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What gets resonated and why: Dialogic resonance in the London-Lund Corpus 2

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This study explores the dialogic resonance of epistemic stance constructions in a recently compiled corpus of spoken British English, the London-Lund Corpus 2. According to Dialogic Syntax (Du Bois, 2014), language users selectively reproduce aspects of previous utterances at varying levels of abstraction to make affordances for dialogic engagement. The dynamic emergence of affinities across comparable linguistic items gives rise to dialogic resonance, or the “catalytic activation of affinities across utterances” (Du Bois, 2014, p. 372). Dialogic resonance is characterised by varying levels of lexical fixedness and variability (Brône & Zima, 2014), from the identity of words to the emergence of abstract equivalence, as shown in the example retrieved from Du Bois (2014, p. 368):

- (1) A: yet he’s still healthy
B: he’s still walking around

Dialogic Syntax is a relatively new analytical framework and much work remains to be done to identify the socio-cognitive goals that speakers have when they recruit different linguistic items for resonance. The aim of this study is to explore the motivations for resonance at various levels of linguistic specificity with a focus on epistemic stance constructions, and study the effect that the variability has on dialogic engagement.

The data for the study come from a recently compiled corpus of spoken discourse, the London-Lund Corpus 2 of spoken British English. The data set under investigation contains 50,000 words of face-to-face conversations in various settings. The analysis is carried out as follows. First, the data are manually searched for instances of dialogic resonance across speaker turns. The main criterion is that the extracted utterances share an object of stance that is framed by an epistemic stance construction (e.g. *I’m sure she’s fine – She might be*). Next, the stance couplings are analysed in terms of both structural and functional parameters (e.g. type of construction, degree of equivalence, speech act, relationship between speakers). Finally, correlations between the parameters are identified.

The results of the corpus study suggest that epistemic stance constructions resonate both at the level of constructs and abstract categories; however, there are fundamental differences between the pragmatic and cognitive effects that they create. For example, the (automatic) reuse of formally and functionally equivalent constructions is preferred in contexts where speakers signal stance convergence (Du Bois, 2007), while generalizations across epistemic categories are required in contexts of strategic stance differential for the purposes of politeness and maintenance of social relations.

References

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