Exploring Lexical Hedges in George Bernard Shaw's *Pygmalion*: A Pragmalinguistic Perspective

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Abstract

The study explores lexical hedges in Shaw's *Pygmalion* from a pragmalinguistic perspective. It attempts to identify the devices, strategies, functions and purposes of lexical hedges in *Pygmalion*. To achieve this aim, it adopts Muhammad's (2025a) model that is mainly adapted from the models of Salager-Meyer (1997), Hyland (1998), Varttala (2001) and Fraser (2010). Employing qualitative and quantitative approaches, the analysis of data pinpoints that there are seven forms of lexical hedges in the drama, and the most pervasive device is the modal auxiliary, whereas the least pervasive is the impersonal pronoun. The analysis also brings into light their diverse functions along with their dramatic, and thematic purposes. The findings show that hedges contribute to the issues which Shaw raises through weaving the drama. As it turns out, when it comes to human nature and moralities just as it is the case with hedging, things are neither definite, certain nor absolute.

Keywords: Lexical hedges, George Bernard Shaw, Pygmalion, modal auxiliary, moralities.

استكشاف التحوّطات المُعجميّة في مسرحية "بجماليون" لجورج برنارد شو: منظور تداولي لُغوي

مستخلص

تستكشف الدراسة التحوّط المُعجميّ في مسرحية بجماليون للكاتب شو من منظورٍ تداولي لُغوي، وتحاول التعرف على أدوات وأساليب ووظائف وأغراض التحوّط المُعجميّ في المسرحية. ومن أجل تحقيق هذا الهدف، تتبنى الدراسة نموذج محمد (2025a) والقائم بشكلٍ أساسي على نماذج سالاچر ماير (1997)، هايلند (1998) ڤارتالا (2001)، وفريزر (2010). وقد أوضح تحليل البيانات الذي تم إجرائه باتباع المنهجين النوعيّ والكميّ وجود سبع صيغٍ من التحوّطات المُعجميّة في الدراما، وأنّ الفعل الناقص هو أكثر الصيغ انتشارًا بينما الضمير غير الشخصي هو أقلها انتشارًا. كما أوضح التحليل وظائفهم المتنوعة علاوة على أغراضهم الموضوعية والدرامية. وأظهرت النتائج أنّ التحوّطات تُسهم في القضايا التي يطرحها شو من خلال نسج الدراما. وكما يتضح، عندما يتعلق الأمر بالطبيعة البشرية والأخلاقيات-كما هو الحال مع التحوّط-فإن الأمور ليست محددة أو مؤكدة أو مطلقة.

الكلمات المفتاحية: التحوّطات المُعجميّة، چورج برنارد شو، بجماليون، الفعل الناقص، الأخلاقيات.

1. Introduction

Lakoff (1973) defines hedges as "words whose job is to make things fuzzier or less fuzzy" (p. 471). Authors, on way or another, communicate their own thoughts and beliefs through the characters they create, and incidents they trigger in their works. Hence, they usually resort to the employment of hedging devices for various purposes. An instance of these works is George Bernard Shaw's *Pygmalion*.

As Henderson (1911) states in his biography, George Bernard Shaw was born in Dublin, Irland, in 1856, into a protestant family. His drunkard father George Carr Shaw, a clerk turned corn merchant, had neither education nor money. Overall, Shaw resented his father, for he could not afford to send Shaw to university and pushed him to work when he was fifteen. The only two traits in which Shaw resembled his father were "a sense of humor, an appreciation of the comic force of anti-climax" (Henderson, 1911, p. 6), and being, as he marked himself in the preface to his first novel *Immaturity*, "a downstart, the son of a downstart" (Shaw, 1931, p. viii).

Shaw, on the other hand, was more attached to his mother Lucinda Elizabeth Gurly, and found solace in her companionship and in her music. Lucinda abandoned Shaw's father and followed her music teacher George John Vandeleur Lee to London (Weintraub, 1977). At the age of twenty, Shaw moved to London to reunite with his mother and his sister Lucy. She supported him in his beginnings in London, and he acknowledged that without her backing he would have foundered (Burton, 1916).

Shaw was such a puzzlingly contradictory man in his own life, which was quite reflected in his works. His writings echoed "Socialism, Fabianism, Communism, anti-democracy, Feminism, Philosophy, and Dictatorship" (Çakirtaş & Şekerci, 2015, p. 340). He joined the Fabian society in 1884, and a year after the Socialist League. He was "a Marxist and an anti-Marxist, a revolutionary and a reformer" (Suleiman, 2010, p. 5). In his early life, he supported the abolition of marriage and family, then he joined the Fabians who had

no particular opinion on marriage. Later on, he stated that marriage institutions are not related to Socialism, and afterwards contended that Socialism has a great effect on marriage and family (Griffith, 2003). Eventually in 1898, Shaw married his nurse Charlotte Payne-Townshend. Their marriage, though unconsummated, lasted fifty years until Charlotte's death in 1948.

Reading between the lines, Shaw's upbringing as a downstart, his mother's relationship with Lee, his marriage to Charlotte played a great role in shaping his life and thought, which was considerably mirrored in almost all of his writings. As a member of what he labelled "downstart" class, he frequently tackled struggle between the downstart (working) class and the middle class in terms of social identity, inequality and morality. Furthermore, his mother's relation with his father and with Lee influenced the trust he would have invested in his relationships, as well as influencing his ideas about marriage and the nature of his actual marriage. As a result, he often simulated these conditions in his works such as *Pygmalion*.

In *Pygmalion*, Shaw addresses morals, identity and class. He shows the change of morals and identity through the voice of Alfred Doolittle, a poor dustman, who turns into a rich middle-class lecturer because of a silly joke. The play also tackles the power of language: Eliza, Alfred's daughter, transforms from a flower girl to a middle-class lady only through working on her language. Through the characters' oscillation of morals and classes, Shaw makes the audience question social norms.

The present study examines how Shaw uses hedging devices in *Pygmalion*. It pinpoints the frequently employed form of lexical hedges, the hedging strategies Shaw makes use of, and their functions and purposes. In this way, the study highlights the significance of exploring the pragmatic functions of hedging in literary discourse.

2. Literature Review

A number of studies have been carried out on the linguistic phenomenon of hedging in different fields employing various models

and following different approaches. Recent studies address the concept of hedging from different perspectives such as linguistic dependencies of speculation (e.g. Kilicoglub & Bergler, 2008; Vlachos & Craven, 2010; Muhammad, 2025a), politeness maxims (e.g. Liu, 2020), and gender specifications (e.g. Amine, 2019). These perspectives are adopted in approaching different types of discourse including academic discourse (e.g. Jalilifar, 2007; Gomaa, 2019; Jameel, 2023), journalistic discourse (e.g. Jensen, 2008), political discourse (e.g. Vlasyan, Pastukhova, & Shusharina, 2018; Hassan & Said, 2020), online media discourse (e.g. Florea, 2017), and literary discourse (e.g. Liu, 2020; Hassan, 2024; Muhammad, 2025a; Muhammad, 2025b). The present study approaches hedging in literary discourse, and accordingly it focuses on presenting the studies that examine hedges in literary works.

Liu (2020) investigates hedging from the perspective of politeness in the novel *Jane Eyre*. Her study is a qualitative one that adopts the framework of Leech's politeness principle. Through analyzing some dialogues from the novel, she shows how hedging fulfills the six maxims of politeness: tact, generosity, approbation, modesty, agreement and sympathy. She concludes that there are four main functions of hedging: "maintaining a better communication environment, saving face and achieving the purpose of self-protection, making the expressions polite and euphemistic, and making words more appropriate and acceptable" (p. 1614).

Hassan (2024) addresses the phenomenon of hedging in three modern plays: *Look back in Anger*, *The Invention of Love* and *Under the Blue Sky*. The study is a quantitative one that adopts Hyland's and Yu's models. He enumerates the types and frequencies of hedges that take place in these plays, determines the prototypical type in each play, and pinpoints that hedging softens remarks in the plays and preserves social peace. These two studies mainly touch on hedging as a pragmatic phenomenon used to produce a communicative effect in the literary works examined.

Unlike the aforementioned studies, Muhammad's (2025a) and (2025b) examine hedging in a different light. Muhammad (2025a)

tackles lexical hedging in Shaw's *Arms and the Man* and *Man and Superman,* and Muhammad (2025b) tackles the pragmatics of syntactic hedging in Shaw's *Pygmalion*. Each of the two studies blends both qualitative and quantitative approaches, and they adopt an eclectic approach in classifying hedging devices and strategies. The two studies integrate four taxonomies, namely those of Salager-Meyer (1997), Hyland (1998), Varttala (2001) and Fraser (2010). Besides, the two studies examine the pragmatic functions of hedging, pinpoint the hedging strategies found in the works under study, and relate these functions and strategies to the themes of the plays studied as well as the author's views.

In a similar vein, this present study adopts Muhammad's (2025a) model of analysis in classifying lexical hedges and hedging strategies and functions. It applies these models to Shaw's *Pygmalion* so as to bring out the fact that considering hedging contributes to a better interpretation of the drama. Besides, it makes the audience aware, to some extent of the author's attitude.

3. Theoretical Framework

Yule (1996) refers to hedges as "cautious notes expressed about how an utterance is to be taken" (p. 130). Unlike boosters that reinforce the certainty of propositions, hedges convey uncertainty towards the truth of propositions. Put another way, they are used to "mitigate, downgrade, understate and downtone propositions" (Muhammad, 2025a, p. 377).

Above all, hedges have a number of functions, which can be identified by realizing a number of strategies. Addressers use hedges for specific purposes. In so doing, they assign specific functions to these devices. These concealed strategies and functions are indicated in Figure 1 below.

Figure 1. Hedging Strategies (Muhammad, 2025a, p. 378)

Muhammad (2025a; 2025b) lists ten hedging strategies as follows: avoidance, intimacy, indetermination, subjectivization, depersonalization, downtoning, politeness, concealment, irony and persuasion. In addition, there are a number of functions that can be realized through these strategies. These functions include the following: the prevention of potential negative reactions, the protection of face, the avoidance of direct involvement, and the expression of modesty (Namsaraev, 1997; Taweel, Al-Saidat, Rafayah & Saidat, 2011).

This study adopts Muhammad's (2025a) model of analysis in detecting lexical hedging devices: a "model [that] is mainly adapted from the integration of three taxonomies, namely those of Salager-Meyer (1997), Varttala (2001) and Fraser (2010)" (Muhammad, 2025a, p. 379). Table 1 below presents Muhammad's (2025a) model. It classifies lexical hedges into four main categories: verbs, modal items, approximators and impersonal pronouns.

Table 1. Lexical Hedging Devices (Muhammad, 2025a, pp. 379-380)

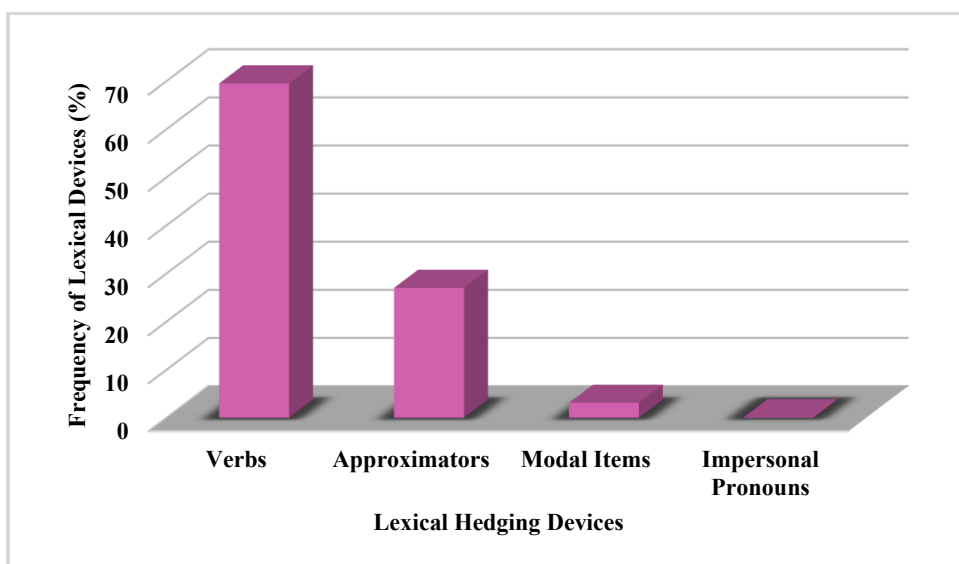| Lexical Hedging Devices			Examples
Verbs	Modal Auxiliaries		May, might, can, would, should
	Certain Lexical Verbs	Non-factive Reporting	Argue, propose, suggest
		Tentative cognition	Believe, think, assume
		Tentative linking	Seem, look, sound
Approximators			Quite, often, a lot of, about
Modal Items	Modal Adjectives		Possible, probable, unlikely
	Modal Adverbs		Perhaps, possibly, presumably
	Modal Nouns		Assumption, suggestion, claim
Impersonal Pronouns			One, they

4. Methodology

The data of this study is collected and analyzed through employing a blend of both qualitative and quantitative methods. First, the forms of lexical hedging devices employed in *Pygmalion* are identified. Then, the frequency of the occurrences of these lexical devices is detected. Afterwards, the strategy, function and purpose behind the employment of hedges are tackled.

5. Data Analysis

The total number of lexical hedging devices studied in *Pygmalion* is 954. These 954 hedges include 4 main categories as follows: 663 (69.5%) verbs, 258 (27%) approximators, 32 (3.4%) modal items, and 1 (0.1%) impersonal pronoun as demonstrated in Table 2 below. Figure 2, following the table, also represents a clearer view of the proportions of these lexical hedging devices found. Some of these categories are further divided into different forms as discussed in the following sections.

Table 2. Distribution of Lexical Hedging Devices in *Pygmalion*

| Lexical Hedging Devices	Freq.	%
Verbs	663	69.5
Approximators	258	27
Modal Items	32	3.4
Impersonal Pronouns	1	0.1

Figure 2. Distribution of Lexical Hedging Devices in *Pygmalion*

5.1. Verbs

Verbs are used as hedging devices 663 times, representing 69.5% of the overall lexical hedges detected. Table 3 and Figure 3 below distribute the sub-categories of verbs detected in *Pygmalion* as follows: 537 (81%) modal auxiliaries and 126 (19%) certain lexical verbs.

Table 3. Distribution of Verbs in *Pygmalion*

Verbs	Freq.	%
Modal Auxiliaries	537	81
Certain Lexical Verbs	126	19

Figure 3. Distribution of Verbs in in *Pygmalion*
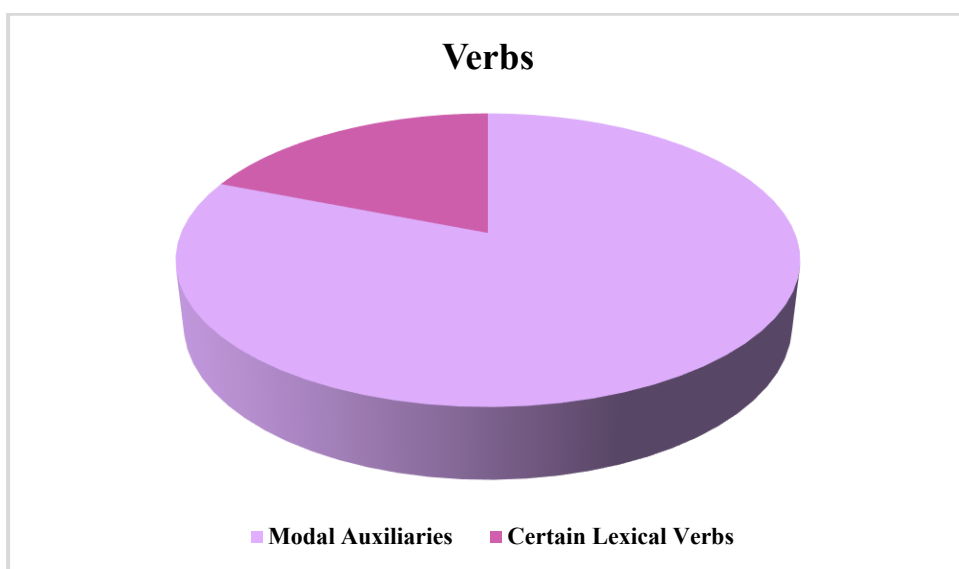
Overall, the most frequently employed type of verbs is the modal auxiliary, amounting to more than four times the lexical verbs detected in the play. This finding is considerably consistent with the fact that modal auxiliaries are commonly detected as the principal means of producing modal meaning in everyday interactions and in various types of discourse (e.g. Hardjanto, 2016; Wang & Tatiana, 2016; Gomaa, 2019; Adrian & Al Fajri, 2023). The two types of verbs are to be discussed and analyzed in the following sections.
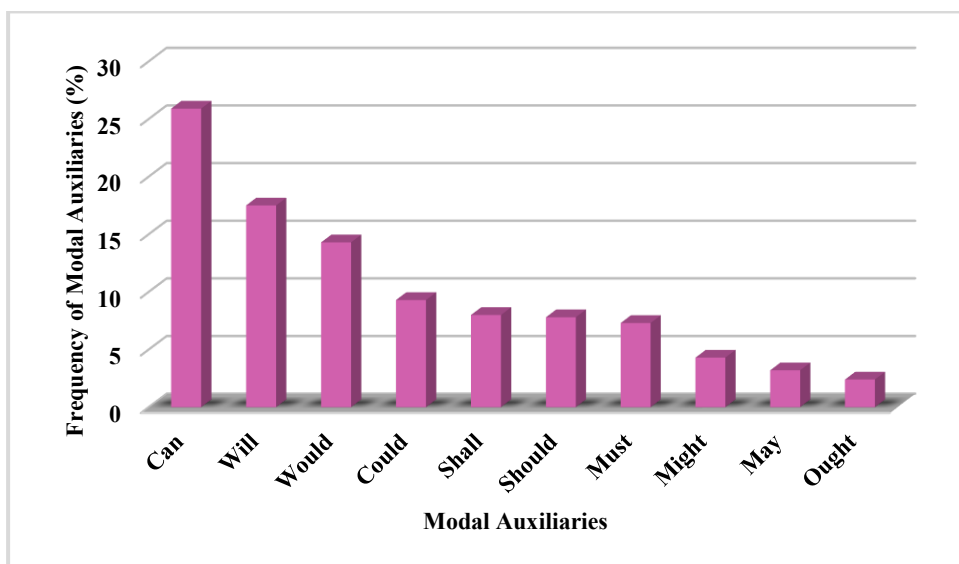
5.1.1. Modal Auxiliaries

The data from *Pygmalion* include ten different modal auxiliaries that could be interpreted as hedging devices. Modal auxiliaries, as mentioned above, are used to hedge propositions 537

times. Table 4 and Figure 4 show the distribution of these 537 auxiliaries put in descending order of frequency.

Table 4. Frequency of Modal Auxiliaries in *Pygmalion*

Modal Auxiliaries	Freq.	%
Can	139	25.9
Will	94	17.5
Would	77	14.3
Could	50	9.3
Shall	43	8.0
Should	42	7.8
Must	39	7.3
Might	23	4.3
May	17	3.2
Ought	13	2.4

Figure 4. Frequency of Modal Auxiliaries in *Pygmalion*

According to the table and figure above, the 537 modal auxiliaries detected in the play include 139 (25.9%) instances of *can*, 94 (17.5%) *will*, 77 (14.3%) *would*, 50 (9.3%) *could*, 43 (8.0%) *shall*, 42 (7.8%) *should*, 39 (7.3%) *must*, 23 (4.3%) *might*, 17 (3.2%) *may*,

and 13 (2.4%) *ought*. Overall, the most frequently employed modal auxiliary is *can*, while the least frequently employed one is *ought*.

In what follows, the researcher provides examples of the occurrence of these ten modal auxiliaries with hedging potential in *Pygmalion*. In each example, the modal auxiliary is underlined as follows:

[1]   a. HIGGINS. "She <u>can</u> go her own way, with all the advantages I have given her" (Shaw, 1977, p. 383).

b. CLARA. "People <u>will</u> think we never go anywhere or see anybody if you are so old-fashioned" (Shaw, 1977, p. 383).

c. HIGGINS. "Do you mean to say that you <u>would</u> sell your daughter for £50?" (Shaw, 1977, p. 367).

d. HIGGINS. "I daresay my mother <u>could</u> find some chap or other who would do very well" (Shaw, 1977, p. 399).

e. HIGGINS. "I <u>shall</u> make a duchess of this draggletailed guttersnipe" (Shaw, 1977, p. 351).

f. LIZA. "You expect me to get into that and wet myself all over! Not me. I <u>should</u> catch my death" (Shaw, 1977, p. 357).

g. HOSTESS. "She <u>must</u> be a princess at least" (Shaw, 1977, p. 393).

h. HIGGINS. "You <u>might</u> marry, you know" (Shaw, 1977, p. 398).

i. DOOLITTLE. "Ah! You <u>may</u> well call it a silly joke" (Shaw, 1977, p. 407).

j. THE MOTHER. "Not so long. But he <u>ought to</u> have got us a cab by this" (Shaw, 1977, p. 333).

Hedge 1 below is representative of the different strategies, functions and purposes realized through the use of modal auxiliaries as hedges in *Pygmalion*.

Hedge 1. DOOLITTLE. "If I was one of the deserving poor, and had put by a bit, I <u>could</u> chuck it; but then why should I, acause the deserving poor <u>might</u> as well be millionaires for all the happiness they ever has" (Shaw, 1977, p. 408).

In his speech, Doolittle uses the modals "could" and "might" to express epistemic meaning. Once more, these auxiliaries are used as a strategy of indetermination as well as avoidance. The modal auxiliary *should* expresses obligation rather than likelihood, and accordingly is not regarded as a hedge. The proposition above also contains other hedges such as if-conditional and the approximator "a bit". Doolittle resorts to these hedges to save his face and avoid strongly stating an incredible fact.

Doolittle utters the proposition in Hedge 1 in Act V. He goes to Mrs Higgins' house to meet Higgins and inform him of what his little joke has done to him. In the presence of Mrs Higgins, Higgins and Pickering, Doolittle tells the story of how he was transformed from a poor dustman to a wealthy lecturer, and from a happy man to a miserable one. Though becoming a member of the middle class troubles him, Doolittle cannot go back to be a poor dustman, for he is "one of the undeserving poor" (Shaw, 1977, p. 367). According to the middle class, he is seen as unworthy of charity.

Shaw masterfully uses these modal auxiliaries as hedges to depict class prejudices against the poor and the rigid code of charity. In this way, Shaw criticizes the middle-class morality that is based on prejudice rather than humanity. Hedging his proposition, Shaw avoids being biased against the middle-class standards. These modal auxiliaries thus contribute to the themes of *Pygmalion*.

5.1.2. Certain Lexical Verbs

Lexical verbs are used to hedge propositions 126 times. Table

5 and Figure 5 below show the distribution of these 126 verbs as follows: 107 (84.9%) tentative cognition verbs, 16 (12.7%) tentative linking verbs, and 3 (2.4%) non-factive reporting verbs. Tentative cognition verbs are the most common verbs as hedging devices, whereas non-factive reporting verbs are the least common.

Table 5. Distribution of Lexical Verbs in *Pygmalion*

Lexical Verbs	Freq.	%
Tentative cognition verbs	107	84.9
Tentative linking verbs	16	12.7
Non-factive reporting verbs	3	2.4

Figure 5. Distribution of Lexical Verbs in *Pygmalion*
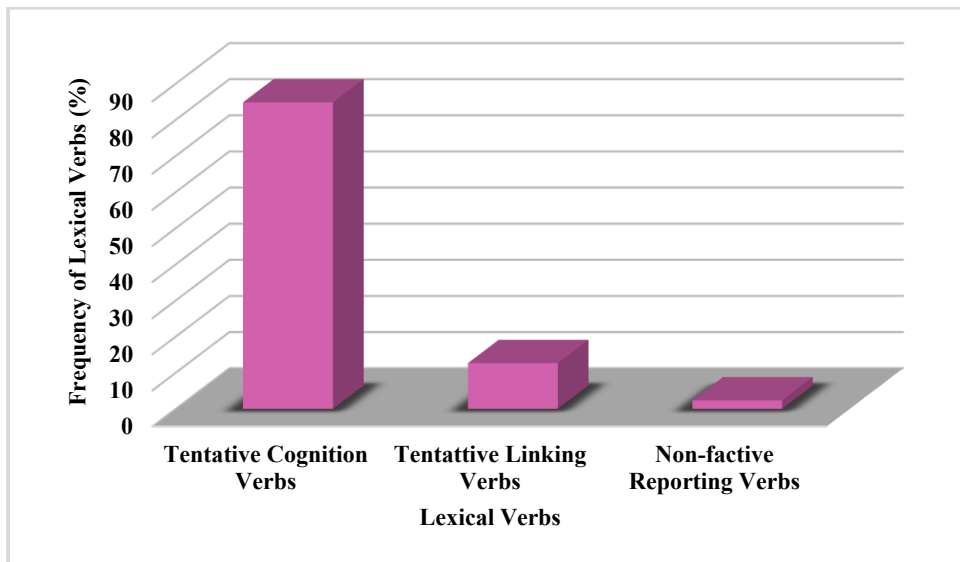
A. Tentative Cognition Verbs. There are altogether 11 different tentative cognition verbs identified in *Pygmalion*, with a total of 107 occurrences. The verb "think" is by far the most common tentative cognition verb with frequency of 60 (56.1%) out of the overall 107 verbs found in the play. It is followed by "suppose" with frequency of 16 (14.9%), and "hope", "wish" and "expect" with frequencies of 6 (5.6%) each. Other instances of this category of verbs can be found in

Appendix A. A typical example of these verbs in *Pygmalion* is given in Hedge 2.

Hedge 2. "HIGGINS. […] You were a fool: I <u>think</u> a woman fetching a man's slippers is a disgusting sight" (Shaw, 1977, p. 419).

In the same vein of Hedge 5, Higgins here uses the verb "think" accompanied by "I". Reading between the lines, Higgins avails of the phrase "I think" as a strategy of subjectivization, and Shaw consequently avails of it as a strategy of irony. Once more, Shaw employs tentative cognition verbs to avoid imposition on the audience so that they would respect his opinion and react positively to it.

Hedge 2 above takes place in Higgins' final dialogue with Eliza in Act V. Higgins asks Eliza if she had enough, and her first utterance was "[y]ou want me back only to pick up your slippers" (Shaw, 1977, p. 417). Picturing her as a slave, Higgins pinpoints that he wants her to come back for the fun of it not for her "little dog's tricks of fetching and carrying slippers" (Shaw, 1977, p. 419). In this regard, Shaw condemns Eliza's attempts to elicit affections from Higgins in return for carrying his slippers:

> [H]er attempt to win the love of Pygmalion-Higgins is the evidence of her fear of the role of the woman who has genteel manners without the money to maintain herself in a genteel setting- an emotion which Shaw, as a onetime member of the "downstart" class, understood very well. (O'Donnell, 1995, p. 8)

Shaw, through this hedge, reflects his personal attitude towards the conditions that he coexisted with. Furthermore, he criticizes the tacit pact between the working class (embodied in Eliza) and the middle class (embodied in Higgins). The working class offers the middle class services so as to get in return security, acceptance and a way to support themselves in society. Establishing his reliability with the phrase "I think", Shaw confers a speck of fuzziness on his proposition so as allow the audience to react freely and save both his face and theirs. Subsequently, this hedge serves a thematic purpose.

b. *Tentative Linking Verbs*. There are altogether 3 different tentative linking verbs identified in *Pygmalion*, with a total of 16 occurrences. These verbs are "look", "seem" and "sound", which are distributed as follows: 7 (43.8%), 6 (37.5%) and 3 (18.8%) respectively. A typical example of tentative linking verbs in *Pygmalion* is given in Hedge 3.

Hedge 3. "He has well marked and rather interesting features, and <u>seems</u> equally free from fear and conscience" (Shaw, 1977, p. 363).

This hedge takes place in Act II in *Pygmalion*. It occurs in the descriptive tier of Doolittle's character. In describing him, Shaw uses the tentative linking verb "seem" as a strategy of indetermination to give his description a coloring of fuzziness. This is mainly for the sake of producing a dramatic effect.

In the play, Shaw tackles human nature in terms of morality and principles. In these respects, Doolittle is an emblem of the fluctuating nature of human. On his first appearance, he asks Higgins for money as if he is selling his daughter, yet does not take more than a five-pound note, though offered ten: "Ten pounds is a lot of money: it makes a man feel prudent like" (Shaw, 1977, p. 368), he justifies. On his second appearance, he complains about being a member of the middle class, but does not show readiness to go back to being a dustman. On one occasion, he epitomizes morality; on the other, he is violating it himself. Utilizing the lexical hedge "seem", Shaw invites the audience to contemplate the character of Doolittle. Moreover, he employs it to reveal this tentative nature of man. Accordingly, this hedge serves descriptive, dramatic and thematic purposes in *Pygmalion*.

c. *Non-factive Reporting Verbs*. There are altogether 2 different non-factive reporting verbs identified, with a total of 3 occurrences. The verb "propose" occurs 2 (66.7%) times, and the verb "imagine" occurs only 1 (33.3%) time. Hedge 4 below is indicative of one occurrence of the verb "propose".

Hedge 4. HIGGINS. "All I <u>propose</u> is that we should be kind to this poor girl" (Shaw, 1977, p. 352).

Higgins addresses Pickering and Mrs. Pearce using the verb "propose". This verb is used as a strategy of subjectivization. Higgins is actually the one who is not kind to Liza. However, he tentatively introduces this suggestion and proposes the idea of being kind himself as a means of saving his own face,

This hedge takes place in Act II in a conversation between Higgins, Pickering, Mrs. Pearce and Liza. Higgins addresses Liza roughly, and asks Mrs. Pearce to take her away and hit her if she causes any trouble. Mrs. Pearce then asks him to be more reasonable. He responds to Mrs. Pearce with a much calmer manner, proposing that they should all be kind to Eliza.

Aware of the inconvenience he caused with his rough language and behaviour, Higgins tries to be more polite. He uses the non-factive reporting verb "propose" to hedge his proposition as a means of face-saving. In this way, he makes his statement less direct so as not to risk being criticised from his civilized company, who has already seen a great portion of his rudeness. In this vein, this verb functioning as a hedge serves a dramatic purpose in the play.

5.2. Approximators

The second frequently employed form of lexical hedges is that of approximators. Approximators make the proposition weaker, thereby attenuating the state of imposition on the audience (Gribanova & Gaidukova, 2019). there are altogether 41 different approximators identified, with a total of 258 occurrences. The adverb "quite" is the most common approximator with frequency of 40 (15.5%). It is followed by "some" with frequency of 34 (13.2%), and "more" with frequency of 28 (10.9%). Other instances of this approximators can be found in Appendix A. A typical example of approximators in *Pygmalion* is given in Hedge 5.

Hedge 5. "DOOLITTLE. [tolerantly] <u>A little of</u> both, Henry, like the rest of us: <u>a little of</u> both" (Shaw, 1977, p. 409).

Using the approximator of quantity "a little", Doolittle avails of the hedge as strategies of indetermination, downtoning and irony. Doolittle responds to Henry's claim "Doolittle: either you're an honest man or a rogue" (Shaw, 1977, p. 409). He mocks morality, toning down the force of his claim.

This hedge takes place near the middle of Act V. In Mrs Higgins's drawing room, Higgins and Doolittle squabble over to whom of them Eliza belongs. Henry argues that he has paid Doolittle for Eliza five pounds and accuses him of being a rogue, for being honest and being rogue are two qualities that do not go together. Doolittle, rather than denying being a rogue, admits he is a little of a rogue and a little of an honest man like all of them. He thus suggests, as his name implies, that all humans, no matter what class they belong to, may do little of whatever it takes to make their way through life.

In this way, Shaw uses Alfred Doolittle as a vehicle for criticizing morality, particularly that of the middle class. Shaw here employs hedging to signal that all humans can be a little of rogue and honest, not only working-class men but also middle-class ones. Through Doolittle's voice, Shaw resorts to the use of the approximator "a little", repeating it twice in the same utterance so as to reduce the potential threat it may have on the audience. It thus serves a thematic purpose.

5.3. Modal Items

The third frequently employed form of lexical hedges is that of modal items. Modal items include modal adjectives, adverbs and nouns. This reflects Shaw's lexical diversity in expressing modality in his drama. They are used to hedge propositions 32 times. Table 6 and Figure 6 below show the distribution of these 32 modal items put in descending order of frequency.

Table 6. Distribution of Modal Items in *Pygmalion*

Modal Items	Freq.	%
Adverbs	15	46.9
Nouns	12	37.5
Adjectives	5	15.6

Figure 6. Distribution of Modal Items in *Pygmalion*
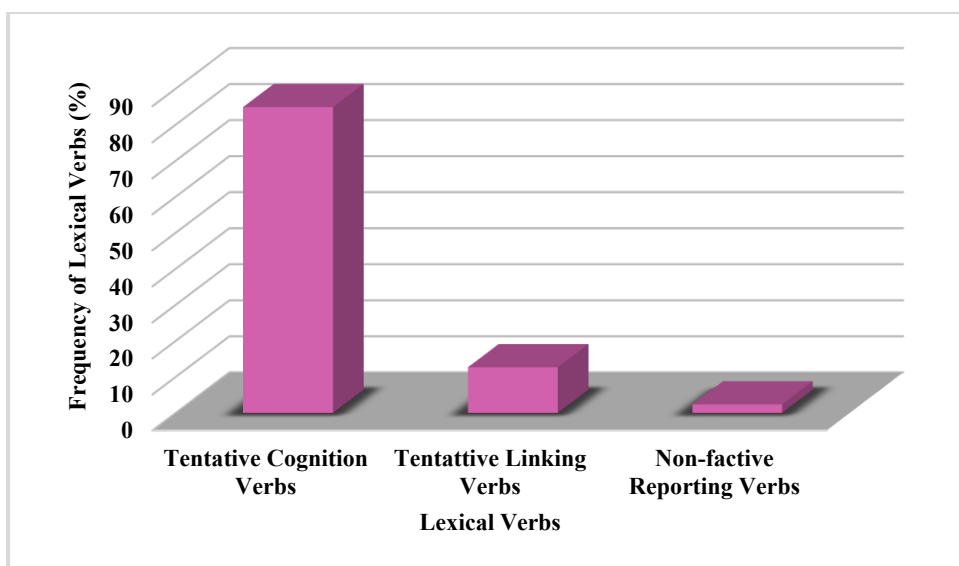
According to the table and figure above, the 32 modal items are distributed as follows: 15 (46.9%) modal adverbs, 12 (37.5%) modal nouns, and 5 (15.6%) modal adjectives. Modal adverbs are the most common modal items, whereas modal adjectives are the least common. Instances of the occurrence of these modal items can be seen on the following utterances:

[2] a. PICKERING. "Perhaps we were a little in considerate" (Shaw, 1977, p. 410).

b. LIZA. "But it's my <u>belief</u> they done the old woman in" (Shaw, 1977, p. 381).

c. HIGGINS. "So here I am, a confirmed old bachelor, and

likely to remain so" (Shaw, 1977, p. 360).

Hedge 6. DOOLITTLE. "She shouldn't have the heart to spend ten; and perhaps I shouldn't neither" (Shaw, 1977, p. 368).

Doolittle uses the modal adverb "perhaps" as a strategy of indetermination, and Shaw avails of it as a strategy of irony. Doolittle employs this hedge to protect his proposition, and to establish his reliability. At bottom, Shaw hedges this proposition to reflect the class differences, creating a comic effect.

This hedge takes place in Act II, when Doolittle goes to meet Higgins, and asks for money in exchange of leaving his daughter. He asks Higgins to give him a five-pound note, and Higgins offers to give him ten pounds. However, Doolittle refuses to take ten and elaborates that ten is a lot of money and it will only burden him. Neither him nor Eiza are able to deal with this amount of money. He only asks for five, "not a penny more, and not a penny less" (Shaw, 1977, p. 368).

Shaw here uses this hedge to bring out the difference between classes. The hedge "perhaps" introduces a tentative decision that Doolittle has to make. It also represents temptation put in his way that he could have given in to. Thus, this hedge serves a dramatic and thematic purposes in the play.

5.4. Impersonal Pronouns

The least frequently used sub-category of lexical hedges is that of impersonal pronouns. They are used to hedge propositions 1 time in *Pygmalion* as indicated in Table 2. This one occurrence is given in [3] below.

[3] LIZA. "One would think you was my father" (Shaw, 1977, p. 350).

The impersonal pronoun "one" is used as a strategy of depersonalization. Liza in the utterances above relieve herself from bearing the responsibility for the truth of the information mentioned. Accordingly, she eliminates her presence through the use of the

impersonal pronoun, which functions as a writer-oriented hedge.

6. Results and Conclusion

6.1. Results

The main findings of the present study are as follows:

- The modal auxiliary is by far the most frequently employed form of all lexical hedging devices studied with frequency of 2004 (48%). This finding is strongly in accordance with the concept of modality that in essence cuts across that of hedging. Aside from being common to almost all categorizations of hedges developed in almost all disciplines, modal auxiliaries are also common to daily human interactions. In a drama, which is a form of human expression and representation, modal auxiliaries play a central role as a means of expressing hedging.
- The most frequently used modal auxiliary in *Pygmalion* is *can*. This finding is congruent with the main themes of the drama. *Pygmalion* addresses the issues of class and language, portraying characters who can undergo a social and linguistic transformation, thereby introducing hypothetical possibilities though the use of "can".
- The second frequently used modal auxiliary is *will*. The predominance of *will* with epistemic potential is attributed to the nature of the dramas, as characters frequently declare future actions, thinking, wishing, or proposing they would take place. This future prediction commonly involves a component of tentativeness. It may also be attributed to the genre of the dramas, being comedy of ideas. Making readers full of anticipation for a future incident that has a possibility to take place, whether it actually happens or not, or an incident that is suggested to not possibly take place, produces a somewhat comic effect.
- The least frequently used modal auxiliary is *ought*. The infrequency of *ought* is due to the fact that it is less common in spoken language and has a tack of formality more than other modal verbs. Hence, it would not have been suitable to be

employed very often in a setting of social interactions as in the dramas.

- The most frequently used type of lexical verbs is the tentative cognition verb, whereas the least frequently used one is the non-factive reporting verb. This finding comes in perfect accordance with the nature of Shaw's drama, being structured as extended debates and full of argumentative contrasting views, rather than mere reporting of probable incidents.
- The verb *think* is by far the most common tentative cognition verb. It has been used as a predicate of that clauses, and has often been included in the parenthetical phrase "I think" which occurred in the beginning, middle or end of sentences. Besides, it is one of the most common cognition verbs used in the English language.
- The least frequently used lexical hedging device is the impersonal pronoun. Shaw limits his use of this hedge so as not to diminish his characters' presence in the proposition, for he does not seek to hedge their commitment to the proposition. That is, his hedges are more proposition-focused than writer-focused.

6.2. Conclusion

Hedging is a linguistic phenomenon that confers fuzziness on propositions. There are seven forms of lexical hedging devices studied in *Pygmalion* with a total of 954 devices, which are distributed as follows: 537 (56.3%) modal auxiliaries, 107 (11.2%) tentative cognition verbs, 16 (1.7%) tentative linking verbs, 3 (0.3%) non-factive reporting verbs, 258 (27%) approximators, 15 (1.6%) modal adverbs, 12 (1.3%) modal nouns, 5 (0.5%) modal adjectives, and 1 (0.1%) impersonal pronoun. In addition, the most frequently employed form of lexical hedges in the play is the modal auxiliary, whereas the least frequently employed one is the impersonal pronoun. There are different strategies of hedging found in the drama. These strategies are employed to reinforce, in many ways, the different underlying notions in the drama: morals, identity, class, and the power of language. In conclusion, lexical hedging devices considerably contribute to the audience's perception of the drama.

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Appendix A
List of Lexical hedging devices identified in *Pygmalion*
(The items in each sub-category are listed in alphabetical order)

a. Modal auxiliaries:

can
could
may
might
must
ought
shall
should
will
would

b. Tentative cognition verbs:

believe
calculate
conclude
daresay
expect
find
hope
regard as
suppose
think
wish

c. Tentative linking verbs:

look
seem
sound

d. Non-factive reporting verbs:

imagine
propose

e. Modal adjectives:

likely
possible

f. Modal adverbs:

maybe
perhaps
possibly
probably

g. Modal nouns:

belief
chance
hope
idea
notion

h. approximators:

a bit
a few
a good deal
a great deal
a little
a lot of/lots of
about
almost
awfully
evidently
extremely
few
frequently
greatly
half
hardly

jolly
less
long ago
many
more
most
mostly
nearly
nigh
occasionally
often
partly
plenty of
pretty

quite
rather
regularly
seldom
slightly
some
somehow
sometimes
soon
sort of
thereabouts

i. Impersonal pronoun:

one