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Linguistic Study of Stance-Taking in Online Media

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Abstract

This paper addresses stance-taking in an online media as nowadays people utilize them for several functions. Online media refers to communication technologies using the internet to present or exchange information. Online media used for several purposes such as selling products; advertising; sharing news, pictures, video, or information; or discussing such topics as politics, entertainment, education, and culinary. In achieving its goal, online media is systematically design. Every sentence has sort of persuasion, argumentation, and evaluation in an explicit way or implied to get better interaction with the readers. It needs the aspect of *stance,* which refers to lexical and grammatical expression of attitudes, feeling, judgments, or commitment cornering the proportional content of the message (Biber and Finegan in Myers: 2003,254).

Stance is considered as important concept in linguistics which brings a wide range on how utterances' meanings are expressed and how speakers (or writers) address their audience. Applying descriptive qualitative research, this paper is aimed at elicitting kinds of stance-taking utilized in *google.com* as one of the biggest online media. The researcher compiled the data by collecting the sentences which represent the act of stance taking then categorizing the kinds of stance-taking. The research resulted in finding that there are three kinds of stance: epistemic, attitudinal, and stylistic stance. Epistemic stance deals with the marking of certainty and uncertainty of the facts. Attitudinal stance concerns on personal perspective, aesthetic preference, as well as moral judgment or emotional response. Then, stylistic stance deals with the way of expressing idea.

Keywords: discourse analysis, electronic discourse, website, stance taking

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1. Introduction

Nowadays online media is widely accessed as an alternative to other media such as television, radio, and newspaper. Online media quickly becomes popular since it offers an abundant source of information and a massive data in an easy way. It can be realized in a form of website, forum, blog, image galleries, video portal, and many more. The existence of online media also impacts on language and communication practices. In online media, people do not applied face-to-face interaction with a unique characteristics of language used like using more acronyms, stylized spelling, reducing some words and sometimes image talks more than the sentences. Thus, to attract the potential

readers, every sentence in online media has sort of persuasion, argumentation, as well as evaluation in an explicit or implied way to gain a better interaction with the readers.

Moreover, online media also built in an exact point of view. The realization of point of view in a text is known as *stance-taking*. *Stance*, in short, refers to the position people take in relation to oneself, to what is said, and to other people or objects. Stance refers to lexical and grammatical expression of attitudes, feeling, judgments, or commitment concerning the proportional content of the message. People need *stance* to articulate their opinions, feelings or attitudes towards something or someone. *Stance* becomes an important concept in linguistics to know speakers' meaning and how they address their audience as Barton and Lee (2013:87) stated that stance deals with to the position people take in relation to oneself, to what is said, and to other people or objects.

Stance refers to lexical and grammatical expression of attitudes, feeling, judgments, or commitment concerning the proportional content of the message (Biber and Finegan in Myers: 2003,254).The other definition proposed by Du Bois (2007: 139) that stance has the power to assign value to object interest, to position social actors, to adjust the alignment between stance takers, and to invoke presupposed system of socio-cultural value. Chindamo, et al (2012:1) stated that *stance* can be defined as the expression of someone's personal viewpoint concerning proposed information. It can be concluded that stance refers to the position people take in relation to oneself, to what is said, and to other people or objects. All of the definitions focus on the expression of individual speaker or writer rather than on interactive relations.

Stance is marked through particular forms of language but also through other resources for meaning making. In any given stance statement, there are three major components – the person expressing the stance or also known as *stance-taker* or the person take a position; the topic being discussed or the *stance* object in which the *stance* related to; and the resources being drawn upon which deals with a particular word choices and style through which the *stance* is expressed. (Barton and Lee, 2013: 87).

Biber in Myers (2003: 254) divides stance into three categories: epistemic, attitudinal, and stylistics stances. Epistemic stance concerns the marking certainty and uncertainty about the factual basis for statements. It signals speaker's knowledge and belief towards her statement. The second stance is attitudinal stance which refers to the personal aesthetic preference, moral judgement or emotional response. Attitudinal stance used in signalling speaker's feelings. Some markers of attitudinal stance convey an emotional response, rather than an aesthetic preference or moral norm. By using the stance, people prefer to talk about their feeling rather than about right and wrong. Attitudinal stance

can be xpressed by delivering aesthetic appreciation, moral judgement, and emotional affect. Then, the third type is stylistic stance that deals with the way of expressing idea. The examples of stylistic markers are adverbs like *seriously, honestly, frankly, etc* which relates to the tone of the speakers

2. Method

To analyze *stance-taking,* the researcher applies descriptive qualitative method which focuses on the comprehensive explanation rather than the numbers. As Creswell (2003: 182) stated thatt he composition of the research in qualitative method is mostly provided in wording composition rather than numbering. In addition, the analyses are interpretative which means description, explanation, and interpretation are obtained based on researcher's point of view supported by relevant language theories. This research particularly answer the following questions: what are the three major components in stance taking? And What are the types of stance taking found in online media? The source of data is the online media *www.google.com,* especially in *About Us,* which is considered as one of the biggest online media.

The researcher gathered the data by reading the website, then observing and collecting sentences which utilized stance taking. After the data are gathered, the researcher identified three major components in stance taking followed by classifying stance taking types found in online media. The data found is displayed in a table elaborated with explanation and discussion and wrapped up in a conclusion. Those classifications is grounded on theories proposed by Myer (2013) and Borton and Lee (2013) about stance taking in online media.

3. Finding and Discussion

The research resulted in there types of *stance:* epistemic, attitudinal, and stylistic as illustrated in there separated tables. Before discussing the types, three major components of *stance* will be explained. In *google.com* the *stance taker* is the writer of online media specifically the founder of *Google,* Larry Page. He tells about the history of *Google,* the products, and the investment in *Google.* Then, the *stance* object or the topic being discussed is about *Google:* its profile, commitment, and career in *Google.* Moreover, persuasive language, formal style and convincing word choices are the *stance* resources. From those three major components, the forth component is also identified: the *addressee.* Addressee plays an important role since they will be

the potential readers who response the issued discussed. *Addressee* of this media is general readers as well as potential readers who are interested to invest in this company. Identifying those components lead to the understanding of how *Google* build the interaction with its potential readers.

There are 17 *stances* found from the text which is categorized into three types of stance. The first is epistemic stances which mark certainty and possibility. Epistemic stance deals with stating of facts, knowledge, or beliefs towards certain stance objects. Chindamo, et al (2012:23) added that epistemic stance is related to the degree of certainty concerning the object of discussion. Acts of epistemic stance marking are easy to spot in various writing spaces. The example of epistemic stance is illustrated in a sentence below:

> *Our long term focus does have risks. Markets* **may** *have trouble evaluating long term value, thus potentially reducing the value of our company. Our long term focus* **may** *simply be the wrong business strategy. Competitors* **may** *be rewarded for short term tactics and grow stronger as a result. As potential investors, you should consider the risks around our long term focus*

By emphasizing modality *may* and repeating it several times, the writer delivers his perspectives about the condition of the company that lead to the thing he does not know about. It expresses the uncertainty of what will happen next. The other examples of epistemic stances are displayed in the table below.

The second type found is attitudinal stance which expresses affect including feeling, mood, disposition and attitude. One example of attitudinal stance is happiness expression which stated verbally, as found in the data below:

> *We are* **delighted** *you are considering an investment in Google and are reading this letter*

The word *delighted* signals the exited feeling as well as warm appreciation for the readers' trustworthiness in choosing *Google* for investment. It implies the happy feeling or appreciation rather than explains about right or wrong investment. Thus, it is categorized as the attitudinal stance. There are 7 attitudinal stance found in *Google* as illustrated below.

Then, the third type is stylistic stance which refers to the manner or style of speaking. Stylistic stance can be realized through the use of affect markers, evidential, quantifiers and modal verbs, and adjective and adverb. The use of such adverbs as *usually, primarily,* and *generally* as shown in the table below reflects the use of stylistic stance In online media.

TABLE 1: Types of *epistemic stance* found in online media.

1	This change **will** bring important benefits for our employees, for our present and future shareholders, for our customers, and most of all for Google users. But the standard structure of public ownership **may** jeopardize the independence and focused objectivity that have been most important in Google's past success and that we consider most fundamental for its future	Epistemic stance
2	We are confident that, in the long run, this **will** benefit Google and its shareholders, old and new. We want to clearly explain our plans and the reasoning and values behind them.	Epistemic stance
3	Our goal is to develop services that significantly improve the lives of as many people as possible. In pursuing this goal, we **may** do things that we believe have a positive impact on the world, even if the near term financial returns are not obvious.	Epistemic stance
4	If opportunities arise that **might** cause us to sacrifice short term results but are in the best long term interest of our shareholders, we **will** take those opportunities. We **will** have the fortitude to do this. We **would** request that our shareholders take the long term view.	Epistemic stance
5	We **will** not shy away from high-risk, high-reward projects because of short term earnings pressure. Some of our past bets have gone extraordinarily well, and others have not. Because we recognize the pursuit of such projects as the key to our long term success, we **will** continue to seek them out. For example, we **would** fund projects that have a 10% chance of earning a billion dollars	Epistemic stance
6	We aspire to make Google an institution that makes the world a better place. In pursuing this goal, we **will** always be mindful of our responsibilities to our shareholders, employees, customers and business partners. With our products, Google connects people and information all around the world	Epistemic stance
7	Our long term focus does have risks. Markets **may** have trouble evaluating long term value, thus potentially reducing the value of our company. Our long term focus **may** simply be the wrong business strategy. Competitors **may** be rewarded for short term tactics and grow stronger as a result. As potential investors, you should consider the risks around our long term focus. We **will** make business decisions with the long term welfare of our company and shareholders in mind and not based on accounting considerations. Although we **may** discuss long term trends in our business, we do not plan to give earnings guidance in the traditional sense. We are not able to predict our business within a narrow range for each quarter.	Epistemic stance

Aforementioned explanation of *stance taking* reflects how *Google* treats the potential readers. This personal viewpoint is important in social act since *Google* do not talk face-to-face with the readers and cannot get the immediate response. Thus, the language used is organized in a good composition by utilizing the aspect of *stance*. It leads to the interactive communication and shape the further interaction. *Stance taking* helps the online interaction successfully delivered to the public or larger community.

TABLE 2: Types of *attitudinal stance* found in online media.

1	Our commitments: Creating opportunity for everyone. We **believe** everyone deserves the chance to learn, succeed, and be heard.	Attitudinal stance
2	We are **delighted** you are considering an investment in Google and are reading this letter.	Attitudinal stance
3	Sergey and I founded Google because we **believed** we could provide an important service to the world-instantly delivering relevant information on virtually any topic. Serving our end users is at the heart of what we do and remains our number one priority.	Attitudinal stance
4	We strive to provide users with great commercial information. We are proud of the products we have built, and we **hope** that those we create in the future will have an even greater positive impact on the world	Attitudinal stance
5	We **believe** a dual class voting structure will enable Google, as a public company, to retain many of the positive aspects of being private. We understand some investors do not favor dual class structures. Some may believe that our dual class structure will give us the ability to take actions that benefit us, but not Google's shareholders as a whole. We have considered this point of view carefully, and we and the board have not made our decision lightly. We are **convinced** that everyone associated with Google-including new investors-will benefit from this structure.	Attitudinal stance
6	We **believe** we have a world class management team impassioned by Google's mission and responsible for Google's success. We **believe** the stability afforded by the dual class structure will enable us to retain our unique culture and continue to attract and retain talented people who are Google's life blood. Our colleagues will be able to trust that they themselves and their labors of hard work, love and creativity will be well cared for by a company focused on stability and the long term.	Attitudinal stance
7	We intend to contribute significant resources to the foundation, including employee time and approximately 1% of Google's equity and profits in some form. We **hope** someday this institution may eclipse Google itself in terms of overall world impact by ambitiously applying innovation and significant resources to the largest of the world's problems.	Attitudinal stance

TABLE 3: Types of *stylistic stance* found in online media.

1	**Usually** we expect projects to have some realized benefit or progress within a year or two. But, we are trying to look forward as far as we can. Despite the quickly changing business and technology landscape, we try to look at three to five year scenarios in order to decide what to do now.	Stylistic stance
2	We know that some people have raised privacy concerns, **primarily** over Gmail's targeted ads, which could lead to negative perceptions about Google. However, we believe Gmail protects a user's privacy	Stylistic stance
3	Decisions are often made by one of us, with the others being briefed later. This works because we have tremendous trust and respect for each other and we **generally** think alike. Because of our intense long term working relationship, we can often predict differences of opinion among the three of us. We know that when we disagree, the correct decision is far from obvious.	Stylistic stance

4. Conclusion

Stance-taking plays an important role in online interaction. Utilizing stance taking signals the stance takers' opinions, emotional judgements, as well as a language style used to gain the particular function in a larger community. Stance is considered as public act

because it is applied in public online spaces such as website, *YouTube* and blog, news portal, or forum. *Google* in one of online media where opinions are expressed through specific language used which make it a good source to examine stance. *Google* is an online media which employs stance taking in a form of persuasive composition to gain the potential readers: the readers who are interested to join the investment. The concept of stance taking really matters to attract the audience since it can relate what *Google* want to say in an interactive way. Therefore, the good interaction can keep on going and the website can survive to reach its goals.

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