

Research on the Functions of General Extenders from the Perspective of Intersubjectivity

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Abstract. From the perspective of intersubjectivity, this study examines English general extenders in interpersonal interaction and their implications for cross-cultural communication. Based on spoken language corpora from existing literature and by integrating politeness strategy theory with the Gricean Cooperative Principle, the research findings reveal that general extenders exert pragmatic functions guided by politeness strategies, which are rooted in intersubjectivity and closely related to the addressee's self-image, covering both positive and negative politeness. Specifically, conjunctive extenders enhance social closeness through shared experiences (positive politeness) and perform a hedging function regarding informativeness in line with the Quantity Maxim; disjunctive ones mitigate tone via alternative possibilities (negative politeness) and maintain caution about information accuracy based on the Quality Maxim. Their intersubjective function relies on the subjectively assumed shared knowledge, experiences and conceptual frameworks between communicators, enabling information omission and listener inference. Mastery of these extenders facilitates smooth cross-cultural communication by negotiating shared knowledge, and the research findings provide solid theoretical and practical support for cultivating socio-pragmatic competence in EFL teaching.

Keywords: general extenders, intersubjectivity, positive politeness, negative politeness, pragmatic competence

1. Introduction

General extenders are pragmatic markers and metalinguistic operators, characterized by morphological stability with variation and subtle, diverse functions. Contemporary English extenders have derived punctuation functions, filler functions, and interpersonal functions on the basis of their original set-marking functions, expressing presumed shared experiences or knowledge and reflecting active integration and goodwill. Notably, compared to purely grammatical functions, their interpersonal functions (e.g., markers of shared information) have become the core focus of contemporary research. Studies show that general extenders have gradually faded their original set-marking functions and acquired an interpersonal function—intersubjective functionality. Existing research in academia mainly includes lexical-syntactic perspectives such as constructional analysis

of extenders [1], functional-pragmatic perspectives such as meta-pragmatic analysis [2] and corpus analysis [3], and social variation perspectives such as quantitative analysis of adolescent dialects [4] and qualitative observation of Australian English [5]. These studies employ empirical methods such as corpus analysis and social variation analysis.

This paper seeks an alternative approach, focusing on the manifestation of the intersubjective functions of general extenders, attempting to answer the following questions: First, what is the rationale behind the term "general extenders"? Second, what is the difference between the intersubjectivity and subjectivity underlying the interpersonal functions of general extenders? Third, how do general extenders fulfill interpersonal functions? Fourth, how do conjunctive and disjunctive extenders reflect intersubjective functions through positive/negative politeness strategies?

2. Literature review

English general extenders are semi-fixed structures composed of "conjunctions (and/or) + semantically generalized components" (e.g., and everything, or something), with core components maintaining lexical openness [6]. Terminologically, academic evolution has gone through three stages: structuralist (focusing on referential functions), pragmatic turn (revealing interpersonal functions), and cognitive integration (mature multidimensional paradigms) [7]. The term "general extender" is preferred for its semantic transparency, functional compatibility (covering referential, interpersonal, meta-pragmatic dimensions), and typological adaptability, with cross-linguistic counterparts like Chinese ".....什么的" and Japanese "toka" [8]. Typologically, they are divided into conjunctive (and-extendors, additive) and disjunctive (or-extendors, alternative) by conjunction type, and general-type (high semantic entropy) and restricted-type (low semantic entropy) by referential restriction degree [9]. Diachronically, their functions evolve unidirectionally: from category marking to interpersonal coordination, and to meta-pragmatic awareness marking, reflecting enhanced intersubjectivity [10].

3. Intersubjectivity: the key to enabling the interpersonal function of general extenders

In communication, every individual is a speaking subject while simultaneously being aware that the other is also a speaking subject [11]. This interrelated relationship of speaking subjects is intersubjectivity. General extenders in dynamic speech involve the nature of participants' social relationships [12], fulfilling interpersonal functions.

3.1. Intersubjectivity based on shared experience or knowledge

Numerous examples show that general extenders in real pragmatic practice do not typically serve the function of "category implication" but frequently act as markers of intersubjectivity [5]. For instance, the speaker in "The Park-Hyatt Coolom and places like that, Regency in Melbourne and things like that" uses general extenders to activate shared luxury hotel-related experiences, fostering interactional goodwill [3]. This builds cognitive consensus via shared knowledge (cognitive dimension of intersubjectivity) and generates interactive affinity (social dimension), driving communicative convergence. Even without prior social closeness, their use implies an appeal to move closer [12]. Communicators achieve convergent understanding due to assumed shared knowledge and worldviews, a result of intersubjective awareness [11].

3.2. Subjectivity and intersubjectivity

Benveniste [13] argued that "subjectivity" is the speaker's ability to posit themselves as a subject via language, determined by the linguistic status of "person". "Intersubjectivity" refers to language's reflection of the speaker's consideration of the listener's attitudes, beliefs, and "face" [10]. Subjectivity is the epistemological basis of intersubjectivity: language enables individuals to establish selfhood, and intersubjectivity arises from mutual awareness of speaking subjects [11]. It encompasses epistemic (addressee's propositional attitudes) and social (face/image needs) aspects [14]. Daily communication inherently involves intersubjectivity, as speakers and listeners mutually recognize each other's subject status [10].

4. Intersubjectivity manifestations for the fulfillment of the interpersonal functions of general extenders

Although individual conceptualizations are subjective, intersubjectivity does not rely on the uniformity of conceptual content. It is constructed through the interaction of perspective reciprocity, shared knowledge, and negotiation. Essentially, intersubjectivity is a dynamic coordination process rather than a static state.

4.1. Perspective reciprocity as the prerequisite for intersubjectivity

People assume a shared world and knowledge, with "perspective reciprocity" (inferring others' perspectives from one's own) as the prerequisite for intersubjectivity [15]. This is a basic interpretive procedure for all interactions [16]. General extenders, like discourse markers such as "you know", signal shared knowledge and experience, allowing speakers to omit details and rely on listeners' inference [14]. For example, "She looks like she works in a grocery store or anything" activates temporary categorization via shared background, achieving social proximity [5]. Their use aligns with the conversational strategy of "saying no more than necessary", related to Grice's Quantity Maxim [17].

4.2. Intersubjectivity based on shared knowledge and experience

General extenders' core function is marking presumed shared information, relying on three cognitive foundations: universal common sense, shared cultural knowledge, and group-specific knowledge [8]. They construct a shared cognitive space, enabling conceptual integration [8]. In "I also picked up some tins of... choucroute royale, that's a cabbage thing oh yes mm frankfurter and sausages and things", "and things" implies unlisted ingredients within shared cultural knowledge of the dish [18]. Group-specific knowledge may lead to comprehension barriers for outsiders, as in Mary and George's conversation about "whales, candlelight, and stuff like that", which requires shared romantic experience-based cognitive frameworks [12]. Channell's [1] experiment confirmed that understanding general extenders depends on pre-existing cognitive rapport; without it, category identification becomes erratic.

4.3. Intersubjectivity co-constructed through negotiation

In real-time interactions, intersubjectivity is co-constructed via micro-negotiation. In a police call, the operator's "Has he been drinking or anything?" constructs an ad hoc category centered on "drinking", which Nicole revises with "No, but he is crazy" [9]. This shows linguistic understanding

is a collaborative meaning-making process based on shared experience, not unilateral decoding [14]. General extenders facilitate such negotiation by leaving room for listeners' feedback and category adjustment.

4.4. The intersubjective function of general extenders as highlighted by the meta-knowledge marker "you know"

Meta-knowledge markers like "you know" explicitly signal shared consensus, strengthening general extenders' intersubjective function [14]. "You know" marks culturally/socially shared truths and seeks interactive alignment [14]. In Roger and Sara's conversation about apartment takeover, "y'know—all that crap" combines "you know" (explicit shared procedural knowledge) and "all that crap" (generic reference to trivial tasks), enhancing communication efficiency [12]. In "He just kept talking about Life being a game and all. You know", "you know" assumes listener familiarity with the metaphor, dynamically expanding shared knowledge [19]. "You know" and general extenders often co-occur, as the former explicitly marks shared information while the latter implicitly activates it, jointly reinforcing intersubjectivity.

5. General extenders as instantiating positive and negative politeness strategies

Positive politeness strategies affirm the listener's values and self-image, while negative politeness strategies use vague phrasing to avoid imposing on the listener's freedom [8]. Conjunctive general extenders (e.g., and stuff) imply "additional options", signaling "invited solidarity" to instantiate positive politeness [3]. They also hedge in line with the Quantity Maxim, focusing on the listener's self-image and enhancing social closeness via assumed shared knowledge [5]. Disjunctive general extenders (e.g., or something) imply "alternative possibilities", mitigating imposition to exemplify negative politeness [10]. They hedge on information accuracy per the Quality Maxim, focusing on the speaker's utterance validity while minimizing imposition, embodying implicit intersubjectivity [20].

Table 1. Pragmatic functions of two types of general extenders

Type	Politeness Strategy	Functional Focus	Pragmatic Maxim
Conjunctive	Positive	Invited solidarity/ Listener-focused	Quantity Maxim
Disjunctive	Negative	Mitigating imposition /Leaving leeway	Quality Maxim

For example, "Could you pass me the scissors or something?" uses the disjunctive extender to soften the request, reducing pressure and respecting the addressee [8]. Requests, invitations, or suggestions often employ such extenders to achieve a mitigating effect.

6. Conclusion

This study, grounded in subjectivity and intersubjectivity theory, clarifies the designation and validity of English general extenders, distinguishing conjunctive and disjunctive types' functional differences. Conjunctive extenders, based on the Quantity Maxim, activate positive politeness via shared knowledge; disjunctive extenders, built on the Quality Maxim, realize negative politeness via hedging and tone mitigation. Both serve pragmatic coordination in interpersonal communication. The vagueness of general extenders is a cognitive tool for intersubjective negotiation. This research

provides a theoretical foundation for pragmatic awareness cultivation and communicative strategy training in English teaching.

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