verbs; however, as “*Modal elements frequently combine and interact dynamically*” [4, 3], combining modal elements is really a new and interesting finding in study today. Although until now there have been a few studies of collocation of these modal elements, studying collocations of modal elements has always been a fascinating area to linguists. We can refer to the following studies: Hoyer [4] undertook a study of modal-adverb collocations. He found a marked tendency for epistemic modals to attract adverb satellites. Giang [2] expressed her overview of harmony of adverb satellites on non-factive verbs, however it is only a minor part in her master thesis because her study mainly investigated linguistic features of non factive verbs. The above review shows that until now a study of collocations of cognitive non factive verbs and epistemic adverbs remains a neglected area.

3. Epistemic adverbs

Epistemic adverbs express the speaker’s judgement about the certainty or doubt towards the truth of proposition. In other words, it is the degree of the speaker’s certainty to the possibility of the proposition [5, 51].

Epistemic adverbs which are one of the most popular lexical devices showing modality often comment on the content of a proposition. They express the speaker’s judgement about the certainty, reliability, and limitations of the proposition; they can also comment on source of the information. Especially in communication, the speaker wants to convey his/her judgement and attitudes to the possibility of the state of affair stated in the proposition. According to Biber et al. [1], epistemic adverbs consist of three kinds: *epistemic stance adverbs*, *attitude stance adverbs* and *style stance adverbs*. Also, they state that epistemic stance adverbs often used in communication are single word adverbs such as *certainly*, *perhaps*, *probably*, *possibly*, *maybe*, *surely*, *definitely*....

(1) *Perhaps* you’ll be hurt just a little in the foot [10, 149]

(2) That is *certainly* the simplest explanation [11, 58]

However, Khuong and Giang [5] divide epistemic adverbs into two kinds: assertive epistemic modal adverbs such as *certainly*, *surely*, *definitely*, *clearly*... and non-assertive epistemic modal adverbs such as *probably*, *possibly*, *perhaps*, *maybe*...

Based on the scale of certainty by Givón [3], assertive epistemic modal adverbs can be put on the continuum of degree of certainty below:

Surely/ Clearly Definitely Certainty
→

Figure 1. The scale of certainty of assertive epistemic modal adverbs

Palmer [7] suggests that epistemic modality should involve any modal system that indicates the degree of commitment by the speaker to what he or she says- the extent to which the truth of a proposition is possible. Therefore, non-assertive epistemic modal adverbs can be described as possibility-based. We can present the degree of possibility as follows:

Maybe/ Perhaps Possibly Probably
→

Figure 2. The scale of possibility of non assertive epistemic modal adverbs

4. Cognitive non-factive verbs

A cognitive non factive verb commits the speaker to neither the truth nor falsity of the expression expressed by its complement clause. According to Kiparsky [6], modal

lexical verbs are divided into two main types: factive verbs and non factive verbs. Non-factive verbs work as an operator to mitigate the commitment and bring open-hearted atmosphere with the cooperation. In the research by Giang [2], there are three main types of non-factive verbs: cognitive non factive verbs: *believe, think, expect, suppose, guess, fear...*, perceptive non factive verbs: *look, feel, sound, seem, appear...* and reportive non factive verbs: *say (that), tell, hear,...* Cognitive non factive verbs do not inform the listener or hearer of the subject's action, but show the speaker's attitude to the proposition. According to [2], syntactically, in order to become a modal lexical device, non factive verbs have to satisfy the following distinguished features:

- The subject is always in the singular first person.
- The verb is in simple present tense.
- Adverbial phrases of causes or purposes must not be added to the sentence.
- In tag questions, the tag only aim at the subject of proposition (complement clause).
- As a modal device, these structures: *I think/ I believe/ I suppose...* can stand in different positions in a sentence such as initial, medial, and final. Besides, they function as an adjunct.
- The complementizer *that* is often omitted (in about 90 % of the cases)

(3a) *I think* exercise is really beneficial to anybody.

(3b) Exercise, *I think*, is really beneficial to anybody.

(3c) Exercise is really beneficial to anybody, *I think*.

(3d) I think exercise is really beneficial to anybody, *isn't it?*

5. The pragmatic dimension of epistemic adverbs on cognitive non-factive verbs

Adverbs represent the largest class of epistemic modals. Besides, many adverbs can serve as epistemic modals called as "epistemic stance" by Biber et al. Especially, these adverbs together with cognitive verbs play an important part in expressing the speaker's commitment to the truth of the proposition based on the scale of certainty. These adverbs can weaken or strengthen the force of epistemic modal verbs in the speaker's utterances.

5.1. Epistemic adverb and cognitive non-factive verb collocations with high certainty

In regarding the modality, cognitive non-factive verbs together with epistemic adverbs can allow the speaker to show more certain attitude than the case in which he/she merely use these verbs alone like in the following examples

(4) I don't know why I worried about it before. It seems easy enough now. I hope they get the planes up on time for once. *I certainly hope* that tomorrow is going to be a day with dust on the road [14, 308].

(5) *I surely think* that this is not a hindrance to make it successful [15].

(6) He gets on pretty gaily with the young squires with

whom he drinks, bets, rides, and talks about hunting and shooting but he says the country girls are bored; *indeed I don't think* he is fair wrong [14, 161].

(7) Everyone says he was marvelous. It's like acrobats *really I suppose* and just as dull. I wasn't asking about that [9, 191].

In examples (4) to (7) above, as epistemic adverbs *certainly, surely, indeed, really* occur before cognitive non-factive verbs, they occupy a more marked position. These adverbs are then even more likely to emphasize the speaker's commitment to the truth of the expressed proposition with high certainty. In these instances, the epistemic adverbs such as *certainly, surely, indeed, really* strengthen the force of the cognitive non factive verbs: *hope, think, believe, suppose*. In other words, they allow the speaker to express his/ her high commitment towards the propositional content. The speaker can impart the information to the hearer with high certainty which implies that the speaker has enough evidence to make such a high certainty in his/her utterances.

5.2. Epistemic adverb and cognitive non-factive verb collocations with mid certainty

It can be said that epistemic adverbs also have emphasizing functions as *hedges* which can be used as politeness marker.

(8) There is a letter for you. *I think perhaps* it is from her [12, 605].

(9) *I guess maybe* we'll starve, but he won't care. He's so mean! [12, 440].

(10) *I think probably* the most important thing is having good fundamentals [16].

(11) *I think possibly* the first film that has music as its leading character [17].

In (8) – (11), the epistemic adverbs such as *perhaps, maybe, possibly, probably* standing before or after cognitive non-factive verbs are used to express the speaker's uncertainty to the truth of the proposition. In other words, the speaker wants to express his/her uncertain attitude to the content of the proposition with pragmatic implicatures. The speaker may be true or he/she might be mistaken in his/her judgement and the speaker hopes the hearer agrees but he cannot demand. With the speaker's uncertainty, the hearer can have an opportunity to give his/her own thoughts and makes the conversations more effective. On the other hand, the collocations of epistemic adverbs and cognitive non-factive verbs at mid certain level can mitigate the imposition on the hearer, give a strategy for facilitating open discussion and avoid disagreement. We can see such forms as a means to express the speaker's sensity to the addressee.

5.3. Epistemic adverb and cognitive non factive verb collocations with low certainty

In order to express the epistemic modality with low certainty, the speaker can use epistemic adverbs such as *hardly, still, just, only ...* before or after cognitive non-factive verbs like in the following examples

(12) *I hardly think* he'll be taken in again [8, 116].

(13) *I only think* the Austrians will not stop when they

have won a victory [10, 169].

Strickland was an odious man, but *I still think* he was a great one [11, 153].

(15) I can't pass judgement, Ollie. *I just think* it's part of it. I mean, I know I love not only you yourself. I love your name and your numeral [13, 130].

In examples (12) to (15), the speaker wants to express the uncertainty in his/ her commitment to the truth of the proposition by combining the adverbs *hardly*, *only*, *still*, *just*... and cognitive non-factive verbs. These collocations contain the power that can diminish his/her certainty to the lowest level. In other words, the speaker gives his/her thoughts or opinions; however, he /she is not sure of it and waits for the hearer's response that may be agreement or disagreement. This is a communicative strategy in which these low certain adverbs work as weak operators to decrease subjective certainty and reduce the illocutionary force of the speaker's claim because he/she believes that the hearer has his/her own views or thoughts which are contrary to his/hers. Besides, the speaker wants to avoid the imposition of his knowledge on the hearer. The table below presents the pragmatic dimension of epistemic adverbs on cognitive non-factive verbs.

Table 1. *The pragmatic dimension of epistemic adverbs on cognitive non-factive verbs*

Scale of certainty	Collocations	Pragmatics
High	I certainly/ surely/ indeed/ really...think/ believe/ hope/ suppose...	Strengthening the speaker's commitment to P
Medium	I think/ believe/ hope...perhaps/ maybe/ possibly/ probably...	Mitigating the speaker's commitment to P
Low	I hardly/ only/ still/ just/ nearly...think, believe/ suppose/guess...	Avoiding the imposition of speaker's knowledge

6. Conclusion

With the pragmatic features of epistemic adverb and cognitive non factive verb collocations mentioned above,

we can see the importance of these collocations in communication. It is impossible to use them effectively without mastering their pragmatic features based on the scale of certainty and possibility called hedges which are used for specific communication purposes such as politeness, vagueness, mitigation. Good knowledge of the pragmatic features of these collocations will help learners of English use them more effectively in communication. This paper is hoped to give readers some new findings on the harmony of epistemic adverbs and cognitive non factive verbs in pragmatics

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