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HEDGES IN MOVIE DIALOGUES IN ENGLISH: THEORETICAL AND PRACTICAL ASPECTS²

ABSTRACT: In this research, the distinctive features of hedges are presented from a theoretical aspect, while the practical analysis of the corpus revolves around two major points: (1) politeness as a possible addition to the Cooperative Principle, (2) the quality maxim as the most frequently hedged of Yule's maxims.

The corpus consists of 436 hedging expressions marked in the transcripts of 14 movie dialogues. The analysis of the corpus and the classification of hedges are based primarily on Yule's categorization from 1996, following Grice's Cooperative Principle (1975).

Key words: hedge, Grice's maxims, cooperative principle, politeness.

1. INTRODUCTION

The aim of this paper is to provide insight into the distinctive features of hedges from a theoretical aspect on the example of movie dialogues. The analysis of the corpus in terms of frequency and range of use of hedges is based primarily on George Yule's classification.

The corpus of this study consists of 436 examples of hedging expressions marked in the transcribed dialogues of 14 movies awarded the Academy Award for Best Writing in the period (2000-2010).

The idea of selecting movie dialogues as the corpus rests on the supposition that they reflect natural conversation, and contain a wealth of contextualized linguistic information which outweighs the question of authenticity of realism in movies. A number of criteria were employed in selecting which movies were to be used: first

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2 This is a shortened version of my master's thesis, which carries the same title, and which was written under the supervision of prof. dr Tvrtko Prčić.

of all, language, the dialogues had to be in English. Also, that the movie had to have a minimum of ten different instances of hedges in its script and finally, relevance in terms of topic, dialect and subject matter. The selected movies include: *A Beautiful Mind* (2001), *Gosford Park* (2001), *Eternal Sunshine of the Spotless Mind* (2004), *Sideways* (2004), *Crash* (2005), *Brokeback Mountain* (2005), *The Departed* (2006), *Little Miss Sunshine* (2006), *No Country for Old Men* (2007), *Juno* (2007), *Milk* (2008), *The Hurt Locker* (2009), *The King's Speech* (2010), *The Social Network* (2010).

2. THEORETICAL CONSIDERATIONS

In this paper the cooperative and the politeness principles intertwine in the analysis of hedges.

- The Cooperative Principle (CP)

“Make your conversational contribution such as is required, at the stage at which it occurs, by the accepted purpose or direction of the talk exchange in which you are engaged” (Yule 1996: 37).

Yule (1996: 37) based his analysis of the CP on Grice's Maxims, which are as follows:

- The Maxim of Quantity:
 1. Make your contribution as informative as is required (for the current purpose of the exchange).
 2. Do not make your contribution more informative than is required.
- The Maxim of Quality: Try to make your contribution one that is true.
 1. Do not say what you believe to be false.
 2. Do not say that for which you lack adequate evidence.
- The Maxim of Relation: Be relevant.
- The Maxim of Manner: Be perspicuous.
 1. Avoid obscurity of expression.
 2. Avoid ambiguity.
 3. Be brief (avoid unnecessary prolixity).
 4. Be orderly.

Although there are many other works dealing with Grice's Cooperative Principle, for the purposes of this paper, it is enough to mention, alongside the previous definition, Geoffrey Leech's approach. In his book *The Principles of Pragmatics* (1983), Leech discusses Grice's CP and introduces the question of the interpersonal relationship and interaction between the CP and the Politeness Principle (PP). Leech claims the PP is not just an addition to the CP "but a necessary complement, which rescues the CP from serious trouble" (Leech 1983: 80)

- The Politeness Principle (PP)

There are three major models of the Politeness Principle formulated by Lakoff (1973), Leech (1983) and Brown and Levinson (1978/1987). The latter is the one adopted in this paper and it is a model that is centered on the concept of 'face'. In their theory, communication is regarded as potentially hazardous, and their supposition is that people constantly try to maintain one another's face, and politeness is embodied in employing any of the strategies available for minimizing the threat of FTAs. Brown and Levinson (1987: 61) define 'face' as "the public self-image that every member wants to claim for himself". Face consists of two aspects:

- Negative face: desires not to be imposed upon;
- Positive face: desires to be liked, admired, ratified and related to positively

FTAs (Face Threatening Acts) are "acts which intrinsically threaten face" (Brown and Levinson 1987: 60). FTAs are acts which could harm or threaten the positive or the negative face of either the speaker or the hearer; while a 'Face Saving Act' is the act by which a speaker says something that lessens or minimizes the possible threat to another person's face (Yule 1996: 61). Face saving acts are closely related to the notion of 'politeness', which is "the means employed to show awareness of another person's face" (Yule 1996:60).

- Hedge:

Although under a different label, hedges became the center of linguistic research as early as 1966, when Weinreich examined the use of what he called 'metalinguistic operators', claiming that "for every language 'metalinguistic operators' such as [in] English *true, real, so-called, strictly speaking* [...] function as instructions for the loose or strict interpretation of designata" (Weinreich 1966: 163), quoted from Fraser (2010: 16). The term Hedge was introduced by George Lakoff

in 1972, in his article *Hedges: A Study in Meaning Criteria and the Logic of Fuzzy Concepts*. He based his work on Zadeh's Fuzzy Sets Theory (1965). Lakoff stated that "the borders of natural language concepts are not clear-cut but fuzzy" (Hovy 2004: 2).

The introduction of the concepts of politeness and mitigation into the definitions of hedges marks a turning point. Schröder and Zimmer (1997) claim that "[i]n pragmatics, the concept of 'hedge/hedging' is linked to politeness phenomenon, mitigation, vagueness and modality". On the same note, Janet Holmes, a linguist known for her analysis of hedges in casual conversation, described words and phrases such as *I think, sort of, maybe, possibly* and others as being politeness devices.

A different approach to hedges was established when George Yule introduced Grice's Cooperative Principle into the definition of hedges as he stated that:

"[w]e assume that people are normally going to provide an appropriate amount of information [...] we assume that they are telling the truth, being relevant, and trying to be as clear as they can. Because these principles are assumed in normal interactions, speakers rarely mention them. However, there are certain kinds of expressions speakers use to mark that they may be in danger of not fully adhering to the principles. These kinds of expressions are called hedges" (Yule 1996: 37-38).

After a detailed analysis of the aforementioned approaches, I propose the following hybrid definition: ***hedges are linguistic devices used by speakers either to mark the violation of one or more of the maxims of Grice's Cooperative Principle (maxims of quality, quantity, manner, relation), or as means of expressing politeness.***

As in the examples below:

- Hedge for the maxim of quality: *It seems that..., Probably, I think, I'm not sure;*
- Hedge for the maxim of quantity: *As you already know..., Let's just say;*
- Hedges for the maxim of manner: *I don't know if this is clear, This may be slightly confused;*
- Hedges for the maxim of relation: *Anyway, By the way, Not to change the*

subject, but...;

- Hedges for politeness: *Not to insult your intelligence, but..., I know you're busy, but..., You're the expert here, but...*

When it comes to classification, hedges are classified according to their structure, based on the grammatical class of their compounds, or according to their pragmatic function. Yule's classification, and consequently this paper, is based on the function of hedges.

3. DESCRIPTION OF THE RESEARCH

The basic idea of this paper is that the Cooperative Principle and the Politeness Principle complement each other, and that Yule's categories need to be broadened to include 'politeness' as the four maxims of the CP are not sufficient to cover all the functions of hedges. This paper also explores which of the maxims is most often violated and what are the reasons behind that.

A combined approach was used when classifying the hedging expressions. Each of the expressions marked in the corpus was labeled according to its function in terms of not only the four maxims but with the addition of another category, termed the maxim of politeness.

The examples will be provided in a proper context; each expression will be preceded by a short description of the situation in which it is uttered by speaker 1, and it will be followed by the response of speaker 2.

3.1 The Maxim of Quality

People use a wide range of expressions to indicate that they may be violating the maxim of quality, or in other words, that what they are saying may not be completely true or accurate. Out of a total of 436 expressions marked in the dialogues, 349 were used to mark the possible violation of the maxim of quality.

Based on the corpus analysis, the most common expressions used as hedges for the maxim of quality include: *I think, I don't (really/even) know (exactly), I guess, maybe (not), Probably, I thought, Might, I (don't) believe, I suppose, It seems, I'm not (quite/really) sure, Kind of, etc.*

In example (1), the use of the phrase *I think* qualifies the statement as an

opinion thus hedging the speaker against the possibility that it might not be true.

(1) (Juno is in the drugstore buying another pregnancy test. She had already bought two, and the result was positive)

Rollo (the drugstore owner): Back for another test?

Juno: *I think* the first one was defective. The plus sign looks more like a division symbol, so I remain unconvinced.

Rollo: Third test today, mama bear. Your eggo is prego, no doubt about it.

(Juno, 2007)

From Rollo's reaction we see that Juno was right to use a hedge since her statement turns out not to be true, the tests were not defective and Rollo recognizes her statement as wishful thinking.

Examples (2a.– c.) are taken from the movie 'No Country for Old Men' and they feature the same two characters, Sheriff Ed Tom Bell and Officer Wendell:

(2) a) (Bell and Wendell are inspecting a murder scene in a Texas desert)

Wendell: How do you reckon the coyotes ain't been at 'em?

Bell: *I don't know...Supposedly* they won't eat a Mexican.

Wendell: (looking at two corpses, both in suites) – Those boys *appear to be* managerial.

b) (Still inspecting the scattered bodies in the desert)

Wendell: These boys is all swole up. So this was earlier – getting set to trade.

Then, whoa, differences... You know – *might not* even have been no money.

Bell: *That's possible*.

Wendell: But you don't believe it.

Bell: No, *probably* I don't.

c) (Wendell and Bell are in Llewelyn Moss' trailer. Chirugh had broken into that trailer looking for Moss before they came. They are looking around, searching for a clue as to whom had been there)

Wendell: *I believe* they've done lit a shuck (slang for left in a hurry)

Bell: *Believe* you are right.

Wendell: (looking at the cylinder in Bell's hand) – That from the lock?

Bell: *Probably must be*.

Wendell: So when was he here?

Bell: *I don't know*.

(No Country for Old Men, 2007)

In the examples above, Wendell and Bell are exchanging their assumptions and speculations as to the events that lead up to the murders, what happened in Moss' trailer, who the murdered people are, etc. There is no clear cut evidence so both speakers hedge their conclusions thus alerting their conversational partners that what they are saying is merely an assumption.

There are also phrases and sentences which are more specific to their context but still serve the function of hedging for the quality of the utterance for instance: "*The principles of detection tell me...*" (The Departed, 2006), "... *at least that's what he tells the girls*" (Beautiful Mind, 2001), and other.

It should be noted that there could be several interpretations to one and the same hedge, this is the case with phrases such as *I think* and *I believe* which, depending on the context, not only hedge for quality but also for politeness.

3.2. The Maxim of Quantity

Hedges for the maxim of quantity can be classified into two categories, those marking that the speaker may be going into greater detail than is necessary and those marking that the speaker will, for some reason, give less information than might be expected.

The examples marked in the scripts mainly represent the second type, and the most common hedging device used for that purpose according to the corpus is exemplified in (3):

- (3) (Miles and Maya are enjoying the romantic atmosphere after a dinner at a friend's house; they are leisurely talking about wine)

Maya: Why are you so into Pinot? It's like a thing with you.

Miles: [...] It's a hard grape to grow, *as you know*, right? It's thin-skinned, temperamental, ripens early. *You know*, it's not a survivor like Cabernet [...] I mean, *you know* Cabernets can be powerful and exalting too, but they seem prosaic to me for some reason by comparison.

(Sideways, 2004)

The phrase (*as*) *you know* marks that the speaker will not elaborate on a point simply because their conversational partner is familiar with the facts and does not need additional explanation. In (3), Miles is aware that Maya is a wine

expert and that she does not need a detailed explanation, so he marks this using the phrase *(as) you know*, thus achieving a somewhat double function as he is being a cooperative conversational partner in terms of marking a violation of the maxim of quantity, and the other is being polite as he asserts Maya's expertise.

Another hedge would be *Let's just say* or *suffice it to say* as exemplified in (4):

- (4) (Dr. Mierzwiak is explaining to Joel the procedure by which his ex-girlfriend erased him from her memory and Joel is finding that difficult to grasp)

Joel: This is a hoax right? [...] There's no such thing as this.

Dr. Mierzwiak: *Look, our files are confidential, Mr. Barish, so I can't show you evidence. Suffice it to say that Miss, uh... Miss Kruczynski was not happy, and she wanted to move on. We provide that possibility.*

(Eternal Sunshine of the Spotless Mind, 2004)

In the previous example, Dr. Mierzwiak first gives an explanation as to why he cannot be more detailed when it comes to Clementine's procedure, and then goes on to use an idiomatic phrase *Suffice it to say* to mark that he will not be disclosing any additional information.

Other examples of quantity hedges include: *Like I said, As many of you have heard.., I ain't at liberty to give that information, without asking for details,* etc.

3.3. The Maxim of Relation

"Be relevant" (Yule 1996: 37) is not an easy instruction to follow as it is in people's nature to make digressions, and so in order to be cooperative conversational partners they use what Yule described as "markers tied to the expectation of relevance" (Yule 1996: 38). The function of these markers or hedges is to either indicate that the speaker is about to say something which is unconnected or just seemingly unconnected to the rest of the conversation in which case he will use a phrase like *by the way* or *besides*, or to indicate that he has digressed from the course of the conversation and into some unconnected or irrelevant topic and that he wishes

to stop, in which case hedges such as *anyway* are used. This division depends strictly on the context.

Example (5) shows the use of *anyway* as a marker of relevance used when the speaker wants to stir the conversation back to its main topic following a digression or distraction:

(5) (Juno had just told her friend Leah that she is pregnant who in turn did not react as expected rather kept asking unimportant questions)

Leah: It's probably just a food baby. Did you have a big lunch?

Juno: No, this is not a food baby, all right? I've taken, like, three pregnancy tests, and I'm for shiz up the spout.

Leah: How did you even generate enough pee for three pregnancy tests? That's amazing.

Juno: I don't know, I drank, like, ten tons of SunnyD. *Anyway*, dude, I'm telling you I'm pregnant, and you're acting shockingly cavalier.

[...]

Leah: Oh, my God! Oh, shit!

(Juno, 2007)

Example (6) is for the phrase *By the way*:

(6) (Jack and Miles are in the car; they opened a bottle of Pinot Noir, and are discussing the origin of the name of that wine)

Miles: Color in the red wines comes from the skins. This juice is free run, so there's no skin contact in the fermentation, ergo no color.

Jack: Sure is tasty.

Miles: Did you read the latest draft, *by the way*?

Jack: Oh yeah. Yeah.

Miles: And?

Jack: It's great. I mean, there are so many improvements.

(Sideways, 2004)

In (6), Miles and Jack are talking about wine and all of a sudden, Miles asks Jack whether he read the new draft of his book. The shift of topic is marked using the phrase *by the way*; otherwise the statement would have seemed out of the blue and completely unrelated to what is being said. The conversational partner accepts the change of topic and reacts accordingly since he is not caught aback but

rather duly noted by the use of a hedge.

According to the corpus analysis, the phrases *Anyway* and *By the way* are the most common markers concerned with the expectation of relevance.

3.4. The Maxim of Manner

This maxim is concerned with the manner in which a statement is delivered, whether it is brief, clear and orderly or ambiguous and obscure. In (7), when asked what his novel was about, Miles is aware that his answer may not be orderly or concise so he starts by hedging himself:

(7) (Miles and Maya are talking and flirting, Maya is showing interest in Miles' book)

Maya: So what's your novel about?

Miles: *Well, it's difficult to summarize.* It starts as a kind of first-person account of a guy taking care of his father after a stroke. It's kind of based on personal experience, but only loosely.

Maya: So is it kind of about death and mortality, or...?

Miles: Uh, yeah... not really.

(Sideways, 2004)

From Maya's response it is clear that Miles was right to begin his explanation with a hedge since his answer did not meet the maxim of manner and Maya was not able to draw the right conclusions about it.

In a similar example, Fred, the person in charge of shooting a TV series is telling Cameron, the director of the series to re-shoot a scene because the black man in the scene sounded too eloquent in the first take. Fred is aware that his statement about the black man's speech will strike Cameron as confusing so he introduces it with a hedge:

(8) (Fred is not satisfied with Jamal's speech and he is asking Cameron to re-shoot the scene)

Fred: *This is gonna sound strange, but* is Jamal seeing a speech coach or something?

Cameron: What do you mean?

Fred: Have you noticed, uh... This is weird for a white guy to say,

but have you noticed he's talking a lot less black lately?

(Crash, 2005)

It is important to note that the hedge phrase in (8) is borderline between the maxim of manner and what will be termed the maxim of politeness as it could be interpreted as a mitigating device for a potential FTA (Panić-Kavgić 2009: 3).

3.5. The Maxim of Politeness

The Politeness Principle is concerned with reducing disagreement or the negative effect of a statement. This aspect is only slightly covered by Yule's maxims in that by being a cooperative conversational partner one is hoping to be judged positively by his or her conversational partner, but what about cases when it is obvious that a certain sentence or phrase is introduced with the sole purpose of maintaining face or reducing disagreement? Obviously these are not covered by the four maxims of the Cooperative Principle rather they are hedges for the maxim of politeness.

From a total of 436 expressions marked as hedges in the corpus, as much as 38 expressions could not be classified under any of the four maxims of the CP.

The following are examples of hedges for what shall be termed the maxim of politeness:

- (9) a) (In the Humvee, the EOD unit is accompanied by Colonel John Cambridge, a doctor, who does not usually go out into the war zone – James is instructing him how to act in case of danger)

Sergeant First Class Williams James: *Not to insult your intelligence, sir; but* if the shit hits the fan, please don't fire out the Humvee. The round will just bounce around, and someone might get shot. I don't like getting shot.

Colonel John Cambridge: Understood, Sergeant.

(The Hurt Locker, 2009)

Sergeant James is addressing a superior so he could not simply give him directives as that would be perceived as disrespectful and aggressive. Instead, Sergeant James introduces his instruction by using the phrase *Not to insult your intelligence, sir; but* which acts as a device for minimizing threat to the face of Colonel Cambridge. The Colonel's response shows that he recognized Sergeant James' politeness strategy, and in turn, he confirmed that he will oblige.

Example (9b) includes the continuation of the dialogue from example (8):

(9) b)

Fred: Is there a problem, Cam? [...] *I mean, 'cause all I'm saying is it's not his character. Eddie's supposed to be the smart one, not Jamal, right? You're the expert here, but* to me, it rings false.

Cameron: We're gonna do it one more time.

(Crash, 2005)

The expressions in italics are used to reduce threat to face. Fred knows that what he is asking is strange and perhaps irrational so by using a hedge he is trying to make it seem as if Cameron has a choice. Cameron obliges but unlike the Colonel in example (9a), he does feel threatened by Fred's approach.

In (9a.–b.), hedges were used to minimize FTAs when giving orders, while in the following examples their function is to minimize intrusion when asking for something:

(10) (Nash is at his old university, he is about to ask his former colleague Martin who is now head of the department, for permission to spend time there)

Nash: *It's a lot to ask and now that I'm here I'm quite certain that you'll just say no, but I was wondering* if I could hang around.

Martin: Huh, will you be needing an office?

(A Beautiful Mind, 2001)

Other expressions include: *Look, I know you're busy, but..., I don't want to cause any problems, I just...*

The speakers use these hedges to provide their conversational partners with more room to decide thus making their request less intrusive and more likely to be granted.

One can also employ a hedge to soften rejection, where the hedge usually consists of a kind statement followed by *but*, as in example (11):

(11) (The archbishop, Cosmo Lang is advising the Duke of York who is soon to become crowned King George VI (Bertie), not to listen to his speech therapist Logue)

Cosmo Lang: My concern is for the head on which I must place

the crown.

Bertie: *I appreciate that archbishop, but it's my head.*

Cosmo Lang: Your humble servant.

(The King's Speech, 2010)

The idea that the Cooperative Principle is not sufficient on its own has been discussed by Geoffrey Leech. According to him the CP has the function of “regulating what we say so that it contributes to some assumed illocutionary or discoursal goal(s)”. As for the PP, Leech describes it as having a higher role than that of the CP; the role of the PP is to “maintain the social equilibrium and the friendly relations which enable us to assume that our interlocutors are being cooperative in the first place” (Leech 1983: 82). In other words we need to be polite to our conversational partners so that the communication channel does not break down. Leech claims that in certain situations the PP can become even more important than the most prominent of the maxims of the CP, the maxim of quality. Accordingly, if politeness is so significant it follows that hedges used to uphold the PP are just as important as those for the four maxims of the CP.

4. CONCLUDING REMARKS

The point of reference for the research was Yule's classification of hedges based on Grice's maxims. The clear and concise categories of quality, quantity, manner and relation made the corpus analysis much more straightforward. The idea to broaden the categories to include politeness stems from the fact that the CP and the PP are closely related. Being a cooperative conversational partner implies in itself that one is observing politeness as well as the other maxims but from the practical analysis of the corpus it was determined that that was not enough as speakers sometimes employed certain expressions and linguistic devices with the sole purpose of being polite and such cases could not be accounted for by any of the four maxims.

Although the results of the research were in favor of broadening Yule's categories to include *politeness* as a fifth maxim, a hierarchy amongst the maxims should be maintained. The maxim of politeness, despite being more closely related to the other maxims than it is presented in Yule's work, it is still less significant in terms of information exchange.

As for the question which of the maxims is most often hedged and the conclusions that can be drawn from that, the answer to the first part was a matter of statistics, counting the instances of hedges for all the maxims and comparing them. The numbers were as follows:

Out of a total of 436 expressions marked in the corpus, 349 were used to mark the possible violation of the maxim of quality; 23 expressions were classified as hedges for the maxim of quantity, 19 for the maxim of relation, and only 7 for the maxim of manner. The other 38 expressions were categorized as hedges for the purposes of mitigation and politeness. So even if one was to disregard these 38 expressions which do not correspond with Yule's standard four maxims, the result is still undeniably clear, the maxim of quality alone represents 80% of the total number of hedges marked in the corpus. This could be due to the fact that quality hedges cover a wider range of functions than all the other hedges. By using a hedge for quality, one is not only marking that what is being said may not be completely accurate or true, rather he could be conveying that he does not take full responsibility for the statement he makes.

Also, hedges for quality such as *I think, I believe, I guess, etc...*, can qualify a statement as an opinion, thus helping the speaker avoid any possible disagreement from his conversational partner. This is closely related to using hedges for quality such as *slightly* and *a little* to soften an utterance. Moreover, if any of the other maxims is violated, there is still a possibility that the message will get across. However, if the maxim of quality is violated, meaning that if what is being said is false or inaccurate, then there is not much point in getting it across. Finally, if we were to look at it purely from an ideological aspect, the frequency of use of quality hedges stems from our need to hedge ourselves from uttering a lie.

This paper provides the reader with a theoretical understanding of hedges based on a thorough practical analysis of plenty of examples. Among the things highlighted in it is the importance of being a cooperative conversational partner, not just in terms of observance of the maxims but in the sense of employing hedges whenever appropriate in order to maintain the civil relations and social balance that keeps the communication channel from breaking down.

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Hana El Farra

DISKURSNE OGRADE U FILMSKIM DIJALOZIMA NA ENGLESKOM JEZIKU:
TEORIJSKI I PRAKTIČNI ASPEKTI

Rezime

Cilj ovog rada jeste pružanje uvida u specifičnosti diskursnih ograda sa teorijskog aspekta kroz razmatranje različitih pristupa toj temi, kao i utvrđivanje njihove upotrebe i učestalosti kroz praktičnu analizu korpusa koji sadrži 436 jedinica zabeleženih u 14 transkribovanih filmskih dijaloga. Analiza korpusa, kao i podela diskursnih ograda uglavnom je zasnovana na kategorijama koje je Yule odredio 1996. godine, i koje prate Griceov princip kooperativnosti iz 1975. Rad sadrži dve glavne postavke: (1) mogućnost dodavanja maksime učtivosti principu kooperativnosti, (2) diskursne ograde kao najučestalije u okviru maksime kvaliteta.

Rezultati istraživanja idu u prilog proširenju Yuleovih kategorija kako bi obuhvatile i maksimu učtivosti, ali uz opasku da treba zadržati hijerarhijski odnos među maksimama,

odnos po kojem bi se maksima učtivosti nalazila na poslednjoj poziciji po važnosti kada je u pitanju razmena među sagovornicima; dokazano je da se diskursne ograde najčešće javljaju u okviru maksime kvaliteta budući da čine čak 80% ukupno označenih jedinica u korpusu.

Ključne reči: diskursna ograda, Grice-ove maksime, princip kooperativnosti, učtivost.