

A Study on the Functions of General Extenders From an Intersubjective Perspective

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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 integrating politeness strategy theory with the Gricean Cooperative Principles, the findings reveal that general extenders serve pragmatic functions guided by politeness strategies, which, covering both positive and negative politeness strategies, are rooted in intersubjectivity and closely related to the addressee's self-image. Specifically, conjunctive general 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. The findings provide solid theoretical and practical support for cultivating sociopragmatic competence in EFL teaching.

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

Introduction

General extenders are pragmatic markers and metalinguistic operators, which are morphologically stable yet not static, and exhibit nuanced and multifaceted 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 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 (Channell, 2000), functional-pragmatic perspectives—e.g., meta-pragmatic analysis (Overstreet & Yule, 2002) and corpus analysis (Aijmer, 2013), and social variation perspectives like

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quantitative analysis of adolescent dialects (Cheshire, 2007), and qualitative observation of Australian English (Dines, 1980). Those studies employ empirical methods, including 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?

The Emergence of “General Extenders”

Guided by terminological principles (International Organization for Standardization, 2022), English general extenders are defined as semi-fixed structures composed of “conjunctions (and/or) + semantically generalized components” (e.g., *and everything, or something*). Their “semi-fixedness” is reflected in: The chief components (e.g., *stuff, things*) maintain lexical openness, allowing additional modifiers (e.g., *and all that bureaucratic stuff*) to form detailed and reduced variants. COCA corpus statistics show that such structures occur at a frequency of 3.2 times per 10,000 words in American English spoken discourse (1990-2019). The terminological evolution of this phenomenon presents three stages: the structuralist period (1980-1994)—terms such as “set-marking tag” (Dines, 1980) and “vague category identifier” (Channell, 2000/1994) focus on their referential functions; the pragmatic turn period (1995-2010)—concepts such as “category hedge” (Aijmer, 2002, p. 214) and “pragmatic operators” (Ariel, 1994, p. 3250) reveal their interpersonal functions; the cognitive integration period (2011-present) marks the maturity of multidimensional analytical paradigms. It should be noted that, though published in 1993, Silverstein’s theory of “metapragmatic regimentation” integrates the formal structure, contextual appropriateness, and cognitive salience [of general extenders] through mechanisms involving regimenting indexical phenomena, which is categorized under the “cognitive integration phase” and gained systematic application in cognitive-functional research post-2010; hence its adjusted phase assignment reflects academic convention.

General extenders serve as pragmatic markers, embodying the function of “vague reference”, which embodies special pragmatic value and can be classified as “category hedges” (Aijmer, 2002, p. 214). Due to frequent use among acquaintances, such constructions have evolved significant interpersonal functions on the basis of their “fuzzy reference” function, overlapping to a certain extent in function with “discourse particles” (Aijmer, 2002, pp. 214, 228) or “discourse markers” (Schiffrin, 1987) such as *well, like, you know*, etc. As “pragmatic markers” (Aijmer, 2013), they can be classified as “pragmatic operators” (Ariel, 1994), but at the macro-semantic level, they belong to “metalinguistic operators” (Aijmer, 2002, p. 213), comparable with discourse markers such as *sort of, like*, etc.

These utterance-final constructions, due to their unique pragmatic functions, are widely favored among adolescents and have long surpassed their original single function of “vague category reference” or “categorization devices” (Overstreet & Yule, 1997b, p. 252). Their stable yet variable morphology, and diverse functions, while enriching English spoken expression, pose certain challenges for EFL learners in correct understanding and appropriate use. To date, China’s foreign language academia, based on Altenberg’s (1998) term “vagueness tags”, tends to adopt the term “fuzziness labels” (Zhang, 2009; 2013; Zhang; 2019), a term similar to “vague category markers” (Evison, McCarthy, & O’Keeffe, 2007). Given that such constructions do

not primarily serve the function of “category implication”, the term “fuzziness labels” or “vagueness tags” can no longer comprehensively reflect their multi-functionality. In light of their newly generated pragmatic functions, the “neutral” term “general extender”¹ has emerged.

The Rationale and Typological System of General Extenders

The Rationale of Terminological Designation

Based on the principle of cognitive-functional adaptability in terminology construction (Temmerman, 2000, pp. 49-51), the rationale for designating the term “general extenders” can be substantiated from three perspectives: First, semantic transparency. “General” directly points to the non-specificity of the core components of the construction, corresponding to the fuzzy essence of category boundaries in prototype category theory (Rosch, 1975, pp. 202-205). For example, the “stuff” in “and stuff” loses specific referentiality and instead activates abstract semantic features like [+classifiability] and [+similarity]. This process conforms to the “semantic bleaching mechanism” (Zhang & Fang, 1996)—when the entity nature of a word weakens, its categorial classifying function is reconfigured; Second, functional compatibility. This term breaks through the single-function limitation of traditional “set markers”, encompassing three pragmatic dimensions: referential function—activating potential category members through the conjunction “and/or” (e.g., “apples and stuff” → the subcategory of fruits), reflecting categorial exemplification function (Wang, 2022); interpersonal function—implementing negative face maintenance (Brown & Levinson, 1987) through fuzzification (hedging), such as “or something” weakening, by implying informational uncertainty, the imposition of a request (e.g., “Could you bring a charger *or something*?” is less forceful than a direct request); metapragmatic function—as a metapragmatic regulatory device (Silverstein, 1993), it guides the listener’s metacognitive monitoring of the speaker’s attitude through indexicality mechanisms (e.g., “I might need some help *or whatever*” implies open negotiation of the conversational turn). Third, typological adaptability. Cross-linguistic correspondences substantiate the theoretical flexibility of the term: The Chinese extender “...*shenme de*” (Zhang, 2001) in conversation serves both non-exhaustiveness and cognitive stance adjustment functions (e.g., “*mai dian pingguo, xiangjiao shenme de*” [buy some apples, bananas, and so on], exemplifying the food category and avoiding the imposition of shopping suggestions through intentional omission); Japanese “*toka*” achieves information omission through pragmatic inference triggered by exemplars, with its grammaticalization path (semantic bleaching → pragmatic function enrichment) constrained by principles of linguistic universality, sharing cognitive motivations with Chinese; Spanish “...*y eso*” (Portolés, 1998, pp. 189-205) coordinates communicative stances in sentence-final extensions, corroborating typological differences in “conjunctive explicitness” and “intonation pattern compensation”. In contrast, traditional terms such as “set markers” and “list completer(s)” (Jefferson, 1990, pp. 65-71), limited to single referential functions, exhibit mismatches between names and realities, failing to encompass the diverse pragmatic values derived from the construction’s semantic bleaching and subjectification over time.

¹ General extenders (GEs) have been translated variably: e.g., “*gài kuò kuò zhǎn yǔ*” (generalized extender) by Chen (2015) and “*tōng yòng yán shēn yǔ*” (universal extender) by Wu (2019) and Wu et al. (2023). However, Chen’s “*gaikuo*” (generalized) fails to capture the vagueness and generality of the construction’s semantics. Similarly, Wu’s “*tōng yòng*” (universal) misinterprets “general”, which emphasizes vagueness/generality rather than universality. Moreover, GEs’ essence lies in pragmatic buffering via “semantic blanking”, enabling listeners to autonomously fill this semantic space and generate associations. Thus, translating “extender” as “*tuò zhǎn yǔ*” (expander) better aligns with its pragmatic function.

The Dual Criteria of Typological Classification

The classification system of general extenders follows the principle of bipartition between form and semantics: Formally, they are divided into two types (Ball & Ariel, 1978, p. 36²) based on the type of conjunction—the first type is conjunctive (and-extendors), with “and” as the hub, extending similar items (e.g., “pens, paper, *and stuff*”), whose function is close to “additive conjunction” (Lü 1982, pp. 325-327); the second type is disjunctive (or-extendors), with “or” as the node, indicating possible alternative items, commonly found in negotiation contexts (e.g., “tea *or something else?*”), corresponding to the connective subcategory of “alternating choice”.

Semantically, they, based on the degree of referential restriction of the core component, are divided into: general-type—core nouns lack modifiers, with high semantic entropy; restricted-type—core nouns are modified by adjectives/prepositional structures, with low semantic entropy³. This bipartition is empirically supported: General-type core nouns trigger enhanced N400 amplitudes in ERP (Nieuwland, Ditman, & Kuperberg, 2010, p. 334), confirming that their referential uncertainty increases cognitive processing resource consumption.

The Diachronic Path of Functional Evolution

From a diachronic perspective, the functions of general extenders exhibit a unidirectional grammaticalization trajectory:

(1) Early stage (pre-1980s): as an indicating tool for category marking, with the core function being referential extension (Overstreet & Yule, 1997a, pp. 86-87⁴). Example: “Bring chairs, tables, *and stuff*”, where “and stuff” merely provides an open-ended prompt for the furniture category;

(2) Mid-stage (1990s-2010s): deriving interpersonal coordination functions, becoming a carrier of face strategies. Example: “Maybe we could meet at 5 *or something?*”, where “or something” weakens the imposition of the time;

(3) Recent stage (2010s-present): developing into a marker of metapragmatic awareness, regulating cognitive coordination between speakers and listeners. Example: “He’s kind of arrogant, *and all that*”, where “and all that” implies shared background to guide the listener’s inference.

This evolution is essentially a process of enhanced intersubjectivity (Traugott, 2010, p. 35), corroborating the universal law of language forms shifting from propositional functions to discursive functions.

Intersubjectivity: The Key to Enabling the Interpersonal Function of General Extenders

In communication, every individual is a speaking subject, simultaneously aware that the other is also one (Traugott, 2003a, p. 128). This interrelated relationship of speaking subjects is intersubjectivity. General extenders in dynamic speech involve the nature of participants’ social relationships (Overstreet, 1999, p. 65), fulfilling interpersonal functions.

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 (indicators) of intersubjectivity (Overstreet & Yule, 1997b, pp. 254-255).

² Ball and Ariel (1978, p. 36, as cited in Channell, 2000, pp. 21-22) define general extenders as follows: “The function of these tags is ‘to suggest, without specifying, other conjuncts or disjuncts similar in some relevant respect to the preceding’”.

³ The Delta value (Δ) is derived from the calculation of semantic entropy based on the BNC corpus, ranging from 0 to 1.

⁴ Overstreet and Yule (1997a, p. 87) adopt the terms “adjunctive general extenders” and “disjunctive general extenders”, whereas Aijmer (2013, p. 139) simply refers to them as “and-extendors” and “or-extendors”.

Example 1. The Park-Hyatt Coolum and places like that, Regency in Melbourne and things like that. (Aijmer, 2013, p. 141)

In Example 1, the speaker uses the two general extenders “and places like that” and “and things like that” to activate shared experience or knowledge about luxury hotels between both parties, creating an atmosphere of goodwill in the interaction, rather than unilaterally conveying categorial information. This kind of closeness between communicators is the most simple and real manifestation of intersubjectivity. Therefore, this paper selects the perspective of intersubjectivity to explore the interpersonal functions of general extenders and finds that their functions mainly lie in marking certain assumed shared knowledge and experience between communicators, as well as the shared conception of the world between them. This intersubjectivity is the foundation upon which the functions of general extenders are built. The use of general extenders helps establish and maintain this affinity⁵ based on assumed shared knowledge and experience, contributing to the reduced distance between interlocutors. This is the essence of the intersubjectivity behind the interpersonal functions of general extenders (Overstreet, 1999, p. 18). In other words, communicators can achieve convergent understanding because the speaker assumes certain shared knowledge and a shared conception of the world with the listener, which is precisely the inevitable result of their intersubjective awareness. Even if the two parties were not originally socially close, the use of general extenders still represents an implicit appeal to move closer (Overstreet, 1999, p. 66). General extenders build cognitive consensus by activating shared knowledge (the cognitive dimension of intersubjectivity), thereby generating interactive affinity (the social dimension of intersubjectivity), and the synergistic effect of the two ultimately drives the realization of communicative convergence.

Subjectivity and Intersubjectivity

Benveniste (1971) discussed “subjectivity in language”, arguing that once a speaker utters the personal pronoun “I” and contrasts it with the second person “you”, a “subject” is naturally constituted (pp. 224-225). He defined “subjectivity” as the ability of the speaker to posit himself as a “subject”, determined by the linguistic status of “person” (p. 224), and further recognized that the pairing of speaker and listener—an intersubjective relationship—is the fundamental condition of linguistic communication: In communication, each person is a language subject and simultaneously aware that the other is also a language subject. Benveniste concluded that discourse that discourse “... is language in so far as it is taken over by the person who is speaking and within the condition of intersubjectivity, which alone makes linguistic communication possible” (p. 230). This view is echoed by Traugott (2003a, p. 128).

Intersubjectivity is essentially an epistemological prerequisite for subjectivity. According to Benveniste, humans can establish themselves as subjects only by means of language, because only language can establish the concept of the speaker’s “self” in the reality in which language is constitutive, and “subjectivity” is the ability of the speaker to view themselves as a “subject”, determined by the linguistic status of “person” (1971, p. 224). From a linguistic perspective, “subjectivity” refers to the way in which natural language reflects the speaker’s self, beliefs, and attitudes through its structure and normal operational modes (Lyons, 1982, p. 102; Traugott, 2010, p. 3); “intersubjectivity” refers to the way in which natural language reflects the speaker’s consideration of the listener’s attitudes and beliefs, particularly their “face” or “self-image”, via its structural and conventional functioning (Traugott, 2010, p. 33; Overstreet, 2014, p. 118). In other words, every individual in daily

⁵ “Affinity” (*qīn hé gǎn*) is defined as “an assumed solidarity/closeness” or “a sense of rapport” (Overstreet, 1999, pp. 18, 66).

communication is a speaking subject, while simultaneously aware that the other is also a speaking subject (Traugott, 2003a, p. 128)—this mutuality of speaking subject awareness is intersubjectivity. Therefore, broadly speaking, daily communicative behavior entails intersubjectivity (Traugott, 2010, p. 32). Intersubjectivity involves both an epistemic aspect, taking into account the addressee's or reader's presumed attitudes toward the propositional content, and a social aspect, considering their face or image needs related to social stance and identity (Traugott, 2003a, p. 128).

How General Extenders Fulfill Interpersonal Functions: Manifestations of Intersubjectivity

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.

Perspective Reciprocity as the Prerequisite for Intersubjectivity

While their conceptualizations of the world vary, people in society often assume that humans share a common world and a shared body of knowledge (Husserl, 1929/1977, p. 92), and their behavioral patterns rest on the idea that the external world is sufficiently similar to oneself and others. This is the embryonic form of the concept of intersubjectivity. Before the term intersubjectivity became popular, the academic community used the term “reciprocity of perspectives” to describe such interactive behavior (Cicourel, 1974; Schegloff, 1992). This term, based on the presumption of shared knowledge and a shared world, was first introduced by Schutz (1973, pp. 11-12): Individuals engaged in coordinated actions with others assume the socially standardized and shared nature of their knowledge and will seek actively, even unconsciously, to sustain it. They accomplish this by maintaining the “reciprocity of perspectives” (Schutz, 1973, as cited in Heritage, 1984, p. 77). Perspective reciprocity (Schutz, 1973, pp. 11-12, 14) is a psychological process of inferring others' perspectives from one's own, the prerequisite for achieving “intersubjectivity” (Schegloff, 1992, p. 1297), and the [first] “interpretive procedure...basic to all interaction” (Cicourel, 1974, p. 34). Once social interactions rest on this universal operational foundation, discourse markers activating the aforementioned presumed shared experiences (i.e., intersubjectivity) appear in talk, e.g., “*you know what I mean*”, “*you know*”, or “*you name it*”.

Example 2. ...her people's stories I mean the competing stories put forth by psychoanalysis, Marxism, feminism, you name it, many of which are there to be adopted by the pliant-minded as their very own. <FROWN>

As shown in Example 2, the speaker directly appeals to the listener by means of “you name it” to regard the humanistic ideological schools beyond psychoanalysis, Marxism, and feminism as shared knowledge, implying the assumption of intersubjectivity that the listener can name such ideological schools.

General extenders, as markers of intersubjectivity, share a similar function with the above discourse markers, all signaling to the other party that you and I share common knowledge, common experiences, and common conceptual schemes; I don't need to spell everything out; you can supply whatever unstated background knowledge is needed to make sense of what I say (Overstreet, 1999, p. 68). For example:

Example 3. She looks like she works in a grocery store or anything. (Overstreet, 1999, p. 72)

Example 3 shows that the speaker activates a temporary categorization process based on shared background knowledge through the extender “or anything”, this pragmatic strategy presupposing that the listener can accurately infer the referred-to social type without explicit indication. The extender in Example 3, although exhibiting some degree of categorization function, is primarily used to achieve social proximity through the

signification of presumed shared experiences. This function reveals that all speech is inherently incomplete, and thus the speaker must presume both the listener's adherence to the Cooperative Principle and their competence in contextual inference.

At the same time, the use of general extenders also reflects the conversational strategy of "Say no more than you must and mean more thereby" (Traugott, 2003b, p. 634), which is directly related to Grice's (1975, pp. 45, 52) Cooperative Principle, specifically the Maxim of Quantity, and serves as the pragmatic-functional basis of conjunctive general extenders.

Intersubjectivity Based on Shared Knowledge and Experience

As discourse markers, the primary function of general extenders is to mark the presumed shared information and reciprocal perspectives between communicators. To deconstruct the specific information categories activated by general extenders within the intersubjectivity framework, three cognitive foundations must be examined: universal common sense, shared cultural knowledge, and group-specific knowledge. This linguistic phenomenon essentially constructs a shared cognitive space, achieving conceptual integration by implying that the speaker and listener share a willingness to cooperate and a common knowledge base. In short, extenders invite the listener into the speaker's social space (after Vygotsky), enabling presumed shared entities to co-occur in the collaborative making of meaning (Evison et al., 2007, pp. 140-141), as in Example 4 with "sausages" and "frankfurters".

Example 4.

B: I also picked up some tins of... *choucroute royale*, that's a cabbage thing oh yes mm frankfurter and sausages and things.

A: mm that's right (ICE-GB S1A-009#065-069).

The phrase "and things" implies that there is more or the list is not exhaustive. In this example, the speaker refers to items beyond just sausages and frankfurters. Although these items belong to an undetermined and unlexicalized category, they lie "within the shared cultural knowledge" (O'Keeffe, 2006, p. 129). The dish *choucroute royale* includes sausages, frankfurters, and other ingredients, rendering an exhaustive list redundant given the interlocutors' shared knowledge. Here, the general extender "and things" is employed, which results from the cooperative interaction between A and B.

Meanwhile, A's response, "mm that's right", indicates an understanding of this vague category, thereby confirming their mutual understanding.

The construction of intersubjectivity essentially depends on the dynamic mutual accommodation of the intentions and cognitive states of both communicators. In this process, extenders serve as markers of co-present shared knowledge, and the activated shared knowledge often exhibits group-specific exclusiveness—for example, in Example 5 (Overstreet, 1999, p. 70), when such markers encode private information, only the communicators can make sense of the meaning through in-group (coterie-specific) knowledge, while outsiders tend to face epistemic barriers.

Example 5. (George and Mary talk about their friends Dexter and Charlene)

Mary: Charlene is really unhappy with Dexter.

George: Why?

Mary: Y'know, she wants whales, candlelight, and stuff like that.

As illustrated in Example 5, outsiders typically experience a decoding failure upon hearing Mary's third-turn response. This comprehension barrier originates from a two-fold cognitive gap: (i) categorial conflict,

wherein “whales” and “candlelight” lack an inherent semantic association within conventional classification systems; and (ii) referential vagueness, as the extender “stuff like that” fails to provide a clear semantic anchor. Interpreting the actual referent of this utterance requires reconstructing the coterie-specific cognitive framework—namely, the romantic experiences (e.g., whale watching, candlelit dinners) shared by Mary and her boyfriend, George. This privileged interpretative access is a hallmark of intersubjectivity. As a member of this cognitive in-group, George can automatically activate an ad hoc category (Barsalou, 1983) via the “exemplar + extender” construction, which might be characterized as “elegant pursuits” or “refined romance”—practices that may include “cooking together”, “music appreciation”, etc. It is crucial to emphasize that the semantic boundaries of such categories are highly context-dependent and their accurate interpretation presupposes shared experiences. In this case, the general extender marks intersubjectivity by activating shared knowledge and presuming the listener will supplement implied information. The key difference across the examples lies in the knowledge base they draw upon: Example 3 relies on universal common sense, Example 4 on cultural common knowledge, whereas Example 5 on in-group knowledge.

Channell (1994/2000, p. 124) experimentally confirmed that the understanding of general extenders depends on a shared knowledge base: When 39 participants were asked to list associations for “They’ve got a car *and that*”, they produced over 50 unrelated answers (e.g., canoes, toilets, mortgages). This finding confirms two key points: (1) The actual referent of a general extender requires preexisting cognitive rapport between the speaker and the listener; (2) when intersubjectivity is disrupted (e.g., outsiders lack shared experience), the identification of category members becomes entirely erratic.

Intersubjectivity Co-Constructed Through Negotiation

Co-constructing understanding via micro-level negotiation is evident in real-time interactions, illustrated by Example 6—a police call transcript showcasing negotiated category membership.

Example 6.

Nicole: Well, my ex-husband just broke in... and he’s ranting and raving.

Operator: Has he been drinking or anything?

Nicole: No, but he is crazy.

Operator: Did he hit you?

Nicole: No.

(Language interaction between Nicole and the emergency operator; source: Overstreet & Yule, 1997a, p. 94)

Here, the operator’s use of “or anything” constructs an ad hoc category (centered on “drinking”), which Nicole then redefines through her negation. Such micro-negotiations reveal that linguistic understanding is fundamentally a co-construction of meaning based on shared experience, not unilateral decoding.

The Intersubjective Function of General Extenders as Highlighted by the Meta-Knowledge Marker “You Know”

As a more specific realization of intersubjectivity markers, meta-knowledge markers (e.g., “you know”) explicitly signal presumed shared consensus within a common cultural or social group, directly facilitating the construction of intersubjectivity and further strengthening the interactive collaborative function of general extenders. The primary function of “you know” is to mark “general consensual truths which speakers assume their hearers share through their co-membership in the same culture, society, or group” (Schiffrin, 1987, p. 274). It can also seek interactive alignment by establishing shared viewpoints.

General extenders serve as intersubjectivity markers, and the use of “you know” makes this function more salient by explicitly flagging presumed shared information or experience. In Example 7, Roger and Sara discuss how she would take over his apartment after his move. Roger’s use of “y’know—all that crap” achieves two intersubjective strategies simultaneously: The meta-knowledge marker “you know” makes explicit implicit rules, while the general extender “all that crap” bundles trivial categories. This dual marking maximizes communicative efficiency, allowing Sara, the hearer, to confirm the shared understanding with a simple “Yeah”.

Example 7.

Roger: that there is someone who will y’know like take it over, and under my recommendation as y’know—all that crap, ...

Sara: Yeah.

Roger: and they will um-and see—and like see if I get any feedback on their intentions about what they want to do. (Overstreet, 1999, p. 74)

Roger’s “y’know—all that crap” presupposes the shared knowledge of the cumbersome procedures for taking over the apartment, using “you know” to mark shared knowledge and “all that crap” to generically refer to related tasks, thus avoiding the need for tedious enumeration. Similarly, in Example 8, the meta-knowledge marker conveys the assumption that the speaker’s message aligns with what they assume the listener to know or believe (e.g., life as a game).

Example 8. He just kept talking about Life being a game and all. You know. (Salinger, 1951, p. 12)

The appearance of “you know” often signals older information or the speaker’s assumption that the listener should know the preceding discourse’s information. By using “you know”, the speaker aims to increase shared knowledge between interlocutors. This shared knowledge is typically neither conventional nor preexisting; rather, it emerges dynamically during interaction to serve specific purposes. Socially, “you know” acts as a monitor, prompting the listener to confirm prior information. Thus, communication is a process of continuously expanding shared knowledge, with “y’know/you know” serving as a key marker, which reminds the listener of known or presumed information to enhance mutual cognition, prompts further dialogue, or signals a desire for confirmation. Additionally, it guides and constrains discourse understanding, achieving pragmatic increment (Ran, 2002). Since “you know” directly marks shared information, while general extenders implicitly activate this shared information, the two often co-occur, jointly reinforcing intersubjective functions.

General Extenders as Instantiating Positive and Negative Politeness Strategies

Positive politeness strategies (Brown & Levinson, 1987, pp. 101, 129) aim to make the listener feel both valued and that their values are affirmed by the speaker, while negative politeness strategies (p. 129) involve vague phrasing to give the listener options or explicitly indicate unwillingness to interfere with their freedom of action. The intersubjectivity involved in general extenders essentially fosters a sense of affinity based on presumed shared knowledge and experience, which ties into politeness strategies. Specifically, conjunctive general extenders (e.g., *and stuff*) imply “additional options”, signaling “invited solidarity” and instantiating positive politeness; disjunctive general extenders (e.g., *or something, or anything, or whatever*) imply “alternative possibilities”, thereby mitigating imposition and exemplifying negative politeness.

Functions of conjunctive general extenders: First, they demonstrate positive politeness by signaling closeness to affirm the listener’s self-image; second, they perform a hedging function (in line with Grice’s Quantity Maxim) by subjectively foregrounding the speaker’s own stance. By presuming shared knowledge (e.g.,

common ground; Brown & Levinson, 1987, p. 103), conjunctive extenders both support both positive politeness (by valuing the listener) and underpin cognitive foundations for social closeness. Within the framework of positive-politeness-strategy analysis, these extenders signify “connection” and “social bonds”. Research consistently shows that frequent conjunctive extenders in modern English assume shared experiences and rapport, displaying the speaker’s positive-politeness-oriented concern for the listener’s self-image (Aijmer, 2002; Evison et al., 2007; Palacios Martinez, 2011; Overstreet & Yule, 1997b; Overstreet, 2014, p. 121). They dynamically negotiate intersubjectivity—enhancing its significance while reflecting collaborative attention to the cognitive attitudes and social identities between both speaker and listener.

Functions of disjunctive general extenders: Disjunctive general extenders instantiate two core functions: a hedging function (reducing information certainty in line with Grice’s Quality Maxim) and a tone mitigation function (avoiding threats to the addressee’s face and self-image). They prioritize speakers’ concern for their own utterance’s informational accuracy over concern for the addressee’s self-image, revealing a tendency toward self-focus inherent in this type. Consequently, disjunctive extenders are essentially subjective in nature. Notably, their use aims to minimize potential imposition on the addressee—an act that embodies a negative politeness strategy while conveying implicit intersubjective meaning (Overstreet, 2014, pp. 121-122).

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 (hedging)	Quality maxim

When a speaker risks appearing imposing, disjunctive extenders (e.g., *or something*) serve as a negative politeness strategy to mitigate the tone and alleviate pressure. For example, in “Could you pass me the scissors *or something*?”, adding “or something” draws on the common ground regarding the referent’s range. This lowers the imposition by signaling an intersubjective negotiation, which is central to negative politeness. Specifically, requests, invitations, or suggestions often resort to disjunctive extenders to achieve a mitigating effect that saves the addressee’s face.

Conclusion

Grounded in subjectivity and intersubjectivity theory, this study clarifies the terminological motivation of the linguistic term “English general extenders”, justifies the validity of the designation, and distinguishes functional differences between conjunctive and disjunctive types. Findings reveal: Conjunctive extenders, based on Grice’s Quantity Maxim (information reduction), activate positive politeness via presumed shared knowledge; disjunctive extenders, built on Grice’s Quality Maxim (hedging on informativeness), realize negative politeness via hedging and tone mitigation. Both strategies serve pragmatic accommodation in language’s interpersonal function. The vagueness of general extenders is essentially a cognitive tool for intersubjective negotiation. This probe provides a solid theoretical foundation for pragmatic awareness cultivation and communicative strategy training in English teaching.

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