This chapter will be devoted to a mixed bag of unstressed, uninfl ectable clitic particles representing various subtle pragmatic functions, and each of which may occur as a marker on a variety of different constituents, from verb to noun phrase to non-final clause. Because of this varied distribution, this class of items will here be called ‘versatile particles’.¹ The examples in this and the following chapter are taken from naturally generated oral discourse, especially conversation, as it is in this kind of data that these particles and constructions are most likely to occur.

Several of the particles to be discussed will be described as ‘hedges’. A hedge, as defi ned by Brown and Levinson (1978), is:

...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 (p. 150).

Hedges oft en modify nominal constituents; an example is the phrase ‘a kind of’ or ‘technically’ in English. An example of a hedge on a predicate is ‘sort of’, as in ‘He was sort of angry.’ Note that hedges may perform seemingly opposite functions of mitigating or intensifying. This latter sense is an extension of the colloquial sense of ‘hedge’.

Studies of particles with elusive meaning in a variety of languages have revealed the existence of a ‘purely’ pragmatic hedging function, modifying the utterance at the illocutionary level rather than at the semantic level. English expressions like well, oh, ah, so, anyway, actually, still, after all, by the way, now, all right, you know have been shown to function as so-called ‘performative hedges’ by hedging Gricean conversational maxims (James 1972; James 1973; Lakoff 1973a; Lakoff 1973b) or Searle’s (1969, 1975) felicity conditions (cf. Brown and Levinson 1978; Lakoff 1972a).

¹ With a nod to Matisoff and his “versatile verbs” (Matisoff 1969).
17.1  **Thur**

The lexeme *thur* ‘one’ has already been discussed as having grammaticalised to an indefinite marker. *Thur* also occurs on other types of phrases, where it functions as a pragmatic hedge, mitigating or alternatively strengthening the force of the reference. As a hedge, *thur* may occur on various nominal or nominalised phrases, on adverbial and complement clauses, and on clauses concatenated with a non-final marker.

17.1.1  **Postpositional phrase with thur**

A phrase containing the manner postposition *dabu* ‘like’ may be hedged with *thur*, such as in the next two examples. A natural gloss for this usage is the English expression ‘sort of…’. In example (1), where *thur* marks the postpositional phrase *giwa dabu* ‘as if (it were) true’, the effect of the particle *thur* is to hedge or mitigate the certainty of the phrase.

(1) Mastong, gi-du-la manggi-du-la, rang-gi-la
   don’t.know COP-SUB-PRT NEG.COP-SUB-PRT self-AGT-PRT
   thong-ma-la manca. Nyi noksam mi-n got-pa-kap-nyi
   see-NOM-COP NEG.COP PRT mind think-SE look-PTC-with-NF
   giwa dabu *thur*-bu la ko.
   COP.NOM like one-FOC COP PRT
   ‘I don’t know whether it is true or not, I haven’t seen it myself. But when I think about it, it sort of seems as if it were true.’

In example (2), the first instance of *thur* is a quantifier. The second *thur* is a versatile particle functioning as a hedge.

(2) Tam das *thur* sho ca, ngartsham dabu *thur* ca.
   story bit one only COP joke like one COP
   ‘(I) have one story, sort of like a joke.’

17.1.2  **Thur on adverbial clause in -nyi**

*Thur* may hedge an adverbial clause in -nyi, as seen in the second occurrence of *thur* in the following example.

(3) Nyi shama thur-gai jelpo-rang khi wu-le brang mawa,
   PRT much one-ABL king-EMPH feces expel-INF place NEG.COP
   nang dok-nyi *thur*…
   distress receive-NF one
   ‘So after a while, the king himself, not having anywhere to go to the bathroom, began to be rather distressed…’