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Epistemic and evidential constructions in stance-taking. A quantitative discourse approach

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This study compares two verb-based constructions: the 1st person epistemic [*think* (*that*)] and the 3rd person evidential [*seems* (*that*)]. Although the two forms are semantically distinct, functionally they are comparable, both used to express a speaker's stance with respect to a given proposition (Biber and Finegan 1989, Kärkkäinen 2003, Aijmer 2009). Our hypothesis is that the choice between the two forms will, in part, be determined by relative social rank between the interlocutors.

A sample of 700 examples of the two constructions were extracted from an Internet bulletin board. Different statuses on the bulletin board, from casual senders through moderators, permit the operationalisation of social rank as a factor in constructional choice. The study employs the behavioural profile approach (Geeraerts *et al*. 1994, Gries 2003). Drawing on previous research in epistemic and evidential constructions, the sample is manually annotated for a range of formal, semantico-pragmatic and social factors. Multivariate statistics are then used to model the results of the analysis in an effort to identify which usage patterns predict the choice of construction. Using mixed effects logistic regression, the results demonstrate that social rank does play a role in the choice, but that this effect is dependant on a range of semantico-pragmatic factors.

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