stance-taking in social media

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WHAT IS STANCE?
Lexis, grammar and other meaning-making resources to express attitudes, feelings, beliefs, evaluations, judgments, commitment towards a precise target (i.e. interlocutor, person represented in discourse, ideas represented in discourse, other texts)

(Biber & Finegan 1989; Du Bois 2007; Englebretson 2007; Kiesling 2011)

STANCE COMPONENTS
① stance-taker
② stance-object (i.e. topic under discussion)
③ resources (e.g. evaluative lexis, modal verbs, punctuation, typography, different languages)
④ addressee(s) (Barton & Lee 2013)

KINDS OF STANCE
i) Epistemic: knowledge, beliefs
· Certainty, doubt, actuality, precision, limitation (e.g. definitely, I know, I doubt, in fact, possibly, might, must, it seems that)
· Source of knowledge or perspective from which information is given (e.g. according to, rumour has it)

Example from Thoroughly Modern Millie blog (Myers 2010):
I’ll be spending the first night of Passover with friends at a restaurant in Delray. The menu will be a traditional Passover meal with all the fixings. I would say that most of the population in this area either eat out or order a complete dinner and have it at home.

ii) Attitudinal: feelings, personal perspectives (adverbials such as ironically and fortunately, verbs such as fear and love, adjectives such as happy and angry)

Example from Israeli Mom blog (Myers 2010):
I confess, these posts/comments upset me.

iii) Stylistic: the way in which something is said
· Speaker/writer comments on communication itself (e.g. honestly, with all due respect)
Example from *India Uncut* blog (Myers 2010):

To me, the Marvel superheroes just had more complexity – even more humanity, *if I may put it like that.*

- Smiley (soften, ironicise, self-mock)

Example from *Facebook* (Georgalou 2014):

The Spanish showing us the way out of the crisis :p [The user embeds a link from BBC news, entitled: “Spanish town to grow cannabis to pay debt”.

**GRAMMAR OF STANCE-TAKING**

**i) Verb + clause complement**

- Stance-taking clause comes first + subordinates clause that states stance
- Exception: smileys, LOL (stance after statement)

Examples from blogs (Myers 2010):

- *I think* this is a beautiful story. (comment to *Bitch PhD*)
- *And I suppose* the EU laws on human rights add another layer. (comment to *BoingBoing*)
- *It is my personal feeling that* the blogosphere has elements which may change us all, when we can indulge in peering into the souls of those affected by current events. (*IsraeliMom*)
- devin: you know, *I wish I could say* this is intentional. (*Dr Dave*)

**ii) Separate sentence:** Stance comes after the statement.

Example from *Thoroughly Modern Millie* blog (Myers 2010):

I remember going there last spring and found the street was not well lit, the sidewalk was irregular and there is no parking lot. *That's not for me.*

**iii) Adverbial**

- Extra aspect of meaning to clause
- How action was done / circumstances

Example from *TripAdvisor* (Vásquez 2011):

Upon arrival in the lobby of the hotel we were highly impressed with the lobby and general ambience of the ground floor. *Unfortunately* that is where it stopped!

**iv) Modal and semi-modal verbs**

- *Epistemic:* certainty / uncertainty (e.g. *may, might*)
- *Deontic:* obligation / necessity (e.g. *should, must*)
- *Dynamic:* ability / inability (e.g. *can*)
Examples from blogs (Myers 2010):

- Tomorrow **may** have a slightly higher entropy than today, but not by an amount that explains the radical difference in the behavior of memory over the two intervals (comment to *Cosmic Variance*).
- Black people **should** remain focused and be ourselves without worrying about what other people have to say. (comment to *Black Prof*).
- Health officials said the hardened resin, made with venom from toads of the Bufo genus, contains chemicals that **can** disrupt heart rhythms. (*BoingBoing*).

**v) Pre-modifying adverb**

- Adverb vs adverbial
- Modify verb, adjective, another adverb
- Usually single words
- Not float around sentence
- Emphasise attitude to statement

Examples from Twitter (Zappavigna 2012):

- I feel **really** good, finally reached the 1,000 followers who wanted both!!
- That's funny cause I thought he kinda favoured you ... LOL nah **just** joking :)

**vi) Stance nouns:** Stance is compacted into a noun (**nominalisation**)

Example from TripAdvisor (Vásquez 2011):

I thought it was a very good hotel, looking at the beautiful pictures at the hotel site, but when we arrived it was a **disappointment**...

**DISCOURSE OF STANCE-TAKING**

**i) Reported speech:** Dramatise situation from which reader can infer writer's view.

Examples from *fromGR2UK* blog (Georgalou 2016) and *Dooce* blog (Myers 2010):

- Χρόνια πολλά σε όλους και ελπίζω σύντομα η Ανοιξη να έρθει και στο Surrey γιατί ο καιρός είναι απίστευτα χειμωνιάτικος και ξενέρωτος. Ή όπως μου λένε οι Άγγλοι: “It's typical and soon you'll be miserable like us”.
- Not that I was expecting the walls to be lined with gold, but you look at the set and see how sharp and clean it is, and then you go backstage and, **oh my god, has my daughter been playing in here?**

**ii) Rhetorical questions:** Point of view is presented as **obvious**.

Examples from Facebook (Georgalou 2014):

- Otan pas na trakareis tin mprostini sou mixani, epeidi afise to gkazi gia na kanei to stauro tou pernontas apo ekklisia, ti kantilia prepei na tou katevaso kai poso ta aksizei?
iii) Intertextuality: Express stance by alluding to other texts.

Example from Facebook (Georgalou 2014):

Αμα βάλω πρόσφατη [φωτ] θα έχουμε εγκεφαλικά κι εμφράγματα. (Θα με δεις και θα πάθεις ατύχημααα, βάζεις στούχημααα!) Αγαπώ τους φίλους μου, Προστατεύω την υγεία τους! χαχαχα

iv) Irony: Contradiction, mockery, humour

Example from Facebook (Georgalou 2014):

eίδες τι παθαίνει ο άνθρωπος στα γερμάτα; [the user is 37 years old]

v) Concessions: Most obvious way to hold up some possible alternative view to one’s own.

Example from TripAdvisor (Vásquez 2011):

I was not expecting the Hilton but I was expecting something clean and comfortable.

vi) Conversational devices: In response to earlier post or comment.

Example from Facebook (Georgalou 2014):

Helen: food just out of the oven:-) [she posts a picture of gemista]
Greek friend: Mmmmmmmmmmmmmmmmmmmmmmm
Iranian friend: yummmmmmmmmmmmmmmmmmmmmmm!

STANCE-TAKING AS A MULTIMODAL LINGUISTIC ACT

Rating
Social media provide built-in features that invite people to express opinions publicly.

FACEBOOK ‘LIKE’

- express positive stance but not want to leave written comment
- express interest in post or its content
- show support to poster
- agree or align with stance of status poster
- answer ‘yes’ to a question raised in post
- indicate that post has been read

BUT: ‘Like’ does not immediately signal intended stance. → potential miscommunication
STANCE-TAKING AND PHOTO-SHARING ONLINE: FlickR & INSTAGRAM

Flickr and Instagram are **stance-rich** environments.

- Different semiotic modes (images, words) + writing spaces (title, description, tags, comments, sets and groups in Flickr) together in stance-taking.
- Interactive stance-taking → stance-taker relates to others.

**Stance-takers**

1. **Photographer** (different possible participation roles)

   - title + description + tags to express **knowledge** about image (e.g. ##sweetpotato and ##chili #muffins recipe from @jamieoliver)
   - title + description + tags to express **feelings + attitudes** about image (e.g. ##beautifulview)
   - use particular language/image to tell others **who** one is (e.g. selfie at one’s working place)
   - use particular language/image to relate to viewers (e.g. English for a broader audience)

2. **Viewer** (comments/tags; anyone online – Flickr; privacy settings – Instagram)

   - commenters express knowledge / belief / opinion / feeling towards **image** or particular part of it (e.g. image showing preparation of cranberry + ginger muffins; commenter: Waves of nostalgia for these cranberries.)
   - commenters express knowledge / belief / opinion / feeling towards **title** and/or **description** (e.g. image description: The Hill Inn, between Whernside and Ingleborough, was full of cold wet walkers enjoying the fire (and the beer); commenter: Black Sheep is great! I used to drink that beer while in York.)
   - commenters refer to **previous comment** (e.g. expressing (dis)agreement)
   - **languages** commenters use to make comments (e.g. photographer’s native language)
   - commenters relate to **other commenters + photographer** (e.g. @ reference, common language, positive politeness)

**Stance resources**

- Act of posting on Flickr/Instagram = act of stance-taking
- Editing, filters
- For multilingual participants, choice of languages = key stance marker

**Stance objects**

- express views on images + photography
- talk about self + others
- talk about events related to content of photo
- discuss features on Flickr/Instagram
- express attitudes towards languages
- project one’s sense of self through particular style of writing

(Barton & Lee 2013)
TASK
Read the following examples from Facebook (Georgalou 2014) and try to identify how the users express their stances.

Example 1
**Context:** Alkis (Greek, 31 years old, MSc student in Services Management, AUEB) is studying for his MA dissertation.

Example 2

Example 3
**Context:** Helen shares an article from the New York Times, entitled “Greek Unemployed Cut Off From Medical Treatment”. Her friend who comments is also Greek.
Example 4

Example 5

Example 6

Context: Romanos (Greek, 23 years old, IT support). Post one day after 2012 elections.

Example 7

Context: Carla (Greek, 35 years old, translator)
STANCE AS PUBLIC ACT

- Stance-taking = key in online interaction
- Opinions + unique sense of self on larger community of stance-takers
- Stance markers signal opinions + relate to other people or their comments.
- Possible to harm others + one’s self.

PowerPoint presentation

Available online: http://www.marizageorgalou.com/invited-lectures

Bibliography


