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Mullan, Kerry Jane; Karlsson, Susanna

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Subjectivity in contrast: A cross-linguistic comparison of ‘I think’ in Australian English, French and Swedish

Kerry Mullan and Susanna Karlsson

1. Introduction

This chapter focuses on the use of *I think* in conversation, and its use and (approximate) equivalent forms in Australian English, French (*je pense*, *je crois* and *je trouve* - literally ‘I think’; ‘I believe’ or ‘I think’; and ‘I find’ or ‘I think’ respectively), and Swedish *jag tycker* and *jag tror*. Such phrases have attracted a lot of attention in recent years, and have been referred to in a number of ways in different studies. They have been called, among other things, *epistemic predicates* (Aijmer, 1998), *parentheticals* (Urmson, 1952; Dehé & Kavalova, 2007; Schneider, 2007), *mental verbs*, *stance markers* (Kärkkäinen, 2003), and (*I-oriented*) *comment clauses* (Povolná, 2005). Common to all these studies is that they refer to phrasal collocations consisting of a verb that predominantly takes arguments that refer to participants in the discourse (‘egophoricity’; cf. Dahl, 2000). Most commonly, they are made up of a first person pronoun in combination with a verb in the present tense. The verb predominantly tends to be a ‘mental’ verb, i.e. a verb that concerns the area of cognition, belief or opinion.

We have chosen to refer to these phrases as comment clauses, since they can be considered epistemic parentheticals which are clausal in origin and which function as pragmatic markers Brinton (2008). As Biber, Johansson, Leech, Conrad and Finegan point out, comment clauses are also usually short, loosely connected to the main clause, and can appear in a variety of positions (1999: 197); all of these features apply to *I think* and its equivalents in this study. Kaltenböck (2008, 2009a, 2009b) also argues strongly for *I think* to be considered mainly as a comment clause, based on his findings that the presence or absence of the *that*-complementizer does not exhibit different prosodic behaviour.

It has been shown across languages that these subjective (or *intersubjective* – cf. Fitzmaurice, 2004 and Kärkkäinen, 2006) phrases tend to grammaticize into discourse markers (Brinton, 1996; Brinton, 2008; Heine, 2003; Traugott, 2003). Aijmer (1997) prefers to make a distinction between grammaticization and what she calls “pragmaticalization” (p. 6), but points out that several of the same processes are involved in both, i.e. increased frequency, pragmatic strengthening, semantic bleaching, phonological reduction, and subjectification. Traugott (1995) sees the latter process as particularly important in grammaticization, defining it as “a pragmatic-semantic process whereby meanings become increasingly based in the speaker’s subjective belief/state/attitude towards the proposition” (p. 31). She points out that in the case of *I think*, for example, the subject is losing its referential (or objective) properties and grammaticising into the

starting-point of a perspective (pp. 38-39). Traugott later claims that where subjectification occurs, the speaker's perspective is an essential element in the new polysemies of a word or expression (Traugott, 2003, p. 634).

Travis (2004) also suggests that many cognitive verbs have adapted to the necessity of managing interaction, and that the most frequently used constructions of these verbs are grammaticizing into fixed formulae for this purpose. Thompson and Mulac's (1991) study looks at *I think* and *I guess*, and proposes that these expressions have grammaticized from a main subject and verb with complement to syntactically free "epistemic phrases comparable to epistemic adverbs" (p. 313). Their basis for this grammaticization is the frequency of *I think* occurring without *that*:

[...] the evidence suggests that the most frequent subjects and verbs occurring with what syntacticians have considered to be 'that-less' 'complements', ... have in fact been reanalyzed by speakers as epistemic phrases, which have a degree of freedom not possible for subject-verb combinations; in particular they are 'free' to occur in other positions, just as other epistemic phrases, such as epistemic adverbs, do in English.

The grammaticization processes described above apply to the case of *I think*. Kärkkäinen's study of *I think* in American English refers to the phonological reduction and increased speed of *I think* in intonation unit-initial position (Kärkkäinen, 2003, p. 121), and Mullan's (2007, 2010) findings for Australian English are consistent with this. However, some occurrences of the comment clauses in the data demonstrate full pronunciation, without reduction or increased speed, as would be expected from an item still in the process of grammaticizing.

Aijmer (1997) claims that *I think* has developed into a discourse marker which is syntactically a speech-act adverbial (p. 1). However, she sees this development as incomplete, since *I think* continues to be a main verb followed by a complement clause, at the same time as developing new functions in conversation "as a response to the demands of planning and interaction with the hearer which may in their turn become conventionalised" (p. 40).

Some of the grammaticization processes can also be applied to *je pense*, *je crois* and *je trouve*, although fewer than those which apply to *I think* (Mullan 2007, 2010). These are: layering, divergence, pragmatic strengthening, semantic bleaching, phonological reduction, subjectification and polysemy. This indicates that the French expressions do not seem to have grammaticised to the same extent as *I think*.

In the Swedish data, many of the processes associated with grammaticization are found with *jag tycker* and *jag tror*. Specifically layering, semantic strengthening, semantic bleaching, phonological reduction and subjectification seem to be at work (Karlsson, 2006). However, Thomson and Mulac's (1991) claim that the loss of *that* is

an intrinsic feature of the grammaticization of epistemic phrases into discourse markers may have to be revised for Swedish. Although most of the occurrences of *jag tycker* lack the equivalent of *that* in instances where it would traditionally be obligatory, there is no or very little indication that any of the other grammaticization processes are at work: they appear semantically rich, phonologically unreduced, and – perhaps most importantly – function as main verbs, triggering subordinate word order in the clause they command¹. However, in positions where ‘that’ is not expected or even grammatical², several grammaticization processes are observable.

In this study, however, we will refrain from a detailed discussion of the finer points of grammaticization across languages. From our own research and that of others, we determine that processes of grammaticization are at work in all three languages, but to different degrees and in somewhat different ways. Here, we discuss the frequency and the distribution of *I think*, *je pense*, *je crois*, *je trouve*, *jag tycker* and *jag tror*.

2. Data

This comparative study is based on the detailed analysis of 660 occurrences of the comment clause *I think* and its equivalents in French and Swedish in a total of sixteen hours of conversation. The corpora analysed consist of three similar data sets made up of separate conversations by native speakers of general Australian English³ and standard French⁴ (Mullan, 2007, 2010), and Swedish (Karlsson, 2006). These were recorded in Australia between August 2000 and September 2002, and in Sweden between 1985 and 1999.

Table 1 Distributions of comment clauses in Australian English, French and Swedish.

	<i>Tokens</i>	<i>Per 10,000 words</i>	<i>Total number of words</i>	<i>Number of participants</i>	<i>Time</i>
<i>I think</i>	281	58	31,847	9	4h 30
<i>je pense</i>	133	20			
<i>je crois</i>	36	5	41,035	9	5h
<i>je trouve</i>	59	9			
<i>jag tycker</i>	69	10	70,000	77	6h 30
<i>jag tror</i>	82	12			

The participants in the English and French conversations are all aged between 19 and 42, are of middle-class background, all have (or

¹ However, other phrases, such as *jag menar* ‘I mean’ have progressed much further down this cline, and only rarely occurs in a phonologically non-reduced form, and just as rarely syntactically commands the clauses following them

² Cf. variations (b-f) in section 4 below.

³ It is generally agreed that there are three main types of Australian English: broad, general and cultivated, and that these are largely distinguished on the basis of vowel pronunciation (cf. Horvath, 1985).

⁴ Hansen (1997) defines standard French as “the kind which is spoken by educated Parisian speakers and which exhibits no noticeable regional or social characteristics” (p. 154). While this may seem a narrow definition, it is representative of the French spoken by these participants.

are studying for) a university degree, and come from different parts of Australia and France. The English and French conversations comprised two participants with the researcher present: the participants were mostly made up of complete strangers meeting for the first time, except for one pair of co-workers who had only met one week prior to the recording, and one pair who were acquaintances (cf. Mullan, this volume). The Swedish data is a compilation of a variety of different interactions, such as dinner conversations, health care conversations, focus group interviews, and private telephone conversations, all in all 31 conversations. The conversations are made up of over 70 individual participants, between the age of 19 and 65 years. They come from all parts of Sweden, although with a slight preference for the middle parts of the country, especially the West Coast and the Stockholm area. They vary greatly in length: some are as brief as 25 seconds, while one conversation is close to 1,5 hours.

Although the researcher was present at the French and English recordings, her participation was limited to asking questions on certain topics to initiate the conversation and to adding comments occasionally. Bardovi-Harlig and Hartford (1992) refer to this type of data collection as “unscripted experimental”, where speakers are brought together to have a conversation or to accomplish a task, and where the researcher provides no instructions other than suggesting the topic of conversation. Most of the Swedish data consists of conversations that would have taken place with or without the researchers’ interests; however, in two of the conversations, a researcher is present, introducing certain topics into the discussion. Despite the fact that some of the conversations recorded for these corpora were pre-arranged (and do not therefore strictly conform to the definition of completely “naturally occurring” in Conversation Analysis), all the interactions which took place are representative of what is referred to in Conversation Analysis as *talk-in-interaction*, and will therefore be referred to as conversations throughout this study.

3. Methodology

The data was analysed qualitatively using a combination of the principles of the sequential-interactional frameworks of Interactional Sociolinguistics and Conversation Analysis (CA). However, we have chosen the intonation unit (IU) rather than the turn constructional unit (TCU) used in CA as our unit of analysis, and some of the data was collected in a more controlled setting than the CA norm (see discussion above).

In addition we include some basic quantitative data, such as frequency counts of intonation units and the comment clauses under analysis. Quantitative data are also uncommon in CA, since individual items cannot be examined in isolation from the surrounding context. However, all of the occurrences of the comment clauses have been analysed individually and qualitatively in context. This was achieved by examining the surrounding discourse (i.e. topic under discussion and any other relevant contextual information), the position in the intonation unit, and the prosody of the comment clause itself. As such

the quantitative data are not simple frequency counts, but a useful illustration of the functions and positions of the comment clauses.

Interactional Sociolinguistics combines Gumperz's anthropological work on culture, society, language and the self (Gumperz, 1982 *inter alia*), and Goffman's (1967) sociological focus on social interaction and the notion of face, (subsequently developed further by Brown and Levinson (1987)). Gumperz (1982) called for a "general theory of verbal communication which integrates what we know about grammar, culture and interactive conventions into a single overall framework of concepts and analytical procedures" (p. 4). The "concepts" Gumperz was referring to were those of *contextualisation cues*, *contextual presupposition*, and *situated inference*:

1. *Contextualisation cues* are the verbal and non-verbal signals which frame a speech exchange (Gumperz, 1995, p. 102). Gumperz places particular emphasis on the importance of prosody as a contextualisation cue in interaction, and recommends "isolat[ing] sequentially bounded units, marked off from others [...] by some degree of thematic coherence" (Gumperz, 2001, p. 223).⁵
2. *Contextual presuppositions* are assumed background knowledge which allows situated inferencing.
3. *Situated inferencing* refers to the understanding of both the communicative activity (i.e. chatting, joking etc.), and the speaker's actual illocutionary act.⁶

Conversation Analysis (CA) is the study of recorded, naturally occurring talk-in-interaction, where the principle aim is to discover how participants understand and respond to each other's turns, with the main focus on sequences of actions. CA has several central interactional organisation concepts, as outlined below:

1. *Turn-taking*. The seminal paper by Sacks, Schegloff and Jefferson (1974) details a system of conventions for turn-taking in conversation - principally that "overwhelmingly one party talks at a time" (p. 15).
2. *Adjacency pairs*. Turn-taking sets up a system of utterances which generally occur in pairs. The production of a first pair part of an adjacency pair such as a greeting or an invitation, sets up the constraint that the interlocutor provide the appropriate or 'conditionally relevant' second pair part of the adjacency pair, such as a return greeting or an acceptance.
3. *Preference and (dis)preferred responses*. This refers to the second pair part of an adjacency pair. For example, an invitation requires a response in the form of an acceptance or a

⁵ Gumperz later refers to these bounded units as "informational phrases", and notes that these correspond to what discourse analysts refer to as idea or information units (1992, p. 234); his description of how to identify these informational phrases prosodically matches that of the intonation unit.

⁶ See Gumperz (1982, 1992) for a more detailed explanation of contextualization and related concepts in Interactional Sociolinguistics

decline, where the preferred response would be acceptance. This concept of *preference* does not refer to the psychological disposition of the speaker, but to the structural feature of the sequential organisation of the adjacency pair, where the preferred response is the unmarked one.

4. *Recipient-design* refers to “a multitude of respects in which the talk by a party in a conversation is constructed or designed in ways which display an orientation and sensitivity to the particular other(s) who are the co-participants” (Sacks et al 1974: 727).
5. *Repair* refers to corrections of what participants perceive as problems in speech.

As mentioned above, the unit of analysis employed in this study is the intonation unit (IU). An intonation unit is defined technically by Du Bois, Schuetze-Coburn, Cumming and Paolino (1993) as “a stretch of speech uttered under a single coherent intonation contour [...] marked by cues such as a pause and a shift upward in overall pitch level at its beginning, and a lengthening of its final syllable” (p. 47). Chafe (1993) describes intonation units as “in a sense what language is all about” (p. 37). He points out that if the intonation unit is a verbal representation of what is in the speaker’s mind at a certain time, then the speaker’s intention must be to convey that idea to the listener; in this way intonation units can reveal how much and what kind of information a speaker can focus on at once (p. 39). This is clearly linked to the CA concept of recipient-design and the sequential nature of co-construction of discourse in CA and Interactional Sociolinguistics.

Both Kärkkäinen (2003) and Travis (2005) have demonstrated the importance of the intonation unit as the unit of analysis in discourse. Kärkkäinen shows how the intonation unit position affects the function and meaning of *I think* in American English, and claims that finding that epistemic stance almost always occurs at the beginning of intonation units would not have been possible without using the intonation unit as “the locus of the expression and qualification of speaker commitment” (Kärkkäinen, 2003, p. 33). Travis points out the importance of transitional continuity to an analysis of discourse markers, since the function often correlates with the intonation unit contour (Travis, 2005, p. 23) – for example marking finality. Like Kärkkäinen (2003), we believe that using the intonation unit allows for a more interactional (rather than grammatical) approach to subjectivity, and that this approach is the most suited to our data.

The transcription conventions given at the end of this chapter are based on a combination of the University of California, Santa Barbara method of discourse transcription devised by Du Bois et al. (1993) and that of Conversation Analysis devised by Jefferson (1994).

4. Distribution within the intonation unit (IU)

While it is primarily prosody (and context) which determines whether the comment clause is functioning as what we have called an organisational discourse marker or not (see section 5, below), the IU position is equally important. It was found that IU position and the corresponding IU contours were crucial in determining the exact organisational discourse marker role of all the comment clauses under investigation; for example, a truncated IU usually indicates on-line planning, and a falling intonation contour signals topic finality and also turn completion on occasion.

The following (equivalent) examples have been constructed to illustrate the possible IU positions for the comment clauses in our data. Only one of each English, French and Swedish example has been chosen, but as can be seen from the three languages presented, the comment clause can appear in exactly the same IU position for each language, namely initial (a), medial (b and c), final (d), and separate - after the IU (f). None of the three languages seem to allow the possibility of the comment clause appearing in IU-separate position before the IU (e).

(a) *I think (that)* Australia has a lot to work on.

(b) Australia *I think* has a lot to work on.

(c) Australia has *I think* a lot to work on.

(d) Australia has a lot to work on *I think*.

(e) ? *I think* (.) Australia has a lot to work on.

(f) Australia has a lot to work on (.) *I think*.

(a) *Je pense que* l'Australie a encore beaucoup de travail.

(b) L'Australie *je pense* a encore beaucoup de travail.

(c) L'Australie a *je pense* encore beaucoup de travail.

(d) L'Australie a encore beaucoup de travail *je pense*.

(e) ? *Je pense (que)* (.) l'Australie a encore beaucoup de travail.

(f) L'Australie a encore beaucoup de travail (.) *je pense*.

(a) *Jag tycker (att)* Australien har mycket att jobba på.

(b) Australien *tycker jag* har mycket att jobba på.

(c) Australien har *tycker jag* mycket att jobba på.

(d) Australien har mycket att jobba på *tycker jag*.

(e) ? *Jag tycker* (.) Australien har mycket att jobba på.

(f) Australien har mycket att jobba på (.) *tycker jag*.

Note that in the Swedish examples (b-d) and (f), where the comment clause is in an IU-final or IU-medial position, the word order of the comment clause is sensitive to the syntactic rule of V2, common to many Germanic languages.

Tables 2 to 4 present the distribution across IU positions in the English, French⁷ and Swedish data.

⁷ Unless stated otherwise, all references to *je pense*, *je crois*, and *je trouve* also refer to the inclusion of the subordinator *que* ('that') where this is syntactically obligatory at the beginning of a proposition in standard European French, i.e. *je pense que*, *je*

Table 2 Distribution of comment clauses within the IU of Australian English

	<i>IU-initial</i>	<i>IU-medial</i>	<i>IU-final</i>	<i>IU-separate</i>	<i>Total</i>
<i>I think</i>	192 (68%)	16 (6%)	19 (7%)	54 (19%)	281

Table 3 Distribution of comment clauses within the IU of French

	<i>IU-initial</i>	<i>IU-medial</i>	<i>IU-final</i>	<i>IU-separate</i>	<i>Total</i>
<i>je pense</i>	75 (56%)	6 (4.5%)	19 (7%)	22 (16.5%)	133
<i>je crois</i>	26 (72%)	3 (8.5%)	3 (8.5%)	4 (11%)	36
<i>je trouve</i>	35 (60%)	8 (13%)	7 (12%)	9 (15%)	59

Table 4 Distribution of comment clauses within the IU of Swedish

	<i>IU-initial</i>	<i>IU-medial</i>	<i>IU-final</i>	<i>IU-separate</i>	<i>Total</i>
<i>jag tycker</i>	37 (53.5%)	17 (24.5%)	7 (10%)	8 (11.5%)	69
<i>jag tror</i>	44 (53.5%)	21 (25.5%)	15 (18.5%)	2 (2.5%)	82

The above tables compare the position of the comment clauses by IU. It can be seen that the great majority occurred in IU-initial position for all three languages. The patterning then differs slightly per language and per comment clause, but with the exception of the two Swedish expressions, the other comment clauses all favour IU-separate position over the other two positions. The French and English comment clauses show a similar distribution across IU-final and IU-medial position.

In the Swedish data, over 50% of the occurrences are found in IU-initial position, and around 25% of the occurrences are in medial position. The IU-final and IU-separate instances together make up around a fifth of the instances. It seems clear that the most common IU environment for Swedish comment clauses is at the beginning or middle of the IU. It is noteworthy that the two comment clauses, *jag tycker* and *jag tror*, show an almost identical distribution in IU-initial and IU-medial position, while they seem to behave very differently in the IU-final and IU-separate positions, where *jag tycker* is as common as a separate IU as it is in IU-final position, while *jag tror* only occurs in an IU-final position twice, i.e. in around 2.5% of the total occurrences.

The distribution of comment clauses in Swedish differs from that of English and French in that the Swedish speakers make much more frequent use of the IU-medial position. This warrants a comment. An overwhelming majority – all but a few cases – of the instances in IU-medial position are of the type (b) above, i.e. the comment clause precedes the finite verb. Most of the instances do not have a content word in initial position, but rather the pro term *det* ‘it/that’. Typically, this occurs in instances that are responsive to what

crois que, and *je trouve que* (unless where this latter is followed by a noun phrase). We would therefore normally expect to see *que* following the expression in IU-initial position (as in example (a) above), but not usually in IU-medial, -final, or -separate position (although this is possible in the case of truncated or interrupted speech).

has been said in a previous utterance by another speaker. Compare below:

det tycker jag också
that think I too
'I think so too'

This and similar constructions are very frequent in the Swedish data, which accounts for the comparatively higher frequency of IU-medial comment clauses in the Swedish data. It also accounts for why the IU-initial position is more frequent in English and French data: while the above example is syntactically possible in English and French, this particular word order is in fact quite rare, and did not occur in the data. Equivalent examples of *I think so too* were coded as IU-separate in the English and French data. Instances of (c) are also practically non-existent in all the data, and (e) did not occur at all (see earlier discussion regarding the validity of the constructed examples).

5. Functions

In this analysis we refer to the *organisational*, *semantic* and *pragmatic* functions of the relevant comment clauses in discourse. These are outlined below:

- Organisational
 - to mark a boundary in discourse, e.g. to initiate a topic, frame a side sequence, or to sum up in discourse
 - to mark a new or different perspective from the prior turn (or speaker)
 - for on-line planning
 - to mark finality to a proposition (IU-final position)
 - to signal turn completion and pursue speaker response (turn-final position)
- Semantic (expression of opinion/level of certainty)
- Pragmatic (face-saving)

The prosody of these comment clauses as organisational discourse markers typically involves acceleration and phonological reduction. This is because the focus is not on the personalisation of the comment clause itself, but on what follows.

Where the comment clause displays level stress and no reduction, this typically indicates that the expression of opinion is the primary function. Where there is a fall-rise intonation, the primary function of the comment clause is to indicate some uncertainty as to the veracity of the proposition.

Examples (1)-(7) below illustrate occurrences of the comment clauses under analysis in all intonation unit positions and with all the functions discussed above across the three languages. Examples (1) and (2) are from the Australian English conversations; (3) to (5) from the French corpus; and (6) and (7) from the Swedish corpus.

The first example illustrates an occurrence of *I think* in intonation unit medial position marking a connection between the interlocutor's prior utterance and the speaker's own opinion on that remark.

- In this example, the participants had been asked to talk about which qualities they thought made up a ‘good’ person, and had been talking about empathy towards other people prior to this extract. Following the researcher’s contribution Lisa says *yeah, and I -- I --* in line 2, displaying her agreement. It is possible that she was going to place *I think* here, before *that is one thing Australians do tend to, to do a bit* in lines 2/3, which would also have been a valid way of marking her stance. However, Lisa restarted, to instead say *that is one thing* prior to *I think*. This may have been for emphatic effect, or simply a case of an extra piece of information or dimension coming to mind. In either scenario it also shows some self repair and on-line planning, and marks a connection with the prior intonation unit *that is one thing*, before expressing her opinion with *I think Australians do tend to, to do a bit*. The intonation on *I think* is level and equally stressed here, indicating that the primary function here is to express an opinion, although Lisa mitigates this somewhat by the hedges *one thing, tend to, and a bit*.

Example (2) IU-separate; organisational: marking finality and turn completion

1 Heather: mm. yeah. it's scary to see what can happen. in a --
2 in a community.
3 Marie: mm.
4 Heather: that though so many of the Germans, I understand,

- 5 ^didn't a),⁸ didn't know the full extent of what was
 6 going on, and were ^scared, and didn't want to, I
 7 mean they were like u- ^us, and it could ^happen.
 8 and we could react that same way. that's the ^scary
 9 bit. (0.4) *I think*.
 10 Marie: well I would say that now it happened.

From this example we can see how Heather sums up her turn with *that's the scary bit* (lines 8/9) with an intonation contour indicating completion. She follows this with *I think* (after a slight pause), again with a completed intonation contour. This is an example of a same-speaker continuation here when there is no interlocutor uptake; it is clear that this *I think* again signals turn completion, at which point Marie does indeed take over. The prosody here indicates an expression of opinion here; *I think* is unreduced and receives equal emphasis.

Such instances of IU-separate *I think* are examples of what Schegloff (1996) refers to as *turn increments* and *post-completion stance markers*. He distinguishes between the two, defining turn increments as “elements of talk [...] which constitute extensions to the TCU (Turn Constructional Unit) or the turn [...] and which themselves come to another possible completion of the TCU or the turn” (pp. 90-92). These turn increments are not grammatically independent units, but follow on from the grammatical construction of the prior TCU (Schegloff, 1996, p. 90), as well as from a point of prosodic completion (Walker, 2004, p. 147). *I think* in the above example can be considered a grammatically dependent complement to the prior utterance *that's the scary bit*, which then constitutes another possible completion point. As there is a pause of 0.4 seconds before *I think* is uttered, this can be considered a *post-gap increment* (as opposed to a *next-beat increment* or *post-other-speaker-talk increment*) (Schegloff, 2000; Walker, 2004, p. 150).

Walker's phonetic analysis of increments shows how pitch, volume, rate of articulation, and other particular articulatory characteristics all illustrate increments as being continuations of their host; this is done either by “redoing” the intonation contour of the final foot of the host, or by “reshaping” it (Walker, 2004, pp. 153-154). It seems that the former is the case here; the rise-fall patterning of *scary bit* is repeated in *I think*. In this case *I think* is also an example of Schegloff's post-completion stance marker, which represents retrospective alignment towards the prior talk (Schegloff, 1996, pp. 90, 92). (Another example of this is illustrated in the Swedish example 7 below.)

Example (3) IU-initial; semantic: expression of opinion/uncertainty

In the following example of intonation unit-initial *je pense*, the speaker indicates some uncertainty as to the veracity of the proposition. I have asked the participants what *dogmatique* means.

⁸ The speaker was going to mention two points: a and b.

- 1 Kerry: *et c'est ça être dogmatique?*
2 Céline: *(2.0) euh .(.) être dogmatique, non je pense pas que*
3 *ça soit ça en fait. pour moi dogmatique c'est plutôt,*
4 *avoir des -- des idées préconçues? peut-être. et pas*
5 *vouloir changer? non? ou (0.3)*
5 Kerry: *mm mm.*
6 Céline: *[avoir des dogmes?]*
. .
7 Céline: *@@. non donc j'ai pas ??. non mais je pense que*
8 *dogmatique en fait, (H) c'est avoir une --. un style*
9 *de vie qui corresponde à, (0.3) qui correspond,*
10 Bernadette: *mm.*
11 Céline: *eu::h (0.3) à certains dogmes, par exemple euh,*
12 *(0.3) euh quand on est catho[lique okay on a --. on*
13 *a le (.). un]*
13 Bernadette: *[une certaine croyance.*
14 *(0.3) mm.]*
15 Céline: *style de vie qui correspond [euh,]*
16 Bernadette: *[ouais.]*
17 Céline: *je pense que [c'est ça.]*
18 Bernadette: *[ouais.]*
19 Céline: *mais je suis pas certaine non plus.*
- 1 Kerry: *and is that what being dogmatic means?*
2 Céline: *(2.0) er (.) being dogmatic, no I don't think it's*
3 *that in fact. for me dogmatic is more, having*
4 *pre- preconceived ideas? maybe. and not wanting*
5 *to change? isn't it? or (0.3)*
6 Kerry: *mm mm.*
7 Céline: *[having dogmas?]*
. .
8 Céline: *@@. no so I don't have ?? {a dictionary}. no but*
9 *je pense que dogmatique in fact, (H) it's when you*
10 *have a --. a lifestyle that corresponds to, (0.3)*
11 *which corresponds,*
12 Bernadette: *mm.*
13 Céline: *er:: (0.3) to certain dogmas, for example er, (0.3) er*
14 *if you're Catho[lic okay you have --. you have the*
15 *(.) a]*
16 Bernadette: *[a certain belief. (0.3) mm.]*
17 Céline: *lifestyle that corresponds [er,]*
18 Bernadette: *[yeah.]*
19 Céline: *je pense que [it's that.]*
20 Bernadette: *[yeah.]*
21 Céline: *but I'm not certain either.*

The researcher's initial question follows a discussion on expressing opinions; Bernadette has said that some people will not listen to

others' opinions, which means that there can be no exchange. Following an initial two-second pause, Céline replies in the negative, saying in lines 2/3 that she does not think that *dogmatic* means that. Her hesitation in the second pair part of this adjacency pair indicates consideration of her reply (already indicating some possible uncertainty). Céline goes on to say what *dogmatique* means for her (*pour moi*, line 3), thus illustrating the subjectivity of her response at this point. The following four instances of rising intonation and the tag question *non?* 'isn't it?' suggest that she is not putting this definition forward as a definitive answer, acknowledging that others may have a different idea as to the meaning of this word. There then follows twelve to fifteen seconds of a side sequence where Bernadette says that she would like to know the exact definition of *dogmatique* and asks if Céline has a dictionary. Céline says that it was too heavy to bring with her to Australia, and following the laughter the topic of *dogmatique* is taken up again in line 7 with the topic changing *mais* ('but'); Céline continues with her explanation of *dogmatique*.

The context surrounding the second instance of *je pense* in this extract (line 17) illustrates that Céline is expressing a degree of doubt as to the exact definition, and her next utterance explicitly confirms her lack of certainty on this point. The topic here is one which can be both subjective and objective. It is therefore clear that with this instance of *je pense* Céline is expressing her opinion, while at the same time indicating some uncertainty as to the exact definition of *dogmatique*.

The most frequent function of IU-initial *je pense* in the data was that of expressing speaker opinion. Contrary to the case of IU-initial *I think* (where only 19% of the data primarily expressed speaker opinion), there were forty-six instances of IU-initial *je pense* used to express an opinion: 35% of the total corpus.

Example (4) IU-initial, IU-final; Organisational: framing a side sequence

The following example illustrates an IU-initial *je pense* and an IU-final *je crois* used to mark a boundary in discourse, namely to frame a side-sequence. In this conversation Pauline and Vincent have been discussing how they feel towards France.

1	Vincent:	<i>ouais c'est bizarre les (.) les rapports qu'on peut</i>
2		<i>avoir avec les Français. c'est-à-dire que quand on</i>
3		<i>est sur le territoire français, enfin moi j'habite à</i>
4		<i>Paris et c'est la ville la plus, je pense la plus</i>
5		<i>stressée de de France je crois, et je m'en suis mis</i>
6		<i>quand je conduis par exemple à haïr le Français</i>
7		<i>moyen quoi</i>
1	Vincent:	<i>yeah it's weird the (.) the connections that you can</i>
2		<i>have with the French. that's to say that when you're</i>
3		<i>in France, well I live in Paris and it's the most, je</i>
4		<i>pense the most stressed city in in France je crois,</i>

5 and when I drive for example I've started to hate the
6 average French person

This is a very interesting example in that *je pense* and *je crois* occur within the same intonation unit (lines 4/5), and was the only instance in the data where this happened. Vincent is talking about the French and France, and initiates a side sequence about living in Paris with *enfin* ('well') in line 3. He starts to say that it is the most stressed city in France in lines 4/5, but he stops after *la plus* ('the most'), to add *je pense* - marking this claim as his opinion only, rather than making a factual statement - then repeats *la plus* ('the most') and continues with his utterance. He then terminates this side sequence with *je crois* in line 5, before going back to talking about the French, their driving, and other related topics. Both instances of *je pense* and *je crois* are level and unreduced here, thereby expressing Vincent's opinion, as well as playing the organisational role of framing a side sequence.

Example (5) IU-separate; organisational: marking finality and turn completion

We will now look at an example of intonation unit-separate *je trouve* used to mark finality and turn completion. Irène and Guillaume have been discussing the use of informal and formal personal pronouns *tu* and *vous* ('you') in French.

1 Guillaume: *je sais toujours que dans le travail*
2 *il y a une euh, (0.3)*
3 Irène: *mais ça j'allais te demander, t'as*
4 *l'impression [que --]*
5 Guillaume: *[un truc] à ne pas franchir.*
6 *[une limite à pas franchir,]*
7 Irène: *[mais ça j'allais te demander,] t'as*
8 *l'impression qu'en passant du tu -- enfin*
9 *du vous au tu, tu (0.3) tu (.) tu perds un*
10 *peu cette notion de respect? °moi j'*
11 *[trouve.]°*
12 Guillaume: *[non] c'est pas une notion de respect,*
13

1 Guillaume: I know that at work there's always
2 a er, (0.3)
3 Irène: but that's what I wanted to ask you, do
4 you think [that --]
5 Guillaume: [a thing] that can't be crossed.
6 [a line that can't be crossed,]
7 Irène: [but that's what I was going to ask you,]
8 do you think that by moving from *tu* -- I
9 mean from *vous* to *tu*, you (0.3) you (.)
10 you lose that notion of respect a bit? °moi
11 j'[trouve.]°
12 Guillaume: [no] it's not a question of respect, ...

Here we see Irène attempt to ask Guillaume his opinion in lines 3/4, and again successfully in lines 7-10. After asking him whether he feels that by moving from *vous* to *tu* means that you lose a notion of respect, she finishes her question with an intonation unit-separate *moi j'trouve* in lines 10/11. As well as clearly marking this as her answer to her own question to Guillaume and inviting him to offer his own (perhaps differing) point of view, the falling intonation contour marks finality and turn completion. Irène is inviting interlocutor response, as she waits for Guillaume to answer the question she has just put to him, which he does immediately - in fact overlapping Irène's final *trouve*, as he recognises the role of this instance of *je trouve* and its intonation. The prosody of *moi j'trouve* is reduced and quiet, indicating an organisational discourse marker.

This use of *moi* ('me') in front of the subject pronoun *je* is extremely common in French conversation. It has the effect of emphasising the subject pronoun, thereby asserting the speaker's position, and corresponds to something like 'this is what I think', which is used much less often in English. André-Larochebouvy (1984) refers to *moi, je* as a "prototype" of the kind of signals which differentiate and mark a distance, designed to point out the specificity of the speaker (p. 152).

There were a total of nine instances of IU-separate *je trouve* (or 15% of the data), all of which were found to have organisational roles. Like *je pense* and *je crois*, *je trouve* appeared most frequently in IU-separate position (following IU-initial), but with a relatively low occurrence.

Example (6) IU-final; semantic: marking uncertainty; organisational: marking finality and turn completion

The next example illustrates the multifunctionality of comment clauses.

- 1 Midwife: *va ^vä::gde du ↘själv °nä du ↑föddes?°*
- 2 Patient: *när ja föddes?*
- 3 Midwife: *↑a: ↑*
- 4 Patient: *fyra å'tt ^halt kilo.*
- 5 Midwife: *aha. å din ^man kanske också va?*
- 6 Patient: *nä han vägde tre å:: (.) sju tror ja,*
- 7 Midwife: *de ju inget litet.*
- 8 Patient: *näh*

- 1 Midwife: *what did you your↘self ^weigh °when you were*
- 2 *↑born?°*
- 3 Patient: *when I was born?*
- 4 Midwife: *↑yeah: ↑*
- 5 Patient: *four 'n a ^half kilos.*
- 6 Midwife: *uhu. and your ^husband too yeah?*
- 7 Patient: *nah he weighed three poi::nt (.) seven tror ja,*
- 8 Midwife: *that's not so little.*
- 9 Patient: *no*

In this interaction between a midwife and a pregnant woman, the speakers have been discussing the size of the fetus, and how big the child can be expected to be at birth. The question arises because the woman is very small: a large baby might cause difficulties at childbirth. In order to establish hereditary patterns, the midwife asks how much the prospective mother and father weighed at birth (lines 1 and 5). The pregnant woman answers the question about her own weight at birth without much hesitation; even if she cannot be held accountable for remembering the event herself, there is still a chance that she has access to records and storytellings about her own birth. The follow-up question about her husband's birth weight, however, is answered in a somewhat different fashion. Where the first response, in line 4, is direct and without hesitations, the second, in line 6, contains not only hesitation, but also a comment clause, *tror jag*. Here, the woman cannot be held accountable to the same degree: it is unlikely in the extreme that she was present at her husband's birth. The brief pause within the numeral *three point seven* and the lengthening of *point*, indicates that it is not the number of kilograms that is in question, but rather the number of hectograms. She closes her response with a final comment clause that refers specifically to the *seven* part of the utterance, further underlining her uncertainty about her husband's exact birth weight. The comment clause also underlines that the proposition is to be heard as closed: there will be no elaboration or alternative suggestions to replace *seven*. The midwife's comment follows at an established rhythm, without pause or hesitation, indicating that she has heard the pregnant woman's utterance as finished.

Here, the multifunctionality of the comment clauses becomes apparent. Prosody and hesitation signals that the comment clause operates locally on *seven* – that is the part of the utterance that is in doubt. But the comment clause also operates on the entire utterance on a global level, marking the proposition as complete and opening up the floor for the other speaker.

In Swedish, this is a comparatively widespread use for *jag tror*, whereas *jag tycker* rarely is used like this. Almost a fifth of the instances of *jag tror* occur in this position, but only a tenth of the instances of *jag tycker* occur in this position with these functions. On the other hand, *jag tror* very rarely occurs in the IU-separate position, a position which is, by comparison, common for *jag tycker*. We shall see an illustration of this in the next example, which also contains an IU-initial *jag tycker*.

Example (7) IU-initial, IU-separate; Semantic: marking uncertainty, organisational: marking finality and turn completion, pragmatic: face-saving

In the next example, a group of teenagers have been asked to give their opinions on different musical styles. A few minutes before the extract below, they listened to a song by the contemporary Swedish indie pop group *Kent*, and the discussion has led to a point where some of the participants have claimed to like the group's music, while

some are more hesitant. Bea is the researcher, who moderates the discussion.

- 1 Dan: *nä:e: >elle ja<. (.) de beror på (.) ^vissa låtar kan va bra*
- 2 *men (0.3) de ^mesta gillar ja inte.=*
- 3 Adam: *=jo men: >ja tycker nog< >de går no:g< å ^lyssna på men*
- 4 *(.) ^Jumper e väl (0.7) strået ^vassare >i såna fall<*
- 5 Bea: *mm[:.]*
- 6 Adam: *[äv]en fall de inte ^e så stor skillnad på dom.*
- 7 *(0.6)*
- 8 *>tycke ja<.*
- 9 *(0.3)*
- 10 Bea: *mm̥*
- 11 *(1.8)*
- 12 *pt .hh varför eh: ni som inte tycker*
- 13 *^om dom då (.) va ^ä dä som inte ä--*

- 1 Dan: *nah: >or yeah< (.) it depends (.) ^some songs can be good*
- 2 *but (0.3) ^most I don't like =*
- 3 Adam: *= yeah but: >ja tycker probably< >it's pro:bably alright to*
- 4 *^listen to but (.) ^Jumper is probably (0.7)a tad ^better >in*
- 5 *that case<*
- 6 Bea: *mm[:.]*
- 7 Adam: *[ev]en though they're ^pretty similar.*
- 8 *(0.6)*
- 9 *>tycke ja<.*
- 10 *(0.3)*
- 11 Bea: *mm̥*
- 12 *(1.8)*
- 13 *pt .hh why eh: you who don't ^like*
- 14 *them then (.) what ^is it that isn't--*

Here, Adam expresses the opinion that *Kent* is “alright”, but that the rivaling band, *Jumper*, is somewhat better. In the previous discourse, speaker Dan has expressed his rather negative opinion of the band. Now that Adam expresses his opinion, he frames it as a stance that differs from that of Dan, not only by the use of *jo men* (‘yeah but’), that clearly marks contrast, but also by using the IU-initial comment clause *jag tycker*. By doing this, he clearly marks his utterance as not simply an addendum to Adam’s opinion, but rather as an opinion that is his own, one that the other speakers need not necessarily agree with.

In the course of his utterance, Adam experiences some difficulties at handing over the turn. The first point of possible turn transition occurs at the end of line 4. Here, Adam has made his opinion clear: *Kent* are alright, but *Jumper* are better. None of the other participants self-select: the only hearable response is from the moderator, Bea, and only minimal at that. No one challenges Adam’s opinion, but it is not endorsed either. As a result of no other speaker taking over the turn, Adam continues speaking, somewhat moderating his previous stance by adding that the two bands are very similar in style. This is followed by a comparatively long pause, but – again – no speaker change. Here, in line 8, Adam adds an IU-separate comment

clause that functions both as a marker that this is Adam's opinion – the others need not agree, but also effectively closes his turn, clearly signaling that Adam has said all that he intends to say on the subject. The remarkably long silence that follows the comment clause before Bea goes on to moderate the discussion, clearly indicates that even if no one else volunteers to take the turn, Adam has no intention of elaborating further.

Here, the IU-separate comment clause not only marks the utterance as the speaker's own opinion, allowing for other speakers to give their opinions without anyone losing face, but also facilitating for the speaker to hand over the turn and his speaker rights and obligations.

As in example 2 above, the second comment clause in example 7 is a *post-gap increment* (Schegloff, 2000) and *post-completion stance marker* (Schegloff, 1996, pp. 90, 92). Here, just as in the English example, the final intonation of the host utterance is repeated in the comment clause. In the Swedish example, the comment clause's grammatical dependency of the host is shown by the inverted word order of the comment clause.

6. Conclusion

In this study we have shown that, although the frequencies of occurrences of mental state verb comment clauses differ across the three languages examined here (with *I think* occurring three times more often in conversation than the next most popular comment clause – *je pense*), some of their characteristics recur across English, French and Swedish.

In all three languages, the comment clauses revealed themselves to be multifunctional; they all function as a means to make relevant organisational cues, as pragmatic markers and carriers of semantic information. In the discussion of the examples above, we have shown that the comment clauses are multifunctional more often than not. Even if one functional aspect may appear to be stronger in the individual case, it is almost impossible to rule out the others completely. This is the strength of the comment clauses, in that it makes them very useful and allows for them to occur in so many different interactional environments.

Which function is the strongest or most readily identifiable in each example, however, is dependent on the position of the comment clause within the IU. Comment clauses in IU-initial position and in IU-final position are often organisational in nature: they function as utterance frames, both as a means to initiate a proposition, thus signalling to co-participants how it is to be heard, and as a way to close an IU, signalling the end of the stretch of talk that is to be interpreted as semantically less supported by the speaker.

The IU-separate position is predominantly organisational too; it tends to be a so-called *turn increment*, adding more talk to an already functionally completed utterance. It reproduces a possibility for other speakers to take up the turn, without any of the involved speakers losing face.

IU position also influences the level of semantic meaning associated to the comment clause. When the comment clauses occur in initial and medial position, they carry more of a mental state semantic meaning than when they occur in a final or separate position.

If we transfer the information provided in tables 2 to 4 above into a bar chart (Figure 1), the distribution of IU positions for the comment clauses under examination becomes very clear, and reveals some interesting similarities and differences across the three languages.

Figure 1 Distribution of comment clauses across the IU in Australian English, French and Swedish (in percentages)

It is noteworthy that *I think* and *je pense* seem to behave more alike than *je pense* and the other French comment clauses. Both *I think* and *je pense* predominantly occur in IU-initial position, but are also comparatively frequent as IU-separate clauses. This should be compared to *je trouve* and *je crois*. They behave similarly to one another, with the initial position as the most frequent one, and more or less equal distribution between the other three positions. As for *jag tycker* and *jag tror*, Swedish seems to be the language that stands out the most from the rest in this study. Here, unlike in the other languages, the IU-medial position is comparatively frequent, most likely because of the V2 rule in Germanic languages (which interestingly, does not apply to English). Looking at the distribution between IU-final and IU-separate positions, *jag tycker* behaves much like *je trouve* and *je crois*, while *jag tror* stands out among the comment clauses studied here in that it is difficult to find examples of it at all occurring in IU-separate position.

Common to all three languages, however, is that IU-initial position is the unmarked position.

To further this study of the relationship between the forms, functions and distribution of comment clauses in languages that are more or less closely related to each other, more languages would need to be added to the study.

Transcription Conventions

(based on Du Bois et al.,1993; Jefferson, 1994)

.	final intonation contour
,	continuing intonation contour
?	appeal intonation contour
ˊ	very gently rising intonation contour
↓	falling pitch
↑	rising pitch
--	truncated intonation unit
wou-	truncated word
[]	overlapping speech
=	latching speech
LOUD	increased volume
°soft voice°	decreased volume
>fast <	increased speed
<slow >	decreased speed
^	primary accent
(H)	inhalation
(Hx)	exhalation
(.)	break in rhythm (0.2 seconds or less)
(1.0)	time intervals over 0.3 seconds
.....	extraneous data / quotation omitted
the::n	lengthened sound or syllable
{ }	researcher's comments (to provide more context or background information useful to the reader)
.	transcript omitted
.	

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