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I think and *it seems:* **A corpus cognitive approach to stance-taking and social status on an online bulletin board**

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This study examines the epistemic mental predicate construction *I think* and the evidential predicate construction *it seems* in rhythmic gymnastics bulletin board conversations. It employs the Cognitive Linguistic analytical framework and corpus-driven quantitative methodology to examine the expression of stance relative to the extra-linguistic dimension of social hierarchy (rank). The study demonstrates that, despite the democracy and social freedom on Internet communication, social hierarchy and its linguistic expression is transmuted to virtual societies.

The expression of intersubjective stance is at once one of the most common and complex functions of language. Natural interactive language is indisputably characterized by varied and complex epistemic and evidential expressions, which are constantly chosen to convince one's interlocutors of a given construal of the world. In Functional Linguistics (Biber & Finegan 1989, Aijmer 1998, Scheibman 2002 Kärkkäinen 2003, Hunston & Thompson 2003, Martin & White 2005, Englebretson 2007), work has sought to understand the structures used in the expression of stance. However, these approaches have largely focused on discourse function at the expense of conceptual representation. This study advances our understanding of the phenomenon in two ways. Firstly, it employs a conceptual analysis, especially construal and grounding (Langacker 1990, Brisard 2002), in order to explore the multidimensionality of linguistic expressions. Secondly, it employs a quantitative corpus-driven method, multifactorial usage-feature analysis (Geeraerts *et al*. 1994, Gries 2003, Divjak 2010, Glynn forthc.) to systematically map the formal and conceptual structures involved.

The data for the study are extracted from an online rhythmic gymnastics bulletin board. The study benefits from the dialogic and conversational style of the medium, where the exchange of views and opinions is a prominent feature (Claridge 2007). The members of the board are seen as having formed a virtual community that is characterized by social and linguistic variation. Therefore, we have divided the users into three ranks in terms of activity (number of posts) and status (e.g., moderators) in the community. The sample consists of around 8000 messages, with their immediate context, extracted from the posts of 12 members. Extracted postings are restricted to native speakers of British or Australian English in order to control for regional variation. All instances of epistemic *I think* and evidential *it seems* are annotated for a range of formal, semantic and extra-linguistic features, operationalizing the lexical profile of the two constructions in question. The quantitative treatment of the results of the feature analysis permits the use of both exploratory (multiple correspondence analysis) and confirmatory (ordinal logistic regression) statistical analyses.

The multifactorial analysis implemented in our study will help explore the multidimensionality of linguistic structuring and consequently test our hypothesis that bulletin board users on a higher rank are more likely to use assertive epistemic and evidential mental predicates to express speaker stance than members on a lower rank.

Keywords: stance, corpus linguistics, cognitive linguistics, multivariate statistics

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