MITIGATING PHRASES IN MODERN ENGLISH

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Means for conducting cooperative exchange are in the focus of modern linguistic researches, which are aimed at analyzing language use. People cooperate in their use of language according to a number of principles which are being studied and explained nowadays as Grice's Cooperative Principle, the Politeness Principle advocated by Leech, the Economy Principle as well as others [2: 180].

Politeness is an integral part of life in any human society as it both reflects and regulates social distance. To communicate, create, and maintain social roles, people use a wide variety of special structures and phrases, including mitigating (softening) expressions. Mitigation is "a reduction in how unpleasant, serious, etc something is" [4: 980]. Mitigated speech as a linguistic term describing deferential or indirect speech inherent in communication between individuals of perceived high power distance has been used for at least two decades. The term has recently been popularized by Malcolm Gladwell defining mitigated speech as "any attempt to downplay or sugarcoat the meaning of what is being said" [3].

The aim of the article is to systematize mitigating (softening) expressions and analyze their usage in modern American fiction (on the material of F. Scott Fitzgerald's novel "Tender Is the Night").

This literary work contains different types of words, expressions and structures to make the character's opinions and statements sound less dogmatic in both personal situations and professional context:

- *Do you feel that the situation is getting worse? And do you want to do anything about it?" – "I suppose I do"… "Do you think it's from the drinking or from the abnormality?" – "I think the drinking is caused by the other "…[1: 268]* – This is Doctor Diver's conversation with his young patient from Spain.

- *I think Nicole is less sick than anyone thinks – she only cherishes her illness as an instrument of power…* [1: 263]. – Kaethe, a housewife, expresses her opinion about Nicole's state of health talking to her husband.

Mitigating elements can be divided into several groups.

1. The expressions ***I think, I suppose, do you feel, do you think, etc*** are used to suggest that we are just giving or asking for personal opinions, with which the listener may disagree.

English speaking people find it necessary to soften the tone of the message that makes people sad, unhappy and disappointed. It occurs in situations dealing with illnesses, bad habits, gossiping, quarreling, negative features of one's appearance or character, misfortune, failure etc*: -I guess I'm the Black Death", he said slowly. "I don't seem to bring people happiness any more[1: 245].*

The above phrases have the effect of softening what they are saying, by presenting the ideas as opinions, not orders or instructions: - *I think it's better to leave them out" [1: 72]. – (=leave them out)*

Mitigating expressions in the negative form introduce opinions which are not positive:

- "*I don't believe I know him*" [1: 62]. – (=I don't know him);

- *I don't suppose you ever hear much about those sort of people in Hollywood…"* [1: 39] – (= you don't hear);

- *I just don't think they're attractive …* [49] – (=they are not attractive).

2. The second group of mitigating expressions are ***tentative offers, request, etc,*** which are made if the speaker is not confident about the things mentioned by him:

-"*We wondered …if you wouldn't come over this morning."* [1: 46] – Dick Diver invites the young actress to the party.

-"*Then if I were you I'd just lay it on any grave without looking at the name*" [: 87] – This is Dick's advice to the girl with a wreath who failed to find her brother's grave to lay a memorial on it.

In both examples the speaker is using tentative expressions (is not speaking with confidence) addressing people whom he doesn't know very well.

3. The expressions ***so to speak, sort of*** and ***kind of*** are used to show that we are not speaking exactly: *You could always make me feel some you know, kind of, you know, kind of happy way – you and Nicole* [1: 304] – Rosemary' thoughts are not expressed in a clear and obvious way. Her hesitant state is described with the help of the

repeated expression "kind of" and the modal verb "could", the meaning of which is revealed in the dictionary through the words "*possible*" – "*not certain to*":

Could – *used to show that sth is or might be* <u>*possible*</u> *[4: 347]*;

Possible – *that might exist or happen but is* <u>*not certain to*</u> *[4: 1174].*

4. Mitigating elements may also be modal words of uncertainty: perhaps, maybe, etc.

- "<u>*Perhaps*</u> *I shouldn't have said that…*" [1: 270] – Dick is informed that his wife's father is dying. The man who has brought this news is trying to soften his criticism of the past action expressed by the modal verb "should" and the perfect infinitive.

Perhaps – *used when you want to make a statement or opinion less definite [4: 1123].*

- "*It sounds like nonsense to me*" – <u>*Maybe*</u> *it is' Dick…*"[: 147] - Though not being certain that Dick's opinion about the war is correct, doctor Franz Gregorovius advises him to avoid sharp critical remarks about it.

Maybe – *used when you are not certain that sth will happen or that sth is true or is a correct number* [4: 949].

So, modern English contains a wide variety of words, expressions and structures which are used to minimize (mitigate, soften) the effect of impolite statements or to make the speaker sound less dogmatic and more diplomatic about serious things or someone's private life.

References

1. Fitzgerald F. S. Tender Is the Night. Moscow: Raduga Publishers, 1983. – 394 p.

2. Mey L.J. Pragmatics. An Introduction. – Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 2001. – 392 p.

3. Mitigated speech – Wikipedia. – en.wikipedia.org/...

4. Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary / 7th edition. – Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005. – 1780 p.