

DO HEDGES ALWAYS HEDGE? ON NON-CANONICAL MULTIFUNCTIONALITY OF *JAKBY* IN POLISH¹

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Abstract

One of the canonical uses of *jakby* in Polish is that of the Lakoffian hedge, which modifies the propositional content of an utterance by pointing to its fuzziness, inexactitude or approximation. In conversational speech the word is frequently put to excessive use, which appears to significantly deviate from the prescribed one, and as such deserves closer attention. The aim of the present study, which makes use of corpus linguistics tools to collect naturally-occurring data and discourse analysis framework to manually examine them, is twofold. Initially, it sets out to examine the linguistic contexts of *jakby*, which are assumed to furnish valuable guidelines for sifting out the prototypical uses of the word from the innovative ones. Next, the focus shifts onto identifying context-sensitive functions of the latter in highly diversified stretches of discourse. The research findings demonstrate that the cotextual settings of the non-canonical *jakby* exhibit a number of distinctive characteristics, such as frequent co-occurrence of the word with pragmatic markers, reflexive discourse and unfilled pauses, all indicative of its relatively tenuous link with the neighbouring portions of text. As regards the functions of the unconventional *jakby*, the word emerges as a pragmatically multifunctional yet no longer hedging device, capable of, among others, facilitating floor-holding/-grabbing, helping to plan discourse, marking register clash and introducing elaboration on prior thought. Rich in pragmatic functions and syntactically more detached from the adjacent textual material than its canonical base, the investigated *jakby* appears to fit into the category of propositionally empty yet strategically salient pragmatic markers.

Keywords: Hedges; Pragmatic markers; (Non-)propositional meaning; (Non-)canonical use of language.

1. Introduction

As expressions communicating inexactitude/approximation and mitigating the force of propositions, hedges are complex, multi-faceted phenomena, which pose a number of tightly interwoven definitional, terminological and typological difficulties. These appear to arise principally from the fact that hedges, which entered the research arena over forty years ago, have attracted keen scholarly interest in diverse fields of study (including logical semantics, philosophy of language, pragmatics, discourse analysis, as

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well as cognitive and applied linguistics), where they have been investigated from many distinct theoretical and methodological angles.

While academic research on hedging devices is overall both extensive and diversified, in some languages they seem to have come under more thorough scrutiny than in others. In Polish, which is the focus of the present study, they fall into the category of relatively unexplored pragmatic phenomena. Yet, some illuminating comments on their nature can be found, among others, in Wierzbicka (1991) and Duszak (1994), who adopt a cross-linguistic/-cultural (Polish-English) perspective on hedging. Wierzbicka (1991: 44) observes that whereas “English is fond of understatement and of hedges (...), Polish tends to overstate (for emphasis) rather than understate”, and Duszak (1994) highlights the contribution of hedges, among other linguistic devices, to developing distinct intellectual styles in academic discourse.

In an attempt to allow a deeper insight into hedging mechanisms in Polish and advance the understanding of their uniqueness, the present study examines the use of *jakby*, which, to the best of my knowledge, has not yet received a systematic treatment, only brief mentions, such as the one in Miodek (1996) who comments on its excess in everyday speech. Importantly, it is not the hedging function of *jakby* (constituting one of its canonical uses) itself that is of particular interest here, but rather a frequent deviation from it, which is a relatively recent trend in spoken Polish, resulting in a substantial pragmatic expansion of the hedge. On the assumption that this contextual enrichment of *jakby* will be reflected in its cotextual embeddedness, initially the study sets out to investigate the immediate lexico-grammatical environment of the expression, such as its co-occurrence preferences and scope. Next, the attention refocuses onto identifying a range of novel, non-/less-hedging functions that the word can fulfil in diverse stretches of discourse.

Logically fallacious and stylistically indecorous, the use of *jakby* in (some of) the recognised contexts might be regarded as a mere disfluency phenomenon or an unfortunate peculiarity of speaking style, disrupting an otherwise smooth discourse flow and reducing the communicativeness of utterances. Nevertheless, even though serving as a gap filler may indeed underlie most, if not all, of the non-canonical uses of *jakby*, on numerous occasions the word proves successful at simultaneously performing salient pragmatic functions, which appear to override the purely mechanical pause filling. Somewhat counterintuitively, then, the unconventional *jakby* may, at least in some contexts, be considered to contribute to discourse fluidity and to boost communicative efficiency in interactions by yielding useful clues to the interpretation of propositions, alerting the hearers to various casual speech phenomena (e.g. self-repairs, false starts) and adding to the naturalness and spontaneity of talk.

2. Background

2.1. Hedges: Origins and definitional problems

In the original, semantically-oriented Lakoffian approach of 1972 hedges are conceptualised as “words whose meaning implicitly involves fuzziness [and] whose job

is to make things fuzzier or less fuzzy” (1972: 195).² As such, they comprise both ‘intensifiers’, like *very*, *really*, *exceptionally*, and ‘deintensifiers’, including words/phrases such as *sort/kind of*, *in a sense/way*, *somewhat* and many others.³ The point of departure for Lakoff’s (1972) study is a firm belief that a standard practice in Formal Logic of interpreting sentences in natural languages in terms of truth values, i.e. classifying them as true, false or ‘nonsense’, is a major misconception, since natural language concepts are marked by a substantial degree of vagueness and fuzziness (Lakoff 1972: 183). Accordingly, category membership is construed as gradable rather than rigidly fixed, and hedges as effective instruments for manifesting this gradability.⁴

With time, this narrow Lakoffian construal of a hedge as a marker of fuzziness turned out insufficient to fully account for the inner workings of the phenomenon, notably for its communicative functions, and so the concept began to be perceived as a pragmatically-motivated, context-sensitive linguistic device. Markkanen and Schröder (1997) attribute the first pronounced shift in focus to research on hedged performatives, principally Fraser’s (1975) interpretation of modals and semi-modals in performative sentences as affecting their illocutionary force in a hedging fashion. The next critical step towards a further extension of the concept is believed to be centrally concerned with the recognition of hedges not only as devices affecting the truth-value of propositions by means of making their component parts more or less fuzzy, but also as modifiers of speakers’ commitment to the truth of the propositional content of entire utterances, the distinction drawn clearly in Prince et al. (1982) and Hübler (1983). The most remote interpretation of the original notion of a hedge appears to be peculiar to more dynamic pragmatic approaches, where the phenomenon is perceived as fulfilling valuable strategic functions on the interactional plane of discourse (Markkanen and Schröder 1997: 4–5).

Such a broad conceptual framework offered by pragmaticists and discourse analysts allowed for scrutinising hedges from diverse vantage points, such as speech act theory (e.g. Blum-Kulka 1985; Flowerdew 1991; Meyer 1997; Tchizmarova 2005), politeness (e.g. Brown and Levinson 1978; Myers 1989; Itakura 2013), vagueness (e.g. Zuck and Zuck 1985; Channell 1990, 1994; Cutting 2007), modality (e.g. Holmes 1982,

² George Lakoff, who was the first to introduce the term ‘hedge’ as a technical label (in contrast to its ordinary, non-specialist use), is popularly believed to have pioneered hedging research. Yet, hedges had previously been examined by Weinreich (1966) under the name ‘metalinguistic operators’ (e.g. *true*, *real*, *so-called*, *strictly speaking*) as well as Zadeh (1965, 1971) and Heider [Rosch] (1971). In point of fact, Zadeh’s (1965) fuzzy set theory, which holds that individual items are not absolute members of a particular category but fit into it only to a certain degree, provided Lakoff with a theoretical framework, and Heider’s experiment in psychology on people’s perception of category membership offered an additional empirical underpinning for his study on fuzziness and hedging.

³ See also Brown and Levinson (1978: 150) who conceive of a hedge as “a particle, word, or phrase that modifies the degree of membership of a predicate or noun phrase in a set; it says of that membership that it is *partial* or true only in certain respects, or that it is *more* true and complete than perhaps might be expected” (emphasis in the original). Importantly, their interpretation of hedging devices, approached from the angle of politeness phenomena, goes far beyond this limited definition thereof.

⁴ Interestingly enough, in the 1980s, when his focus shifted onto more cognitively-oriented investigations of linguistic phenomena, Lakoff (1982, 1986, 1987) reinterpreted his original understanding of hedges, drawing heavily on Fillmore’s frame semantics and Kay’s experimental studies within the framework of idealised cognitive model (ICM) theory (Clemen 1997: 238).

1984; Mortelmans 2012), cognition (e.g. Vass 2004; Fetzer 2009, 2010), discourse markers/particles (e.g. Fraser 1990; Redeker 1990; Aijmer 2002), genre (e.g. Hyland 1998; McLaren-Hankin 2008; Abdollahzadeh 2011; Behnam, Naeimi and Darvishzade 2012), cross-linguistic/-cultural comparison (e.g. Poveda Cabanes 2007; Defrancq and De Sutter 2010; Hu and Cao 2011; Jalilifar and Alavi-Nia 2012; Yang 2013), just to name those which seem to feature most prominently in a voluminous literature on the subject. While offering a remarkable insight into the nature of the phenomenon, this heterogeneity of research perspectives and methods contributed substantially to definitional and terminological chaos. Yet, the following definition of hedges and hedging in pragmatics offered by Schröder and Zimmer (1997) is a particularly apt one, neatly capturing the complexity of the concept (understood both as a linguistic device and a communicative strategy) and the diversity of related research: “A hedge is either defined as one or more lexico-syntactical elements that are used to modify a proposition, or else, as a strategy that modifies a proposition. The term ‘hedging’ is used to refer to the textual strategies of using linguistic means as hedges in a certain context for specific communicative purposes, such as politeness, vagueness, mitigation, etc.” (Schröder and Zimmer 1997: 249).

As can be seen, the concept of a hedge was constantly being reformulated as the focus of scholarly attention was shifting away from the initial logico-semantic onto more explicitly pragmatic accounts of the phenomenon. The key contributory factor to this conceptual reorientation, and at the same time the common denominator of all pragmatic approaches to hedges, appears to be the recognition of the central role of a broadly understood context in their comprehensive description. This is tantamount to envisioning hedges as “determined by context (type of discourse), the colloquial situation and the speaker’s/writer’s intention, plus the background knowledge of the interlocutors” and hedging as “implicit at the level of utterance and not explicit in any lexical unit” (Clemen 1997: 243).

2.2. Typological approaches to hedges

Strongly interlaced with the above-mentioned conceptual (and thus definitional and terminological) intricacies are difficulties with providing an accurate typological account of hedging devices, which form a highly heterogeneous and open-ended category. As Nikula (1997: 190) observes, due to the fact that hedges are typically context-bound phenomena in that individual words, phrases and constructions cannot serve a hedging function unless contextualised, their number is practically infinite, which renders compiling a full inventory thereof virtually impossible (cf. also Clemen 1997: 236).

Yet, this is not to say that academic research on hedging is lacking in typological attempts, which in point of fact tended to accompany the description of the phenomenon right from the outset and greatly advanced its understanding by helping to illuminate the complexities of its elaborate structure. A notable contribution to categorising hedges appears to be Prince et al.’s (1982) dichotomy between semantically-oriented ‘approximators’ (e.g. *sort of*) and pragmatically salient ‘shields’ (e.g. *I think*). The former are conceived of as devices which modify the propositional content of an

utterance by marking the degree of fuzziness of its individual components, thus highlighting their non-prototypical category membership. The latter, by contrast, rather than signalling fuzziness within a proposition, are deemed to be exponents of fuzziness between the propositional content and the speaker, and, more specifically, of the degree of his/her commitment to (or assessment of) the truth of an entire proposition. The distinction seems crucial not only because it brings to attention the semantics/pragmatics divide in the description of hedges, but also due to accentuating the distinct scopes of their influence, as evident in the elements they modify, i.e. single words or phrases in the case of approximators and whole propositions in the case of shields.⁵

Owing to a rather disorderly use of terminology in hedging research, the devices subsumable under ‘shields’ in Prince et al. (1982) are elsewhere frequently encountered under the label ‘epistemic hedges’, as their functions seem to widely echo those fulfilled by epistemic modal auxiliaries. In critical literature the correlation between hedging and epistemic modality (understood as “unwillingness to make an explicit and complete commitment to the truth of propositions” and related to “items used to display confidence, or lack of confidence, in the truth of propositional information” (Hyland 1998: 3, 44)) is essentially presented in two ways, i.e. either hedging is taken to be a blanket term subsuming epistemic modality as a lower-order category, or the reverse is the case (cf. Markkanen and Schröder 1997: 7; Hyland 1998: 3). Be that as it may, the concepts overlap to a remarkable extent, and so the affinity between them, however challenging as a theoretical construct, appears relatively straightforward and easy to see in practice.⁶ The oft-quoted and illustrative example of the correspondence is the modal auxiliary *may* in English, which, when used for constructing hypotheses, is both a carrier of epistemic modality and a hedging device. Yet, modal auxiliaries are not the sole exponents of either epistemic modality or hedging. For instance, in Hyland (1998) it is lexical verbs, followed by adverbs and adjectives, that top the list of items expressing epistemic meaning in scientific research articles, whereas modal verbs score comparatively low, outnumbering only modal nouns in the lexical category. What is more, lexical items, though preponderant as markers of epistemic meaning, do not exhaust all possibilities here and, according to Hyland (1998), their hedging functions can also be successfully fulfilled by a fair number of rarer but equally effective non-lexical devices, such as IF-clauses, questions, passivisation, contrast markers, impersonal phrases and time reference (Hyland 1998: 45).

The discussion on the interconnectedness between hedging and epistemic modality is of major significance for outlining the relevant typological attempts at hedges, as it lays the groundwork for yet another essential dichotomy frequently encountered in the literature on the subject, namely one between ‘epistemic’ and

⁵ A comparable bipartite division can be found in Hübler (1983), who differentiates between ‘understatements’ (i.e. markers of the so-called ‘pragmatic indeterminacy’), bearing a close resemblance to Prince et al.’s (1982) ‘approximators’, and ‘hedges’ (i.e. indicators of ‘neustic indeterminacy’), roughly synonymous with ‘shields’ (for alternative attempts at classifying hedges see Caffi (1999, 2007) and Diewald (2006)).

⁶ While hedging is typically assumed to map onto the epistemic type of modality only (see, for instance, Hyland 1998: 105), Markkanen and Schröder (1997: 7) are of the opinion that on some occasions deontic modals, such as the hypothetical *would* in English, are strongly reminiscent of hedges and should be interpreted as such.

‘strategic’ hedges, to use Mauranen’s (2004) terminology (cf. Myers 1989; Varttala 1999). By and large, the former are believed to modify the proposition of an utterance by means of indicating the degree of the speaker’s commitment to its validity, whereas the latter are said to have no bearing on propositional content and to serve purely interpersonal and interactional functions, chiefly mitigating illocutionary force to minimise a potential imposition to the hearer (e.g. toning down opinions or softening criticism for the sake of adhering to communicative politeness principles) and stimulating discourse flow.⁷ Mauranen’s (2004: 194) findings based on her research into hedges in academic talk reveal that markers of vagueness (like *kind of, sort of, or so, or something*) display a tendency towards epistemic uses, while mitigators (such as *a little bit, just*) are closer to the strategic end of the spectrum. Although this two-way distinction may hold considerable theoretical appeal, the author cautions against such a rigid dichotomisation, highlighting two facts, namely that one hedge may fulfil both functions, depending on context, and that even in a single context it may be highly problematic to differentiate between epistemic and strategic uses, as they sometimes tend to shade into one another, yielding a substantial number of in-between cases.

The significance of context is also pointed up in Clemen’s (1997) typically pragmatic and holistic approach to cataloguing hedging devices, which is premised on the assumption that “hedging is achieved primarily by setting utterance in context rather than by straightforward statement” and “can be deduced only from the combination of the individual clausal elements plus the relevant illocution” (Clemen 1997: 235, 243). More specifically, hedging is perceived as a pragmatic strategy involving politeness, indirectness, mitigation, vagueness and understatement, which can be obtained by employing a vast array of ‘modifying devices’, namely hedged performatives, epistemic qualifiers, modal verbs, modal particles/downtoners, etc., adjectives/adverbs, certain personal pronouns, passive/passive infinitive, impersonal/indirect constructions, parenthetical constructions, subjunctive/conditional, concessive conjunctions and negation (Clemen 1997: 243). The principal asset of such an integrated approach is that it affords a bird’s-eye view of the phenomenon and helps to capture its complexity as both a linguistic tool and a dynamic communicative strategy which entails context-sensitive negotiation of meanings.

3. The data, method and objectives of the study

As mentioned above, the subject of this study is the Polish word *jakby* which, in spoken language, has recently been put to excessive use, while receiving comparatively little

⁷ Interestingly enough, Mauranen (2004) does not limit the interpretation of epistemic hedges to mere considerations of their impact on propositional content, observing that expressions which “deal with the referential function of language rather than the interactive or strategic function, constitute a larger category than that which can be assessed by reference to truth value”, and that “[t]he epistemic category therefore comprises primarily referential uses in addition to propositional ones” (Mauranen 2004: 176, 177).

scholarly attention and no systematic treatment.⁸ Essentially, dictionary entries give three uses of the word. In *Słownik języka polskiego* (Szymczak 1978), for instance, it is defined in the following fashion: 1. “weakened *jak* in comparative functions” (e.g. *Mizerny JAKBY z krzyża zdjęty*. ‘Looking more dead than alive.’; *lit.* ‘Looking poor like/as if taken down from a cross.’), 2. “a particle attenuating the literal sense of a word it accompanies; about something similar to something else, resembling or triggering associations with something” (e.g. *Patrząc na nią doznawał JAKBY zawrotu głowy*. ‘Looking at her was making him feel *sort (kind) of/somewhat* dizzy.’); (*colloq. phrase*) *tak jakby* ‘almost, virtually’ (e.g. *W tym roku zimy TAK JAKBY nie było*. ‘There has been *almost/virtually* no winter this year.’), 3. (*colloq.*) “a word equivalent to the conjunctions *gdyby, jeżeliby* ‘if’, containing a condition on which performing a given activity may be dependent” (e.g. *JAKBYŚ miała czas, wpadnij do nas*. ‘If you had time, drop in on us.’) (translation mine).

The three uses of *jakby* are also found in *Słownik języka polskiego* online, where, however the word has two separate entries. *Jakby I* is understood as “a particle indicating that a proposition expressed in a sentence does not correspond exactly with an actual state of affairs” (e.g. *Wszystko w jego żołądku zaczęło JAKBY pulsować*. ‘Everything in his stomach started to *sort (kind) of* pulsate.’) (translation mine), which makes it exactly synonymous with point 2 in the previous definition, whereas *jakby II* acts as a conjunction whose function can be twofold, i.e. roughly equivalent to 1 above on some occasions and precisely correspondent with 3 on others.

In reference to these fundamental uses when discussing the importunity of *jakby* in Polish, Miodek (1996: 15) highlights their exclusive legitimacy and observes that overusing the word is not only a logical fallacy but also a stylistic shortcoming, as it disrupts communication flow by deflecting the hearer’s attention away from the content of a message onto its form. Yet, despite getting an unfavourable reception from linguists, the practice of crossing the boundaries of the accepted, dictionary uses has become so increasingly widespread that the intrusive *jakby* started to function as a vogue word.

Importantly, of all the provided dictionary definitions of *jakby*, it is only its use as a particle, explicated under 2 and *jakby I* above, that falls within the ambit of this research, as it is only there that it fulfils strictly hedging functions, and its unconventional applications appear to be a departure or deviation precisely from its canonical role as a hedge. Directly affecting the propositional content of an utterance by means of specifying the degree of its inexactitude or approximation, *jakby* as a hedge seems to fit neatly the Lakoffian definition of the phenomenon and, at the same time, to serve as a prototypical ‘approximator’ in Prince et al.’s (1982) nomenclature. For the sake of terminological transparency this hedging use will be referred to in the paper as ‘canonical’, whereas all other uses that fail to tally with the prescribed ones will be labelled ‘non-canonical’. It is the latter that will be the focal centre of interest in the present study, which is designed to examine the co(n)textual embeddedness of such atypical uses of *jakby* and the scope of pragmatic functions the word is capable of performing. It should be emphasised that such facets of context as participant

⁸ Schröder and Zimmer (1997: 252) remark that until the second half of the 1980s linguistic hedging tended to be the province of researchers working chiefly on English and German, and that in the bibliography they compiled publications in other languages account for less than 2%.

framework, register, text type and sociolinguistic factors (like age, gender, class, education, etc.) are outside the remit of this paper. The study, which is both quantitative and qualitative in nature, combines corpus linguistics tools used to extract data and discourse analysis framework applied to manually examine them.

On the assumption that the discussed phenomenon is constrained principally to the conversational mode of communication, the empirical data were retrieved from the spoken sub-corpus of the National Corpus of Polish (Narodowy Korpus Języka Polskiego (NKJP)) through a search engine designed specifically for browsing spoken material (see Pęzik 2012). The entire data set consisted of transcripts of recorded conversations, which comprised 205,197 utterances and 2,372,186 words. The corpus allowed ready access to 2,227 occurrences of *jakby* in its various uses. Nevertheless, since all non-hedging dictionary uses were beyond the scope of the study, they had to be manually sifted out from the relevant data, which, in the end, amounted to 82.98% of the total number of instances of *jakby* (see Table 1 below). While this volume of data seems sufficient for non-automated, qualitative research targeted at examining context-bound subtleties of the use of the word, such as its discourse functions, the study is exploratory, as new material is always likely to yield fresh insight into the workings of the phenomenon, rendering the present findings on its nature inconclusive.

4. The study

4.1. Separating canonical from non-canonical uses of 'jakby'

A necessary prelude to the study proper was the process of cleaning the available data retrieved from the NKJP, which involved a careful, manual sifting out of the relevant uses of *jakby* from the irrelevant ones. As mentioned above, the former category comprised all canonical instances of the word as a hedge coupled with non-canonical deviations from this function, whereas the non-hedging dictionary uses of *jakby* in comparative(-like) and conditional(-like) sentences (including its phraseological combinations, as in *jakby nie było* 'be that as it may', *jakby (sic!)/jak by to powiedzieć* 'how to say that' or *wrażenie jakby* 'impression that') were considered inapplicable to the present investigation and disregarded accordingly. The results of such a data filtering process can be tabulated in the following fashion:

Table 1. Token and percentage distribution of relevant and irrelevant uses of *jakby* in the NKJP

	<i>Comparative</i>	<i>Conditional</i>	<i>Unclear</i>	<i>Other</i>	<i>Total</i>	
<i>Irrelevant data</i>	267 (11.99%)	89 (4.00%)	23 (1.03%)	-	379 (17.02%)	2,227 (100%)
<i>Relevant data</i>	-	-	-	1,848 (82.98%)	1,848 (82.98%)	

The successive stage in the data collection consisted in separating the relevant data into canonical and non-canonical uses of *jakby*, which presented a number of considerable difficulties related to laying down objective criteria for such a dichotomisation. Most

importantly, from the outset the study was bound to be fraught with the logical problem of circularity in the adopted research method. In terms of methodological accuracy the most desirable approach to grouping the data might seem to be a meticulous examination and juxtaposition of the immediate linguistic contexts of *jakby* in conventional and unconventional uses. Yet, apart from being based on the the assumption that such contexts could yield reliable clues for differentiating between both types of usage, which in itself is a potentially faulty premise, the method would involve a serious logical fallacy, necessitating recourse to already existing bipartite division of the use of *jakby*, based most likely on intuitive judgements. In other words, prior knowledge of canonical and non-canonical contexts of *jakby* is a *sine qua non* for distinguishing between both types of its uses to the same extent as the existence of such a distinction is indispensable for exploring the differences between customary and non-standard contextual settings of the word.

In view of the circularity problem and consequent lack of any solid foothold, a fundamental premise was made in the study that the conventional uses of *jakby* were more likely to be encountered in the written language, whereas the atypical ones were in the main a spoken phenomenon. This gave sufficient reason to regard the written part of the NKJP (primarily prose passages) as a fairly reliable source of information about the linguistic environments of canonical *jakby*. Having been successfully retrieved from the corpus, they were thoroughly scrutinised and juxtaposed with more or less conventional contexts of the word, encountered in the already mentioned spoken sub-corpus of the NKJP. On the assumption that the written contexts could serve as a template for the canonical uses, any mismatch between them and their spoken counterparts was considered atypical.

This comparative analysis made it possible to identify a number of marked differences between the two types of linguistic behaviour of *jakby*. Firstly, it was observed that the unconventional *jakby*, unlike its canonical base, tended to frequently co-occur with a variety of semantically empty pragmatic markers (PMs), characteristic of carrying procedural rather than conceptual meaning (to use the cognitivist terminology), and thus offering guidelines on the correct interpretation of the semantic content of utterances.⁹ The most typical PMs noticed in the immediate vicinity of *jakby* comprised (*to*) *znaczy* (*lit.* 'that is'), broadly equivalent to the PM *well* in English, (*no bo*) *wiesz* '(well) you know', *no* 'well', *tak?* 'right?', *gdzieś tam* (*lit.* 'somewhere there') 'in a way/sense', *tam* (*lit.* 'there') 'well' (in some of its contexts), as can be seen in the following examples:¹⁰

⁹ In an extensive critical literature on the subject the phenomena labelled here 'pragmatic markers' are discussed under a vast array of alternative (often only partially overlapping) names, some of which include the following: 'discourse marker', 'conversational marker', 'discourse particle', 'pragmatic particle', 'discourse connective', 'pragmatic connective', 'discourse operator', 'metalinguistic operator', 'cue marker', 'cue phrase', 'contextualization cue', 'discourse signalling device' (see, for instance, Brinton 1996; Hansen 1998; Schourup 1999; Mišković-Luković 2006).

¹⁰ In most cases, a regular translation of examples was deemed sufficient to illustrate a point, yet the remainder required explanatory glossing. In the latter case a gloss line was supplemented with free translation only when it was technically feasible, i.e. in utterances expressing a complete and (relatively) coherent thought, and when glossing was considered not to furnish enough clues to their meaning.

- (1) (...) mnie pociągnęła sama to znaczy . wiesz *JAKBY* . no wydaje mi się, że (...). (18, 2138, 2009)
 (...) I got attracted to the very convention PM . PM Ø¹¹ . PM it seems to me that (...).
- (2) (...) wszystkie z tych trochę *JAKBY* gdzieś tam grają rolę. (8, 1094, 2010)
 (...) all of these causes (...) slightly Ø PM play a role.
- (3) (...) dla mnie *JAKBY* . tak ? ważniejszą taką normą jest felieton. (14, 1653, 2009)
 (...) for me Ø . PM ? a more important sort of norm is a column.
- (4) znaczy nie nie nie no bo wiesz Mario też mi tam nic
 PM neg. neg. neg. PM PM PM Mario Mario also me PM nothing
 (nom. sing. masc.) (dat.)
 nie *JAKBY* no wiesz no on mi nic nie *JAKBY* nie zawinił.
 (480, 143649, 2010)
 neg. Ø PM PM PM he me nothing neg. Ø neg. do
 (dat.) harm.
 (3rd sing. past ind. masc.)

The final utterance, where the concept intended by the speaker could easily be encapsulated in 5, instead of 24, words (*Mario nic mi nie zawinił*. ‘Mario did not do me any harm.’), serves as a vivid illustration of how typically spoken phenomena, like repetitions and pragmatic markers, work. With 8 occurrences of the latter, it provides tangible evidence for a close correlation between the presence of such pragmatic devices and lack of canonicity of *jakby*.

Secondly, it turned out that on numerous occasions the unconventional *jakby* was immediately surrounded by pauses, both empty (indicated in the corpus by a dot) and filled with reflexive discourse (represented by *y*, *yy*, *yyy*), which was noticeable already in examples 1 and 3 above and is plainly evident from the following sentence:

- (5) To pomaga w poznaniu ale jednocześnie też . *y* . *JAKBY* można powiedzieć ogranicza możliwości. (92, 13459, 2009)
 It facilitates cognition but at the same time also . *um* . Ø you can say it limits possibilities.

Thirdly, it was noted that, in comparison to the standard, the non-canonical *jakby* displayed a marked tendency towards a broader syntactic scope, understood as a range

¹¹ In all translations and glossing of the discussed examples this symbol stands for the non-canonical uses of the semantically empty yet pragmatically rich *jakby*.

of elements it modified.¹² Essentially, the conventional scope of the word proved to be limited to the adjacent nouns (or NPs), verbs (or VPs), adjectives (or AdjPs) and adverbs (or AdvPs), as illustrated with examples 6, 7, 8 and 9 below:

- (6) Książd Grozd niósł (...) zaświadczenie czy *JAKBY* [pokwitowanie wszystkich odprawionych mszy] (...). (112, 1936)
Priest Grozd was carrying (...) a certificate or *a sort of* [a receipt for all celebrated masses] (...).
- (7) Moczydłowski przebił go kordelasem (...) Teraz pies *JAKBY* [oszalał]. (170, 1953)
Moczydłowski stabbed him with a hunting knife (...) Now the dog *sort of* [went mad].
- (8) (...) urwał nagle i *JAKBY* [zawstydzony] odstąpił od okna. (206, 1936)
(...) he suddenly broke off and *sort of* [ashamed] moved away from the window.
- (9) (...) zachowywała się ostrożnie i *JAKBY* [nieśmiało]. (52, 1936)
(...) she was behaving carefully and *sort of* [shyly].

Conversely, the non-standard scope of *jakby* tended to extend over entire clauses, as shown in examples 10 and 11:

- (10) (...) to mnie zaskakiwało . ale *JAKBY* [miałam inne jakieś potrzeby wiesz]. (81, 11931, 2008)
(...) this would surprise me . but \emptyset [I had some other needs you know].
- (11) (...) badania wskazują, że ludzie młodzi mają z tym problem i *JAKBY* . [ja też się spotkałem z czymś takim]. (3, 342, 2010)
(...) research shows that young people have a problem with it and \emptyset . [I have also come across something like that].

The recognition of the possibility of scope expansion made it difficult in many cases to identify the originally intended scope. In examples 12 and 13 the candidates for scope included the bracketed NPs, on the one hand, and whole clauses, on the other:

- (12) (...) telewizja Trwam i radio Maryja . gdzie *JAKBY* [[tych momentów refleksji] . jest bardzo dużo]. (3, 221, 2010)
(...) Trwam TV and Radio Maryja . where \emptyset [[those moments of reflection] . are numerous].
- (13) i i *JAKBY* [[uwieńczeniem według mnie tej interpretacji] jest dzisiejsza zgoda]. (89, 13193, 2009)
and and \emptyset [[a culmination in my opinion of this interpretation] is today's agreement].

Equally grave problems with identifying the proper scope were presented by the fact that in the spoken corpus *jakby* tended to shift the canonical premodifier position in relation to scope onto that of a postmodifier.¹³ In consequence, it sometimes proved

¹² It should be stressed that the use of the term 'scope' may seem more accurate with respect to the established, dictionary (rather than any atypical) use of *jakby* as the Lakoffian hedge, since it is only there that the word truly modifies the adjacent elements by means of specifying the degree of their membership in a given category. As far as the irregular uses are concerned, in turn, it is often difficult to determine if any approximation or inexactitude is intended, and, in consequence, if *jakby* is in any way correlated with what it precedes or rather detached from it.

¹³ Importantly, the atypically shifted position of *jakby* did not automatically index its non-canonicity. This can be seen in the following examples, where the word functions as a standard approximator, prototypically modifying the scope that it, nevertheless, non-prototypically follows:

- (14) (...) i robisz sobie takie takie te [opatrunki] *JAKBY*. (186, 29968, 2009)
(...) and you put on those those [dressings] *sort of*.

highly challenging, or altogether unfeasible, to settle beyond a shadow of doubt which of the competing scopes, the preceding or the following one, was the original intention of the author:

- (16) (...) nie ma żadnego [klarownego] *JAKBY*. [planu politycznego]. (28, 3299, 2010)
 (...) there is no [clear] \emptyset . [political plan].
- (17) (...) wydaje mi się, że tu arcybiskup Muszyński [trochę na wyrost] *JAKBY* [interpretuje pewne działania polityczne]. (300, 66342, 2010)
 (...) it seems to me that here archbishop Muszyński [somewhat excessively] \emptyset [interprets certain political activities].

An accurate identification of scope could have been appreciably aided by prosodic information, yielding insight into stress, rhythm and intonation structure, which was, however, lacking in the examined corpus. At the same time, some helpful guidance was offered by the presence of hedges, like *trochę* ‘somewhat, slightly’ in example 17, to which *jakby* appeared to lend additional support, thus emerging as more firmly attached to the preceding rather than the following portion of text. Similarly, a valuable clue was also uncovered in speakers’ repeated attempts at finding the most suitable wording for communicating ideas effectively, which could easily be envisaged as accompanied by *jakby* in its hedging function. This is demonstrated in example 18 below, where, accordingly, the intended scope seems to be the one appearing to the left of the word:

- (18) (...) okres kiedy . źródło historyczne tych mitów [ogniwo pierwotne] *JAKBY* [się zrodziło] może nie ma specjalnego znaczenia. (89, 13172, 2009)
 (...) the period when . the historical source of these myths [the origin] \emptyset [was born] may not be of special importance.

Fourthly, differentiating between the prescribed and unconventional use of *jakby* was also greatly facilitated by a careful inspection of elements seemingly modified by the word in its canonical, hedging function. It was noticed that although they created the impression of making prototypical scopes, there was, in fact, no logical reason for modifying them with any marker of inexactitude, as they represented the exact rather than approximate members of a given set. This is illustrated in the examples to follow:

- (19) (...) w tej sprawie są i stare i nowe y . *JAKBY* [okoliczności]. (15, 1723, 2009)
 (...) in this case there are both old and new em . \emptyset [circumstances].
- (20) (...) wchodzi w tej chwili . *JAKBY* [w życie] nowy podział. (52, 7846, 2010)
 (...) at the moment a new division is coming . \emptyset [into effect].
- (21) (...) nie ma tego w żadnym parlamencie *JAKBY* [europejskim]. (8, 1166, 2010)
 (...) there is nothing like that parlament \emptyset [European].
 in any (loc. sing. masc.) (loc. sing. masc.)
 ‘There is nothing like that in any parliament (which is) sort of European.’

-
- (15) (...) czyli to jest taki taka [surowa architektura] *JAKBY*. (156, 22627, 2008)
 (...) so this is this (masc.) this (fem.) [crude architecture] sort of.

- (22) (...) ta książka (...) miała wydanie również . *JAKBY*. [australijskie].
 (...) this book (...) had edition also . \emptyset . [Australian].
 (acc. sing. neut.) (acc. sing. neut.)
 'This book had also an edition (which was) *sort of* Australian.'

At first glance the bracketed items seemed to constitute the standard, narrow scope of the hedging *jakby* in that they adjoined it directly and represented syntactic categories peculiar to such a context (i.e. noun, adverbial phrase and adjective). Yet, this illusion was dispelled upon recognizing the fact that the words/phrases were perfectly suitable candidates for the slots, be it for reasons of phraseology, as in examples 19 and 20 (*okoliczności w sprawie* 'circumstances of a case' and *wchodzić w życie* 'come into effect' being fixed phrases), or logic, as in 21 and 22 (*europejski* 'European' used in relation to parliament and *australijski* 'Australian' with reference to book edition emerging as nonsensical when hedged by *jakby*).

Alongside the dictionary definitions of *jakby* and inevitable native speaker intuitive judgements, the above mentioned four observations on the linguistic environment of the word were regarded as sufficiently reliable guidelines for drawing a distinction between its customary and innovative uses. As could have been predicted, the process was fraught with a number of major difficulties, some of which, namely those related to scope identification, were already discussed above. Others were concerned with the fact that such a rigorous two-way division often proved impossible to make, as some examples from the corpus were simply not amenable to it, representing points along a cline of canonicity rather than either of the opposite poles. For the sake of methodological expediency all problematic in-between cases, together with those presenting scope-related difficulties, were disregarded in further stages of the study (see the 'unclassified' category in Table 2 below). The results of the data grouping can be numerically represented in the following fashion:

Table 2. Token and percentage distribution of relevant canonical and non-canonical uses of *jakby* in the NKJP

	Canonical	Non-canonical	Unclassified
Relevant data	498 (26.95%)	1,184 (64.07%)	166 (8.98%)
Total	1,848 (100%)		

4.2. Functions of non-canonical 'jakby'

While the unconventional use of *jakby* can simply be regarded as an unwelcome deviation from the accepted norm, and as such deemed unworthy of scholarly attention, upon closer inspection, it appears to be a salient spoken language phenomenon serving a number of pragmatic functions, the most prominent of which are catalogued below.¹⁴

¹⁴ The term 'pragmatic' in relation to function is considered here preferable to 'discourse', as it is customarily regarded to be more capacious and to subsume discourse functions as a lower-order category (see Fischer 2006: 6).

For the sake of clarity the fact that they frequently overlap is disregarded, and so they are presented as discrete entities.

(I) *Jakby* as a floor-holding/-grabbing device

This function of *jakby* correlates with the occurrence of the word in the final position of an interrupted turn. From the speaker's point of view such a use of the expression may be considered an effective tool for holding the floor, as it affords an excellent opportunity to gain extra time for formulating an idea. At the same time, the hearer may decide to turn the situation to his/her advantage and grab the floor from the speaker by discontinuing a turn halfway through. In the examples to follow either of these scenarios seems plausible:

- (23) ~ (...) jest coś co się nazywa dziennikiem intymnym . prawda ? i i i wtedy *JAKBY*
 ~ i blog kusi do tego. (14, 1651–1652, 2009)
 ~ (...) there is something called an intimate diary . right ? and and and then Ø
 ~ and a blog tempts into it.
- (24) ~ Włochy kiedyś też były biedne ale znaczy wiesz mnie to się wydaje że nie ma tutaj *JAKBY* . .
 ~ to tak samo jak Norwegia i Finlandia (...). (657, 190637-190638, 2002)
 ~ Italy was once poor as well but well you know it seems to me that here there is no Ø . .
 ~ the same as Norway and Finland (...).

(II) *Jakby* as a marker of self-repair

In the examined corpus *jakby* was also frequently encountered immediately preceding self-repair, understood as a linguistic phenomenon which “involves a break in the current course of action in order to return to and repair some prior bit of talk [and] plays an absolutely crucial role in the production of coherent stretches of talk and coordinated courses of action” (Sidnell 2010: 117). While all cited examples of self-repairs heralded by *jakby* represent what Sidnell (2010: 117) labels SISTSRs, i.e. self-initiated, same-turn self-repairs, they illustrate clearly distinct mechanisms for the emergence of repair phenomena. In example 25 below *jakby* appears before a repair which is ‘pre-framed’ (Schegloff 2004; cited in Sidnell 2010: 115) in that a stretch of text repeated in the course of the repair process is the one which precedes the troublesome item:

- (25) (...) gdybyśmy sprawdzili przekrój . y *JAKBY* sprawdzili wiekowo . tych którzy odpowiadali na te pytania (...). (71, 9776, 2009)
 (...) if we checked the cross-section . um Ø checked age-wise . those who were answering these questions (...).

In the example to follow no portion of talk surrounding the problematic demonstrative pronoun *ten* ‘this’ is repeated and the repair hinges on correcting the inflection of this pronoun by turning it from masculine to feminine form so that it tallies with the following noun. The erroneous gender form seems to result from the impossibility of anticipating the use of a feminine noun at this stage of discourse production. The occurrence of *jakby* in such a context contributes to prolonging the period of concept framing:

- (26) (...) i ten *JAKBY* ta interpretacja tych badań wydaje mi się bardzo racjonalna. (115, 15949, 2010)
 (...) and this (*masc.*) \emptyset this (*fem.*) interpretation of the research seems to me very reasonable.

In the final example of a self-repair inaugurated by *jakby* the repair mechanism involves no repetition or correction of a piece of text, but rather pivots on a substitution of words (the verb *są* ‘are’ is replaced with the verb phrase *wzbudzają zainteresowanie* ‘excite interest’ (both 3rd *pl. pres. ind.*)) and a minor construction reshuffle:

- (27) (...) przede wszystkim te szkoły . w Polsce są *JAKBY* o tyle wzbudzają zainteresowanie . że promują zdrowy tryb życia (...). (92, 13509, 2009)
 (...) most of all those schools . in Poland are \emptyset (they) excite interest inasmuch . as they promote a healthy lifestyle (...).

(III) *Jakby* as a marker of false start

False starts and self-repairs are often jointly referred to as disfluency phenomena, as they both create undue disruption to an otherwise smooth flow of talk. While the difference between them may indeed be subtle, in the present study a distinctive feature of a false start is assumed to be the fact that the reformulation following the abrupt cutting off of an utterance underway is conceptually distant from, though not necessarily wholly unrelated to, the originally intended bit of talk and/or involves a major syntactic restructuring, as demonstrated in the following two examples:

- (28) (...) w tej koalicji już nie będzie zaufania . i ta koalicja . *JAKBY* . jaki (*sic!*) Platforma ma gwarancje że nie powstaje inny układ koalicyjny. (109, 15031, 2010)
 (...) in this coalition there will be no more trust . and this coalition . \emptyset . what guarantee does the Civic Platform have that no new coalition is being formed now.
- (29) ~ /unclear/ mnóstwo nieporozumień bardzo chętnie je skoryguję ale
 ~ to proszę skorygować
 ~ jest parę takich może . *JAKBY* zróbmy parę kroków w tył. (112, 15433–15435, 2010)
 ~ /unclear/ a lot of misunderstandings I will gladly clear them up
 ~ so please do
 ~ there are a number of such perhaps . \emptyset let’s make a couple of steps backwards.

(IV) *Jakby* as a marker of concept framing

Yet another functionally vital use of *jakby* can be observed in those portions of talk where it participates in the process of formulating concepts, usually alongside other (more or less propositionally salient) items, with which it rarely forms logical stretches of text. In such contexts the word seems to act as a gap filler, aiding the speakers in discourse planning tasks by giving them extra time for neatly structuring the ideas to follow, as illustrated in examples 30 and 31 below:

- | | | | | | | |
|------|--|----------|--------------|-------------------------------|-----------|--|
| (30) | (...) aczkolwiek
też poszedł za
daleko | ale też | <i>JAKBY</i> | w prawdzie
(<i>sic!</i>) | to znaczy | w tym sensie, że
Kaczyński o Gierku bo
akurat by . byłem
autorem wywiadu (...).
(115, 15868, 2010) |
| | (...) yet he also
went too far | but also | \emptyset | indeed | PM | in the sense that
Kaczyński about Gierk
because I happened to |

b . be the author of an
interview (...).

- (31) (...) i go ponoszą te JAKBY emocje. (39, 5761, 2008)
 (...) and he gets these Ø emotions.
 carried away by
 '(...) and he gets carried away by these (what do you call them) *sort of* emotions.'

Unlike the above examples, where after a more or less substantial delay the intended concepts are successfully formulated, and so the hearers get rewarded, in utterances 32 and 33 speakers' attempts at finding accurate wording are thwarted by impatient interlocutors, who cut the turns halfway through:

- (32) (...) czasami są to JAKBY to . to jest bardzo tak.
 rzeczy sensowne a (112, 15493,
 czasami bezsensowne 2010)
 (...) some things are this Ø this . this is very so.
 reasonable and others
 are not
- (33) (...) to się wydaje i . to . ja nawet brakuje dosyć troszkę JAKBY.
 dość oczywiste (87, 12941,
 2009)
 (...) this seems to and . this . I even lack quite a bit Ø.
 be quite obvious (3rd sing.
 pres. ind.)

The use of *jakby* in such an environment shades into the one discussed under point I above (examples 23 and 24), as in both cases it results in the termination of turns. The difference lies in the fact that here *jakby* is not single-handedly responsible for the discontinuation, which is instead a corollary of the aggregate effect produced by all elements participating in the process of concept framing, each being a potential termination point.

(V) *Jakby* introducing elaboration on prior thought

The function of alerting the hearers to upcoming elaboration on discussed issues proves to feature prominently in the examined corpus of non-canonical uses of *jakby*. In general terms, elaboration is understood here as providing extra information (by means of supporting arguments, explaining lines of reasoning, labouing and illustrating points, etc.) in order to make a portion of talk more coherent and intelligible to the audience, as demonstrated below:

- (34) (...) i i to raczej o to chodzi JAKBY my jesteśmy po to żeby pokazywać . tego typu zjawiska że
 jeżeli władza polska i rosyjska mówią (...). (58, 8347, 2010)
 (...) and and this is what it is rather all about Ø our role is to show . this kind of phenomena that if
 Polish and Russian authorities say (...).

Here, the part of the sentence preceding *jakby* serves as a concise summary of the debated subject, which, accordingly might be considered exhausted at this point. Yet, the speaker presses on with the previous idea, announcing the move by inserting *jakby*. In consequence, the concept is formulated with a higher degree of precision.

In the following two sentences *jakby* heralds elaboration which takes the form of explanation and illustration of prior thought (examples 35 and 36, respectively):

- (35) (...) ochrona zmienia się tutaj bardzo często bo *JAKBY* nie każdy jest w stanie sprostać takim wymaganiom. (142, 19739, 2009)
 (...) security changes very often here because \emptyset not everyone is able to meet such requirements.
- (36) (...) nie można czytać pisma świętego (*sic!*) poprzez tylko *JAKBY* . bierzemy jeden fragment . jedno zdanie (...). (84, 12659, 2008)
 (...) the Holy Bible cannot be read solely by means of \emptyset . we take one fragment . one sentence (...).

(VI) *Jakby* as a mitigator of stylistic misuse

While mitigation as such is commonly regarded as one of the core functions of hedges, the type discussed here does not fit into the category of standard, hedging uses of *jakby*. As already mentioned, the only sanctioned attenuating force the word may have is that exerted on the literal sense of lexical items it accompanies, whereby their fuzziness (or non-prototypical membership in a category) is manifested. Given that in the example to follow the word preceded by *jakby* is conceptually the exact rather than approximate member of the relevant category, it is not the effect of its literalness but of stylistic unsuitability that seems to be modified by *jakby*:

- (37) (...) to są argumenty które do złudzenia . przypominają . są *JAKBY* repeta . tych argumentów które towarzyszyły . y naszemu wchodzeniu do unii europejskiej (*sic!*). (69, 9542, 2009)
 (...) these are arguments which strongly . resemble . (they) are \emptyset a repetition . of those arguments which were advanced during . um our accession to the European Union.

Even though the sentence is perfectly intelligible, the decision to use the word *repeta* when rephrasing the stretch of talk immediately preceding it is beset with two problems. Firstly, according to dictionary definitions (e.g. *Słownik języka polskiego* online), the lexical item is used to refer to ‘second helping’ and ‘grade repetition’, and so extending its meaning to encompass any kind of repetition is essentially an unlicensed (though not unimaginative) language practice, especially that a strictly factual context of the utterance may not be particularly amenable to linguistic creativity. Secondly, while the word may sound less prosaic than the neutral and much more frequently heard *powtórka* ‘repetition’, producing a seemingly more spectacular effect, it is, in fact, colloquial in both of its senses, and as such in the examined contextual setting results in register clash (discussed separately under point VII below).

Apart from presenting *jakby* as a mitigator of stylistic misuse, the example is also a vivid illustration of how gaining extra time for concept framing, which is normally expected to streamline the process, is not immediately tantamount to a higher degree of (conceptual, stylistic, etc.) precision in utterances (cf. point IV above).

(VII) *Jakby* as a marker of register clash

One more identifiable function of *jakby* in the examined corpus is that of alerting the hearers to upcoming register clash, resulting from the use of vocabulary that represents distinct levels of formality, as seen in the following example:

- (38) (...) z taką *JAKBY* ideą poszedłem do sklepu. (41, 6430, 2008)
 (...) with this Ø idea I went to the shop.

The use of the marker here effaces an unfavourable impression the word *idea* ‘idea’, which in Polish sounds slightly more formal than in English, would otherwise leave by means of giving it an air of tentativeness and unsuitability.

(VIII) *Jakby* as a contrast booster

The function of *jakby* as a contrast booster appears to be ancillary to that of standard contrast markers (e.g. *but, though, despite, yet, however*, etc.), which is demonstrated below:

- (39) (...) ona [praca magisterska] spełnia wymogi takiego warsztatu dziennikarskiego i *JAKBY* nie jestem zawodowym historykiem więc się nie podejmuję tutaj . wkraczać w panów dyskusje . ale pytam się czy są lepsze prace magisterskie (...). (68, 9338, 2009)
 (...) it [MA thesis] meets the requirements of such a journalistic writing technique and Ø I am not a professional historian so I do not dare here . to enter into your discussions . but I am asking if there are better MA theses (...).

In the discussed example the use of the coordinating conjunction *ale* ‘but’ would perfectly suffice to manifest the required contrast. The insertion of *jakby* results in a somewhat more sophisticated construction, as it turns the initial part of the compound sentence following the marker into an adverbial clause of concession, where it begins to function as a conjunction introducing contrast. As such, *jakby* is best envisioned as a functional equivalent of *wprawdzie* ‘while’, which, to successfully manifest contrast, requires the company of coordinating conjunctions, such as *ale, lecz* or *jednak* ‘but’. Accordingly, in the examined sentence it is the cumulative effect of *jakby* and *ale*, working in tandem to form a mock grammatical construction (modelled on that involving *wprawdzie*), that provides the desired contrast.

5. Concluding remarks

As can be seen, the use of *jakby* in spoken discourse proves to have substantially departed from the canonical one, prescribed in dictionaries of the Polish language. This deviation manifests itself on both formal and functional planes of language use in that it entails marked changes in the immediate linguistic environment of *jakby*, on the one hand, and the functions the word serves in a stretch of talk, on the other.

Formally, the distinctive features of the non-canonical usage included a widespread co-occurrence of *jakby* with semantically bleached but pragmatically salient

markers, unfilled pauses and reflexive discourse, a substantial scope expansion and a frequent lack of logically well-grounded motivation for appearance in a given context. These pointed to a systematic cotextual patterning of the word and yielded valuable clues to differentiating between conventional and unconventional uses thereof.

Functionally, the non-standard *jakby* proved to serve a number of strategically vital pragmatic roles, of which the speakers might not have even been fully aware. While the roles displayed a tendency towards considerable overlap, which often made it difficult to thrust them into rigid categories, it turned out possible to isolate the following ones: Facilitating floor-holding/-grabbing, marking self-repairs and false starts, helping to formulate concepts, introducing elaboration on prior thought, mitigating stylistic misuse (and heralding pseudo-sophisticated lexis), marking register clash and boosting contrast. At the same time, it needs to be highlighted that despite this multi-functionality of *jakby*, many of its uses appeared to be mere accidents of spontaneous speech, devoid of any pragmatically useful function.

In more general terms, the image of the non-canonical *jakby* which emerges from the study is that of a device syntactically more detached from the neighbouring linguistic context than its standard counterpart and pragmatically expanded in the wake of a shift from the original, tightly prescribed function of a hedge in the Lakoffian sense to a range of non-hedging (and less-hedging, given varying degrees of canonicity) functions. As such, it seems to fit into the category of pragmatic markers, similarly lacking in propositional meaning yet well able to successfully secure discourse fluidity in interactions by means of guiding the hearers through the meanders of utterance interpretation process.

Regrettably, the study, exploratory rather than conclusive in character, was not entirely free from unavoidable (but hopefully minor) shortcomings, which stemmed from both the amount of available information on the examined data and the nature of their analysis. The former was concerned with a dearth of a detailed prosodic transcription in the NKJP corpus, which, could have substantially aided the research by streamlining the process of differentiating between prototypical and non-prototypical instances of *jakby* and the identification of the latter's pragmatic functions. In turn, the problem with handling the data lied in a considerable volume of intuitive judgements and subjective choice making, which turned out inescapable due to a largely ephemeral character of the investigated phenomenon, manifested in context-sensitive subtleties of use, often defying rigorous classification.

Last but not least, it is hoped that despite its deficiencies, the study will stimulate a serious and necessary discussion on the acceptability of the non-canonical *jakby*, which is, on the one hand, an undeniably natural and, on the other, a highly intrusive spoken language phenomenon, and as such may engender ambivalent feelings. Given that its uses are easily dismissible as unwelcome speech disfluencies, it is little surprising that despite enjoying huge popularity in colloquial language, *jakby* tends to be stigmatised by academics, who relegate it to erroneous linguistic habits flouting the norms of style and/or rules of logic. The question which deserves careful consideration is whether the overuse of *jakby* should be regarded as an exclusively negative practice contaminating language and desensitising people to its proper use, or rather as a salient pragmatic phenomenon legitimised to some extent by being able to aid in managing discourse flow and to facilitate the correct interpretation of propositional meaning.

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