

The body's stance on stance

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The cognitive linguistic (CL) analysis of stance-taking has finally come into its own after decades of being subsumed under investigations into subjectivity and intersubjectivity in language (Verhagen 2005; Davidse, Vandelanotte, & Cuyckens 2010; Dancygier & Sweetser 2012), which were not always focused on speech within face-to-face interaction, but rather on issues of viewpoint and alignment in discourse. Englebretson's (2007) edited volume and DuBois's paper (2007) in particular, shifted the attention squarely to the expression of stance—the epistemic/attitudinal/emotional in language—which already enjoyed a long tradition in largely text-based and non-CL corpus linguistic research (Biber & Finegan 1988, 1989; Biber et al. 1999; Precht 2000; Haddington 2006). With the recent added interest in CL on multimodality in interaction, a growing literature is emerging that investigates gesture, gaze, and other co-speech behaviours such as shifts in posture, head, or facial expression that accompany expressions of stance-taking during face-to-face interaction (McClave 2000; Streeck 2009; Debras & Cienki 2012; Debras 2013; Schoonjans et al. 2013; Schoonjans 2014; Jehoul et al. 2017). Researchers are discovering certain co-speech embodiments such as eyebrow-raising, shoulder shrugs, mouth shrugs, or head nods that accompany general expressions of stance categories such as (DIS)AFFILIATION, DOUBT, CERTAINTY, INDIFFERENCE, and so on.

Our research (Hinnell & Rice 2017, 2018, 2019, 2022; Rice & Hinnell 2015, 2017) has followed this line of inquiry, but has taken it a step further. We have been documenting highly conventionalized co-speech embodiments that accompany certain fixed expressions in English that convey a particular stance profile. Using a range of video sources, from YouTube to the Red Hen multimedia archive (Steen & Turner 2013; Joo et al. 2017), we illustrate just how much of stance-taking is realized in the body, with the corporeal stance signal on par with speech and prosody. Indeed, we have hypothesized that a weak body partitioning is at play when it comes to co-speech embodiments, such that the more subjective or “stancy” an utterance is, the more likely it will involve the upper body, while the more objective or propositional the content, the more likely that manual gestures will prevail.

In this talk, we survey our recent research that examines the incidence and nature of co-speech embodiments with a variety of fixed expressions of stance in English interaction. Sample stance categories with expressions that are reliably and recurrently multimodal include: ATTITUDINAL INDIFFERENCE or CONCESSION (*what can I say?*), EPISTEMIC UNCERTAINTY (*I don't get it*) or IMPRECISION (*or something like that*), AFFILIATION with a prior utterance (*which is true*), DISAFFILIATION with a prior utterance (*sure, sure*). The striking and frequent pairings between particular stanced expressions and particular embodiments lead us to support the mounting call in cognitive linguistic circles that the construction, as the primary unit of linguistic analysis, needs to be conceptualized holistically as a “composite utterance” (Enfield 2013) or as a multimodal entity, with verbal, prosodic, and kinesic form accompanying the particular stance and pragmatic meanings that inhere (Cienki 2015; Zima & Brône 2015; Zima & Bergs 2017). This presentation represents a contribution towards inventorying the English multimodal “constructicon”.

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