



UNIVERSITY OF TORONTO  
VARIATIONIST SOCIOLINGUISTICS  
LABORATORY

# Stance, style, and semantics: Operationalizing insights from semantics-pragmatics to account for linguistic variation

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# Introduction

- “[S]tylistic work is among the most important of all human endeavours” Eckert (2001:126)
- One of the ways that stylistic work is carried out in speech is through stancetaking
- However, the collaborative and “shifting relationships among speakers, talk, and figures presented in the talk” (Kiesling 2016:19) have rarely been explored quantitatively (but see Kiesling et al. 2015)

# Introduction

- We explore stancetaking in the variationist paradigm using **English complementizer *that*** (1a) or **zero** (1b) as a case study:

(1a) It's great **THAT** I was able to do all these things. (F/22)

(1b) I thought **Ø** it was funny! (M/28)

# Stance



# Definitions of stance

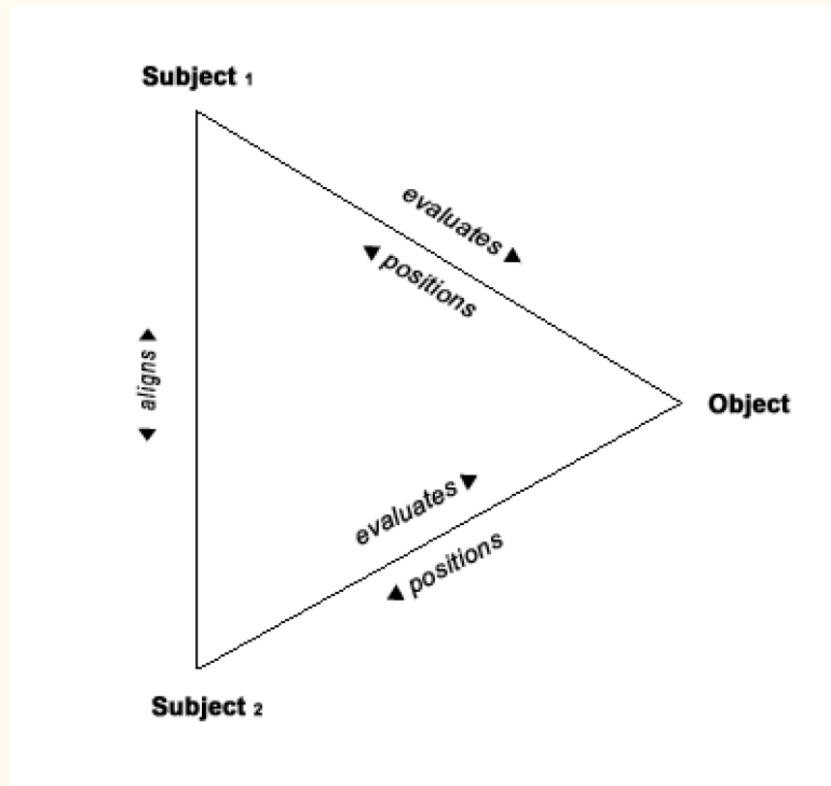
- “A person's expression of their relationship to their talk (...) and (...) to their interlocutors” (Kiesling, 2009: 173)
- “The overt expression of an author’s or speaker’s attitudes, feelings, judgments, or commitment concerning the message” (Biber & Finegan 1988: 1)
- “A linguistically articulated form of social action whose meaning is to be construed within the broader scope of language, interaction, and sociocultural value” (Du Bois 2007: 140)
- “A position with respect to the form or the content of one’s utterance” (Jaffe 2009: 3)

(For more detailed discussion, see Jaffe (2009).)

# The stance triangle

Du Bois (2007):

- We position ourselves with respect to what we talk about (the **stance object**)
- We position ourselves with respect to our interlocutors



The stance triangle (Du Bois 2007: 163)

# Stance in variationist sociolinguistics

- Several variationist analyses demonstrate how stance can explain why speakers may choose one variable over another:
  - Kiesling et al. 2012: authoritative stances accounted for patterns of variable (-ing) and coronal stop deletion use within a friendship group that could not be explained by identity categories alone (e.g., class)
  - Podesva 2016: features commonly associated with African American English (/t,d/ deletion, falsetto) enable speakers to take stances about race
  - Levon 2016: speaker's deontic stances accounted for the stylistic use of creaky voice

# Stance: it's complicated

Coding for stance in qualitative analysis of intra-speaker variation raises some methodological complications:

- Stance is dialogic (negotiated), compositional, and multi-modal, which makes relying on only one linguistic medium (such as only written or only spoken data) challenging
- Requires in-depth contextual, ethnographic knowledge of speakers and interactions



# Data and method

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# The data

- Corpus:
  - Unique corpus, collected by eight individuals who recorded themselves in three event types ranging from high to low formality
- Participants:
  - Gender: Two men, five women, and one non-binary speaker
  - Age: 21-57
  - Ethnicity: 7 white speakers, 1 Filipino speaker
  - Language background: Five native speakers and three non-native speakers of English
    - **Sample varies along several social dimensions, but none of the social factors were statistically significant**
- Extracted all complement clauses, excluded all tokens with the matrix verb *feel*, which almost exclusively takes *like* as a complementizer (Brook 2014) → **734 tokens**

# Coding protocol

**Table 1: Coding protocol**

Predictor	Levels
<b>Linguistic predictors</b>	
Matrix verb	<i>say, know, think, etc.</i>
Matrix subject	First person singular, other
Intervening verbal arguments*	Present, absent
Intervening material elsewhere*	Present, absent
<b>Style and stance predictors</b>	
Event type	Casual, medium, formal
Affect	Positive, neutral, negative
Alignment	Align, neutral, disalign
Hierarchy	Novice, same level, expert
Investment	High, medium, low

\* coding based on Torres Cacoullos & Walker (2009)

# Coding protocol

## **Step 0: Contextual information**

Who are the speakers? What situation?

## **Step 1: Find tokens**

## **Step 2: Find stance acts**

Stance acts = segments of the size that reveal at least one aspect of stance  
(equivalent to Questions Under Discussion, Roberts 2012)

## **Step 3: Evaluate**

Assign values to the stance act

# Coding protocol

## Example of a stance act

X: Can I interrupt for one moment? Do you wanna.. I think it's still nice to sit out [and the] patio is open for one more [day. We might want to have] lunch outside if we can?

S: Ya:y, OK. Cause I thought Ø you said Ø you wanted Thai so I was assuming...

X: Yeah, but we can do that at another lunch. It occurred to me that the patio is still open

S: That is really true. I'm lovin' this weather.

# Coding protocol

	Ochs (1996)		Du Bois (2007)
	<b>Affective stance</b>	<b>Epistemic stance</b>	<b>Stance triangle</b>
<b>Affect</b> pos neutral neg	How do I evaluate the stance object?	n/a	Relating to stance object
<b>Investment</b> high medium low	How much do I like/dislike the stance object?	How sure am I in what I say about the stance object?	
<b>Alignment</b> align neutral disalign	Do I care about the face of my interlocutors?	Do I agree with my interlocutors?	Relating to co-stancetaker
<b>Hierarchy</b> expert same.level novice	n/a	Who is more knowledgeable wrt the stance object?	

Kiss (in preparation)

# Coding protocol

- What the speaker **uttered** versus what the speaker **could have uttered**
- Scalar implicatures (Horn 1989) arise at the level of utterance (e.g. expressives, Potts 2007)

Affect	So which one of these <u>cutiepies</u> is John's?	positive
	So which one of these <u>dogs</u> is John's?	neutral
	So which one of these <u>bastards</u> is John's?	negative

Investment	John was <u>absolutely right!</u>	high
	John was <u>right</u> .	neutral
	John was <u>probably right</u> .	low

# Coding protocol: Affect

- Can you add one of the following after your contribution?

“...and this is terrible” / “...which is terrible” / “This sucks!” / etc. – **negative affect**

“...and this is great” / “...which is cool” / “I’m happy about this!” / etc. – **positive affect**

None of the above: **neutral affect**

X: Can I interrupt for one moment? Do you wanna.. I think it’s still nice to sit out ... patio is open for one more.. lunch outside if we can?

S: Ya:y, OK. Cause I thought Ø you said Ø you wanted Thai so I was assuming

X: Yeah, but we can do that at another lunch. It occurred to me that the patio is still open

S: That is really true. I’m lovin’ this weather.

[this is great] ➤ positive affect



# Coding protocol: Investment

- Can your contribution be reformulated in more neutral terms?

If yes, your contribution has **high** or **low investment**. If no, it has **neutral investment**.

X: Can I interrupt for one moment? Do you wanna.. I think it's still nice to sit out ... patio is open for one more.. lunch outside if we can?

S: Ya:y, OK. Cause I thought Ø you said Ø you wanted Thai so I was assuming OK.

X: Yeah, but we can do that at another lunch. It occurred to me that the patio is still open

S: That is really true. I'm lovin' this weather.

That is true          I love/like this weather > high investment

# Coding protocol: Alignment

- Do you care about the addressee's face? OR: Do you agree with the addressee?  
Does your contribution build connection with the addressee? (from S. Kiesling)  
**align / neutral / disalign**

X: Can I interrupt for one moment? Do you wanna.. I think it's still nice to sit out ...  
patio is open for one more.. lunch outside if we can?

S: Ya:y, OK. Cause I thought Ø you said Ø you wanted Thai so I was assuming

X: Yeah, but we can do that at another lunch. It occurred to me that the patio is still  
open

S: That is really true. I'm lovin' this weather.

**Explicit agreement (“yay” “that is really true”) > align**

# Coding protocol: Hierarchy

- Can you add one of the following after your contribution?

“Believe me, I know this better than you do” – **expert**

“...but you know this better than me” – **novice**

Neither of the above – **same level**

X: Can I interrupt for one moment? Do you wanna.. I think it's still nice to sit out ... patio is open for one more.. lunch outside if we can?

S: Ya:y, OK. Cause I thought Ø you said Ø you wanted Thai so I was assuming

X: Yeah, but we can do that at another lunch. It occurred to me that the patio is still open

S: That is really true. I'm lovin' this weather.

**Believe me, I know this better than you do**

**You know this better than I do**

No reason to choose either > same level

# Coding protocol: Potential stance markers

**Affect:** explicit assessment (*this is wonderful/terrible*); gradable terms (*like/love/hate; incident/catastrophe*); expressives (*that idiot, this damn dog*); speaker-oriented adverbs (*luckily, amazingly*); etc.

**Investment:** Gradable terms (*very/terribly; like/love/hate*); interjections (*Go:d!*); phonological lengthening (*Go:d!*); emphatic stress (*They don't know you've got a tape recorder going!*); expressives (*that idiot, this damn dog*); repetition; wh-exclamatives (*What a nice hat!*); quantity hedges (*around 100 maybe*); strong negative polarity items; etc.

**Alignment:** explicit agreement (*yeah, you're right*) or disagreement (*I don't agree with that*); reference to the addressee (*you don't want to know*); tag questions (*Right? Isn't it?*); speaker-oriented adverbs (*luckily, amazingly*); backchannel (*you told me that*); politeness strategies; etc.

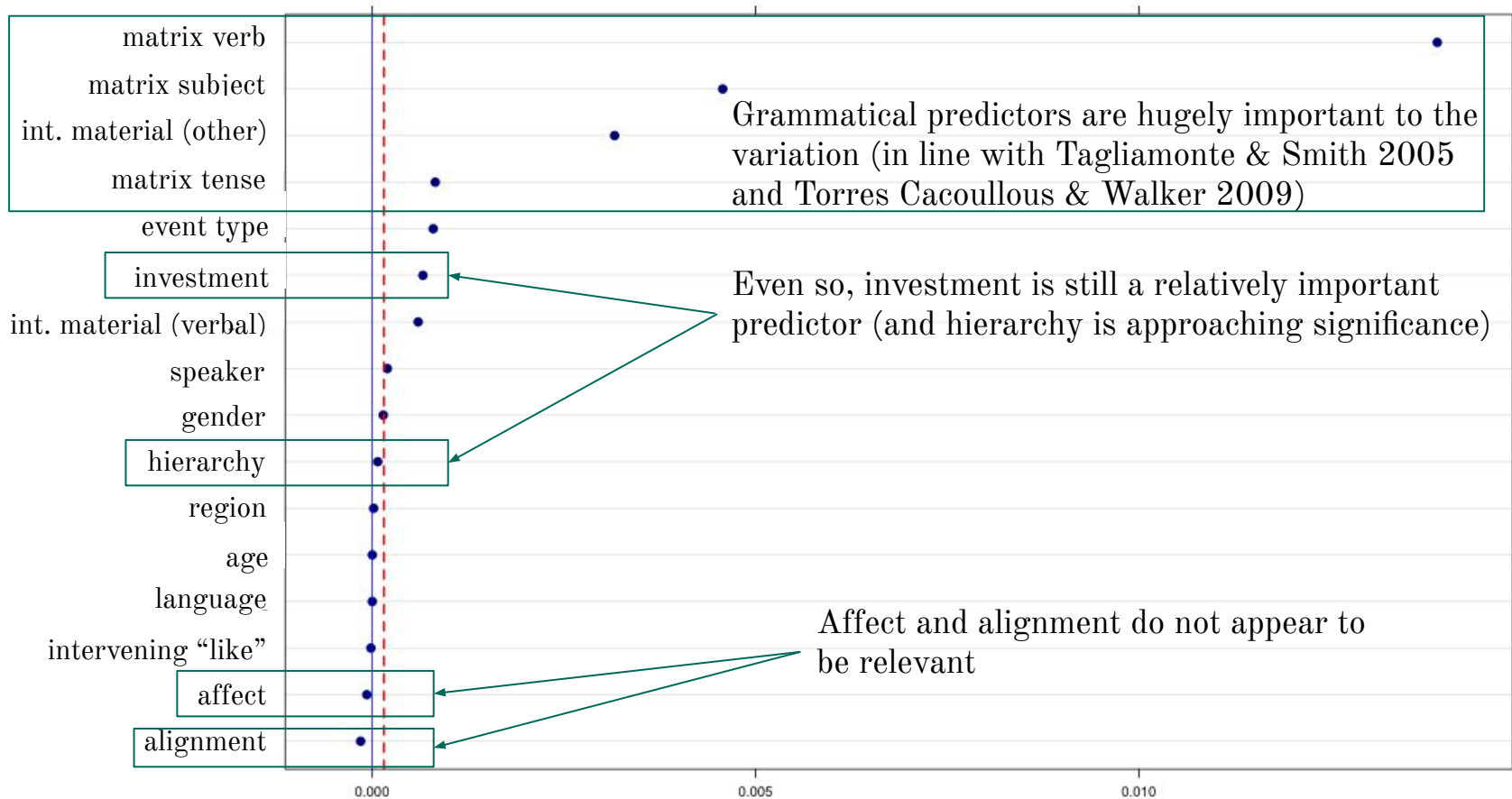
**Hierarchy:** evidentials (*I've heard, it sounds like*); exclusive pronouns (*the midpoint was our hardest problem*); etc.

# Analysis



# Statistical modeling

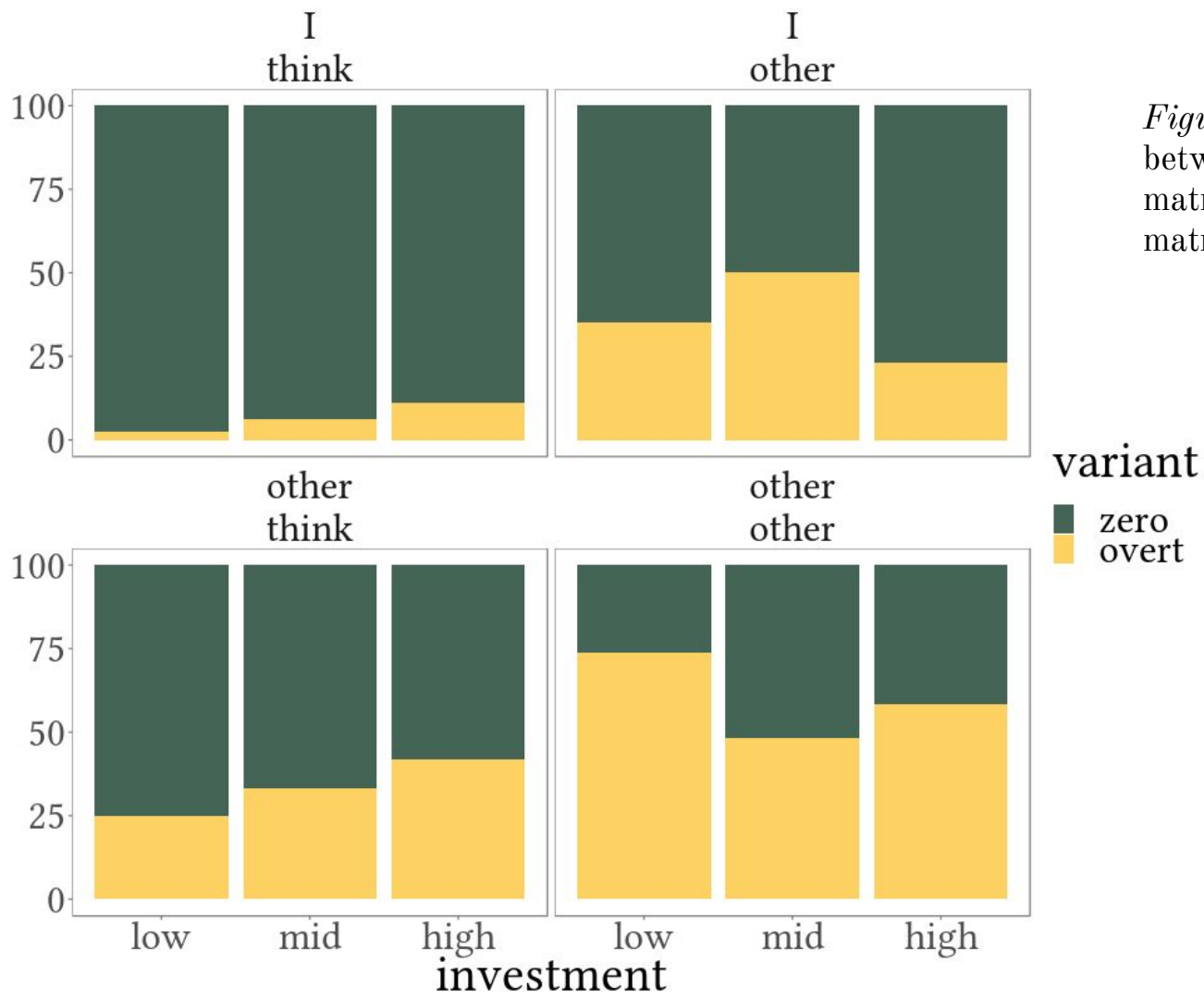
Figure 6: conditional variable importance of all predictors in the data



# Exploratory and inferential statistics

- Investment is not a significant main effect, but interacts with two grammatical predictors: **matrix subject** and **matrix verb** (to be explained in a sec)
- There's also a marginal, inches-away-from-significance effect of high ( $p = 0.0502$ ) hierarchy favouring overt





*Figure 7: interaction between investment, matrix subject, and matrix verb*

# Summing up; examples

- When referring to oneself (“I”), non-neutral investment significantly favours *that*
  - I can't say THAT I'm super educated about narrative analysis (03/low investment)
  - I'm sure THAT everybody else is still struggling with this. (02/high investment)
- When referring to others, non-neutral investment significantly favours *zero*
  - [name] probably had such a good time with you that she decided ∅ it might not be so bad (04/low inv.)
  - he [the judge] just- he just said ∅ he didn't believe it, and acquitted him (08/high inv.)
- With the verb “think”, low investment favours *zero* while high favours *that*
  - And how do you think ∅ the uh- the tree for this looks? (07/low investment)
  - I think THAT it is, it's really descriptive (03/casual, high investment)

# The point

- Investment has a significant effect on the variation, but that effect is conditioned by grammatical predictors: matrix subject and matrix verb
- The linguistic expression of a stance act in a given situation is not static or universal

# Takeaways

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# Theoretical implications

- Including stance offers new ways to understand the complexity of linguistic variation
  - Presents a novel insight into **what complementizers ‘do’ in discourse:** indicate speaker investment
  - Shows that the effect of stance is multifaceted, yet specific, and **not independent from the lexical content of the utterance**
  - Displays the effect of **stylistic practice** on what is often thought to be a strictly grammatically conditioned variable

# Methodological implications

- **Complementary analyses**
  - Quantitative assessment of stance is able to provide something that qualitative approaches do not
- **Replicability**
  - A (potentially) replicable quantitative framework for approaching a qualitative phenomenon

# Practical implications

- Self-coding
  - Greater insight into the data due to **intimate knowledge** of our conversations
    - PRO: Allowed for highly accurate, self-reflective coding
    - CON: Our data was too personal to be shared
- Future directions
  - Apply this framework to other corpora and test for **interrater reliability** (see Kiesling et al. 2015)

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# Speaker sample

**Table A1: Speaker sample and rate of null complementizer**

<b>Speaker</b>	<b>Gender</b>	<b>Age</b>	<b>L1</b>	<b>N</b>	<b>% zero</b>
1	F	28	English	70	86
2	M	28	Other	95	78
3	F	24	English	151	74
4	F	57	English	53	70
5	F	30	Other	155	63
6	F	34	Other	40	60
7	M	21	English	120	57
8	X	27	English	50	52
<b>Total</b>				<b>734</b>	<b>68</b>

# Results: Non-stance analysis

- distribution of complementizers does **not** appear to significantly differ dependent upon:
  - social factors (**age, gender, native language**)
  - matrix **tense** or matrix **polarity**
  - **intervening verbal arguments**
- distribution of complementizers **does** appear to differ significantly dependent upon:
  - **matrix verb**
    - overall displays the strongest effect on complementizer choice: certain verbs (*think, mean, remember, etc.*) strongly favour zero complementizer while others disfavour
  - **matrix subject**
    - displays the second strongest effect, with “I” as subject favouring zero complementizer
  - **intervening material elsewhere**
    - displays the third strongest effect on variation, with the presence of intervening material favouring the realization of overt complementizers
  - **formality**
    - displays the smallest effect on this variation, with formal situations favouring overt complementizers

# Coding protocol: Intervening material

- intervening verbal arguments:
  - “verbal arguments, such as indirect objects [...] and prepositional phrases” (Torres Cacoullos & Walker 2009:14)
    - “It's important **to me** THAT I be admired by others? [laughter] No definitely not.” (01/casual)
    - “[name] told **me** Ø I was not allowed to have alcohol.” (08/casual)
- adjuncts and ‘other’:
  - “single-word or phrasal adverbials [...], clauses [...], parentheticals, hesitations, and fillers” (Torres Cacoullos & Walker 2009:15)
    - “I think Ø **like** there's a couple things I was thinking of looking at closer...” (07/formal)
    - “I figure Ø **when you get married** you basically stay the same person.” (06/casual)

# Examples of stance acts from the corpus

## Affect (neutral)

A: So we have this thing that.. um.. You put it unde.. I don't know how it's called in English but you put it under the pillow of ... or not the pillow but under the bed of.. on the mattress

E: Oh! The [...]

A: Yes! It marks, I mean it's.. it's uh .. it gives a sign when he stops breathing.

## Investment - affective dimension

And.. Oh! And the second is that we keep forgetting to turn it off when we take Mark, so it always like “toot toot toot”. It doesn't sound right away, so it waits for I don't know ten seconds or so? And especially in the evening when I wake up to breastfeed him. I wake up, with my one eye open - I always open just one eye because this other one doesn't want to open when I try. So I was like “Oh OK”! And then I'm, you know, sleeping, sitting asleep, breastfeeding him, and suddenly this “tootoottootoottootoottoot”. I have to stand up, you know, uh get him off my breast, I hate it. I should for.. I should not forget it.

## Investment - epistemic dimension

Because we can't do this, unless we have informed consent.

# Examples of stance acts from the corpus

## Alignment - affective dimension

So notice THAT what happens in ethics is THAT when you yourselves are part of the project, notice how um.. what's the right English word for this? Like, you're starting to get a little bit uncomfortable, right? Like cause you're gonna be recording yourselves in these intimate situations.

## Alignment - epistemic dimension

X: Wait, don't..do not the faculty have like a get-together you guys do stuff like once a month or something? You get together and drink?

S: Yeah, I could..I could umm I could set up a linguistics review panel, right, and say ZERO "I'm gonna record myself".

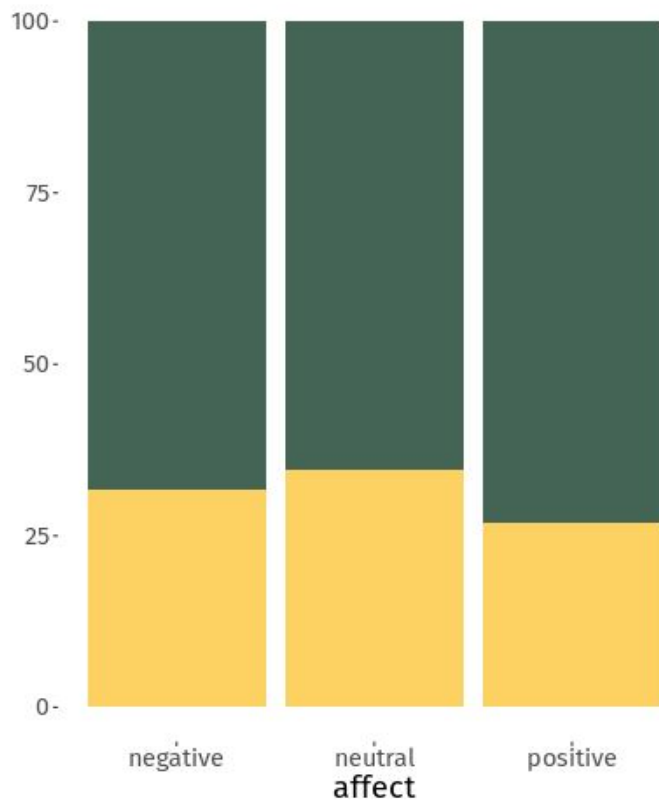
## Hierarchy

OK, so umm, interestingly, when you record other people, one of the things that has prevented anybody from doing this kind of project before is ZERO: you can't just record yourself willy-milly. Because obviously, you could run into anyone, and any time.

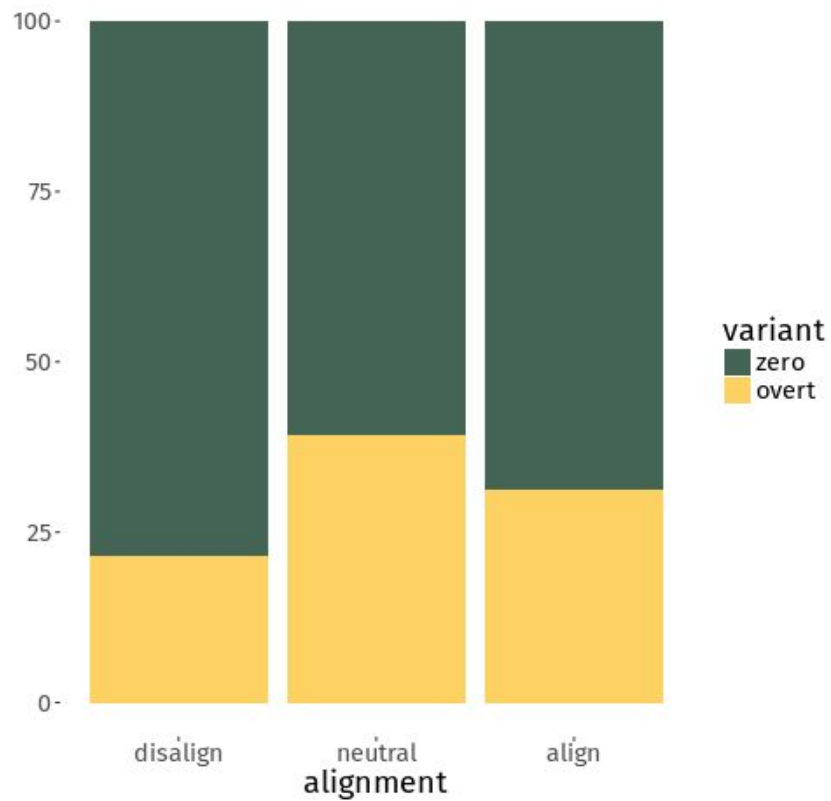


# Bonus slides: Overall distributions

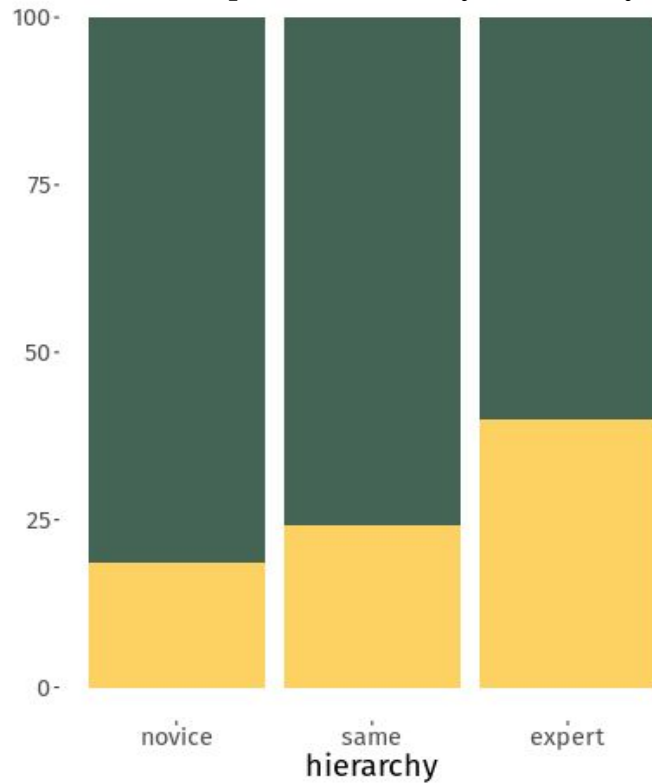
*Figure 2: overall distribution of complementizers by affect*



*Figure 3: overall distribution of complementizers by alignment*



*Figure 4: overall distribution of complementizers by hierarchy*



*Figure 5: overall distribution of complementizers by investment*

