Abstract

The thesis explores an area of vague language, specifically a set of linguistic elements called 'general extenders' (e.g., *or something (like that)*, *and stuff (like that)*). While early research claimed that these forms have primarily referential functions (category implication and list construction) and that they typically occur at clause- and utterance-final positions ('utterance final tags' (Aijmer 1985)), more recent studies stress that, above all, general extenders perform interpersonal functions in communication (e.g., marking an attitude towards a preceding utterance, politeness strategies, expressing different levels of certainty). Furthermore, due to the ongoing process of grammaticalisation (phonological reduction and decategorisation), general extenders acquire new discourse functions and occur more freely within a sentence.

The thesis aims to investigate the behaviour of general extenders in terms of both syntax (sentence types and clause positions) and their communicative functions. To that end, the Research part is divided into two subchapters: quantitative and qualitative. Whereas syntactic behaviour can be objectively quantified, an analysis of communicative functions of every pragmatic marker is necessarily subject to a certain degree of subjective interpretation. The shared knowledge that exists between the interlocutors can play a crucial role in assessing the discourse functions of vague expressions. Therefore, for the purpose of the thesis, a corpus of the popular American situation comedy *Friends* was created, as the shared contexts in television shows need to be transparent to wide audiences. The resultant corpus of approximately 970,000 words was analysed with AntConc, a freeware software for concordancing and text analysis. Out of a total of 188 occurrences, 46 instances – considered from author's point of view to display either the most frequent or the most unanticipated functions of these forms (e.g., topic-changing function, sparing hearer's feelings or creating humorous situations by sharing the context only with the audience, not the hearer) – were chosen and analysed in detail in the Qualitative analysis part.

Keywords: general extenders, shared context, referential function, interpersonal function, politeness strategies.