The Pragmatics of Syntactic Hedging in

George Bernard Shaw's *Pygmalion*

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تداولية التحوط التركيبي

في مسرحية "بجماليون" لجورج برنارد شو

مستخلص

تتناول الدراسة تداولية التحوط التركيبي في الدراما. كما تهدف إلى التعرف على أدوات وأساليب ووظائف وأغراض التحوُّط التركيبي المُستخدَمة في مسرحية "بجماليون" للكاتب شو. ومن أجل تحقيق هذا الهدف، تتبع الدراسة نموذجًا انتقائيًا يجمع بين ثلاثة تصنيفاتٍ، وهي تصنيفات سالاجر ماير (١٩٩٧)، فارتالا (٢٠٠١)، وفريزر (٢٠١٠). وقد أظهر تحليل البيانات الذي تم إجرائه باتباع كلا المنهجين النوعيّ والكميّ وجود سبعة أشكال من التحوُّطات التركيبية في المسرحية، وأنّ الجمل الشرطيّة هي أكثر أدوات التحوُّط استخدامًا. واستُخدِمت هذه الأدوات كأساليب للتجنب، وتبديد الشخصية، والإخفاء، وتبديد الشخصية، وعدم الجزم، والحميمية، والسخرية، والكياسة. كما أوضح التحليل وظائفهم المختلفة بالإضافة إلى الأغراض الدراميّة والرمزية والموضوعيّة التي تكمن وراء استخدامهم. وأشارت النتائج إلى أنّ التحوُّط يساهم في الأفكار الرئيسية التي يسعى شو إلى نشرها حتى يتمكن من تحقيق الإصلاح الاجتماعي، فهو من خلال استخدامه التحوط لا يقيد حرية القراء في تفسير العمل، ولكنه يقودهم– مثلما يقود نفسه–إلى الدخول في متاهة معقدة تغشاها الضبابية.

الكلمات المفتاحية: التحوط التركيبي، أساليب التحوط، وظائف التحوط، بجماليون، الضبابية.

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Abstract

This study addresses the pragmatics of syntactic hedges in drama. It identifies the devices, strategies, functions and purposes of syntactic hedging employed in Shaw's *Pygmalion*. To fulfill this aim, it adopts an eclectic model integrating three taxonomies, namely those of Salager-Meyer (1997), Varttala (2001) and Fraser (2010). Through blending both qualitative and quantitative methods, the data analysis shows that there are seven forms of syntactic hedges present in the drama, and the most frequently employed device is the conditional. These devices are used as strategies of avoidance, concealment, depersonalization, indetermination, intimacy, irony, and politeness. The analysis also highlights their various functions along with their dramatic, symbolic and thematic purposes. The findings indicate that hedging contributes to themes that Shaw seeks to disseminate to bring social reform. Through hedging, Shaw does not impinge upon the readers' freedom of interpretation, but rather leads them, like himself, into an intricate maze of fuzziness.

Keywords: Syntactic hedges**,** hedging strategies, hedging functions, *Pygmalion*, fuzziness.

1. Introduction

Yule (1996, p. 130) defines hedges as "cautious notes expressed about how an utterance is to be taken". The phenomenon of hedging has long been studied as being part of the politeness theory. A number of studies have also been carried out to analyze hedging strategies in scientific and academic discourse, interviews and political speeches (see Section 2.3). However, there is little literature on application of hedging frameworks to literary works, let alone on how hedges, in essence, conceal the different attitudes of characters and authors, and affect the perception of readers in such works. In this study, therefore, the researcher seeks to advance a pragmatic analysis of syntactic hedging devices and strategies to George Bernard Shaw's *Pygmalion*.

Pygmalion, a five-act play, centrally tells the story of Eliza Doolittle, a flower girl who transforms into a refined lady through changing her pronunciation with the help of the phoneticians Henry Higgins and Colonel Pickering. It explores a number of interrelated themes including the shallowness of class divisions and morality, and the power of language.

Concerning the theme of class, Shaw uses the character of Alfred Doolittle, Eliza's father, as a vehicle to satirize the morality of the middle class. On Higgins'

mocking recommendation, Doolittle transforms throughout the course of the play from a dustman to a rich lecturer on moral reform. He is obviously not pleased with this transformation; he remarks, "Now I am worried; tied neck and heels" (Shaw,1977, p. 407), and "I have to live for others and not for myself: thats middle class morality" (Shaw, 1977, p. 408). In this way, Shaw mocks the middle class and depicts its shallowness through the refusal of Doolittle to be one of them, and being content to be "one of the undeserving poor" (Shaw, 1977, p. 367).

As for the power of language, Shaw explores how language can influence a person's attitude and class. That is, when Eliza refined her speech, she was regarded as a woman belonging to the middle class and people admired her. Eliza used the power of language to upgrade, or as Shaw cunningly and implicitly suggests, downgrade her social class. Another aspect of language power evinced in the play is how Pickering calling Eliza "Miss Doolittle", unlike Higgins' insulting language, spurs her transformation. Accordingly, Shaw who believed in the power of language stresses its influences in many ways.

At bottom, the transformation of Eliza is considerably based on that of Shaw's mother and sister Lucy. The two women moved to London and pursued a career in singing,

"rebell[ing] against their gender-defined roles", which was "crucial in Shaw's sympathy with the plight of the independent woman" (Peters, 1988, p. 6). When Lee began to show interest in Lucy, Lucinda took his method of teaching and opened a shop on her own. Likewise in *Pygmalion*, Eliza rebelled against Higgins when he treated her badly, and threatened him that she would teach phonetics herself, taking his methods and working as an assistant to his Hungarian rival Nepommuck. In this regard, Eliza's character's mainly drawn from Shaw's life.

The study is concerned with highlighting how Shaw employs syntactic hedges in *Pygmalion*. It traces the frequently used syntactic hedges, the types of strategies the playwright makes use of, and their functions and purposes. It also pinpoints the effects that these devices have on the audience. In this way, the study is intended to indicate the significance of exploring the pragmatic functions of hedging in literary discourse, and to reveal how such exploration would lead to a better and much deeper understanding of the literary work.

2. Literature Review

A number of pragmatic studies have been carried out on hedging in different types of discourse. Examples of such studies are on academic discourse (e.g. Gomaa, 2019; Jameel,

2023), TV Arabic interviews (e.g. Amine, 2019), journalistic discourse (e.g. Jensen, 2008), and literary works (e.g. Liu, 2020; Hassan, 2024). These studies have addressed the types of hedging devices and strategies used in the data collected and their frequency.

The present study differs from other research in that it mainly elaborates on the forms of syntactic hedges, pinpoints the pragmatic functions of hedging, the hedging strategies employed in the drama, and relates these functions and strategies to the underlying themes of the work. Subsequently, this provides a deeper understanding of the literary work and highlights the effect of using hedging in literature.

3. Theoretical Framwork

3.1. Analysis Frameworks of Hedging

Prince, Bosk and Frader (1982), following Lakoff's concept of fuzziness, maintain that hedges make things fuzzy in one of two cases: "within the propositional content" and "in the relationship between the proposition and the speaker" (p. 4). The former case of hedges is termed "approximators" while the latter "shields". They further subdivide approximators into adaptors and rounders, and shields into plausibility shields and attribution shields. Table 1 below clearly presents these four subcategories of hedges.

Table 1. Hedging Strategies according to the Resulting Type of Fuzziness

Hedges	Classification	Examples
Approximators	Adaptors	Quite, not really, sort of…
	Rounders	Approximately, about…
Shields	Plausibility shields	I think, probably, I believe…
	Attribution shields	According to, presumably…

Concerning approximators, they indicate the speaker's full commitment to the truth of the proposition (Prince et al., 1982). First, adaptors are used when the speaker adapts an old word to a new situation. They include words and phrases such as "quite, not really, somewhat, (just) sort of, almost (describable as), a little bit, and some". An example of adaptors can be seen in [1a.] below. Second, rounders are used when the speaker intends to convey a range of items, but not a precise or exact piece of information. Examples of rounders include "approximately, essentially, about, and (something) between A and B". An instance of rounders is given in [1b.].

[1] a. It's *a sort of* pale leaf colour.

  b. The task will take *approximately* two weeks to be accomplished.

Employing adaptors or rounders, the speaker attempts to reveal that the actual situation is close to a prototypical relevant situation. The speaker in [1a.] uses the closest relevant term to describe the given green shade. The phrase "sort of" is then an adaptor that is used in order to indicate that the actual colour is not identical to, but close to, that of a pale leaf. In a similar vein, the employment of the adverb "approximately" in [1b.] signals that the given range of weeks is not precise, but exemplary of the range the task may take.

As for shields, they indicate that the speaker is either less than full committed, or committed in a marked manner, to the truth of the proposition (Prince et al., 1982). First, plausibility shields are those phrases that indicate the speaker's doubt or uncertainty towards his proposition. They include phrases such as "I (don't) think, I (had to) believe, I see that, probably, as far as I can tell, and as far as I'm concerned". Second, attribution shields are the phrases the speaker employs to attribute the belief in the given proposition to someone else. Examples of attribution shields are "according to and presumably". [2a.] and [2b.] are examples of plausibility shields and attribution shields respectively.

[2] a. *I think* the plan will not work.

   b. *According to* John, the plan may not work.

In [2a.] the speaker expresses his uncertainty in the success of the plan, whereas in [2b.] the speaker attributes that very belief to John.

Salager-Meyer (1997) classifies hedging devices into seven main categories. These are modal auxiliary verbs, modal lexical verbs, adjectival, adverbial and nominal modal phrases, approximators of degree, quantity, frequency and time, introductory phrases, if clauses, and compound hedges. Figure 1 below displays Salager-Meyer's taxonomy of hedges.

**Figure 1.** Salager-Meyer's (1997) Taxonomy of Hedges

1. Modal auxiliary verbs
2. Modal lexical verbs
3. Adjectival, adverbial and nominal modal phrases
    3.1. Probability adjectives
    3.2. Nouns
    3.3. Adverbs (non-verbal modals)
4. Approximators of degree, quantity, frequency and time
5. Introductory phrases
6. If clauses
7. Compound hedges

Hyland (1998) states that hedging is any linguistic means that is used to indicate one of two things: a lack of commitment to the truth of a certain proposition or a desire not to reveal that commitment. Moreover, he pinpoints that the essence of hedging is writers or speakers' judgments

about the propositions they make and the possible effect they may have on addressees or readers.

Figure 2 below shows Hyland's polypragmatic model of hedges. He classifies them into two main categories: content-oriented and reader-oriented. He then divides content-oriented hedges into two subcategories: accuracy-oriented (attribute and reliability) and writer-oriented.

Figure 2. A Polypragmatic Model of Hedging (Hyland, 1998, p. 156)

```
                            Hedging
                               |
     Content-oriented - - - - - - - - - - - - Reader-oriented
              |
   Accuracy-oriented - - - - - - - Writer-oriented
              |
Attribute - - - - - - - Reliability
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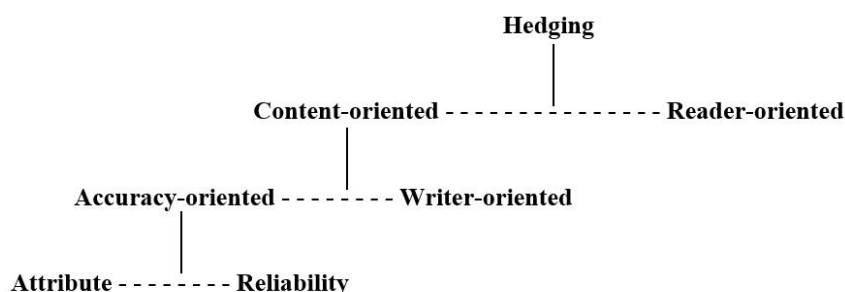
Varttala (2001) classifies hedging according to parts of speech and linguistic forms. His typology consists of eight main categories: modal auxiliaries, full verbs, adverbs, adjectives, nouns, clausal elements, questions and other forms of hedges. Concerning full verbs and nouns, he subclassifies them in respect of non-factive reporting/asserting, tentative cognition, and tentative linking/likelihood. As for adjectives and adverbs, he classifies them in terms of probability, indefinite frequency, indefinite degree and approximation.

Figure 3 provides a concise view of Varttala's typology of hedging devices.

Figure 3. Varttala's (2001) Typology of Hedging Devices (Nekoueizadeh, Bavali, Bagheri, & Rassaei, 2020, p. 161).

1. Modal auxiliary verbs
2. Full verbs
   2.1. Non-factive reporting verbs
   2.2. Tentative cognition verbs
   2.3. Tentative linking verbs
3. Adverbs
   3.1. Probability adverbs
   3.2. Adverbs of indefinite frequency
   3.3. Adverbs of indefinite degree
   3.4. Approximative adverbs
4. Adjectives
   4.1. Probability adjectives
   4.2. Adjectives of indefinite frequency
   4.3. Adjectives of indefinite degree
   4.4. Approximative adjectives
5. Nouns
   5.1. Non-factive assertive nouns
   5.2. Tentative cognition nouns
   5.3. Nouns of tentative likelihood
6. Clausal elements
7. Questions
8. Other

Fraser (2010) lists nineteen hedging devices. He classifies hedging devices in terms of part of speech as well inferences and metalinguistic comments. Figure 4 below shows the nineteen categories of Fraser's hedging devices.

Figure 4. Fraser's (2010) Hedging Devices

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1.Adverbs/adjectives
2.Impersonal pronouns
3.Concessive conjunctions
4. Hedged performative
5 Indirect speech acts
6.Introductory phrases
7.Modal adverbs
8.Modal adjectives
9. Modal noun
10.    Modal verbs
11.    Epistemic verbs
12.    Negative question
13.    Reversal tag
14.    Agentless passive
15.    Conditional subordinators
16.    Progressive form
17.    Tentative inference
18.    Conditional clause
19.    Metalinguistic comment
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3.2. Functions of Hedging

The different functions of hedges can be identified by realizing a number of strategies. Authors, writers and speakers use hedges for certain purposes. By so doing, they assign certain functions to hedges. Linguists and researchers have set to group and examine these somehow concealed strategies and functions, which include the following:

3.2.1. Strategy of Indetermination

According to Namsaraev (1997), this strategy occurs when the addresser gives his proposition "a colouring of lesser semantic/qualitative/quantitative explicitness as well as of uncertainty, vagueness and fuzziness" (p. 68). Martin-Martin (2008) maintain that this strategy may comprise the following devices: epistemic modality (modal auxiliary verbs, semi-auxiliaries, epistemic lexical verbs, verbs of cognition, modal adverbs, modal nouns and modal adjectives), and approximators of quantity, frequency, degree and time. These devices reveal the addresser's indetermination towards the information stated in the proposition.

3.2.2. Strategy of Subjectivization

Another strategy that linguists and researchers highlight is that of subjectivization. Williamova (2005) indicates that this strategy takes place when addressers reflect their personal attitude or doubt about the proposition, and their direct involvement with it. This strategy may comprise, as Namsaraev (1997) states, the use of personal pronouns accompanied by verbs of cognition or performative verbs. Martin-Martin (2008) also adds that they may comprise quality-emphasizing adjectival and adverbial expressions,

which Hyland (1998) labels "boosters".

3.2.3. Strategy of Depersonalization

Martin-Martin (2008) demonstrates that the strategy of depersonalization or objectivization takes place when addressers reduce or eliminate their presence from the proposition. Addressers may do so by using devices such as agentless passive, impersonal (active) constructions and the personal pronoun "we" instead of "I" (Namsaraev, 1997, p. 68). In so doing, they relieve themselves from bearing the responsibility for the truth of the proposition expressed.

3.2.4. Strategy of Intimacy

Namsaraev (1997) points out that this strategy takes place when the addresser attempts to signal intimacy towards the addressee. This strategy may comprise devices such as address forms, and rise or fall-rise intonation. Such devices are used to invite the addressee to be involved in the ongoing situation.

3.2.5. Strategy of Downtoning

Williamova (2005) and Hinkel (2005) assert that the main function fulfilled by this strategy is to minimize the imposition made on the addressee. The strategy of downtoning, or downgrading as Williamova puts it, is used to scale down the intensity of verbs, adjectives and nouns. It

includes the use of expressions such as just, a bit, a little and quite.

3.2.6. Strategy of politeness

Brown and Levinson (1987) list hedging as a strategy of negative politeness. They define it as those devices that "modif[y] the degree of membership of a predicate or noun phrase in a set; it says of that membership that it is *partial*" (p. 145). This strategy takes place when addressers use certain particles, words or phrases to mitigate the force of their utterance so as not to infringe on the rights and wants of addressees.

3.2.7. Strategy of Avoidance

Taweel, Al-Saidat, Rafayah, and Saidat (2011) argue that the predominant hedging strategy in spoken political discourse is the avoidance strategy. They further indicate that it has three different means: topic-shift, generalization and ignorance. In the first means, addressers shift from one topic to another; in the second, they generalize matters to avoid giving a certain answer; and in the third, they deliberately ignore the topic altogether. This strategy is used as a vehicle for self-protection so as not to seem unreliable if proved wrong. Addressers use hedging to avoid being directly involved in the proposition so as not to seem unreliable if proved wrong, as well as to avoid threatening addressees'

faces through direct discourse.

3.2.8. Strategy of Concealment

Odebunmi (2011) draws to attention that hedging devices may be used as a concealment strategy between doctors and clients to avoid stating the exact truth to patients or their families. That is, doctors conceal the actual diagnosis to prevent the negative reaction of clients. Besides, doctors mitigate their diagnosis not only to prevent fear, but also to involve the patient and make him/her understand his/her possible illness. This, in turn, reflects that "disclosing uncertainty to patients [..] can yield better results" (Hanauer, Liu, Mei, Manion, Balis, & Zheng, 2012, p. 327). Above all, hedging may serve as a concealment strategy in different fields other than medicine, for instance, through the use of agentless passive.

3.2.9. Strategy of Irony

Linguists maintain that hedging as a politeness strategy plays a crucial role in delivering jokes, and hence contribute to the overall resulting comic effect (Al Arief, 2023; Kholis, Sugaryamah, & Listiani, 2024). To create irony, comedians, writers or speakers may use hedging devices so as to mitigate the possible resulting rudeness and directness of their views. For instance, the comedian's use of certain hedging devices such as approximators to lessen the

degree of his/her commitment to the proposition may be a mere representation of the tone of mockery and his/her ironical intention. Accordingly, authors and artists use hedging in order to humorously criticize certain conditions while minimizing offense and confrontation that it is their own views.

3.2.10. Strategy of Persuasion

Recent studies reveal that hedging contributes to achieving persuasion in discourse by strengthening pathos, logos and ethos. Zhang and Chen (2020) explore strategic persuasion in some news commentaries, and conclude that hedges enhance pathos by generating resonance, ethos by establishing negotiability, and logos by strengthening reason. Jovic, Kurtishi and AlAfnan (2023) further highlight the persuasive power of hedging in TED talks in these modes of persuasion, arguing that "strong credibility [ethos] was generally established by avoiding hedging devices" (p. 208). They illustrate that TED speakers need to establish a trustworthy persona, rather than a negotiable one. Hence, hedging devices can be used as a means to gain or lose credibility depending on the mode of persuasion and the context in which these devices are employed.

3.3. Syntactic Hedging Devices

This study uses an eclectic approach in analyzing hedges. The model of analysis is adapted from the integration of three taxonomies, namely those of Salager-Meyer (1997), Varttala (2001) and Fraser (2010) as presented in Table 2. Certain syntactic items convey tentativeness regarding the information presented or the attitude of the writer/speaker. These items are labelled "syntactic hedges". Syntactically, hedges may take the form of adverbials, questions, conditionals, concessive conjunctions and agentless passive. The following sections elaborate on these five syntactic categories.

Table 2. Syntactic Hedging Devices

Syntactic Hedging Devices		Examples
Adverbials	Prepositional Phrases	To our knowledge, according to, in a way
	Other Adverbial Phrases/Clauses	so they say, I mean, they tell me
Questions	Reversal Tag Questions	Isn't he?
	Negative Questions	Didn't he pick it?
Conditionals		If clauses, unless, as long as, so long as, given that
Concessive Conjunctions		Although, even though, though, while, whereas
Agentless Passive		Were selected

3.3.1. Adverbials

Certain adverbial phrases have a hedging potential,

revealing the speaker's or writer's lack of certainty. These phrases can be classified into two main categories: prepositional phrases and other adverbial phrases or clauses. These adverbials can happen in initial or parenthetical position as seen in the following examples:

[3] a. *In my view*, Jane is not right for Paul.

    b. Paul, *they say*, left the office.

The adverbial phrase "in my view" in [3a.] is a hedge that shows tentativeness of the addresser's assessment of Jane not being right for Paul. Similarly, the adverbial clause "they say" in [3b.] functions as a hedge weakening the addresser's commitment to Paul having left the office.

3.3.2. Questions

Fraser (2010) lists two types of questions that function as hedging devices: reversal tag questions and negative questions.

3.3.2.1. Reversal Tag Questions

Tag questions, as Quirk, Greenbaum, Leech and Svartvik (1985) state, are a type of yes-no questions that are appended to statements, and have a rising or a falling tone. On the one hand, tag questions with rising tone are intended to elicit verification, inviting the addressee to verify the truth of the proposition. On the other hand, tag questions with

falling tone are intended to draw out confirmation, expecting the addressee to support and strengthen the proposition. Above all, the statement in the sentences containing tag questions expresses an assumption, while the tag question expresses an expectation.

In this regard, the addresser expresses uncertainty towards the proposition (assumption made in the statement), and tag questions are used as a hedging device, expressing an expectation of the truth of the proposition. Accordingly, tag questions are used as a strategy of intimacy (see Section 2.2.4), inviting the addressee to take part in the conversation, whether by verifying or confirming the assumed proposition in the given statement. Examples of tag questions that have a hedging potential are given in [4a.] and [4b.] below.

[4] a. Chandler is coming to the concert, *isn't he?*

   b. The Gellers aren't coming to the concert, *are they?*

The statement in [4a.] expresses a positive assumption that "Chandler is coming", and the tag question "isn't he?" communicates a neutral or positive expectation that he may come. In a similar vein, the statement in [4b.] expresses a negative assumption that "the Gellers aren't coming", and a neutral expectation that they may come. In the two sentences, tag questions are used as a hedging device that reveals the probability of the given proposition, and signals intimacy

towards the addressee.

3.3.2.2. Negative Questions

Quirk et al. (1985, p. 808) distinguish between two attitudes of yes-no negative questions: old expectation (positive) and new expectation (negative). The former one refers to questions where the speaker originally hopes for a positive response, and the latter one refers to questions where new evidence suggests a negative response. Fraser (2010) contends that negative questions that convey positive assertion are questions with hedging potential. In [5] the negative question conveys a positive hedged assertion that Ben slept.

[5] *Didn't Ben sleep?* [I think Ben slept.]

3.3.3. Conditionals

Conditional clauses are a type of subordinate clauses that express a condition or hypothesis. They denote that the situation in the main clause is dependent on that of the conditional clause. In other words, the truth of the proposition in the main clause is contingent on the validity or fulfillment of the condition, or on the implicit act of speech communicated in the conditional clause. In this regard, conditional clauses may express either a direct or indirect condition (Quirk et al., 1985) as can be seen in the following

examples:

[6] a. *If you run away from the dog,* it'll attack you.

   b. He's too polite, *if I may say so.*

On the one hand, the conditional clause in [6a.] expresses a direct condition; that is, it denotes that the truth of the proposition "it'll attack you" is contingent on the fulfillment of the condition "running away from the dog". On the other hand, the conditional clause in [6b.] is an indirect condition; to illustrate, the clause "if I may say so" is not a condition on which the proposition "he's too polite" is dependent, but rather it is a speech act implying politeness. Stemming from such different uses and types of conditions, it is found that not all if-clauses have a hedging potential (Varttala, 2001). Some conditional subordinators can be used as hedges such as certain types of if-clauses (Salager-Meyer, 1997), and other conditional subordinators including as long as, assuming that, given that, and so long as (Fraser, 2010). Instances of conditional clauses that function as hedging devices are the clauses in [7a.] and [7b.] below.

[7] a. *If their findings are correct,* we'll have to reconsider the whole project.

   b. *As long as Phoebe didn't tell Joey,* she told Chandler.

The conditional clauses in [7a.] and [7b.] convey the

tentativeness of the propositions: the addressers do not know whether the findings are correct or not, and whether Phoebe told Joey or not. Accordingly, the claims expressed in the main clauses "we'll have to reconsider the whole project" and "[Sarah] told Chandler" are also of low probability. In these examples, the conditional clauses indicate the addressers' uncertainty, weaken the claims made about the consequent (proposition in the main clause), and qualify commitment to others' findings or views. To put it more explicitly, these clauses show "the [addressers'] assessment that necessary conditions are unlikely to be fulfilled, and therefore that the hedged consequences will not occur" (Hyland, 1998, p. 146).

3.3.4. Concessive Conjunctions

Concession is a grammatical and argumentative-functional relationship, which holds two parts unequal in argumentative intensity (Livant, 2015). Concession, as Mann and Thompson (1986) put it, is a relationship that emerges when an addresser or writer (W) states in one part of the utterance or text the truth of one point which potentially distracts the addressee or reader (R) from a different point stated in another part of the utterance or text. Mann and Thompson (1987) further label these two parts "nucleus" (N) and "satellite" (S). The nucleus is the part that states the main content of the utterance, whereas the satellite is the other part

of the utterance whose content is inconsistent with that of the nucleus.

Table 3 below illustrates the four fields of which the concession relation consists: constraints on N, constraints on S, constraints on the N and S combination, and the effect. When using the concessive conjunctions in a certain text, the writer proposes a relation of opposition or incompatibility between the nucleus and the satellite; however, the writer tackles the situation as being compatible. Accordingly, the writer's positive attitude elicits a similarly positive attitude from the reader.

Table 3. The Four Fields of the Concession Relation (Mann & Thompson, 1987, p. 15)

Relation name:	CONCESSION
Constraints on N:	W has positive regard for the situation presented in N;
Constraints on S:	W is not claiming that the situation presented in S doesn't hold;
Constraints on the N + S combination:	
	W acknowledges a potential or apparent incompatibility between the situations presented in N and S; W regards the situations presented in N and S as compatible; recognizing the compatibility between the situations presented in N and S increases R's positive regard for the situation presented in N
The effect:	R's positive regard for the situation presented in N is increased

Locus of the effect:	N and S

In this vein, concessive conjunctions have a hedging potential. These conjunctions include although, despite, even if, even though, in spite of, though, whereas, and while. Some of these conjunctions are followed by clauses, and others are followed by phrases.

[8] *Although* Ben would hardly admit it, he was becoming uneasy about the issue.

In [8] the writer signals that that the subordinate clause "although Ben would hardly admit it" (S) and the independent clause "he was becoming uneasy about the issue" (N) are compatible, and proposes their potential incompatibility. That is to say, the improbability of Ben admitting the issue is compatible with the fact that he was uneasy, but it is also potentially incompatible with it. Accordingly, the writer hedged the proposition in the subordinate clause, for it is probable that Ben would admit what happened.

3.3.5. Agentless Passive

Agentless passive is the type of passive that has an unexpressed agent. It is used when the agent is immaterial, predictable, or unknown, as well as being used for the sake of brevity (Fowler, 1991). Besides, it may also be used for purposes of mystification (Lingle, 2021), depersonalization

(see Section 2.2.3), or concealment.

[9] All data on the computers were deleted.

The agent in [9] above is not mentioned, and hence the subject of the active counterpart sentence is undetermined.

4. Methodology

The data of this study is collected and analyzed through a blend of both qualitative and quantitative approaches. The types and forms of syntactic hedging devices are first and identified. Besides, the frequency of the occurrences of these forms is detected. The researcher then pinpoints the strategy, function and purpose behind the employment of these hedges.

5. Data Analysis

The total number of syntactic hedging devices studied in *Pygmalion* is 192. These 192 hedges include 139 (72.4%) conditionals, 35 (18.2%) questions, 11 (5.7%) concessive conjunctions, 5 (2.6%) adverbials and 2 (1.1%) agentless passive clauses as indicated in Table 4 below. Figure 5, following the table, also provides a clearer view of the proportions of these syntactic hedging devices found.

Table 4. Distribution of Syntactic Hedging Devices in *Pygmalion*

Syntactic Hedging Devices	Freq.	%
Conditionals	139	72.4
Questions	35	18.2
Concessive Conjunctions	11	5.7
Adverbials	5	2.6
Agentless Passive	2	1.1

Figure 5. Distribution of Syntactic Hedging Devices in *Pygmalion*
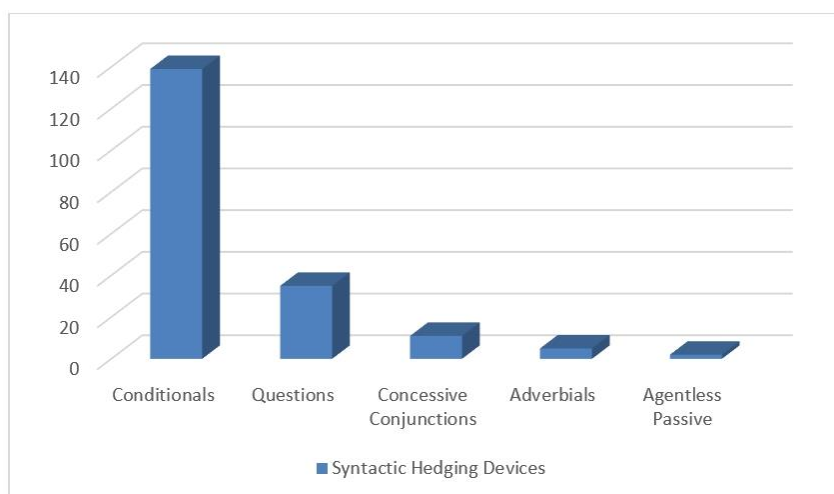
According to Table 4 and Figure 5 above, the most frequently used syntactic hedging devices are the conditionals, whereas the least frequently used ones are the agentless passive clauses. Each syntactic sub-category is to be broken down and analyzed in greater detail in the sections to follow.

5.1. Conditionals

The most frequently used sub-category of syntactic hedges is that of conditionals. Conditional clauses are used as hedging devices 139 times, making up more than half the syntactic hedges detected (see Table 4). The propositions provided in [10] below are typical examples of conditionals used as hedges in the drama.

[10] a. HIGGINS. "<u>If</u> these belonged to me instead of to the jeweller, I'd ram them down your ungrateful throat" (Shaw, 1977, p. 400).

b. HIGGINS. "Pickering: <u>if</u> we listen to this man another minute, we shall have no convictions left" (Shaw, 1977, p. 369).

In *Pygmalion*, there are altogether 5 different conditionals identified. Table 5 and Figure 6 below show the frequencies of conditional conjunctions and forms identified in the play in descending order. The conjunction "if" has the highest proportion, occurring 132 times and representing 95% of the overall conditionals studied. It is followed by the conditionals "unless", "as long as", "if only", and "on the condition that": 3 (2.2%), 2 (1.4%), 1 (0.7%) and 1 (0.75) respectively.

Table 5. Frequency of Conditionals in *Pygmalion*.

Conditionals	Freq.	%
If	132	95
unless	3	2.2
As long as	2	1.4
If only	1	0.7
On the condition that	1	0.7

Figure 6. Frequency of Conditionals in *Pygmalion*
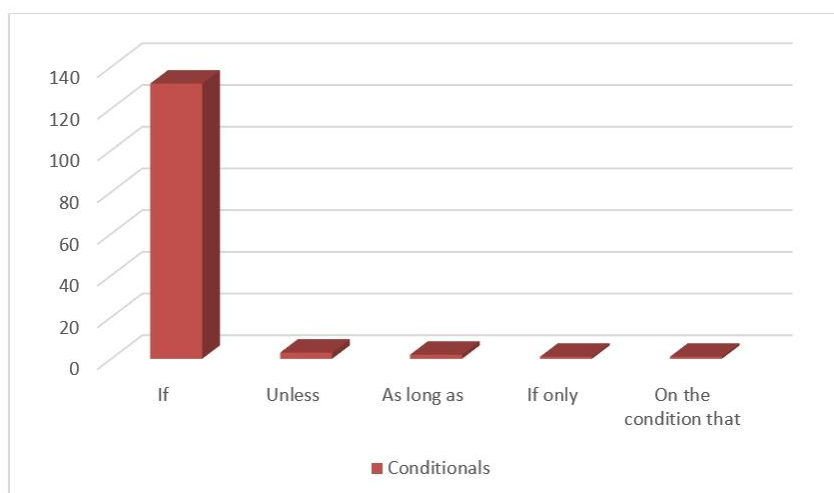
Hedges 1 below is indicative of the conditionals' significance as hedges in *Pygmalion*.

Hedge 1. MRS HIGGINS. "But, my dear Mr Doolittle, you need not suffer all this _if_ you are really in earnest" (Shaw, 1977, p. 408).

Mrs Higgins uses the if-conditional while addressing Doolittle as a strategy of politeness and irony. She is positive,

to some extent, that Doolittle is not as miserable as he asserts, for being a member of the middle class is after all something that plenty of people aspire to accomplish. Moreover, as a member of the middle class herself, she knows what it feels like. Accordingly, she uses the if-conditional to save Doolittle's face, and covertly mock the show he has put on.

This hedge takes place in Act V during Doolittle's complaining about what Higgins little joke has made to and out of him. He complains that everybody now approaches him for money and that he has to speak middle class language to fit in. He shows how miserable he has become as a member of the middle class.

Not only does Shaw criticize middle-class morality in *Pygmalion*, but he also criticizes human nature. Doolittle eventually gives in to the temptations of the middle-class grandeur. The if-conditional shows that truth of suffering is contingent on the fulfillment of the condition that Doolittle is sincere. Shaw thus craftily uses hedging to ironically criticize man morality, contributing to his intricate themes in the drama.

5.2. Questions

The second frequently used sub-category of syntactic hedges is that of questions. They are used as hedging devices 35 times, representing 18.2% of the overall syntactic hedges

studied. Table 6 below distributes the sub-categories of questions found in the play as follows: reversal tag questions and negative questions.

Table 6. Distribution of Questions in *Pygmalion*

Questions	Freq.	%
Reversal Tag	22	62.9
Negative	13	37.1

According to Table 6 above, the 39 forms of questions identified are distributed as follows: 22 (62.9%) reversal tag questions and 13 (37.1%) negative questions. Reversal tag questions are more commonly used than negative questions. Figure 7 provides a better view of the proportions of these two forms of questions.

Figure 7. Distribution of Questions in *Pygmalion*
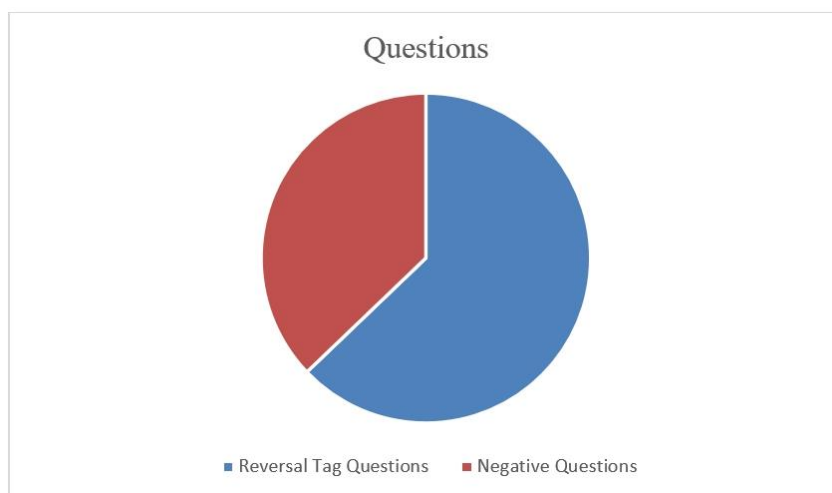
Examples of the occurrence of each type of question

are provided in [11] below:

[11] a. DOOLITTLE. "Listen here, Governor. You and me is men of the world, <u>aint we?</u>" (Shaw, 1977, p. 66).

   b. THE FLOWER GIRL. "Dont I tell you I'm bringing you business?" (Shaw, 1977, p. 348).

Hedges 2 is representative of the questions' effect as hedges in *Pygmalion*.

Hedge 2. LIZA. "<u>Aint you going to call me Miss Doolittle anymore?</u>" (Shaw, 1977, p. 371).

Liza, addressing Pickering, uses the negative question in Hedge 2 as a strategy of indetermination. Her negative question conveys a positive hedged proposition that she thinks he is going to call her Miss Doolittle again. She uses this question realized as a hedge to indicate her uncertainty, hence saving her own face.

The question in Hedge 2 takes place near the end of Act II. Doolittle, Eliza's father, learns from her neighbor that she is at Higgins' place, and goes to ask Higgins for money in the presence of Pickering. Liza enters, and is ashamed of her father. Pickering then asks Liza, "what is his trade, Eliza?" (Shaw, 1977, p. 371). She replies and then asks him the question in Hedge 2 above.

Shaw, through Eliza's voice, uses this hedge to highlight the fuzziness of class identity. Pickering called Eliza Miss Doolittle the first day she came to meet him. In this way, he treated her like a lady. When he saw her father's appearance and behavior as working-class beggar, he was reminded of Eliza's origin and unconsciously degraded her. Calling her Eliza then, as he explains, was "a slip of the tongue" (Shaw, 1977, p. 371). In this light, this hedge serves a thematic purpose in the play.

5.3. Concessive Conjunctions

The third frequently used sub-category of syntactic hedges is that of concessive conjunctions. They are used to hedge propositions 11 times, representing 5.7% of the syntactic devices studied. Examples of concessive conjunctions are provided in [12] below.

[12] a. MRS PEARCE. "nobody can do it better than Mr Higgins, <u>though</u> he may not always mean it" (Shaw, 1977, p. 351).

b. HIGGINS. "That poor devil who couldnt get a job as an errand boy <u>even if</u> he had the guts to try for it" (Shaw, 1977, p. 422).

In the play, there are altogether 3 different concessive conjunctions identified. Table 7 and Figure 8 below

demonstrate the frequencies of concessive conjunctions identified in the play in descending order. The conjunction "though" has the highest proportion, occurring 8 times and representing 72.2% of all concessive conjunctions detected. It is followed by the conjunctions "in spite of" and "even if": 2 (18.2%) and 1 (9.1%) respectively.

Table 7. Frequency of Concessive Conjunctions in *Pygmalion*

Concessive Conjunctions	Freq.	%
Though	8	72.2
In spite of	2	18.2
Even if	1	9.1

Figure 8. Frequency of Concessive Conjunctions in *Pygmalion*
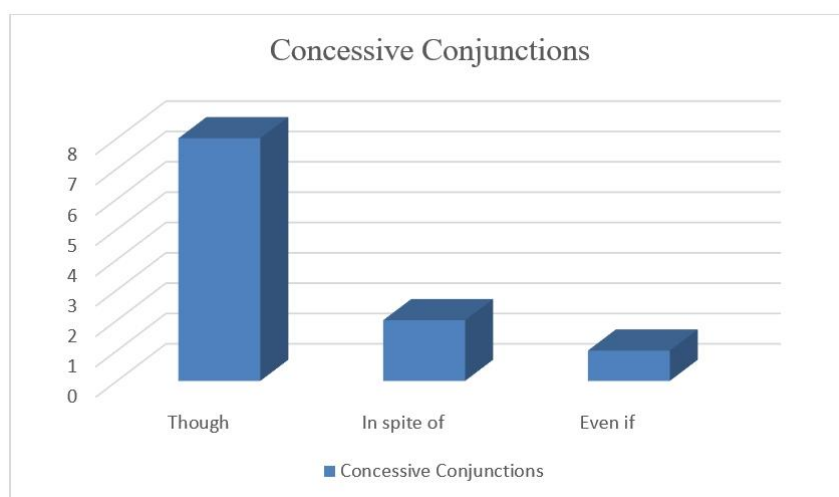
Hedge 3 is representative of the strategies, functions and purposes of concessive conjunctions in the drama.

Hedge 3. HIGGINS. "I should imagine you wont have much difficulty in settling yourself somewhere or other, <u>though</u> I hadnt quite realized that you were going away" (Shaw, 1977, p. 398).

Higgins uses the concessive conjunction "though" as a strategy of indetermination and intimacy. Using this conjunction, he signals that the content of the main clause (N) is compatible with that of the subordinate clause (S), but still acknowledges their potential incompatibility. Lowering the probability of his realization that Eliza is going away, however, he makes his proposition less assertive and more intimate.

Hedge 3 takes place in Act IV in a dialogue between Eliza and Higgins after returning from the ambassador's garden party. Eliza protests about Higgins negligence and treatment. Nevertheless, Higgins does not console her by directly addressing her fears, instead his answers to her inquiries are indefinite and hazy.

This hedge reflects Higgins' complex feelings and attitudes towards Eliza. Though Higgins is not fond of Eliza at the beginning, he has grown accustomed to having the woman he made out of her around. Higgins signals intimacy

towards Liza through hinting at the possibility of her stay using the conjunction "although". This possibility marks the beginning of his consideration of Eliza from a different angle. He also uses the hedge "quite" in the proposition to further reduce the degree of his realization. Accordingly, hedging here serves a dramatic purpose.
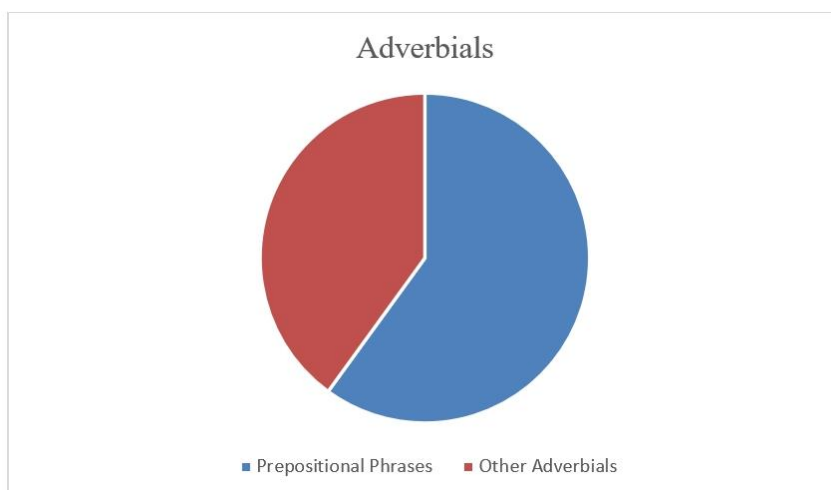
5.4. Adverbials

The fourth frequently used sub-category of syntactic hedges is that of adverbials. They are used to hedge propositions 5 times, representing 2.6% of the syntactic hedging devices examined. Table 8 below presents the sub-categories of adverbials identified in the play as follows: 3 (60%) prepositional phrases and 2 (40%) other adverbials. Prepositional phrases are more commonly used than other adverbials. Figure 9 further gives a concise view of the proportions of these two types of adverbials.

Table 8. Distribution of Adverbials in *Pygmalion*

Adverbials	Freq.	%
Prepositional phrases	3	60
Other Adverbials	2	40

Figure 9. Distribution of Adverbials in *Pygmalion*

Adverbials

■ Prepositional Phrases   ■ Other Adverbials

Examples of the occurrence of each type of adverbial are provided in [13] below:

[13] a. HIGGINS. "youre what I should call attractive. That is, <u>to the people in the marrying line</u>, you understand" (Shaw, 1977, p. 398).

b. LIZA. "My aunt died of influenza: <u>so they said</u>" (Shaw, 1977, p. 381).

An example indicating the functions and purposes of using adverbials as hedges in *Pygmalion* is provided in Hedge 4.

Hedge 4. DOOLITTLE. "Now did you or did you not write a letter to him to say that the most original moralist at present in England, <u>to the best of your knowledge</u>, was Alfred Doolittle" (Shaw, 1977, p. 407).

Addressing Higgins, Doolittle uses the prepositional phrase "to the best of your knowledge" as strategies of depersonalization and avoidance. This phrase is used as a shield; that is, Doolittle attributes the belief of the proposition expressed above to Higgins. He thus distances and absolves himself from bearing the responsibility of the statement.

This hedge occurs in Act V as Doolittle puts the onus of becoming a member of the middle class on Higgins. After meeting Doolittle for the first time, Higgins wrote a letter to an American millionaire jocularly recommending Doolittle as "the most original moralist". Because of that silly joke, Doolittle had been paid three thousand a year for lecturing on moral reform.

Through this adverbial phrase of hedging potential, Doolittle indicates that he is not fully committed to the truth of being a moralist. He pinpoints that it is Higgins' belief or, to put it bluntly, lie. Throughout the play, Shaw uses Doolittle as a vehicle for criticizing middle-class morality. Doolittle employs this hedge to express the inaccuracy of Higgins's statement, thus proving to be an actual token of morality. In so doing, Doolittle shields himself from being unreliable. In this regard, this hedge serves a dramatic, symbolic and thematic purposes in the play.

5.5. Agentless Passive

The least frequently used sub-category of syntactic hedges is that of agentless passive. Agentless passive forms occur as hedging devices just 2 times, representing 1.1% of the overall syntactic hedges in *Pygmalion* as previously demonstrated in Table 2. One of these occurrences in the play is given in [14] below.

[14] HIGGINS. "she's firmly persuaded that I'm an arbitrary overbearing bossing kind of person" (Shaw, 1977, p. 362).

The other occurrence is illustrated in Hedge 5 below in order to show the function and purpose of using agentless passive constructions as hedges in *Pygmalion*.

Hedge 5. DOOLITTLE. "I'm expected to provide for everyone now" (Shaw, 1977, p. 409).

Doolittle uses the passive construction "be expected" without indicating the agent. He employs this construction as a strategy of concealment as well as politeness. That is, he conceals the agent for the sake of face-saving. Using this agentless passive construction as a hedge, he avoids making a decisive statement, and accordingly avoids direct attack.

This hedge takes place in Act V during his grumble to Mrs. Higgins, Higgins, and Pickering. Doolittle complains

about the responsibilities that come with being a middle-class man. When he was a poor dustman, he used to approach rich people for money. Now that he has become rich, everyone approaches him for money.

Shaw uses this hedge to show the hollowness of morality in being connected to one's financial situation. As a working-class man, Doolittle seeks charity, and feels it is his right to ask the wealthy for money. As a middle-class man, he is burdened with other working-class members whom he now provides for himself. This change in sensibilities accounts for the reality of morality that governs the social strata. However, Doolittle, concealing the agent in his proposition, avoids attacking the class he once belonged to. Behind the scenes, this hedge contributes to the irony of the drama. In a broader light, it also serves pure thematic purposes.

6. Conclusion

The linguistic phenomenon of hedging is used in discourse with the aim of communicating tentativeness as a strategy that performs certain functions and purposes, and produces certain effects. First, the data of this study is extracted from the whole text of the play *Pygmalion*, whether from dialogic, descriptive, or narrative levels. 192 syntactic hedging devices are found distributed in seven forms. These forms include 139 (72.4%) conditionals, 22 (11.5%) reversal

tag questions, 13 (6.7%) negative questions, 11 (5.7%) concessive conjunctions, 3 (1.5%) prepositional phrases, 2 (1.1%) other adverbials, and 2 (1.1%) agentless passive clauses. The most frequently employed type of syntactic hedging devices is the conditional, while the least frequently employed types are the other adverbials and agentless passive clauses with even percentage. Second, there are a number of hedging strategies found in the plays: avoidance, concealment, depersonalization, indetermination, intimacy, irony, and politeness. These strategies are used to reinforce, to a greater extent, the dialogues and various themes in the drama: the morality of the middle class, the fluctuating nature of man, and class identity. Third, Shaw does not impose a certain view on the audience, instead he employs hedging devices so as invite the audience to question the issues he raises and contemplate them. In this light, syntactic hedging devices markedly contribute to perception of the drama. As it turns out, when it comes to human nature and moralities just as it is the case with hedging, things are not definite, certain or absolute.

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Appendices

Appendix A. Syntactic Hedging Devices in *Pygmalion*

(The items in each sub-category are listed in alphabetical order)

a. Conditionals:

as long as
if
if only
on the condition that
unless

b. Reversal tag questions:

aint she?
aint we?
arent you?
can I?
do we?
do you?
doesnt she?
dont you?
hadnt you?
havent I?
is it not?
isnt it?
will you?
wont you?

c. Negative questions:

aint ...?
cant we ...?
cant you read?
dont I ...?
dont you?
dont I tell you?
havent you ...?
isnt that so?
wont you?

d. Concessive conjunctions:

even if
in spite of
though

e. Prepositional phrases:

to my taste
to the best of your knowledge
to the people in the marrying line

f. Other adverbials:

as you might say
so they said

g. Agentless passive:

I'm expected to...
she's firmly persuaded...