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Interactionality of Stancetaking in the Risk Discourse

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Abstract. The present research focuses on the sociolinguistic exploration of stancetaking as an interactional and discursive phenomenon. The aim of this study is to demonstrate the interactional, dynamic and malleable nature of stance. The process of stancetaking has been traced with the main analytic focus on the ways in which stances are indicated and transformed as a result of the discursive behavior of the subjects who take them. The discourse situation under analysis involves the discussion of the risks of using mobile phones. The material for the analysis was taken from on-line commentaries in the *Daily Mail*. Stance is treated in this work as a dynamic phenomenon constructed interactively in the process of communication through a sequence of contributions by stance-takers. The epistemic and affective dimensions of discourse stance have been analyzed, and their dependence upon the other communicants' previous contributions has been demonstrated. It has been shown that stancetaking is a dynamic part of the process of identity construction in discourse. Interactive patterns of stance construction have been analyzed. Some of the linguistic resources (lexical, grammatical and stylistic) which speakers have at their disposal for indicating a stance have been distinguished. The relationship between stance and inter-subjectivity has been traced. The act of taking a stance in the process of discourse has been shown to be a social act which is fulfilled with coordination and cooperation on the part of all the participants in a communicative event.

Keywords: stance, stancetaking, risk, interactionality, discourse interaction

A variety of disciplines, including discourse psychology, sociolinguistics, cognitive science, sociology, and linguistic anthropology, involve the study of discourse interaction which is conducted in order to understand how people construct their perception of the world around them as well as their own identities in this world. In this perspective the process of constructing reality occurs in the course of the interaction between an individual and his / her world, as it is mediated by interaction with other people. Stance has been used increasingly as a key theoretical term in the study of language and social interaction. It has been analyzed as a way of establishing an understanding of the connection between social identities and individual person's behavior in the discourse situation. Identity, as Bucholtz and Hall state, is "the social positioning of self and other". Identity may be "linguistically indexed through labels, implicatures, stances, styles or linguistic structures and symbols" [4, p. 585].

The framework for our research involves a synthesis of the key research which has been conducted with respect to *stance* from a number of analytic traditions, including the sociolinguistic, socio-cognitive and critical perspectives of discourse analysis. In this sense, it can be seen that the broad interdisciplinary field of stance research is concerned with the intersection of language, culture and society. The theoretical background for analysing discourse stance ranges across literary studies [28; 17; 18]; sociolinguistic analyses of narrative and conversational interactions [16; 27]; psycholinguistic research on conversational usage [6; 7]; comparisons of written vs. spoken discourse [5; 25], critical approaches exploring how institutional roles and positions of power influence the process of stancetaking [11; 12; 24], and exploration of stance and truth conditions of communication [29].

The term 'stance' has been used in a number of different ways in the literature related to discourse. There is no unanimity among scholars in terms of their approaches to the investigation of stance in the linguistic literature, but many of them are related to the study of the available resources for expressing thoughts and feelings in the course of interaction between individuals. For example, Douglas

Biber, one of the most influential investigators of stance, researched the linguistic mechanisms used by speakers within their personal expression [2]. Biber & Finegan [3] define stance as "the lexical and grammatical expression of attitudes, feelings, judgements, or commitment concerning the propositional content of a message" [3, p. 124]. These lexical expressions of stance mark evaluation, affect, certainty, doubt, hedges, emphasis, possibility, necessity and prediction. Elinor Ochs [20; 21] identifies 'stance' as one of four dimensions that organizes the relation between language and culture. She defines stance as "a socially recognized disposition," making a distinction between epistemic stance *as "a socially recognized way of knowing a proposition, such as direct (experiential) and indirect knowledge, degrees of certainty and specificity," and* affective stance *as a "socially recognized feeling, attitude, mood, or degree of emotional intensity" [20, p. 2]. Barbara Johnstone states that* stance *"has to do with the methods, linguistic and other, by which interactants create and signal relationships with the propositions they utter and with the people they interact with" [13, p.30]. Judith T. Irvine believes that stance is the speaker's point of view and evaluation of utterances, objects, and interlocutors, and* stancetaking *is a social act performed in speaking and located within an interaction whose course it influences" [10, p. 55]. We see that all the definitions of stance that have been mentioned above differ from one another with respect to which mental phenomena are considered to be involved in stancetaking. Some of them include attitudes, feelings, and judgments, whereas others include commitments and assessments of the proposition, but all the mentioned approaches focus on the expression of individual speakers or writers rather than on the interactive relations.*

However, many researchers have observed the interactional nature of stancetaking. For example, another famous investigator of stance, Klaus Scherer, states that stances 'spontaneously develop or are strategically employed in the interaction with a person or a group of persons, colouring the interpersonal exchange in that situation". "Interpersonal stances, – continues Scherer, "are

often triggered by events, <...>, shaped by spontaneous appraisal, affect dispositions, interpersonal attitudes, and strategic intention" [23, p. 705-706]. Scott F. Kiesling also makes a distinction between the relationship of a person to his / her own talk and to his / her interlocutors, claiming that the expression of stance is the primary goal of the participants in the conversation. He defines stance as "a person's expression of their relationship to their talk (their epistemic stance – e.g. how certain they are about their assertions), and a person's expression of their relationship to their interlocutors (their interpersonal stance – e.g., friendly or dominating). Epistemic and interpersonal stances are often related: someone who is being patronizing (interpersonal stance) is usually expressing that they are also very certain (epistemic stance) about what they are saying, but they are also expressing something about that knowledge vis-à-vis their interlocutor, namely, that the interlocutor does not have the same knowledge" [15, p. 172-173]. Tiina Keisainen, in her study of the role of tag questions in the act of positioning oneself, comes to the conclusion that stance is an "interactional achievement, <...> an intersubjective rather than primarily a subjective phenomenon [14, p. 177]. In fact, interaction can be seen as a starting point for taking a stance. Stance can be treated as 'an articulated form of social action' [8, p.137] or as "the act of positioning oneself in the social act of discourse" [22, p. 240]. My view of stance is close to that of John W. Du Bois, who sees stance as an interactional phenomenon, as "a public act by a social actor, achieved dialogically through overt communicative means (language, gesture and other symbolic forms), through which social actors simultaneously evaluate objects, position subjects (themselves and others), and align with other subjects, with respect to any salient dimension of the sociocultural field" [8, p. 163].

As this research is being conducted from an interactive perspective, I shall focus on the interaction which takes place in discourse, analysing the observable expressions of this process in the contributions of the participants. Stance is treated here as a dynamic phenomenon constructed interactively in communication through a sequence of stance-takers' contributions realized in a multimodal manner. Discourse stance has epistemic and affective dimensions, the expression of which strongly depends upon the previous contributions of other communicants. The data for this research was drawn from the Daily Mail *website, and consists of 124 comments which present the reaction of readers to newspaper articles dealing with the health risks associated with using mobile phones (average length approximately 19,600 words).*

In the discourse situations which have been analyzed, the notion 'risk' *is an important part of stancetaking. Risk, according to the 'world risk society' perspective [1], is seen as both a real risk and a social construction of possible harm. In the modern "systems theory approach", risk is understood as being constructed by attributing (expected or observed) negative outcomes to decisions [27]. Risk receives a subjective interpretation in the present study, and therefore 'positive' or 'negative' connotations of taking risks directly depend upon the stances of the communication participants. The way that stances on risks are constructed linguistically is analyzed with regard to semantic categories of risk such as* 'danger',

'hazard', 'choice', 'chance*'*, 'harm*'*, 'possibility', 'victim*'*, 'risky situation*'*, 'beneficiary*'*, etc. Fillmore and Atkins' analysis of "the risk frame" further helps us to understand the different aspects of theoretical approaches to risk as the object of human interaction [9]. As Niklas Luhmann argues, risks have to do with expectations, which can be more or less (un-)certain [19, p. 307]. Expectations are linked with knowledge and experiences of the past, and they can be developed to the representations of everyday knowledge and personal experiences. On the other hand, expectations also refer to epistemic stances, as they have to do with the knowledge of the speaker (or writer). What one considers to be risky depends not just on one's knowledge but on one's sociocultural and individual values (evaluations), and thus, speakers take their affective stances, which are co-constructed and co-coordinated in interaction with other participants.*

In the examples that follow, an excerpt from an Internet discussion of the risks associated with the use of mobile phones can be considered. This discussion was triggered by the article "Mobile Phones Could Be 'Health Time Bomb': More than 200 Academic Studies Link Use with Serious Illnesses", written by Tamara Cohen, and published in Daily Mail on November 9, 2011 (http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-2059223/Mobile-phones-health-time-bomb-studies-link-use-illnesses.html)

1. *"There's that word again," Could". It appears in so many DM headlines. It usually means they are either guessing or reporting some very dodgy research. But it serves its purpose of scaring people. I reckon mobile phones have saved thousands of lives by summoning help or warning of disaster"* (Poppy Clarke, Croydon, UK, 09/11/2011 22:53)

2. *"In 1995 I read a well written article discussing the possible health problems associated with mobile phone use so the warnings are hardly new"* (alex gosling, Borneo, 09/11/2011 23:18)

3. *"Anyone who does NOT think cell phones are a significant hazard should just keep on using them. I don't care about those folks anyways. Personally, I'm 100% convinced that regular cell phone use constitutes serious, long term and even short term health risks and dangers simply because there is too much science conducted by the brightest and the least-financially vested in these technologies to suggest otherwise. If the Head Doc at Cleveland Clinic, as well as at Johns Hopkins, MD Anderson and Mayo Clinic have warned their staff from using cell phones except for in clearly delineated manner and protocol, then, you can betchya last penny, I'm following THE geniuses and their pre-emptive protocols. Naysayers can laugh all they want to; it's always been that way. By all means: carry on!!"* (Evita Luisa, US of A, 10/11/2011 05:40)

4. "*I have a glioma brain tumour on the left side of my brain, the side I hold my phone, I worked in a phone shop for nearly 4 years so my use of them was ten fold. Yes it's possible, definitely. It would be silly to think not, it's radiation at the end of the day. Obviously you cant say 100% though because other factors contribute to things usually, which I feel in my case that heavy mobile phone use was just 1 factor. But what isn't ever addressed is the fact that they'll never be banned because they're such a big money*

maker like cigarettes and alcohol. <u>There's so much kept from the public it's scary</u>. (<u>Laura</u>, Kent, 10/11/2011 07:49)

5. "<u>Thanks for highlighting this very serious subject again!</u> <u>The recent publication</u> of the deeply flawed Danish study (a rehashed study which `only' looked at mobile phone models up to 1995 and `excluded' all business users!), <u>aimed to assure everybody</u> that mobile phones don't cause cancer. <u>Shame on</u> the HPA and BMJ for supporting such dodgy methodology whilst discrediting valuable peer reviewed research by eminent scientists `not' funded by the industry. <u>People who call</u> their research` <u>dodgy' don't usually understand</u> the studies and love their mobile and wifi too much to admit the dangers. Always follow the money and ask WHO benefits from the results. <u>I am not surprised</u> that <u>Cancer Research insists on</u>` no cancer connection' here, considering the huge amount of funding they receive from the mobile communication industry. And all governments profit hugely from selling ever more frequencies. <u>I hope</u> the public wakes up and parents to do so for the sake of their children's health". (<u>I.P.D.</u>, London, 10/11/2011 12:48)

The conversation under analysis occurred in an on-line setting, which certainly has its own unique aspects, but my aim here is only to trace the interactive dynamics of stances taken by the speaking subjects (in our case 'writing subjects'), rather than to analyze the specific features and structures of online communication. As was already mentioned above, discourse stance has at least two dimensions which are seen as important in the process of discourse identity construction – epistemic stance and affective stance. Both of them are constructed in the process of discourse interaction, using different language resources. I propose to analyze this source material with the focus on the interactive nature of its content.

In cue #1 the speaker named Poppy Clark starts the process of stancetaking by referring to the title of the article under discussion, and criticizing the article's (or even the newspaper's) epistemic stance (*"There's that word again," Could". It appears in so many DM headlines*). Usually the modal verb '*could*' is used to indicate the speaker's uncertainty in the uttered proposition. Thus, the speaker is referring to what he perceives as uncertainty in the newspaper, underlining its frequency ('***that* word again**', '*It appears in **so many** DM headlines*'). Moreover, the transposition of the demonstrative pronoun '*that*' emphasizes the speaker's critical attitude towards the newspaper and what it publishes, as well as towards the actual object under discussion. Later, the speaker decodes his implications by stating that the newspaper usually is unsure about what they offer to their readers (*It usually means they are either guessing*) or that they use vague and/or unchecked information (*reporting some very dodgy research*). At the beginning of his utterance the speaker indirectly constructs his epistemic stance by interacting with the stance of the newspaper, though he uses the verb 'reckon' as he continues the presentation of his stance (*I reckon mobile phones have saved thousands of lives by summoning help or warning of disaster*). He concludes his segment by stating that he understands the intentions of the newspaper, and thus, that he considers himself to have deciphered its stance: *But it serves its purpose of scaring people*). The speaker's affective stance is ex-

pressed by the use of lexical units such as '*dodgy'*, and '*scaring'*, and by hyperbole '*thousands of lives'*. Thus, the stance of Poppy Clark can be defined as 'supporting the use of mobile phones' and 'ignoring the risks of using them'.

Participant #2, Alex Gosling, articulates a stance which is similar to that of the previous speaker. He indirectly indicates agreement with Poppy Clark, supporting his opinion by informing the interlocutors that he had read an article where the object under discussion had been described long ago, thus implying that the warnings are the old news (*In 1995 I read a well written article discussing the possible health problems associated with mobile phone use so the warnings are hardly new*). His favourable attitude and evaluation (constituents of an affective stance) are linguistically marked by the word combination '*well-written article'*, while his epistemic stance can be found in his statement expressing doubtfulness about the novelty of the proposed information. The questionable character of assertions concerning the risks connected with the use of mobile phones is expressed by the adjective '*possible'*, which is interpreted here as an allusion to the previously-stated stance.

In the next segment (# 3) the speaker verbalizes a highly critical attitude towards the stances indicated by the preceding contributors. He mentions his virtual interlocutors, explicitly referring to their remarks (*"Anyone who does NOT think cell phones are a significant hazard should just keep on using them*), connecting emotion with his stance (*I don't care about those folks anyways*). This speaker is very loquacious and uses personalization terms *(Personally),* lexical units with connotations of certainty in combination with numbers (*I'm 100% convinced*), and graphic devices for giving extra prominence to some elements in his utterance (NOT, THE), and emphatic colloquialisms (*you can betchya last penny*). To make his stance more convincing, the author actively employs references to the positions taken by acknowledged experts (*the Head Doc at Cleveland Clinic, as well as at Johns Hopkins, MD Anderson and Mayo Clinic*), ironically naming them as '*geniuses'* and their protocols as '*pre-emptive'*. All those who have different stances are called '*Naysayers',* and at the end, the speaker switches from referring to them, to addressing them directly, using an imperative construction: '*Naysayers can laugh all they want to; it's always been that way. By all means: carry on!!"*

Speaker # 4, Laura, starts co-constructing her stance with the description of her own health problems which are possibly associated with the use of mobile phones, and by this disaligning with the previous stance-takers, who approved of active mobile phone use. She names her illness, using a medical term '*a glioma brain'* and explicitly connects it to the use of mobile phone (*tumor on the left side of my brain, the side I hold my phone*). Her epistemic stance is verbalized by the use of various expressions indicating varying degrees of certainty (*'it's possible',' definitely', 'it would be silly to think not', 'obviously'*). Laura also introduces a new topic into the conversation: (*But what isn't ever addressed is the fact that they'll never be banned because they're such a big money maker like cigarettes and alcohol*), initiating a different direction in the development of the discussion, which is later picked up

and continued in the next turn (#5). Her affective stance can be observed in the last sentence, where she calls the public policy *'scary'*.

To conclude, I would like to advance the proposition that stances produced in an interactive context serve as social signals which may influence the perceptions and interpretations of numerous participants in communication. I have shown that stancetaking is a dynamic part of the process of identity construction in discourse. The interactive nature of stance creation and stance maintenance has been studied. Instead of focusing on the individual persons as stance-takers in communication, I analyzed interactive stance-creating patterns. In this paper, I have examined some of the linguistic resources (lexical, grammatical and stylistic) which the speakers have at their disposal for articulating a stance. I have shown that stance is related to inter-subjectivity, meaning that the act of taking a stance is a social act which is implemented through the coordination and cooperation of all the participants in a communicative event. In other words, stancetaking is the personal expression of an individual attitude in reaction to the stances conveyed by other communicants. It can thus be seen that interactivity is an important aspect of stancetaking in discourse

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Ущина В.А. Интеракциональность субъектного позиционирования в дискурсе о рисках
Аннотация. В предлагаемой работе исследуются социолингвистические особенности субъектного позиционирования как интеракционального и дискурсивного явления. Цель данного исследования состоит в том, чтобы продемонстрировать динамическую, интеракциональную изменчивую сущность позиции субъекта дискурсивной деятельности. Материалом исследования послужили фрагменты онлайн дискуссии, представленной в электронной версии газеты Дейли Мейл. Понятие позиции субъекта дискурсивной деятельности трактуется в этой работе как динамическая сущность, конструируемая субъектами в дискурсивной интеракции. Подчеркивается важность изучения лингвистических индикаторов субъектных позиций с даль-

нейшим исследованием динамики их трансформирования в результате дискурсивного поведения субъектов, которые обсуждают риски использования мобильных телефонов. Проанализированы языковые средства маркирования эпистемических и аффективных позиций, совокупности которых представляют собой различные персональные и социальные идентичности участников коммуникации. Проанализированы интерактивные паттерны конструирования субъектных позиций. Выделены языковые ресурсы (лексические, грамматические и стилистические), которые используют говорящие, занимая определенные позиции в дискурсе. Установлена взаимосвязь между позиционированием и интерсубъектностью. Доказано, что акт позиционирования является социальным актом, реализуемым вследствие координации и кооперации всех участников коммуникативного процесса.

Ключевые слова: позиция субъекта дискурсивной деятельности, позиционирование, риск, интеракциональность, дискурсивная интеракция.