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**LINGUAPRAGMATIC ASPECT OF UNDERSTATEMENT IN  
ENGLISH FICTION DISCOURSE**

Actuality of the present article is predetermined by the interest of contemporary pragmalinguistics in peculiarities of speech behaviour of English speakers. To the latter belongs “understatement” which is in the focus of many researchers above all things as a lingual cultural communicative phenomenon being, on the one hand, historically predetermined by cultural traditions of Anglo-Saxon community, and, on the other, affecting British national character [1; 2; 3].

Many linguists will note the fact that English speakers’ speech behaviour is characterized by avoidance of extreme judgments and imposition [4; 5; 6; 3]. This communicative peculiarity was quite thoroughly analyzed by W. Ball, who was the first to draw the researchers’ attention to it, in terms of “understatement” [1; 2]. W. Ball points out that understatement is a good means of saving friendly and business relationships as well as a compromise between good manners and the truth [2].

Since the early studies of understatement when it was limited exclusively to the use of rhetorical figures of litotes and meiosis things have changed [7]. Studying the problem of intensification-deintensification, N. D. Arytyunova focuses on understatement as a means of weakening the force of the utterance [8]. Yu. M. Skrebnev and V. I. Karasik define understatement as a lingual cultural phenomenon illustrating the manifestation of the national character of English speaking individuals [6; 5].

Despite a great interest in understatement as a social linguistic phenomenon, it hasn’t been analyzed as a subsystem of the macrosystem of communicative-pragmatic category of moderation yet.

The object of the present article is understatement as a pragmatic variant of communicative-pragmatic category of moderation, the latter being realized by English speakers in the so-called moderated utterances; its subject is the analysis of the peculiarities of the usage of understatement in different types of moderated utterances.

Moderation as a communicative-pragmatic category reflects one of the culturally symptomatic aspects of English speakers’ conscious speech behaviour – avoidance of extreme judgments and imposition [9]. The invariant meaning underlying the communicative-pragmatic category of moderation may be formulated as the speaker’s intention to moderate the extremity of his/her evaluations, opinions, statements, etc. by making it non-categoric, non-impositional, and indirect as possible. According to our data, the invariant meaning of moderation gets manifested in English speech as a system of its

pragmatic variants, namely, mitigation, hedging, approximation, devaluation and understatement [9]. The latter constitutes the object of the present article.

In our research understatement is viewed as one of the pragmatic variants of moderation which is intentionally used by the speaker to report information or to express his/ her evaluation of the subject of the utterance not fully enough and not totally accurate. This creates the effect of disparity between the utterance's proposition and real state of things in reality.

Being intentionally used in the speaker's own interests and/or the interlocutor's interests, understatement reflects English speaker's behaviour aspect. According to our data, in English-speaking ethnocultures understatement is realized in the so-called moderated utterances (MU). The latter is a specific type of utterance which has a moderator – illocutionary marker of the speaker's realizing intention of moderation - in the modus of the utterance's proposition [9].

As for the means of manifestation of understatement, they are called moderators-signals of understatement. The most widespread means of understatement are moderators of litotic origin, euphemisms, periphrastic-euphemistic structures, qualifiers: a bit // a little, hardly, scarcely, barely, kind of / sort of, quite, rather, more or less, speech stereotypes of supposition modus, speech stereotypes of indefiniteness, etc. [9].

According to our data, MU of understatement make up 23% (690 examples) of the total number of utterances in which moderation is being actualized (3000 examples).

One of the peculiarities of understatement is its use in both evaluative MU with the meaning "good – bad" (83% – 518 examples of evaluative MU) and neutrally evaluative utterances (17% – 172 examples).

As the results of our research have shown, evaluative MU of understatement with the meaning "bad" make up 71% - 368 examples of the total number of evaluative utterances. Such understatement hinders the addressee's or the third person's offense protecting his/her positive image, thus performing a shielding function. While producing evaluative MU of understatement, the focus of the speaker's intention is, as a rule, on the addressee's or the third person's physical appearance, his ethical behaviour etc. Example (1) *He wasn't a handsome man* (Lesley, p. 690) illustrates the use of understatement to describe the third person's physical appearance. Adhering to socio-cultural taboo for explicit negative evaluation of physical appearance, the speaker acts according to the principles of cooperation and politeness. The use of the adjective *handsome* in a negative sentence creates euphemistic replacement for *disgusting*. Similar effect is achieved in example (2): *"I've got us lodgings", she said, picking up Matilda's bag with one hand and tucking the other through her arm. "They aren't very nice, I'm afraid* (Pearse, p. 660). The negative evaluation of the lodgings is moderated by means of using the adjective *nice* in a negative sentence. Consequently, indirectly expressed evaluation doesn't hurt the addressee as much as the direct negative evaluation "lodgings are bad" would do. Moreover, the

moderator *I'm afraid* enhances the effect of moderation. It emphasizes that it is just a subjective opinion, calling the interlocutor to consider the statement from this point of view and acknowledge its true value.

It is worth noting that by employing understatement the speaker intends to communicate more than is said. It produces conventional implicatures which result in additional conveyed meaning as in examples (3) and (4). In utterance (3) "*But Mr. Bleibner, I understand, was **more or less** of an amateur?*" (Christie, 1976, p. 59) the speaker expressing his point of view on Mr. Bleibner's occupation uses the moderator *more or less* to hint tactfully at the lack of his professionalism. As a result, the utterance contains the implicature: +> Mr. Bleibner is not good at his business. The same effect is observed in utterance (4): – *Oh, yes. I like men better than women. Women are never really nice to me. I can't think why. – **Perhaps you are too nice to their husbands*** (Christie, 1989, p. 309). The speaker has conveyed more than he said (his strong disapproval of the addressee's moral behaviour) via implicature: +> stop flirting with other women's husbands. Example (6) illustrates understatement manifested by the moderator *more or less* which is also interpreted as communicating more than is said: – "*You okay?*" *Bradford asked. – **"More or less."** Rune opened another file. Her life had become an endless circle of long hours by herself, of flying on airplanes and staying in hotels, of tense meetings at the Network, of interviews ...*(Deaver, p. 136). In the utterance the speaker, answering the interlocutor's question about her life, opts for understatement because she isn't willing to complain about it and she expects that the interlocutor will be able to work out the implicature intended in the context (her life has changed for the worse). Hence we can assume that conventional implicatures of the moderator *more or less* is that the present situation is expected to be different.

It is necessary to note that moderators of litotic origin contain a semantic microcomponent of restrain which carries out etiquette functions of non-categoricity [6]. It evokes the pragmatic effect of modesty which is a special type of interpersonal attitudes based on the principle of politeness. This becomes quite evident in MU of understatement where the speaker's intention is aimed at different aspects of the "I" – speaker sphere as in example (5): ***Not that I'm much of a dancer. I don't dance awfully well*** (Christie, 1983, p. 48). In utterance (5) the speaker feels ashamed that she can't dance, so she employs understatement just to save her positive image. Such examples illustrate situations of the speaker's positive self-presentation or self-assertion as he / she avoids directly expressed negative evaluation of his/ her personal abilities, behaviour etc. The thing is that but for moderation the speaker would have committed illocutionary suicide because it is considered that the speaker can't characterize himself negatively without any reason [10].

In the language system there have been developed different ways of periphrastic nominations of everything that violates cultural communication stereotypes. In this sense euphemisms and periphrastic-euphemistic structures are used in MU as signals of understatement to moderate the information

about death, murder, crime, etc, thus performing the function of a shock absorber [4], [11], [12], [13]. Euphemisms are known to imply the social practice of replacing the tabooed words by words and phrases that seem less straightforward, milder, more harmless or at least less offensive [6, p. 54]. E. I. Schejgal considers periphrastic-euphemistic nomination to be the result of compromise between semantics (the denotata's real nature) and pragmatics (the speaker's interests). To the researcher's thinking, euphemisms are referred to the things which are to be described negatively but the speaker's interests require that they should be evaluated positively [14, p. 189]. Examples (7), (8), (9) illustrate the point. In utterance (7) *It's certainly a very unpleasant business* (Christie, 1989, p. 318) the speaker prevents emotional shock, which threatens the addressee. By using a periphrastic-euphemistic nomination he lets the addressee know about the murder. In utterance (8) *I thank God – you can't know how grateful I am – that Daddy spoke to me before he ... left. I couldn't have borne it if he'd died without our making contact. Even though he's gone, I feel as though I have my father back again* (Bartel, p. 416) the speaker opts for euphemisms because talks about death are strictly taboo in English-speaking communities. The same effect is observed in example (9): – *So you killed her too. – Let 's put it this way: I let her join her miserable husband* (Baldacci, p. 449). The speaker employs a periphrastic-euphemistic structure seeing it as a more euphemistic manner of expression than “calling a spade a spade”. The nature of understatement manifested by periphrastic-euphemistic structures consists in creating, as V. I. Goverdovskij points out, cognitive effects of conceptual “blackout” (blurring) or “defocusing” undesirable objects, actions, qualities etc. [15, p. 81]. In this sense the interaction of semantics and pragmatics influences locutionary and illocutionary aspects of the utterance so that MU of understatement is characterized by certain disparity between its proposition and real state of things in reality.

Thus, we can assume, that producing evaluative MU of understatement with the meaning “bad” the speaker's purport is to moderate its negative impact on the addressee / the third person by means of producing implicatures or by replacing “strong” expressions with weaker ones.

As for evaluative MU of understatement with the meaning “good”, they are used for expressing positive aspects of a communicative situation. Their number is comparatively less making up 29% - 150 examples of the total number of evaluative utterances (518 examples).

In utterance (4) – *A pleasant thought. – Not unpleasant. I think of you all the time* (Grisham, p. 178) the speaker uses the moderator of litotic origin *not unpleasant* as a signal of understatement. In this case it can be characterized as a sign of embarrassment [14]: the speaker doesn't dare to admit directly that he is in love, so he just hints at it.

The mentioned above pragmatic effect of modesty is observed in MU of understatement in which the speaker gives himself a positive evaluation by implication as in example (9) – *Do you think I haven't done all that again and again? I'm not a bad woman, really I'm not* (Christie, 1977, p. 193). The

woman wants to boast of her abilities but since self-praising isn't traditionally approved of in English-speaking communities, she uses sort of concealed self-advertizing by means of understatement. The perlocutionary effect of such MU of understatement can be described by referring to H. W. Fowler, who considers that "understatement is a device used deliberately to create a certain effect" [18]. Though *not bad*, in which *bad*, being negated, results in something weaker than just good, "the speaker doesn't deceive the interlocutor, but impresses him by moderation" [16].

Examples (1, 2) adduced testify once again to the fact that, as compared to the actual picture of the world, in the virtual picture, pragmatic factors are responsible for shifting idealized evaluations towards a positive norm [1].

As for neutrally evaluative MU of understatement, they make up 17% – 172 examples of the total number of moderated utterances of understatement (690 examples). The distinctive feature of this type of MU is that the employed moderator moderates the illocutionary force of the utterance as in example (7): *It is not impossible, my dear. It's just a very remarkable coincidence* (Christie, 1982, p. 29). The speaker using the moderator of litotic origin *not impossible* softens negation. The example illustrates the way double negation leads to its neutralization. Though the result is indeed affirmative, the meaning obtained is weakened: *not impossible* is weaker than *possible*. This contributes to the effect of decreasing categoricity of the utterance.

Summing up the results of the research made, it is necessary to note that the use of MU of understatement is organically linked up with the norms of speech behaviour and communicative culture of the English-speaking community. It is a kind of a stereotype typical of this socio-cultural system. This kind of speech behaviour is deeply rooted in the depths the English discourse, to wit: in the presence of the communicative-pragmatic category of moderation which is a mediatory evidence of Anglo-Saxon mentality.

Understatement is a means of indirect communication, which is used for expressing the speaker's evaluative and neutrally evaluative attitude to the subject of the utterance. Being a pragmatic variant of communicative-pragmatic category of moderation it is widely spread in English fiction discourse – 23% (690 examples) of the total number of utterances in which moderation is being actualized (3000 examples). Understatement realized in evaluative MU with the meaning "bad" is the most frequently used phenomenon, making up 368 examples of the total number of moderated evaluative utterances (518 examples). It is used comparatively less for expressing positive aspects of a communicative situation (150 examples of 518 moderated evaluative utterances). The use of understatement in neutrally evaluative utterances is almost three times less than in evaluative MU (172 examples of 690).

Understatement, on the one hand, apparently violates Grice's maxim of manner for cooperative interaction: "Avoid ambiguity" and the maxim of quantity: "Do not make your contribution more informative than is required"

[17]. On the other, it meets the requirements of Brown and Levinson's negative politeness, to be precisely, it observes the rule "Use conventionally indirect utterances" [18, p. 14]. It will help the speaker to avoid the responsibility for the utterance's content which might hurt the addressee's positive image. Understatement as a mechanism of producing implicatures is based on speakers revaluing objects, their properties, actions etc. of the objective reality on the propositional level. It results in disparity between the proposition of MU of understatement and real state of things in reality. Producing MU of understatement, the speaker says "p" (where "p" is evaluated proposition), but he means "q" (where "q" is quite a different content). Consciously violating the maxims for cooperative interaction, the speaker gives the addressee a chance to think about the reason for such speech behaviour and work out that his words mean something more than what they just conventionally express.

The prospects of the further research may lie in disclosing the cognitive and communicative potential of MU of understatement on the material of American English.

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**Кишко С. Н. Лінгвопрагматичний аспект недомовленості в англомовному художньому дискурсі**

В статті розглядається сутність мовленнєвого феномену недомовленості як прагматичного варіанту комунікативно-прагматичної категорії модерації англомовного художнього дискурсу, за допомогою якої мовець навмисно (стратегічно) повідомляє інформацію або висловлює свою думку або оцінку об'єкта висловлення недостатньо повно, конкретно або однозначно. Модерація відображає один з важливих культурно-симптоматичних аспектів мовленнєво-мисленнєвої діяльності представників англомовних культур – уникання екстремальності в мовленнєвому спілкуванні.

Основну увагу приділено аналізу особливостей вживання недомовленості у так званих модерованих висловленнях. Аналіз недомовленості дозволяє дійти висновку щодо її використання для передачі як оцінного, так і нейтрально-оцінного ставлення продуцента до об'єкта висловлення. За допомогою недомовленості мовець має намір повідомити щось більше, ніж те, що говорить, тим самим, недомовленість виступає одним із засобів непрямой комунікації. Як механізм породження імплікатур недомовленість створює ефект невідповідності між пропозиційним змістом висловлення і реальним станом речей у дійсності.

Робиться акцент на тому, що вживання модерованих висловлень недомовленості органічно пов'язане з соціокультурними нормами й правилами, що регулюють мовленнєву поведінку англомовної особистості.

*Ключові слова:* недомовленість, прагматичний варіант, комунікативно-прагматична категорія модерації, модероване висловлення, модератор.

**Кишко С. Н. Лингвопрагматический аспект недосказания в англоязычном художественном дискурсе**

В статье рассматривается сущность речевого феномена недосказания как прагматического варианта коммуникативно-прагматической категории модерации англоязычного художественного дискурса, с помощью которого говорящий намеренно (стратегически) сообщает информацию или высказывает свое мнение или оценку объекта высказывания недостаточно полно, конкретно или однозначно. Модерация отображает один из важнейших культурно-симптоматических аспектов речемыслительной деятельности представителей англоязычных культур – уклонение от экстремальности в речевой коммуникации.

Основное внимание уделяется анализу особенностей использования недосказания в высказываниях, которые называются умеренными. Анализ позволяет сделать вывод о использовании недосказания для передачи как оценочного, так и нейтрально-оценочного отношения продуцента к объекту высказывания. Через недосказание говорящий намеревается сообщить нечто большее, чем говорится, тем самым, недосказание является одним из способов не прямой коммуникации. Будучи механизмом порождения импликатур недосказание создает эффект несоответствия между пропозициональным смыслом высказывания и реальным положением вещей в действительности.

В статье подчеркивается, что использование умеренных высказываний недосказания органично связано с социокультурными нормами и правилами, которые регулируют речевое поведение англоязычной личности.

*Ключевые слова:* недосказание, прагматический вариант, коммуникативно-прагматическая категория модерации, умеренное высказывание, модератор.

**Kishko S. N. Linguapragmatic aspect of understatement in English fiction discourse**

The article focuses on understatement as a pragmatic variant of communicative-pragmatic category of moderation in English fiction discourse which is intentionally used by the speaker to report information or to express his/ her evaluation of the subject of the utterance not fully enough and not totally accurate. The latter reflects one of the culturally symptomatic aspects of English speakers' conscious speech behaviour – avoidance of extreme judgments and imposition.

A special attention is being paid to the peculiarities of the use of understatement in utterances called moderated. The research shows that understatement can be used for expressing the speaker's evaluative and neutrally evaluative attitude to the subject of the utterance. By employing understatement the speaker intends to communicate more than is said, thus it is



one of the means of indirect communication. As a mechanism of producing implicatures it results in disparity between the proposition of the moderated utterance of understatement and real state of things in reality.

The accent is made on the fact that the use of moderated utterances of understatement is organically linked up with the norms of speech behaviour and communicative culture of the English-speaking community.

*Key words:* understatement, pragmatic variant, communicative-pragmatic category of moderation, moderated utterance, moderator.

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**Н. І. Лепьошкіна**

### **SLAM AS THE KIND OF MODERN AMERICAN URBAN CULTURE**

The article is the compressed exposition of such an interesting phenomenon as Poetry Slam. Slam poetry has found popularity as a form of self-expression. We think it would be useful to acquaint students with such an interesting form of poetry because its language is original, the real speaking English. We consider it as an interesting kind of modern urban poetry.

Miguel Algarin, Bob Holman, Gary Mex Glazner, Cristin O'Keefe Aptowicz, Michael Salinger and many others have studied this kind of poetry. There is no single point of view. Is this a kind of modern art or may be it does not worth to be discussed? Academic responses to slam are varied. In an interview published in the Paris Review, literary critic Harold Bloom called the movement "the death of art".

In my previous article [1] I have already made an analysis of the role of Slam in urban French culture. The task of this article to focus on the history of its origin, the reasons of its popularity in the USA.

According to Patricia Smith an American poet, spoken-word performer, playwright, author, writing teacher, and former journalist "...the very word "poetry" repels people. Why is that? Because of what schools have done to it. The slam gives it back to the people.... We need people to talk poetry to each other. That's how we communicate our values, our hearts, the things that we've learned that make us who we are." [2]

John S. Hall emphasizes inherently competitive nature of slam and its lack of stylistic diversity. In his 2005 interview in "Words In Your Face: A Guided Tour Through Twenty Years of the New York City Poetry Slam", he recalls seeing his first slam, at the Nuyorican Poets Café: "...I hated it. And it made me really uncomfortable and... it was very much like a sport, and I was