Co-Constructing Memory Through Stance and Affiliation in Conversational Recall

Manar Attar
m.m.attar@student.vu.nl
https://github.com/manarattar/LAD_Manar

1 Description of Linguistic Phenomenon

This squib investigates how speakers collaboratively construct shared memories through stance-taking discourse practices in conversation. Rather than treating memory recall as an individual cognitive process, the data show that remembering is interactionally achieved: speakers jointly frame past experiences through evaluation, affective alignment, and incremental elaboration. In shared-memory talk, speakers do not merely recount events but actively negotiate how those events should be emotionally understood.

Following prior work, *stance* is understood as the expression of a speaker's affective or evaluative positioning toward an object of talk and toward other interlocutors (Du Bois, 2007). Crucially, stance is not an internal attitude but an interactional achievement that emerges dynamically through sequential talk. In the corpus, speakers frequently evaluate shared experiences (e.g., describing a past trip as "really nice"), affiliate with each other's stance through agreement or echoing, and incrementally expand evaluations across multiple turns. These practices operate at the pragmatic and discourse level and rely on interactional context rather than lexical content alone.

2 Research Question(s) and Hypothesis/es

This study asks how speakers use discourse practices to jointly construct emotional stance during shared-memory talk. Two key interactional practices are central to this question. *Evaluative discourse practices* are utterances or discourse blocks in which speakers express affective or value-based assessments of shared experiences, such as emotional reactions or intensified judgments. *Affiliative discourse practices*, by contrast, are responses that align with or support a prior speaker's stance, often through agreement, repetition, or shared affect (Stivers, 2008). These practices can only be interpreted relative to preceding turns and the ongoing activity of remembering.

The central research question is:

How do speakers collaboratively construct emotional stance and social affiliation through evaluative and affiliative discourse practices in shared-memory talk?

This question is motivated by research showing that evaluations often invite alignment from co-participants and that affiliation plays a central role in narrative and reminiscing contexts (Goodwin and Goodwin, 1992; Stivers, 2008). Work on collaborative remembering further demonstrates that shared memories are actively reshaped through social interaction rather than passively retrieved (Hirst and Echterhoff, 2012).

Based on this prior work, three hypotheses guide the analysis. First, evaluative expressions are expected to occur in stance-framing or turn-initiating positions, establishing an emotional orientation toward the memory (Du Bois, 2007). Second, affiliative responses are predicted to follow evaluative expressions more often than other discourse practices, reflecting the interactional organization of alignment (Stivers, 2008). Third, incremental additions are expected to cluster around evaluative expressions, serving to elaborate or intensify stance rather than introduce new referents (Goodwin and Goodwin, 1992).

3 Dataset Description

The dataset consists of a short conversational mini-corpus drawn from a naturally occurring dialogue between two speakers engaged in shared-memory talk. The interaction lasts approximately three minutes and involves spontaneous recollection of shared past experiences, including travel and media-related activities. The conversation was transcribed using conversation-analytic conven-

tions and segmented into utterances and short discourse blocks.

The corpus contains approximately one hundred utterances, grouped into two- to three-utterance blocks for pragmatic analysis. Metadata includes speaker identity, time alignment, and conversational order, allowing for the analysis of sequential patterns while preserving interactional context. Preliminary descriptive analysis revealed frequent use of evaluative language, agreement tokens, and references to shared experiences, motivating the focus on stance-related discourse practices.

4 Linguistic Analysis

The analysis combines qualitative discourse analysis with quantitative corpus methods. Because stance and affiliation are interactional phenomena, the primary unit of analysis is the discourse block rather than the individual word or utterance. This choice reflects the fact that pragmatic functions often unfold across multiple turns and speakers.

Quantitative methods include frequency counts of discourse categories, inter-annotator agreement measures, and confusion matrix analysis. These methods enable systematic comparison between human and assistant-based annotations while maintaining sensitivity to interactional structure.

4.1 Annotation Scheme

A custom annotation scheme was developed to capture stance-building practices in shared-memory talk. Four discourse categories were defined, each reflecting a distinct interactional function.

Each discourse block was assigned a single dominant label based on its interactional function.

4.2 Inter-Annotator Agreement & Variation

A pilot annotation was first conducted, followed by independent full annotation by two human annotators. Inter-annotator agreement between the two human annotators was high (Cohen's $\kappa = 0.826$), indicating strong reliability and suggesting that the annotation scheme captures systematically identifiable discourse practices.

An assistant-based annotation was then introduced as a proxy for LLM performance. Agreement between the assistant and the human annotators was moderate to substantial (Partner 1 vs Assistant: $\kappa = 0.650$; Partner 2 vs Assistant: $\kappa = 0.766$). These results indicate that the assistant was often able to approximate human judgments, particularly for categories with clearer functional boundaries.

Annotation Scheme

Label Name	Definition	Linguistic Cues	Example Utterances
Evaluative Expression	Speaker expresses an affective, emotional, or value-based stance toward an event, person, or shared referent.	Intensifiers (*so, really*), affective adjectives (*nice, crazy*), exclamations	"That was so nice", "Oh my god, it felt amazing"
Memory Reference	Speaker reintroduces or invokes an event, object, place, or moment assumed to be shared or retrievable from mutual knowledge.	*remember*, definite nouns (*the trip, the photos*), temporal markers (*that day, last time*)	"Do you remember that day we traveled?", "The photos were crazy"
Incremental Addition	Speaker extends a completed turn by adding more information, clarifying stance, or intensifying evaluation beyond the syntactic endpoint.	Continuations after closure, trailing intonation, "and…", restarting	"It was nice… like really nice", "Yeah, and more on top of that"
Affiliative Response	Speaker aligns with, supports, or echoes prior stance, reinforcing shared affective positioning.	Agreement tokens (*yeah, true, exactly*), partial repetition, stance echo	"Yeah true", "Exactly, I felt the same"

Figure 1: Confusion matrix showing label agreement between the two primary annotators. Most annotations fall along the diagonal, indicating high agreement, with limited confusion between evaluative and affiliative categories.

Error analysis revealed that most disagreements involved confusion between *Evaluative Expressions* and *Affiliative Responses*. These cases typically occurred when evaluative language also served to align affectively with a prior speaker. Similar boundary cases accounted for the few disagreements between human annotators, suggesting that these reflect genuine areas of functional overlap rather than annotation error.

4.3 Additional Analysis

In addition to frequency-based summaries and inter-annotator agreement, this study conducted a qualitative, annotation-driven analysis focusing on the sequential organization of stance-related discourse practices. Given the small size of the mini-corpus, this analysis was not based on inferential statistics or automated sequence modeling. Instead, it relied on close inspection of annotated discourse blocks while preserving real-time conversational order and speaker alternation.

Sequential positioning was examined by analyzing where different discourse practices tend to occur relative to surrounding turns within short interactional blocks. Each block consists of two to three utterances that together form a locally coherent exchange. By inspecting whether a labeled practice appeared in a stance-initiating position or a responsive position, the analysis reveals sys-

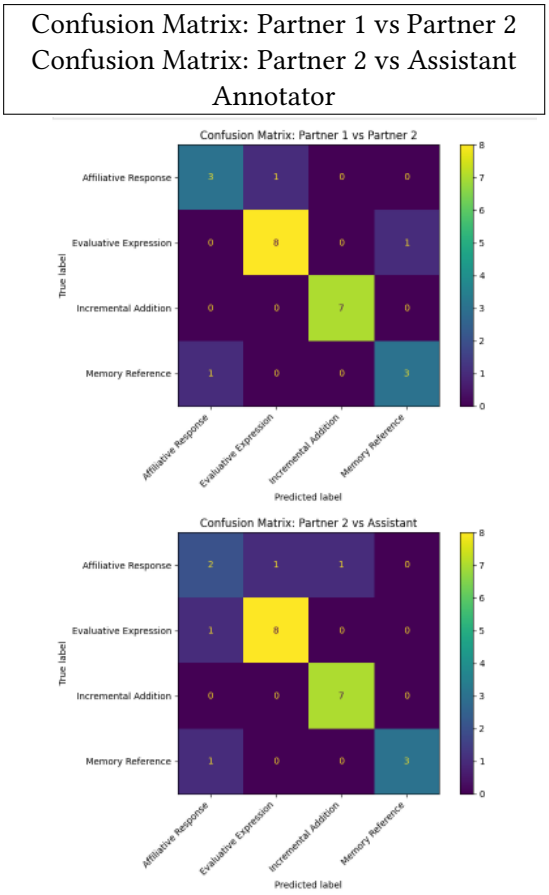

Figure 2: Annotation scheme for stance-related discourse practices used in shared-memory talk. The scheme captures interactional functions through which speakers evaluate past experiences, invoke shared memories, extend stance incrementally, and affiliate with a co-participant's affective positioning.

tematic interactional patterns. Evaluative Expressions frequently occur at points where speakers introduce or frame a shared memory, proposing an affective stance toward the recalled event. In contrast, Affiliative Responses tend to appear in subsequent turns, where speakers align with or ratify the stance introduced by their interlocutor.

Incremental Additions were identified through turn extensions that elaborated on or intensified an evaluation already present in the interaction. These additions often follow a syntactically complete turn and serve to strengthen stance rather than introduce new memory content. Memory References, by contrast, function primarily to anchor the conversation in a shared past event or object and frequently precede evaluative talk, providing the referential ground upon which stance is built.

Although no statistical testing of sequential dependencies was performed, consistent patterns across annotated blocks suggest that the distribution of discourse practices is not random. Instead, the observed regularities point to a structured interactional process in which speakers collaboratively build emotional stance through ordered contributions. This qualitative analysis complements the quantitative agreement measures by demonstrating how the annotated categories function dynamically within conversational sequences.

Taken together, the additional analysis illustrates how pragmatic phenomena can be meaningfully examined in small corpora through careful annotation and interactional analysis, even in the absence of large-scale statistical modeling.

5 Discussion & Conclusion

This study set out to examine how speakers collaboratively construct shared memories through evaluative and affiliative discourse practices. The analysis demonstrates that remembering in conversation is not a neutral recounting of past events but an interactional process in which speakers actively negotiate emotional stance and social alignment. Evaluative Expressions frequently serve as stance-framing devices, proposing a particular affective interpretation of a shared experience, while Affiliative Responses function to ratify, echo, or reinforce that stance. Incremental Additions further contribute to this process by intensifying or elaborating evaluations across turns, allowing speakers to jointly build a coherent and emotionally charged recollection.

The findings support all three hypotheses proposed in this study. Evaluative Expressions tend to occur in turn-initiating or stance-launching positions, consistent with prior work on stance-taking as an interactional resource. Affiliative Responses are more likely to follow evaluations than other discourse practices, indicating that affective assessments invite alignment and shared positioning. Incremental Additions cluster around evaluative talk, suggesting that stance is often constructed cumulatively rather than expressed in a single utterance. Together, these patterns highlight the fundamentally social nature of memory recall and underscore the importance of pragmatic and discourse-level analysis for understanding how memories are co-constructed.

From a methodological perspective, the high level of agreement between the two primary an-

notators confirms that the annotation scheme captures a set of discourse practices that are both theoretically meaningful and empirically identifiable. Importantly, variation between annotators is concentrated in analytically interesting boundary cases, particularly between Evaluative Expressions and Affiliative Responses. Rather than indicating weakness in the scheme, these cases reveal areas where stance and alignment naturally overlap in interaction. Such overlap reflects the complexity of conversational meaning-making, where a single stretch of talk may simultaneously evaluate an experience and signal affiliation with a co-participant.

The inclusion of an assistant annotator provides further insight into the challenges of discourse annotation. Although the assistant annotator achieved moderate to substantial agreement with the primary annotators, confusion matrix analysis shows that distinguishing between closely related pragmatic functions remains difficult. This finding has broader implications for computational approaches to discourse analysis. While structured annotation schemes can be reliably applied by human annotators, modeling interactional context, turn dependency, and pragmatic intent remains a significant challenge for automatic or semi-automatic annotation methods. At the same time, the relatively strong agreement observed here suggests that carefully designed schemes and well-defined units of analysis can make pragmatic phenomena more accessible to computational modeling.

Several limitations of this study should be acknowledged. The analysis is based on a small, single-interaction corpus, which limits the generalizability of the findings. In addition, the focus on verbal interaction excludes multimodal resources such as gesture, gaze, or prosody, which are known to play an important role in stance and affiliation. Future research could extend this approach to larger datasets, incorporate multimodal annotation, or explore how stance-building practices vary across interactional settings and speaker relationships.

In conclusion, this squib demonstrates that shared memory is an interactional accomplishment shaped through evaluative and affiliative discourse practices. By combining linguistic theory with corpus-based annotation and quantitative analysis, the study illustrates how pragmatic phenomena can be operationalized and systematically examined. More broadly, it highlights the value of treating language as data while remaining attentive to the interactional and social dimensions of meaning-making.

References

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