Hedged performatives: function and grammatical status

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Hedged performatives (HPs) are combinations of a (semi-)modal verb and a performative verb, as illustrated in (1) to (3), and were originally discussed by Fraser (1976). Despite their frequent occurrence, especially in spoken discourse, hedged performatives have received surprisingly little attention so far (e.g. Schneider 2010).

(1) ***I have to confess***, *I don't watch Downton Abbey.* (COCA)
(2) *Well you've you've named a whole bunch of really funny comics **i must say*** (Fisher)
(3) MICHELE-KELEMEN# *Well, definitely. I mean, **I have to say**, you know, foreign countries have always sort of hedged their bets on this* (COCA)

Based on data from the Corpus of Contemporary American English and the Fisher Corpus the paper investigates a set of high-frequency HPs with high mutual information scores in spoken English, viz. *I have to/must admit, I have to/must confess, I have to/must say* with a view to exploring their use in discourse, specifically in interactive contexts.

HPs are shown not to be limited to hedging only (as suggested by Fraser). Instead, it is possible to identify three different functions: shield (hedge), emphasis (booster), and discourse maker uses. The shield and emphasis functions, illustrated in (1) and (2) respectively, are the result of a number of interacting co(n)textual parameters, notably speaker/hearer orientation and positive/negative host clause, and have different effects in terms of speaker and hearer face. The discourse marker uses are particularly prominent with *I have to say*, as illustrated in (3). In this use HPs frequently collocate with other discourse markers and function as discourse structuring devices for the purpose of stalling, turn-taking, floor-keeping etc.

With regard to position, HPs clearly prefer left-periphery, where they typically occur without a *that*-complementizer. This raises the question of the grammatical status of such initial HPs. The paper will address this issue with reference to the grammatical-lexical distinction (as proposed by Boye and Harder 2007) and the perspective of Discourse Grammar (Kaltenböck et al. 2011, Heine et al. 2013).

References

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