

## **Left/right asymmetries and the grammar of pre- vs. post-positioning in German and Swedish talk-in-interaction**

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*Abstract:* In this paper, we argue that the suggested mirror-equivalence of ‘left-’ and ‘right-’ adjoined or -positioned constituents in syntax is misleading from the point of view of Interactional Linguistics and needs to be replaced by a positionally sensitive grammatical analysis, in which pre- and post-positioning is seen in the context of the sequential unfolding of conversation in time. We show this on the basis of various examples from conversational German and Swedish. Our main empirical focus is on pre- and post-positioned *verba sentiendi* expressions of the type *ich denke...* or *jag tror* (cf. English ‘I think’). A quantitative analysis shows that these expressions have an uneven distribution in pre- and post-position, as well as in different discourse genres. In a sequential analysis, we can see a positionally sensitive differentiation with respect to syntactic integration and interactional meaning, especially with reference to the dynamics of stance taking and turn taking.

*Keywords:* epistemic stance, online syntax, positionally sensitive grammar, turn construction, social interaction

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## **1. Introduction**

It is not unusual for syntacticians to use the terms ‘left’ and ‘right’ in order to refer to ‘pre-positioned’ vs. ‘post-positioned’ elements, such as when they talk about *left-dislocation* and *right-dislocation*, *left-adjoined* and *right-adjoined* elements, *right-* and *left-branching*, *right-* and *leftward extraction*, *left-* and *right-embedding*, *left* and *right periphery* and so forth. It is obvious that this terminology betrays a strong written language bias: the structures in question are imagined as occurring on a two-dimensional plane, such as a sheet of paper, in which syntactic structures are represented in some formal notation (such as a stemma or ‘tree’) as if this representation were the structure of the language itself. We are not concerned here with this written language bias as such (see Linell 2005), but with the symmetry it suggests in terms of the ‘left’ and ‘right’ variant of the syntactic structure or operation in question being mirror-equivalents. Arguing within the framework of an online approach to (spoken) syntax (cf. Auer 2009a), we want to show that ‘left’ and ‘right’ structures or processes usually are not mirror-images of each other when related to a sequential context but instead refer to different linguistic objects with differing interactional meanings.

The first part of the paper discusses the scope of such a *positionally sensitive grammar* (cf. Schegloff 1996) of pre- and post-positioning on the basis of several examples from German and Swedish, while the second part offers a deepened analysis of stance-related expressions,

including *verba sentiendi* of the type *ich denke/denk ich* and *jag tycker/tycker jag* ‘I think’, etc., as observed in German and Swedish talk-in-interaction. *Verba sentiendi* of this type have been the object of various studies (for example, Kärkkäinen 2003, Thompson 2002 and Thompson & Mulac 1984 on English), but do not seem to have been considered from the point of view of left/right asymmetries in conversational language.

Left/right asymmetries are not restricted to the realm of clausal syntax, but extend into smaller (morphology) and larger domains (sequence structure). Even within syntax, there is an entire scale of syntactic structures and operations that come to mind, some of them deeply embedded in the grammar of a language and subject to only a small amount of ‘free’ variation within the language. (In German or Swedish, one might think of pre- vs. postpositions of the type *den Bach entlang/entlang des Bachs* ‘along the creek’; *mellan studenter/studenter emellan* ‘between the students’.) These will not be considered in this paper. We will focus on left/right asymmetries in which the ‘movable’ element is relatively independent, i.e., syntactically more peripheral to the structure of the clause, and can be (but is not always) phrased in a separate prosodic unit (IP) in the pre- and/or the post-positioned instantiation.

## 2. Some basics about left/right asymmetries

The pattern we are concerned with is this: a constituent  $\alpha$  occurs either prior to a core structure C or subsequent to it, and  $\alpha$  has some (if sometimes only a weak) syntactic relationship to C. In other words,  $\alpha$  is ‘the same’ as regards its linguistic (lexical, morphosyntactic) form, but ‘movable’ in relation to the core.  $\alpha$  may not occur prior to or subsequent to the core with the same frequency or typicality, i.e., the constituent may be more frequent or typical in one of the positions. Some specific interactional effect may be obtained by using an element in a position that is less typical or more marked for it.

We suggest that an adequate analysis of such pairs of pre- or post-positioned items needs to be sensitive to the preceding and following contexts, particularly to issues of turn-taking and sequential organization. Pre-positioned elements occur in the beginning of a conversational project, while post-positioned elements close off the project, or at least suggest such a closure. A project such as a turn-constructive unit (TCU) usually has a clearly defined beginning, while its termination is considerably more delicate, ambiguous and open to interactional negotiation. In fact, post-positioned elements may turn out not to have occurred at the actual end of an eventually finalized project. For other studies in temporal and functional asymmetries in the construction of discourse, we refer to the collection of papers in Beeching & Detges (2014a), which offer analyses of pragmatic markers in a variety of languages from a synchronic as well as a diachronic point of view.

In the next section, we will use extracts of interactional German and Swedish data without focusing on differences between the two languages, since our general point applies to both (and presumably to all) languages. In section 3, we will look into the details of German and Swedish *verba sentiendi* to some degree and also discuss some of the differences between the two languages. However, this paper is not meant as a contribution to the contrastive analysis of these two languages.

### 2.1. Conditional clauses

With some restrictions, conditional clauses can be placed ‘before’ (in the syntactic front field or pre-front field) or ‘after’ (in the post field of) the main clause they modify, and they even can interrupt it ‘parenthetically’, as the fabricated variants of the following German sentences show (the core is in square brackets):

(1) Position of conditional clauses in German

- (a) Wenn ich das gewusst hätte, [(dann) wäre ich erst gar nicht gekommen].  
'If I had known this, (then) I wouldn't have come in the first place.'
- (b) [Ich wäre erst gar nicht gekommen], wenn ich das gewusst hätte.  
'I wouldn't have come right I away, if I had known this.'
- (c) [Ich wäre], wenn ich das gewusst hätte, [erst gar nicht gekommen].  
'I would, if I had known this, not have come right away.'

The first variant is more frequent in spoken German than the second, and the third occurs only rarely (cf. Auer 2000). The structural embedding of the pre- $\alpha$  is not exactly the same as that of the post- $\alpha$ ; version (a) is more strongly integrated into the sentence than version (b), since the dependent clause is placed in a slot which needs to be filled (the front field) in any canonical main clause. Alternatively, a resumptive element – *dann* 'then' – in the pre-verbal slot can fulfill this task. In the (b)-variant, on the other hand, the conditional clause always occurs in the syntactic post-field, after the main clause is already grammatically complete. Despite these structural differences, which follow from independent regularities of the syntax of German,<sup>1</sup> we can speak of a complex sentence with a subordinated conditional clause, which either precedes or follows the core element. The subordinated clause appears to be 'movable', at least as long as we look at it from an abstract (context-free) syntactic point of view. The 'parenthetical' version, just like post-positioning, does not affect word order in the main clause and hence syntactically behaves more like post-positioning than pre-positioning.

Despite these structural options which German offers for positioning a conditional clause, the decision of the speaker to place the constituent in one way or the other may imply different interactional tasks done by the subordinated clause, once it is considered in its specific turn-environment and sequential position (cf. Sacks et al. 1974:722 on a 'turn-in-a-series'). Let us therefore look at two cases of conditional clauses as they occur in their 'natural habitat', i.e., in conversational data:<sup>2</sup>

(2) Conditional clause as  $\alpha$ -pre (German, two-party, informal conversation, from the reality TV show *Big Brother*)

- 01 Sbr: (--)aber JÜRgen,  
but Jürgen,
- 02 der hat zwar SPASS am machen.  
he likes to do things.
- 03 aber der is UNgeduldig.  
but he is impatient
- 04 wenn das nicht direkt KLAPPT-  
if it doesn't work out at once-
- 05 dann kriegt der SO\_n hAls.  
then he gets mad.

<sup>1</sup> There is an additional variant of the pre-positioned conditional clause which does not occur in the front field (immediately preceding the left verbal brace), but in the pre-front field: *Wenn ich das gewusst hätte, ich wäre erst gar nicht gekommen*. This variant is clearly marked and has special interactional functions described in more detail in Auer 2000.

<sup>2</sup> The German examples are transcribed according to GAT (see Selting et al. 2009), while the Swedish examples follow the usual CA transcription system (see Ochs et al. 1996:461–465); the difference depends on the conventions used in the corpora we have excerpted for this study.

<sup>3</sup> The arrow marks the projection.

(see Auer 2009b on projection in syntax). The syntactic structure of the following core element – that of a main clause – is therefore structurally predictable to some degree.

A pre- $\alpha$ , so we can generalize, opens up a syntactic project, but does not conclude it. Instead, it projects (in different degrees of precision and strength) a following component. It is only after the production of the core that the project (the syntactic gestalt), and possibly also a TCU, is complete. The transition from the pre- $\alpha$  to the projected core can be delayed, thereby giving the speaker the opportunity to insert additional materials in a ‘safe’ position, i.e., securely within his or her turn-at-talk, but it needs to be taken care of, and often it follows immediately after the pre- $\alpha$ .

The corresponding post-positioned conditional clause in (3) has very different characteristics:

SCHWARZtee, mit ziTROne,	wenn wir überhaupt noch zitrone Haben;
<i>black tea with lemon</i>	<i>if we still have lemon at all</i>

Owing to the competition between Jürgen and Alex for the turn and in the activity of ‘ordering’ hot drinks from John, the beginning of John’s syntactic project is hard to determine. ‘Black tea, with lemon’ can be heard as an independent beginning of a project or as the continuation of line 07 (‘for me you could (make) another uhm’).<sup>4</sup> In either case, Jürgen’s utterance *SCHWARZtee, mit ziTROne*, is treated as an accountable action, i.e., as a complete request: it is responded to by John with a confirmation. The utterance forms a complete TCU and projects no expansion. Only after John’s confirmation, and as John begins to elaborate further on Jürgen’s extravagant wishes (cf. line 13: he already seems to know that Jürgen wants his tea to be served with sweetener) does Jürgen expand his turn by adding the conditional clause, which *ex post* introduces a certain skepticism about whether John will be able to fulfill his desire regarding the lemon at all.

From the perspective of online syntax, the post-positioned conditional clause has a very different status from the core element – the main clause – in extract (2): instead of being projected, it is added to the syntactic unit already produced as an expansion (cf. Auer 2007). Note in this context that, although pre- and post-positioned conditional clauses are usually both packaged as separate intonation units (i.e., they show two separate intonation contours, each with a nucleus accent), pre-positioned clauses end with ‘continuing’ intonation – usually level or rising boundary tones –, while the core before a post-positioned clause often ends with ‘terminating’ intonation (a falling boundary tone).

In the present case, and quite typically, the post-positioned conditional clause, although syntactically adjoined to the main clause via its subordinated status, occurs at some distance from the former’s completion, indicating that it was not planned from the start, but has the status of an afterthought (Goodwin 1981). Indeed, turn-completion and turn-taking have occurred before. In conversation analytic terms, the conditional clause works as an increment (Ford et al. 1996, Couper-Kuhlen & Ono 2007). The tying which Jürgen establishes by syntactic means (subordination) between the increment and the main action of commanding-requesting tea makes the expansion appear to be part of the turn, although it factually occurs in Jürgen’s next turn.

In sum, as a post- $\alpha$ , the conditional clause is much more open to dialogical negotiation of turn and sequence than as a pre- $\alpha$ , which is produced in a position in which the speaker is considerably more in control of the emerging turn (see also Ford 1993 for English).

The discussion of conditional clauses shows that, although there is a syntactic link between the core element and the ‘movable’ clause irrespective of whether it precedes or follows the

<sup>4</sup> Since the verb ‘to make’ is absent, the resulting utterance *mir kanns\_te wieder\_n schwarztee, mit zitrone*, remains fragmentary from a syntactic point of view, but is obviously treated as complete by the participants.

core, these alternatives differ in interactional status (with regard to turn-taking), syntactic online processing status (projecting vs. non-projecting) and cognitive status (pre-planned vs. afterthought). In addition, pre- and post-positioned conditional clauses also differ semantically: the pre-positioned clause and its core formulate a regularity ('whenever things don't work out immediately for Jürgen, he gets mad'), while the post-positioned clause introduces a particular condition under which Jürgen's wish cannot be fulfilled. (Cf. Diessel 2005, who makes a similar argument for adverbial clauses in general: post-positioned clauses have a more limited scope.) Although singular conditions can, of course, also be expressed by pre-positioned conditional clauses, regularities are usually expressed by putting the protasis first and the apodosis after. (This is the standard format, above all, for 'law-like' if-then relations.)

## 2.2. Left and right dislocations

An obvious example that comes to mind when left/right asymmetries are discussed are so-called left- and right-dislocations (cf. Pekarek et al. 2010, *forthc.*, in press for a detailed analysis on French, and Geluykens 1992 for English left-dislocations). In the following extract (4), both can be observed:

(4) (German, interview about dialects; interviewee H. complains that no Low German is spoken in the media; 'Ohnsorg' is a Low German Hamburg 'folk theater', the '[Komödien-] Stadl' is a Bavarian 'folk theatre')

- 01 H: wenn in fernsehen OHNsorg gezeigt wird, (.)  
when they show 'Ohnsorg' on TV,
- 02 dann wird dort (.) HOCHdeutsch gesprochen.  
then they speak High German there.
- 03 .hhh wA:rum sprechen die nicht <sup>↑</sup>PLATT. (--)  
why don't they speak Low German.
- 04 die BAyern, die sprechen ja AUCH bairisch.  
the Bavarians, they also speak Bavarian
- 05 wenn sie ihre STADL(--).AUFFührungen bringen. (-) ne.  
when they bring their 'stadl' performances. (-) don't they.
- 06 I: [das hab ich schon MAL gehört das argumEnt.]  
I have heard that before, this argument.
- 07 H: [h h hh hh hh ]
- 08 I: ja. das find ich AUCH.  
yes, I think so too

The 'movable'  $\alpha$ -part in this case is a less complex constituent, i.e., a noun phrase.<sup>5</sup> In line 04, the  $\alpha$ -pre noun phrase *die Bayern* 'the Bavarians' (the subject), which begins the syntactic project, is phrased as a separate prosodic unit; the following co-referential pronoun *die* resumes this noun phrase in the front field of the emerging clause, linking the core to the  $\alpha$ -pre:

<sup>5</sup> Of course, complement clauses can also be left- or right-dislocated.

die Bayern,  
the Bavarians,  
 **$\alpha$ -pre**

→

die sprechen ja AUCH bairisch.  
they also speak Bavarian  
**C**

A separately phrased noun phrase in the beginning of a syntactic project does not make a following resumptive pronoun and hence a left-dislocation necessary; other ways to continue the utterance are possible (for instance, the noun phrase may turn out to be a subject which is followed by a parenthetical insertion or a relative clause). But there is a good chance that a prolepsis construction will emerge. The interactional job done by the proleptic noun phrase is topicalization. In the present case, a contrast is built up between the Low German and the Bavarian ‘folk theaters’ and their language choice.

The seemingly symmetrical case of a ‘right-dislocation’ occurs a few lines later:<sup>6</sup>

das hab ich schon MAL gehört  
I have heard that before  
**C**

das argumEnt.  
this argument  
 **$\alpha$ -post**

Again, an ‘extraposed’ noun phrase is tied to the core via a co-referential pronoun (here: *das*), but it occurs after the C-element, which includes the pronoun, instead of before it (as in a prolepsis). Significantly, in most cases, the cataphoric nature of the pronoun can only be understood with sufficient certainty in retrospect. While the utterance is being produced, the pronoun has an anaphoric reading, referring back to what the previous speaker said (in this case, in lines 01-05). This makes the pragmatics of the  $\alpha$ -post variant very different from the  $\alpha$ -pre structure:

die Bayern,  
the Bavarians,  
 **$\alpha$ -pre**

→

die sprechen ja AUCH bairisch.  
they also speak Bavarian  
**C**

1. 01-05

das hab ich schon MAL gehört  
I have heard that before  
**C**

das argumEnt.  
this argument  
 **$\alpha$ -post**

This Janus-faced character of the co-referential pronoun (cf. Imo 2011) is typical of TCU expansions by a noun phrase; the emergent structure up to the end of the C-component, including the pronoun it contains, will already have received a referential interpretation from the preceding context, if this is possible at all. The task carried out by the post-positioned noun phrase is to clarify this reference (at best).

<sup>6</sup> The arrowed bow marks a linking relationship.

This suggests that the post-positioned noun phrase might be an afterthought, similar to the dependent conditional clause in extract (2). There is, however, another difference between ‘left’- and ‘right dislocations’ in German which counteracts this parallelism, namely, prosody. While initial NPs in the pre-front field can be (and often are) produced as separate intonational units, co-referential NPs in the post-field often are not. Rather, they are routinely integrated into the core with which they form one intonational phrase (i.e., the nucleus accent precedes the NP; the expansion may, however, receive secondary stress, as in *argumEnt*). This prosodic integration suggests that the complete utterance is delivered as one planning unit and is not produced incrementally, as in the case of the post-positioned conditional clauses.

### 2.3. ‘Conjunctions’

As yet another kind of example of left/right asymmetries, we consider the position of the consecutive ‘conjunction’ *så att* ‘so (that)’ in spoken Swedish. Our expectation based on written language is that conjunctions typically occur between two clauses that are combined into a complex sentence. Other than in the examples of left/right asymmetries discussed in the preceding two sections, the grammar books here only allow one positioning, i.e., before the core element (the conjoined clause). This canonical usage is, of course, also found in our data, as extract (5) from a conversation shows: here, *så att* combines two independent clauses in speaker (B)’s turn in lines 02–04.

(5) (Swedish, moderated group discussion with high school students, Gothenburg [GSM]); the students are discussing music styles and especially comparing two Swedish rock bands, one of which is named ‘*Jumper*’).

- 01    A:    men Jumper [å domhär gör ju,]  
              *but Jumper and those y’know,*
- 02    B:    [men Jumper e ju]    såhär    liksom  
                                  *but Jumper are y’know sort of kind of*
- 03    klämkäckt värre så att de kan ju vemsomhelst  
              *more cheerful so that that can anyone*
- 04    lyssna på (.) utan å spy  
              *listen to (.) without throwing up*

Speaker (B) delivers his characterization of the band ‘*Jumper*’ in lines 02–04, contrasting and comparing it to another band, which was discussed just prior to this extract. After an evaluation of their music (‘more cheerful’), he adds an ironic comment on the band’s popularity: ‘that’s what anyone can listen to without throwing up’. The consequential relation between (B)’s evaluation of the band’s music and this comment is established by the conjunction *så att*.

A sequentially looser and less canonical use of *så att* as an  $\alpha$ -pre is found in extract (6). The extract is from a get-together of four elderly ladies; speaker (A) is talking about her brother-in-law who suffered a severe illness, which in line 03 is named ‘leukemia’. The teller receives sympathetic responses from (B) and (C) in lines 05, 07 and 08 (the fourth participant is not present during this sequence).

(6) (Swedish, multi-party conversation with elderly ladies, Uppsala [SÅINF:2:1])

- 01 A:    han hade mellan ett å    ett å ett halvt år  
              *he had between one and one and a half years*



01 M: mm (0.2) \*.jå\* men i övrit har du inte nåra (.  
mm yes but otherwise you don't have any

The student's answer in line 05 ends with *så att*, which refers back to the preceding core contribution, but no further conclusion or comment follows. There is mild laughter produced together with *så att*, and the contribution is treated as complete by (M), who takes over the turn without a gap. The post-positioned *så att* suggests that the preceding contribution warrants a conclusion that is too obvious to be verbalized: because the clubs of which (A) is a member work in Finnish, he has *de facto* no organizational contacts of relevance with Swedish. This conclusion is put into words by (M) in line 06: 'no closer (Swedish organizational contacts)'.

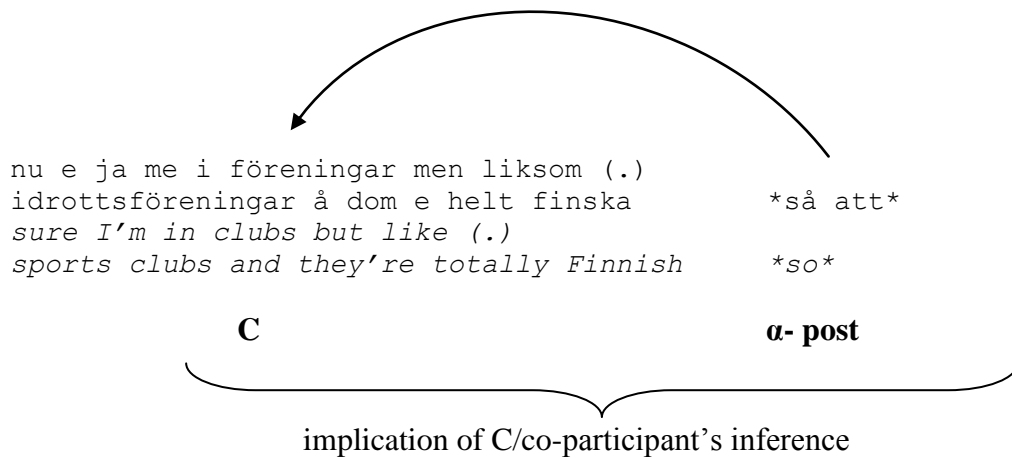
In a comparison, then, *så att* as an  $\alpha$ -pre has a sequentially tying function in that it links the following contribution to what has been said so far – in global, rather than in local discursive terms. Simultaneously, it projects a core element with some specified content, i.e., a summary or an assessment that can be heard as some kind of conclusion or at least as a further topical development of what has been said so far, as in extract (6):

lines 01-09      så att  $\Longrightarrow$       de: jobbit sådär,  
att få det så där klart.  
so      *it's tough like that,*  
*that you're told so clearly*

**$\alpha$ -pre**      **C**

*Så att* as an  $\alpha$ -post, on the other hand, refers back to the core element and is itself a comment on what was said there. In this position, the conjunction is no longer a true conjunction, since it does not project a continuation, but marks the speaker's turn as terminated, possibly together with other turn-final stance markers such as laughter (cf. Schegloff 1996: 92, 102 on turn-final laughter). The recipient then is supposed to be able to infer and draw the appropriate conclusions:

from extract (7):



Post-positioned *så att* not only follows the core element, but also serves as a turn-exit marker, signaling that the speaker is ready for a turn transition (see Jefferson 1983). There is only one sense in which the connective quality of the ‘conjunction’ is preserved: it projects the next sequential slot for a contribution to be linked with the contents of the just-completed contribution. However, this is very different from the case of a prepositioned *så att* that projects the same speaker continuation.

## 2.4. Intermediate summary

On the basis of the three examples above – pre- and post-positioned dependent clauses, NPs with co-referential pronouns before and after a core element, and pre- and post-positioned ‘conjunctions’ – we have tried to develop an initial idea of what we mean by positional asymmetries:

- at least in German and Swedish, pre-positioned constituents tend to be integrated into the syntax of the emerging syntactic project more tightly than their post-positioned counterparts (as well as, in the case of conditional clauses, ‘parenthetical’ counterparts). This is because pre-positioned phrases and clauses can be placed in the front-field of the main clause, which is highly consequential for the syntax of the emerging unit, whereas their post-positioned counterparts occur in the syntactic post-field without further projection or forming new TCUs.
- Pre-positioned constituents project a syntactic trajectory, while post-positioned elements often occur after a possible turn completion point, as TCU expansions. Indeed, some post-positioned elements can serve as turn-yielding devices, as in the case of post-positioned ‘conjunctions’.
- Pre-positioned constituents are integrated prosodically into the core more often than their post-positioned counterparts (with the exception of German right dislocations which tend to be prosodically integrated).
- There are differences of semantic tying, in particular with respect to pronoun resolution and semantic scope: pre-positioned elements can have ambiguous scope, referring to the preceding or the following proposition.

### 3. Pre- vs. post-positioned *verba sentiendi* as subjective stance markers in German and Swedish

In this section, we present a case study of German and Swedish *verba sentiendi* expressions from the point of a positionally sensitive grammar of talk-in-interaction. What we mean are the minimal clausal expressions *ich finde* ‘I find, I think’, *ich glaube* ‘I believe, I guess’, *ich denke* ‘I think’ and *ich meine* ‘I mean’ in German and the closely corresponding expressions *jag tycker* ‘I think’, *jag tror* ‘I think, I believe, I guess’ and *jag menar* ‘I mean’ in Swedish. These expressions have overlapping, but also differing functions.<sup>7</sup>

Grammars traditionally analyze the expressions at issue here as matrix clauses which require a preceding or following complement clause (i.e., they treat the complement clause as the ‘moveable’  $\alpha$ -element). Consider extract (8) with the Swedish *jag tycker* in utterance-initial position:

(8) (Swedish, group conversation on music, GSM)

A: **jag tycker** de passar inte in i hur ja e  
**I think** it does not fit in with how I am

According to traditional analysis, *jag tycker* is a matrix clause and takes the subsequent clause *de passar inte in i hur ja e* as the object complement required by the verb *tycker* ‘to think’. However, while the complement clause can be subordinated by the Swedish *att* or German *dass*, in extract (8) as well as in the majority of cases in our data (see below for numbers), it shows all the grammatical features of a main clause, such as main clause word order (negation after the verb) and no complementizer. In pragmatic terms, the pre-positioned ‘matrix clause’ is not super-ordinated either; rather, it functions as a stance expression that frames the evolving, semantically central utterance from the perspective of the speaker (cf. Kärkkäinen 2003, Thompson 2002). The semantic core of the message is the subsequent utterance.<sup>8</sup>

The same *verba sentiendi* can also occur after the core utterance, which suggests that they are the movable elements. When post-positioned, these ‘matrix clauses’ obey the V2 rule of German and Swedish and therefore display subject–verb inversion, e.g., *tycker jag* in extract (9). Overt markers of grammatical subordination in the message core (the initial main clause) are absent from our data (in German) or even impossible (in Swedish) in this case (see below for a discussion of some exceptions):

(9) (Swedish, group conversation on music, GSM)

A: de e ganska härlit å lyssna på **tycker jag**  
it is quite wonderful to listen to **I think** (lit.: think I)

Despite the frequently lacking syntactic markers of subordination in the core element, the variability of word order in the verb–pronoun sequence shows that pre- and post-positioned *verba sentiendi* expressions cannot be considered mere discourse markers in Swedish or German, as has been suggested for English *I think* (cf. Thompson 2002). The mobility of the position of the subject vis-à-vis the verb makes it clear that we are still dealing with a syntactically complex utterance. The inversion signals that the *verbum sentiendi* expression is linked to the prior utterance as an addition or a follow-up and thus depends on it (see Lindström & Karlsson 2005).

<sup>7</sup> As Goddard and Karlsson (2008) point out, English *I think* is polysemous and translates most of the German and Swedish expressions above (with the exception of *ich mein/jag menar* which is closer to *I mean*).

<sup>8</sup> Cf. the similar arguments presented by Günthner (2008) on the German framing unit *die Sache ist* and by Auer (2006) for the German framing unit *es ist so*.

Finally, the same expressions can be inserted into an emergent construction. In such cases, the inserted unit also shows subject–verb inversion,<sup>9</sup> i.e., it is treated structurally in the same way as the post-positioned variant. For instance, in (10), *tror jag* is inserted between a main clause and a relative clause:

(10) (Swedish, group conversation on music, GSM)

A:   men de e   (.) mycke killar **tror jag** som lyssnar på de.  
       but there are many guys   **I think** who listen to it

Even though these stance expressions display formal variation in the order of subject and verb (like *jag tycker – tycker jag*), we regard the pre- and post-positioned as well as the inserted versions as variants of the same basic type, owing to their semantic and syntactic equivalence. Their semantic value, irrespective of their position in an utterance, is to communicate an epistemic-evaluative stance (in the sense of du Bois 2007) with regard to the contents expressed in the core element. What we want to show, however, is that it makes a pragmatic, i.e., interactional, difference whether these *verba sentiendi* are pre- or post-positioned. Inserted *verba sentiendi* will be discussed only briefly because they are not pivotal for the left/right asymmetry argument that is the focus of this paper.

The data for our study come from two types of interactional settings: structured interview data (usually with one interviewee) and more informal, multiparty conversations (which may or may not be structured) in German and Swedish respectively.<sup>10</sup>

Figures 1 and 2 show the quantitative distribution of the first-person present-tense forms<sup>11</sup> of *jag tror*, *jag tycker* and *jag menar* and of *ich glaub(e)*<sup>12</sup>, *ich denk(e)*, *ich find(e)* and *ich mein(e)*, according to their pre-positioned, inserted and post-positioned usage (infinitive forms of the verbs stand for the whole pronoun+verb construction).

<sup>9</sup> There are some rare exceptions. In the German interview data, out of 162 instances of inserted *glauben*-epistemics, only 5 (3 %) are not inverted; of 32 inserted *denken*-epistemics only 1 (3%), there is one out of 8 inserted *finden*-parentheticals (12%); and only one of the 11 *meinen*-parentheticals (9 %).

<sup>10</sup> These more informal data are group discussions with young people in the Swedish case (GSM, moderated discussions about music styles, recorded in 1994), while in the German case the first season of the German *Big Brother* TV format was used (from 2000). In the case of *meinen*, the informal telephone conversations of the German CALL HOME corpus complemented the data set in order to create sufficient numbers (composed 1996-2000). The formal data are interviews conducted in ten cities in Germany around the year 2000. The Swedish interview data were taken from a collection of mediated (via radio or TV) interviews concerning politics and sports (IVC, from 2005).

<sup>11</sup> These first person singular present tense forms are by far the largest group in the corpora, i.e., all other forms are negligible by comparison. As Thompson (2002) argues for English, this quantitative imbalance is both a condition and a consequence of the pragmatic development in which the former matrix verb construction changes into an epistemic marker.

Past tense forms are sometimes used in German just as in English as a polite way of formulating a suggestion, request or proposal, as in German *Ich dachte, du könntest mir vielleicht helfen* ‘I thought you could perhaps give me a hand’; this special usage needs a separate study and is not included in the statistics.

<sup>12</sup> The final schwa is the first-person singular suffix, which attaches to the stem. It is variable in spoken German.

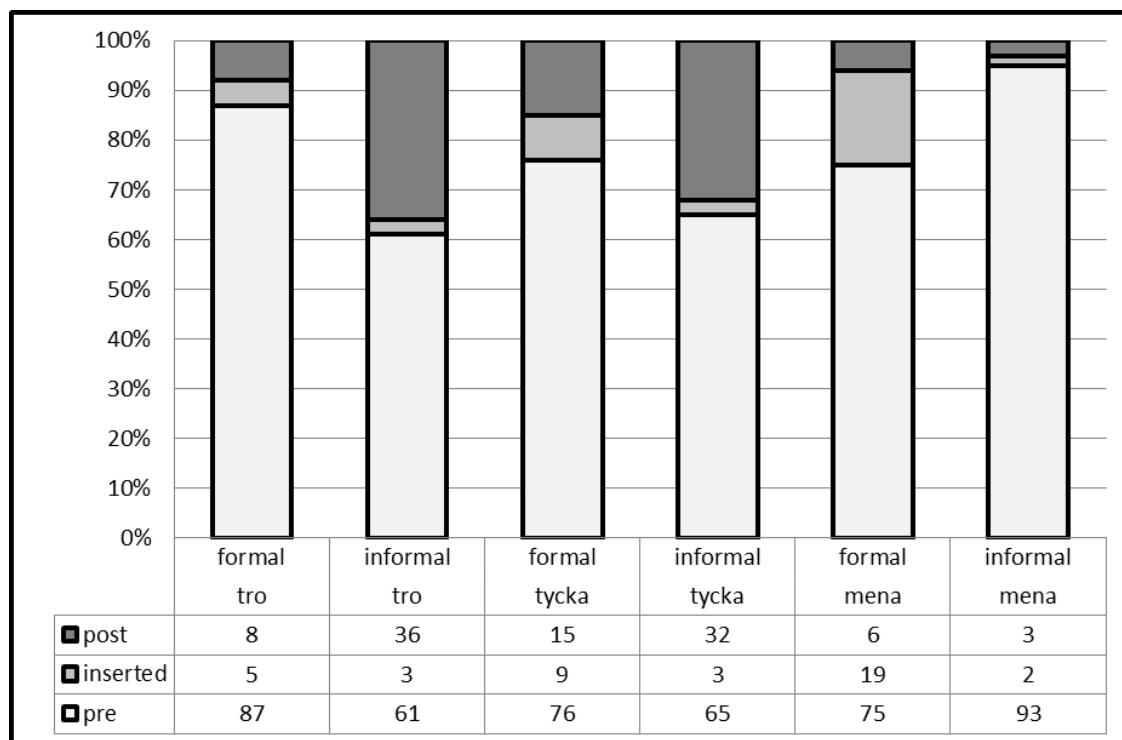


Figure 1. Epistemic markers with *verba sentiendi* in Swedish formal interview data and informal group discussions related to position (preposition, insertion, postposition); percentages of occurrence with or without complementizer.<sup>13</sup>

Pre-positioning in general is more frequent than post-positioning, and inserted stance markers are even rarer. The imbalance between pre- and post-positioning is much more pronounced in the case of *mena* than in the case of *tro* and *tycka*. Further, post-positioning with *tro* and *tycka* is more frequent in the informal multiparty conversations than in the interviews.

<sup>13</sup> Some comments on the Swedish counts: responsive constructions (*tycker jag med* '[I] think so too') to agree with a previous speaker's statement of opinion were not included. Also excluded were cases in which the subject pronoun follows the verb because an anaphorical adverbial element (such as *då* 'then', *så* 'so') occupies the front field. Clefted constructions of the type *det tycker jag är bra* 'that (matter) I think is good' were not included either, since they constitute a specific interactional-grammatical pattern.

The percentages are based on the following absolute numbers: *tro* informal/formal (483/101), *tycka* informal/formal (690/89), *mena* informal/formal (177/16).

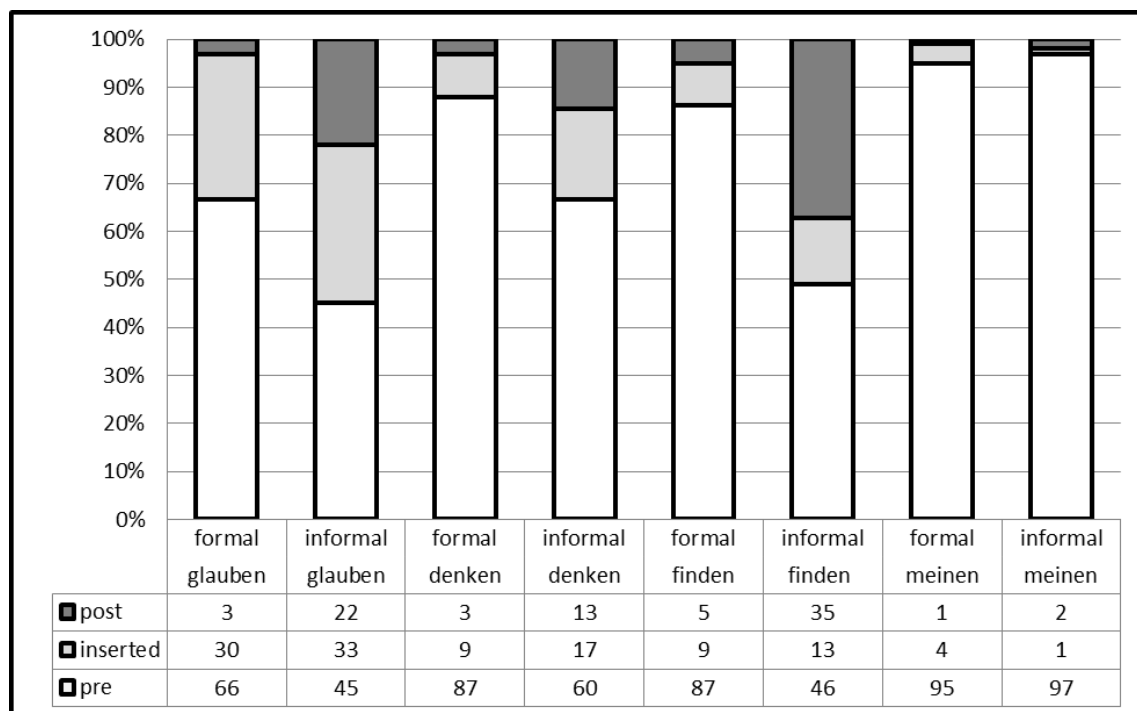


Figure 2. Epistemic markers with *verba sentiendi* in German formal interview data and informal conversational data related to position (preposition, insertion, postposition); percentages of occurrences with and without complementizer.<sup>14</sup>

In the German data sets, pre-positioning is also more frequent than post-positioning. This is highly pronounced in the interview data, while the number of inserted and/or post-positioned epistemic expressions increases in the more informal conversations. In particular, *finden* is quite often post-positioned in informal interactions, but is generally used less often than the other verbs in the epistemic expressions that interest us here.<sup>15</sup> Just like the Swedish verb *mena*, the German cognate *meinen* behaves differently than the rest: the post-positioned variants are extremely rare. The expression *glaub ich* is used especially often in the inserted position and clearly more often than its Swedish counterparts.

The numbers in Fig. 1 and 2 included constructions with or without a complementizer. Fig. 3 and 4 separate these two cases and show the percentage of *dass/att* introduced clauses for the pre-positioned stance expressions. In the case of post-positioned or inserted stance expressions, the *dass/att*-introduction is practically non-existent (see below) or ungrammatical.

<sup>14</sup> Some comments on the German counts: responsive constructions (*glaub/denk/mein/find ich auch* etc.) for expressing agreement with a previous speaker were not included. Also excluded were cases in which the subject pronoun follows the verb because an anaphorical element (such as *da, dann*) occupies the front field. In the case of *denken*, constructions with a phoric element (*da denk ich dran...*) as well as constructions with *denken* in the sense of ‘remembering’ (*wenn ich so (dran) denke, wie...*) and examples of *ich denk* as an introduction to direct speech (reporting what the speaker thought, on a past occasion, in the historical present) were also excluded. In the case of *meinen*, formulaic expressions such as *ich mein nur* or *weißte was ich meine* as a self-contained utterance were excluded, as well as the rare uses of *meinen* in the sense of ‘intend’ (*ich mein das nicht so*). Here, no clause-type complement is possible. All of these cases, with the exception of responsive constructions and *denk* as an introduction of direct speech, are rare.

The percentages are based on the following absolute numbers: *glauben* formal/informal (231/94), *denken* formal/informal (348/58), *meinen* formal/informal (279/388), *finden* formal/informal (97/69).

<sup>15</sup> German *finden* is, however, very frequent in a different, predicative evaluative construction { *ich finde* [obj]NP [pred]ADJ<sub>eval</sub> }, as in *ich finde das gut* (lit. ‘I find this good’, i.e., ‘in my opinion, this is good’), a usage which is also possible in English, but is more or less obsolete in modern Swedish.

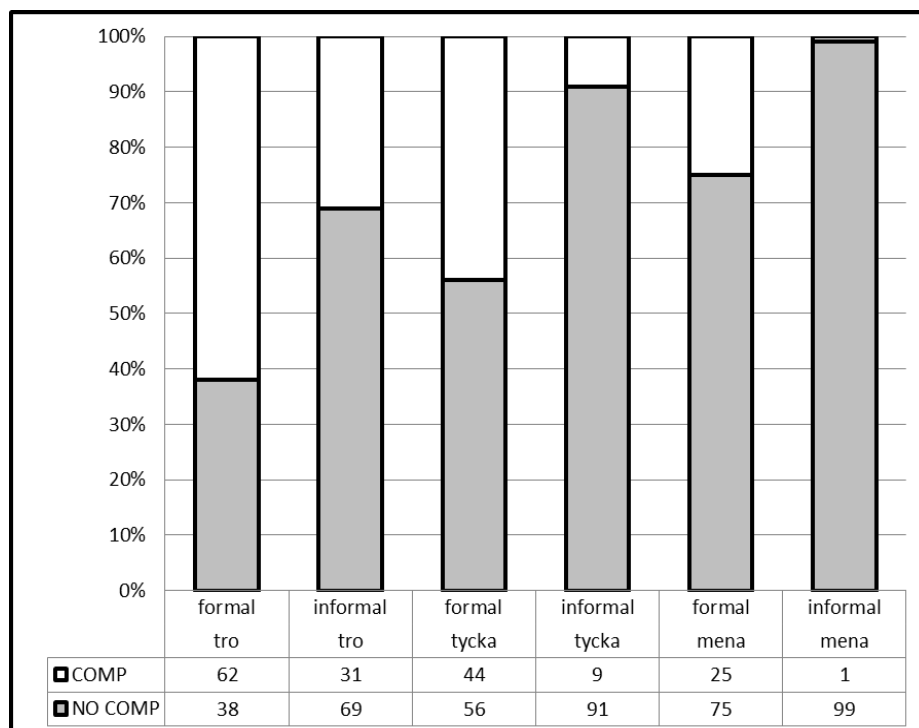


Fig. 3: Percentage of *verba sentiendi* constructions with and without complementizer in the Swedish data according to verb type and formality.

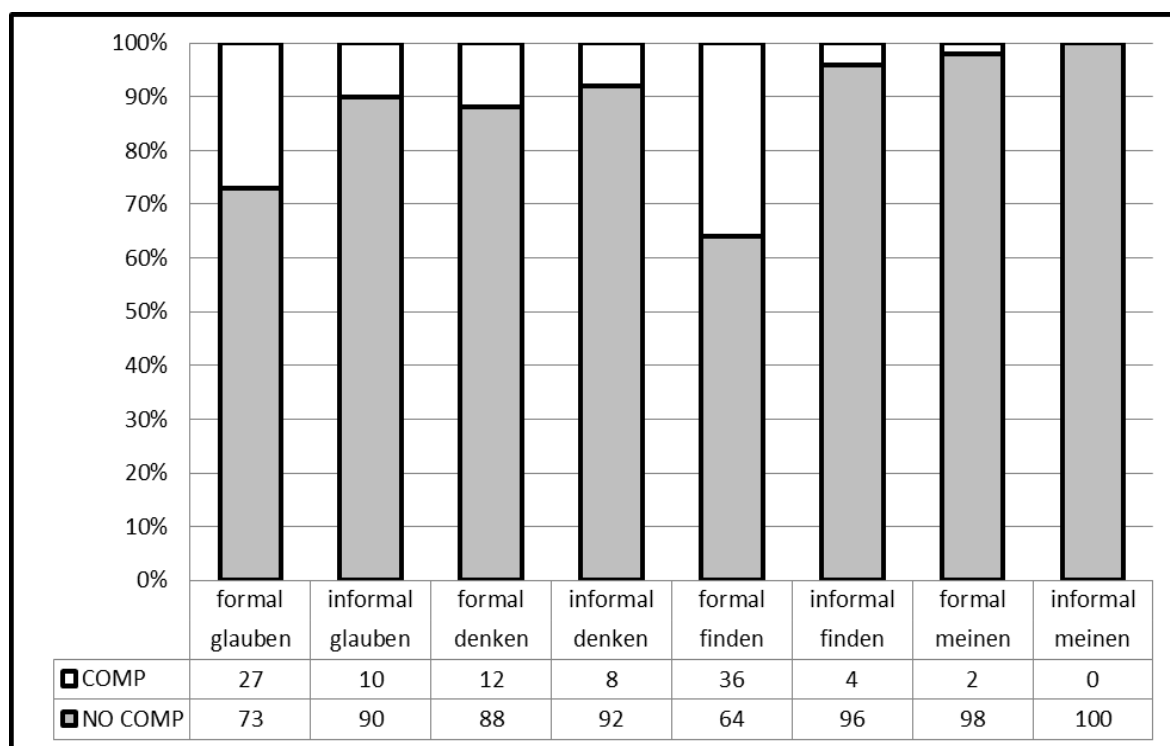


Fig. 4: Percentage of *verba sentiendi* constructions with and without complementizer in the German data, according to verb type and formality.

In both languages, the tendency to avoid the matrix verb construction with a complementizer, potentially marking the subsequent clause as hypotactic, is strongest in the verb *meinen/mena*. German *finden* and *glauben* as well as the Swedish *tro* – and *tycka* in the interviews – occur



most frequently with a complementizer.<sup>16</sup> Predictably, the general number of non-integrated cases increases for all verbs in the more informal data sets. Overall, German seems to have a stronger tendency than Swedish to avoid the complementizer. This points to a grammatical difference between the Swedish and German embedded clauses (and hence the status of *dass* vs. *att*), which cannot be taken up in detail here. The German complementizer is more intimately linked to word order in the subordinated clause. Swedish *att*-clauses can have hypotactic or paratactic word order, depending on pragmatic factors; the latter is the case especially in combination with an initial matrix clause with *verba sentiendi* and *dicendi* (SAG 4:537).

As this paper is not contrastive in orientation, we will only touch on formal differences between German and Swedish below. With the exceptions mentioned, the general picture is the same in the two languages: pre-positioning is generally much more widespread than post-positioning, but post-positioning increases in more informal conversational data. How can we explain these two facts?

### 3.1. Pre-positioned *verba sentiendi*

The seven *verba sentiendi* discussed here each have slightly different pragmatic functions when used to frame a subsequent C-element. A detailed analysis is beyond the scope of this paper; the reader is referred to Imo (2006, 2007) and (2009), as well as Günthner & Imo (2003) for details about German; for Swedish, see Saari (1986) and Karlsson (2006), as well as Goddard & Karlsson (2008). We will only point out some of the main characteristics.

#### 3.1.1. *jag tycker/ich finde/ich denke*

Just like English *I think* (see Kärkkäinen 2003:130-132), pre-positioned Swedish and German *verba sentiendi* are a resource with which speakers can align their respective standpoints and negotiate agreement. The framed utterance part is presented as perspectivized and subjective; no claim to general validity is made. Especially *jag tycker* and *ich finde* are used for position-taking, i.e., for assessments and evaluations, whereas *ich denke* can also preface statements of fact (and is purely epistemic in such cases).<sup>17</sup> As an example of position-taking, consider extract (11) from the corpus of Swedish group discussions on musical styles. The moderator (M) asks the participants, a group of high school students, whether they like a particular piece of music which they just have heard, using the particle verb *tycka om* ‘to like’ in her question (‘Do you like it?’). In direct response, (A) gives his assessment, prefaced with the stance-marker *jag tycker*.<sup>18</sup> (B) concurs, using the wide-spread responsive construction *jag tycker också de* ‘I think so too’, where the pronoun *de* ‘it, that’ refers back to the core of the previous contribution, i.e., ‘it is good’ (this responsive format is not considered in this paper). (C) seems to interject a misaligning turn by saying *nej* ‘no’. This is followed by a fourth participant’s (D) somewhat ambivalent assessment: framing his utterance with *jag tycker*, he states that the music is O.K., but that the band in question is not very ‘musical’, even though their texts are good. In this example then, a stance-marked response turn expresses an assessment

<sup>16</sup> Without going into details here, it should be added that apart from lexical variation, the choice between these two variants is also influenced by other parameters. For instance, a negated matrix verb strongly enforces the use of the complementizer in German (see Auer 1998 for details).

<sup>17</sup> There are some formal differences between *ich denke* and *ich finde*. *Ich denk* often co-occurs with the modal particle *mal* (see Ex. 16), which is not possible for *ich finde*, owing to its evaluative character. *Ich finde* occurs with a subsequent *dass*-introduced dependent clause considerably more often than *ich glaub*, *ich denk* or *ich mein* (see Fig. 4) in the more formal register.

<sup>18</sup> Despite their formal similarity, the simple verb *tycka* and the particle verb *tycka om* have different meanings and should be regarded as separate lexical items: the former expresses an opinion, roughly corresponding to *think*; the latter can be translated with *like*, i.e., ‘being fond of something’.

that diverges slightly from the assessments expressed in the previous contributions (see Kärkkäinen 2003 on *I think* for similar observations).

(11) (Swedish, moderated discussion, GSM)

- 01 M: m tycker ni om de?  
m do you like it?
- 02 A: **ja tycker** de e: bra  
**I think** it is good
- 03 B: ja ja tycker också de  
yes I think so too
- 04 C: nej  
no
- 05 D: **ja tycker** de ä ganska bra men inte så:  
**I think** it is fairly good but not so:  
  
inte så musikaliskt band men de ä bra texter  
not so musical a band but it is good texts
- 06 M: mm

The speakers' contributions appear tentative and hedged, whereas not using a framing device of this kind would make them sound apodictic and potentially offensive to those who do not share the same opinion. (A similar use of German *ich denk* is documented below in Ex. (15).)

*Ich finde* has no direct equivalent in the Swedish data set; the cognate expression *jag finner* 'I find' is barely used at all in colloquial talk. In the following extract, *ich finde* is used to frame the assessment of the present state of a puzzle, which the participants are trying to put together:

(12) (BB25; Kerstin, Jona and others are sitting with a puzzle)

- 01 Ker: also; **ich find** das sieht schon ganz GUT aus,=  
well; I think it already looks quite good,=  
  
02 =dann würd ich DIEses hier vOrne [(hintun).  
=then I would (put) this one here in front.  
((referring to a piece of the puzzle))
- 03 Joa: [ja das muss ja hier  
noch n=stückchen so HOCH.  
yes this one must ((go)) a bit higher here like this.

As the example shows, *ich finde* is used to frame an utterance as a subjective evaluation. The speaker in this case evaluates the state of the puzzle (*sieht schon ganz gut aus* 'looks quite good').

### 3.1.2. *jag tror/ich glaube*

Other than *jag tycker/ich finde/ich denke*, which can be used for evaluative stance-marking, *jag tror* and *ich glaub(e)* mostly function as epistemic markers. Stating a fact, but framing it based on restricted, personal knowledge can also be a strategy to mitigate dispreferred subsequent activities. For instance, in the following example, Verona frames her negative response

to Sabrina's enthusiasm about a good-looking movie actor with *ich glaub*, which she uses to preface the information that the actor is in a relationship:<sup>19</sup>

(13) (BB80) ([about a movie star who Verona knows personally;]) Sabrina and Verona are looking at a photo of this man))

01 Sbr: boah (-) kumma HIER andrea (her).  
have a look (here) Andrea.

02 iss\_er SOlo? (-)  
is he single?

03 iss\_er [HÜBSCH?  
is he handsome?

→ 03 Vero: [ja:, ich glaub [er (-) er  
yes I think he he

04 Sbr: [kann man ihn HA:ben?  
is he available?

→ 05 Vero: er hat ne neue FREUNDIN glaub ich seit=n paar MONaten,  
He's had a new girlfried I think for a couple of months

The epistemic framing device makes the information Verona gives to Sabrina (that the movie star has a new girl-friend) sound less categorical; after all, it is presented as simply representing Verona's perspective, which might be wrong.

### 3.1.3. jag menar/ich meine

When compared to the other stance markers, *ich mein(e)* and *jag menar* stand out in several ways. They are hardly ever post-positioned, and only very rarely do they show inverted verb order when occurring parenthetically in the middle of a sentence (see 4.3 below). *Ich meine/jag menar* appear syntactically frozen in this word order, and they are positionally less flexible than the other *verba dicendi* expressions. They thus come closest to what Thompson (2002) claims for the English epistemic expression *I think*, i.e., they behave almost like discourse markers (cf. also Schiffrin 1987: 297-311 on *I mean*). The tendency for German *ich mein(e)* to occur without the final schwa, the variable marker of first person singular, also points in that direction.<sup>20</sup>

<sup>19</sup> The inverted variant *glaub ich* is additionally inserted into her turn in line 05 (see below, 4.3., for inserted stance-related expressions).

<sup>20</sup> Cf. the following percentages for *verba sentiendi* (pre- and post-positioned) with and without the first person suffix:

	with suffix	without suffix
<i>mein(e)</i>	11%	89%
<i>denk(e)</i>	58%	42%
<i>glaub(e)</i>	15%	85%
<i>find(e)</i>	68%	32%

*Ich mein/jag menar* have undergone a semantic shift away from the literal sense of a *verbum sentiendi* (cf. Günthner & Imo 2003, Saari 1986).<sup>21</sup> Their main functions are the following: (a) to introduce evidence for an argument that is based on common knowledge ('of course'), (b) to introduce self-repairs and (c) to preface non-preferred next activities; in this last usage, they resemble hesitation markers. The first two usages are reflected in the marker's position within the turn: instead of initiating a sequence or responding to another participant's assessment or claim, *ich mein/jag menar* launch an embedded argument in support of such a turn-initial activity, or an embedded self-repair.

The following extracts illustrate *jag menar/ich mein* when used to introduce a supportive argument for the speaker's opinion based on common ground. A typical environment for *jag menar* or *ich mein(e)* are multi-unit turns as in (16), where (A) is talking about music play-lists on the radio.

(14) (Swedish, moderated discussion, GSM)

- 01 A: sen eh har vi dom här sjuka listorna asså (.)  
       then um we have those sick lists right
- 02 sjuttititre sex- sjuttisextio veckor eller nåt sånt där (.)  
       seventythree six- seventysix weeks or something
- 03 **ja menar** de e ju ett å ett halvt år  
       I mean that is a year and a half you know

(A) refers to the play lists as being 'sick' in line 01. The 'sick' nature of the lists is a result of the long time span, i.e., seventy-six weeks, during which the same songs have been played on the radio (for marketing purposes) as outlined by (A) in line 02. Finally, in line 03, a new TCU is initiated with *jag menar*, which is followed by a reformulation of the time frame mentioned before, i.e., 'a year and a half' (which is numerically equivalent, but sounds longer than 76 weeks). *Jag menar* not only foreshadows a specification, but also marks this specification as common knowledge; note as well the modal particle *ju* 'as we know, you know' in the core of the contribution.

The following German example is particularly interesting because the speaker self-interrupts an emerging utterance after the *verbum sentiendi denken* and replaces it with *meinen*. The self-repair makes it clear that, for the speaker, the two verbs are not equivalent. The context is a discussion of how their time in the *Big Brother* house will keep the group together in later life.

(15) BB47 (Alex had an affair with Kerstin during their time in the house.)

- 01 Alx: was weiß ICH, wenn wir RAUS kommen, (.) °h  
       how can I know, maybe when we leave the house,
- 02 vielleicht will kerstin mich ja gar nicht mehr SEHen=  
       maybe Kerstin doesn't want to see me any more,
- 03 dann sim=mer immer noch gute FREUN[de],  
       then we are still 'best friends',
- 04 Sbr: [(lau[ghs loudly))]
- 05 Alx: [mit ma ]nu

<sup>21</sup> *Ich mein* can still occur in the sense of *ich denke/ich find(e)*, but these usages are rare in our data.

- garanti[ert AUCH,  
surely *Manu and I as well,*
- 06 Sbr: [<<shouting, laughing voice>würd kerstin  
dich ni mehr SEHN,>  
*Kerstin wouldn't want to see you again,*
- 07 Alx: [((laughs))]
- 08 Sbr: [((laughs))]
- 09 Alx: nee, aber **ich denke** SCHON;=[also=  
*no, but I do think you know*
- 10 Sbr: [nee **ich denke** mal auch KERstin,  
*no, I think that Kerstin, too*
- 11 **ich denk** mal al **ich mein** sowas äh .h öh (-)  
*I think eh I mean something like this uhm uhm*
- verSCHWÖRT schon,=  
*forges<sup>22</sup> you together after all,*
- 12 **ich denk** mal das werden wir unser LEben nicht ver[gEs]sen.  
*I think we won't forget this all our lives.*
- 13 Alx: [nö,]  
*no*
- 14 (.)
- 15 Sbr: .h und isch hoffe auch dass wir äh .h sagen wir mal alle  
*and I also hope that we uhm let's say that we really*
- wirklich äh (-) jemanden dazugewonnen HABen,  
*all have uhm won somebody ((as a friend))*

Although Alex expresses his fears that two of the women in the house might not want to see him again later in life, Sabrina does not share his concerns. She questions Alex's opinion in line 06 by repeating part of it in a loud and laughing voice, as if he had told a joke, which leads Alex to begin reformulating his view in line 09, framing this statement of opinion by *ich denke*. Sabrina interrupts in line 10 and also formulates a diverging position, which is introduced with *ich denk mal*. Her syntactic project is self-interrupted, but continued and brought to completion in line 12 ('I think we won't forget this all our lives'). In lines 09, 10 and 12, *ich denk(e)* seems to be the appropriate framing device for prefacing one's own (diverging) point of view or opinion (cf. extract 11 on *jag tycker*) for Alex and Sabrina, respectively. But in line 11 Sabrina self-interrupts her turn, which she had also started with *ich denk*, in order to provide a subordinated justification for her opinion that they 'won't forget this all their lives'. This subordinated argument is introduced by *ich mein*, which frames the argument as common knowledge, a matter of course that no one could possibly disagree with (cf. the particle *schon* 'after all'). The argument that 'this forges us together after all' is presented, not as her opinion, but as based on what is obvious.

<sup>22</sup> *Verschwören* can only be used in German as a reflexive verb (*sich verschwören*) and then means 'to conspire against somebody, to plot'; Sabrina wants to say that being in together forges the group as a whole (as in a conspiracy).

The function of prefacing a subordinated argument as common sense knowledge by *ich mein* can shade into another function of this stance marker, which is to preface a dispreferred, diverging opinion, usually in a 'yes-but' format; indeed, the formula *ja men jag menar/ja aber ich mein* 'yes, but I mean' is a standard way of introducing disagreement in conversational Swedish and German. An example is extract (16), in which *ich mein* occurs repeatedly. The telephone conversation between the two partners has reached a critical phase here. (B) is studying in the United States and wants to pursue a career there, while her boyfriend (A) lives in Germany and has no clear intention of leaving.

(16) (CALLHOME [GE4866]; A= boyfriend, B= girlfriend)

- 01 B:     *ich will dass du MITkommst.*  
           *I want you to come with me.*  
           ((...))
- 09 A:     *m WEISS ich;*  
           *yes, I know;*
- 10         *aber (.) naja GU:T.*  
           *but (.) well ok.*
- 11       *nee **ich MEIN** nur. weil ähm::*  
           *no, I only mean, because uhm*
- 12       ***ich mein** ich würde GERN ins ausland gehen.=ne?*  
           *I mean I would like to go abroad. you know?*
- 13 B:     *hm:-*
- 14 A:     *aber ist eben die FRAge so-*  
           *but of course the question is like*
- 15         *kriegst DU n job,*  
           *will you get a job,*
- 16         *krieg ICH n job,*  
           *will I get a job,*
- 17         *und ich muss ja noch rechtzeitig WISsen;=*  
           *and in addition I have to know in time;=*
- 18         *dass ich mich wenn dann drum KÜMmern kann oder so.=ne,*  
           *so that I can that if so I can take care of it or so. you*  
           *see,*
- 19 B:     *hm-*
- 20 A:     ***ich mein** so london würd ich super GERN mal machen, ne.*  
           *I mean like London I would really love to do, you know.*
- 21 B:     *hm*
- 22 A:     *aber?*  
           *but*
- 23 B:     *es würd dir glaube ich auch geFAllen.*  
           *and you will like it I think.*

24 A: LONdon?

25 B: hm?

Both in lines 12/14 and in lines 20/22, (A) formulates a counterargument in a ‘yes-but’ format; he concedes a point, but then raises a problem. In both cases, the first, agreeing part is prefaced by *ich mein*; and in both cases, this converging component of the turn (‘I would like to go abroad’; ‘London I would really love to do’ [=‘visit’]) is followed by a ‘but’.

The third function of *ich meine* is that of marking self-repair, as in the following extract:

(17) (Sabrina and Verena are crawling around on the floor collecting marbles.)

01 Sbr: is keins RAUSgefallen?  
none fell out?

02 Ver: hier?  
here?

03 (-) wieviel HASTe?  
how many have you got?

04 Sbr: auf die STRAße?  
into the street?

→05 äh **ich mein** auf die auf die <<laughing> STRA:ße> (.)  
uhm I mean in the in the street

06 auf (.) auf die terRASsen **meint ich**; (3.5)  
on on the terraces I meant

Sabrina realizes that there is no street on which the marbles could fall; she therefore self-repairs ‘street’ to ‘terraces’ in lines 04-06. The repair is introduced by ‘uhm I mean’ and a laughing repetition of the wrong word which expresses her amusement about herself being so stupid as to use the term *Straße*. Then the repair proper (replacement) follows, and the sequence is concluded by another, post-positioned *mein ich*, this time with inverted word order and in the past tense. (See the next section for final position)

### 3.2. Post-positioned *verba sentiendi*

When the *verbum sentiendi* is post-positioned, the preceding clause is almost never syntactically marked as subordinated by *dass/att*. In Swedish, \**Att den e rätt bra, tycker jag* seems to be impossible. The only cases that come somewhat close are pivot constructions such as seen in extract (18), taken from the Swedish informal conversations. The initial *verbum sentiendi* frame *jag tycker* ‘I think’ is followed by the complement clause *att den e rätt bra* ‘that it is quite good’. An inverted version (*tycker jag*) is then added, resulting in a mirror-image pivot construction (see Scheutz 2005 on German; Norén 2007 and Lindström 2013 on Swedish). But even in these cases, the pivot part seems to be the declarative clause *den en rätt bra*, rather than the complement clause *att den e rätt bra*:

(18) GSM

01 A: men e mm (.) jag skrev- jag skrev inte så mycke  
but um mm (.) I wrote- I didn’t write so much

02 där på den

on that one

→ 03 B: men **jag tycker att** den e rätt bra **tycker jag**  
but **I think that** it is quite good **I think**

The equivalent German construction (*dass das gut ist, glaube ich*) is not ungrammatical but restricted to contrastive contexts.<sup>23</sup> This already points to one difference between pre- and post-positioned *verba sentiendi*: not only is the post-positioned variant considerably less frequent, particularly in the more formal, interview data, but also it is virtually non-existent in the format of a *dass/att*-clause.

When then, and in which function, do post-positioned *verba sentiendi* occur at all? *Ich mein* and *jag menar* are particularly rare in this position, both in the informal and in the interview data. If they are post-positioned, they are almost always linked to self-repair, as in the German extract (17), line 06, above, or in the following Swedish case:

(19) (Swedish, moderated discussion, GSM)

A: å dom e så löjlia (.) deras image **menar ja**  
and they are so ridiculous, their image **I mean**

We therefore find a strong functional reduction: of the three main functions of pre-positioned *ich mein/jag menar*, just one remains for the post-positioned, inverted variant.

For the other verbs, the percentage of post-positioning is always much higher in the informal data than in the interviews. Why is this the case? Obviously, post-positioned elements cannot have a prospective framing function; rather, they provide a stance-related shift of perspective after the statement or assessment has already been produced. Often, they are formulated as separate intonation phrases, which follow the core with or without a pause. This prosodic packaging suggests that they were not planned together with the core, but result from the fact that the speaker, during or around the end of his or her TCU, became alerted to a possible divergence of standpoints between his/her view and the participants' view or became aware of facts that made it advisable to hedge the statement being made. This seems to be more typical of informal, multi-party interactions in which speakers are too engaged in the interaction to plan carefully or consider all their contributions in advance. Here are several examples.

In the first example, the epistemic verb involved is *glauben*, which, as we have seen, is an epistemic stance marker.

(20) (*Big Brother*; Jürgen, John and Kerstin are working on a puzzle)

01 Ker: nee kuck mal;=das is doch SICHer das BEIN, (0.5)  
no look here this surely is the leg

→ 02 GLAUB ich, (--)  
I think

03 weil HIER,  
because here,

04 ist schon dIEse SCHRÄge [(drin).]  
we already have this cline.

05 Jhn: [ja;= ] aber HIER unten (...)

<sup>23</sup> In the only example of this type in our data (*dass ich geschickt bin, das glaub ich schon*, lit. 'that I am skilled that I believe') the resumptive pronoun *das* makes the structure converge with that of a prolepsis.



yes but down here ((...))

The speaker first uses the adverbial *sicher* ‘certainly’ to mark epistemic stance, i.e., she claims to be very sure that the puzzle piece she is talking about is ‘part of the leg’. However, during the production of this utterance or shortly thereafter, she seems to be losing faith in her own statement and downgrades its epistemic status from *sicher* to *glaub ich*. The retrospective re-framing occurs after a half-second of silence in which her co-players fail to produce an uptake, and by withholding their agreement indirectly express their skepticism. Kerstin adds an account of why she thinks what she thinks (line 04), but her co-player (John in line 05) now explicitly expresses doubts about her assumption. The post-positioned *verbum sentiendi* is part of, and reflects, the process of negotiation between the participants about whose opinion is right.

In the second example, the post-positioned *verbum sentiendi* is *find ich*, which, as we have seen, is related to subjective evaluations and assessments.

(21) (Sabrina poses to show Verena and Jürgen her biceps.)

01 Ver: [ZEIG ma.  
show us.

02 Sab: [((poses and giggles))

03 Ver: ja DAS kanns\_te AUCH gut machen; ne?  
yes that's something you are good at as well; right?

04 Jrg: [<p>`ja::,>  
yes

05 Sab: [((giggling))

→ 05 Ver: **FIND ich**;  
I think;

Verena first gives unhedged positive feedback, though not enthusiastic, when Sabrina poses and shows her muscles (‘this you can also do well’, line 03), which is followed by a question tag (*ne?*) eliciting agreement. Jürgen agrees (line 04), but in a low voice and with an elongated falling-rising *ja::*, which might indicate his reservations about Sabrina’s performance. In any case, after this agreement, Verena expands her turn using the stance marker *find ich*, which retrospectively downgrades her positive statement from a fact to merely a subjective opinion.

In extract (22), it is once more Sabrina whose bodily shape is the object of evaluation, this time by Jürgen and Andrea. The *verbum sentiendi* which is post-positioned here is *ich denke*, used in its epistemic sense:

(22) (Andrea, Jürgen and Sabrina are having breakfast. Jürgen and others have overheard Andrea and Sabrina the day before talking about their weight.)

01 Jrg→Sab: ich musste auch gestern so: (-) GRINsen,  
I also had to smile yesterday,

02 ihr zwei,=  
the two of you,

03 wo du erZÄHLT hast,  
when you said,

- 04           du hätts zweinhalb KIlo zugenommen;  
            *that you had put on two and a half kilos.*
- 05 Sbr:       [<<f>a=hahahaha>
- 06 Adr:       [hahahaha
- 07 Jrg:       pro WOChE ham wir gesagt.  
            *per week! we said.*
- 08 all:       ((general loud laughter))
- 09 Adr:       ich hab gesagt das sagt sie auch schon seitdem sie  
            [hier DRIN ist dass das ZWEI kilo sind.  
            *I said she's been saying this since she's in here  
            that it is two kilos.*
- 10 Jrg:       [ahahaha
- 11 Sbr:       ja Erst ja (-) also VIEL mehr is\_es NICH.  
            *yes (only) yes (-) well it's not MUCH more.*
- 12           **DENK ich mal,=**  
            *I think,*
- 13           ich WEISS ja nich aber-  
            *I don't know of course but*
- 14           (2.0)
- 15           ja die rÖcke gehn ja NOCH ZU; he he he he he  
            *well the skirts can still be fastened*

Jürgen is teasing Sabrina about having claimed for weeks that she has put on two kilos (four and a half pounds) and suggests that, more likely, she has put on two kilos (four pounds) each week (line 07). Andrea joins in and points out that she has been saying the same thing since she entered the *Big Brother* house. Sabrina joins in their laughter and thereby acknowledges the playful mode, but she also disagrees: she insists that her additional weight is not much more than two kilos (line 11). This assertion is modified by a post-positioned stance expression *denk ich mal*. It seems that while uttering line 11, it has occurred to Sabrina that she has no grounds for making such a bold statement (since there are no scales in the *Big Brother* house, a fact she alludes to in line 13: 'I don't know, of course'). She therefore retrospectively turns her statement into an opinion, which receives only weak proof from the fact that, as she puts it in line 15, her skirts can still be fastened.

As the extracts above show, post-positioned *verba sentiendi* are a useful device for negotiating consensus in multi-party conversations. Moreover, they perform turn exchange work by signaling or re-signaling completion and preparing for the next speaker uptake (see also Ford & Thompson 1996:170, Kärkkäinen 2003:166). Consider extract (23) from the informal Swedish data set. Here the moderator (M) is asking why the participants like the music of the Beatles. Speaker (A) begins by stating that their melodies are good. There is no immediate uptake, and after a pause of 1.7 seconds, he adds *tycker jag* in line 06. This marks the contribution as a personal assessment rather than as a generally valid statement and recompletes the turn, suggesting that the other participants are now free to take the floor and contribute their opinions. (B) then comes in with another aspect of the Beatles: everybody is familiar with them.

(23) (Swedish, moderated discussion,GSM:17)

- 01 M: va ä dä som gör att den här (.)  
*what is it that makes that this one (.)*
- 02 [den här-  
*this one-*
- 03 A: [nä för dom ha- Be- just Beatles,  
*no 'cause they ha- Be- especially Beatles*
- 04 dom har väldigt goa (.) melodier °på sina låtar°. *they have very good (.) melodies in their songs.*
- 05 (1.7)
- 06 >**tycker jag**<. hh  
***I think.***
- 07 B: alla har ju hört Beatles å,  
*everybody has certainly heard the Beatles too,*
- 08 M: mm
- 09 C: man känner till dom.  
*one knows them.*
- 10 B: ingen som inte vet va Beatles e  
*nobody who doesn't know what the Beatles are*
- 11 **tror jag** ju (.) [kan de ju inte va.  
***I think*** (.) (there) surely can't be
- 12 A: [näh  
no
- 13 A: de e en del yngre som lyssnar på dom också.  
*there's a number of younger people who listen to them too*
- 14 B: kanske inte så [(att dom) köper  
*maybe not so (that they) buy*
- 15 A: [nä- när dom börjar komma ö-  
*when they begin to reach*
- 16 över vår våran ålder så **tror jag** de (.)  
*our age I think it/there (.)*
- 17 de e många som börjar lyssna me- mer på dom.  
*there are many who are starting to listen more to them.*
- 18 (2.1)
- 19 >°**tror jag**°<.  
***I think.***
- 20 M: de e nog vanligt att sånna (1.2) som ni  
*it's maybe common that those (1.2) like you ((pl.))*
- 21 i er ålder sitter å lyssnar hemma på då?

*in your age are listening at home right?*

22 C:        *hja*  
              *yeah*

(B) upgrades his opinion in line 10, namely, that everybody knows the Beatles: there is probably no one who does not know this band. He retrospectively qualifies this extreme case formulation as his personal estimation by using a post-positioned *tror jag* (line 11). (A) continues by stating that people younger than their age group (in the upper teens) also listen to the Beatles, and when they grow somewhat older, they may listen to this music even more. This contribution is qualified with a *tror jag* integrated into the inner sentence frame (line 16). After the possible completion, a pause of 2.1 seconds ensues in line 18: there seems to be consensus about this aspect and no one takes the floor. (A) then re-signals the closure of his contribution with an incremented *tror jag* in line 19 – a semantically superfluous addition because the same qualifier had already been used in line 16. The moderator eventually takes the turn with a question focused on the participants and their habits of listening to music.

In sum, post-positioned *verba sentiendi* can deal with both stance alignment between participants and the dynamics of turn-taking. These are functions that could be labeled intersubjective because they demonstrate attention to the recipients by cueing a proper interpretation and opening up the turn (cf. Ghesquière et al. 2014, Traugott 2014). As the examples above show, some of the stance expressions are constructed as smooth prosodic and constructional packages integrated with the preceding core, whereas in other cases, there is a gap between the core and the post-positioned stance expression. The latter thus have the status of same-turn or third-turn increments.

### 3.3. *Inserted verba sentiendi*

German and Swedish stance expressions containing *verba sentiendi* can also occur as insertions in an emerging utterance. As pointed out above, most of the inserted *verba sentiendi* constructions show inverted word order, i.e., the same subject-final syntax as the post-positioned ones. The exceptions are *ich mein* and *jag menar* with subject-verb ordering. Whereas the first group is sensitive to its syntactic environment, the latter group, which we suggest treating as parentheticals, is independent of the surrounding structure. We first discuss the true insertions with inverted word order.

From an online syntactic view, and given their word order, these *verba sentiendi* expressions are post-positioned to whatever part of the emerging utterance has been produced at the particular point at which they are inserted. Functionally, however, there are two kinds of inserted stance expressions, one closer to pre-positioning and the other closer to post-positioning. In the second case, the inserted status only appears *ex post*, since the *verbum sentiendi* occurs at a point at which a constructional unit is potentially complete, but is later expanded. In this way, the completion point of the first complete TCU is retrospectively suspended, and the appended stance marker appears to be inserted into it. Consider extract (24) where *tycker jag* (line 03) and the prepositional phrase *me soul* ‘with soul’ (line 05) are produced as a series of increments to the possibly completed core element *men de har väl ännu blivit rätt populärt nu också* ‘but it has like become quite popular now, too’:

(24) (Swedish, moderated discussion, GSM:5; talk on the genre disco soul)

01 A:        *men de har väl ännu blivit rätt populärt nu också*  
              *but it has like become quite popular now too*

02            (0.3)

The last increment in the series, the prepositional phrase in line 05, transforms the *verbum sentiendi* expression, which is post-positioned vis-à-vis the preceding declarative clause, into an insertion within the expanded clausal structure.

Another group of examples stand out more truly as insertions. In these cases, the utterance in progress is still developing and has not reached a point at which it could be regarded as syntactically and pragmatically complete. An example is extract (25) where *tror jag* is inserted between a main clause and a relative clause (line 07). There are no pauses or prosodic cues which could suggest that the stance marker is attached as an increment.

01 M:       å de e killar; (.) [som lyssnar på de mest (.) °trodde ni°.  
            and it is guys who listen to it mostly you thought

02 A:

[mm]

03 A:       a [de tror jag.  
            yes I think so

04 B:       [a ja  
            oh yes

05 C:       mm

06 A:       de finns °de e ju klart men de e° (.)  
            there are well of course but there are (.)

+07         mycke killar **tror jag** [som lyssnar [på de.  
            many guys **I think** who listen to it

08 B:

[mm]

09 C:       [mest killar.  
            mostly guys

In conversational German, *glaub ich* is particularly frequent as an insert, and the tendency to delete the subject pronoun suggests that this sequence is developing into an unanalyzable particle without internal structure (cf. Imo 2009). Typically, this *glaub (ich)* occurs immediately after the left verbal brace (the finite verb in second position), as in (25a), or after the first argument following the verbal brace, as in (26b–d):

(a) s\_is **glaub ich** deine LANDessprache  
it is - I think - de your country's language

(b) s\_hat JEder **glaub ich** von uns gesagt  
that has everybody - I think - of us said

- (c) ((das)) hab ich auch **glaub** zwei jahre im sommer nur angehabt  
*that (dress) I have also - I think - only worn two years in summer*
- (d) das EINzigste was ich **glaub\_ich** immer ganz GU:T finde is ...  
*the only thing that I - I think - always find quite good is ...*

Despite their syntactic format, these kinds of ‘early’ insertions therefore could be analyzed functionally as delayed alternatives to pre-positioned *verba sentiendi*.

Parenthetical *ich meine* and *jag menar* expressions are exceedingly rare in German. In Swedish, examples such as (27a-b) show that *jag menar* functions as a hesitation marker rather than as a *verbum sentiendi* proper, very similar to certain usages of English *I mean* (cf. Schiffrin 1987: 297-311; Imo 2005).

(27) Swedish *jag menar* as parenthetical within the sentence frame.

- (a) tror ni att de finns **jag menar** en stor lyssnarskara  
*do you think that there is I mean a big bunch of listeners*
- på den här musiken  
*for this music*
- (b) men dom (.) e u ju **jag menar** pensionärer som (verkar)  
*but they (.) are um apparently I mean retired who (seem to)*
- gå ut å dansa  
*go out and dance*

The inserted markers do not directly relate to our overarching question of left/right asymmetries, but they clearly demonstrate the temporality of utterance construction and show different kinds of orientations to either pre-positioning or post-positioning.

### 3.4. *Intermediate summary on VS-pre and VS-post*

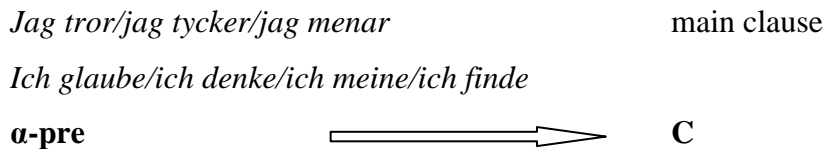
In this section, we have examined *verba sentiendi* expressions in Swedish and German such as *jag tycker* or *ich finde*, taking the issue of left/right asymmetries further and providing in-depth empirical insights into one particular case of such an asymmetry. Quantitative results based on more formal and more informal data sets revealed that the post-positioning of these expressions is much rarer than the pre-positioning, particularly in the more formal (dyadic interview) context.

We have argued that pre-positioned *verba sentiendi* should not be understood in terms of a matrix clause/embedded clause construction, but as a string that projects more talk to come and offers an interpretive frame for it. The verbs that are available for this purpose in Swedish and German have overlapping, but also partly differing functions. While *jag tror/ich glaube* are mainly epistemic stance markers, *ich denke* and particularly *jag tycker* and *ich finde* are predominantly used for evaluative position-taking. The functional profile of *ich mein/jag menar* is different. These expressions have become specialized as repair markers, framing devices for disaffiliative points of view or markers for subordinate arguments based on common knowledge/shared opinions, i.e., they project some kind of justification or adjustment in relation to the on-going activity.

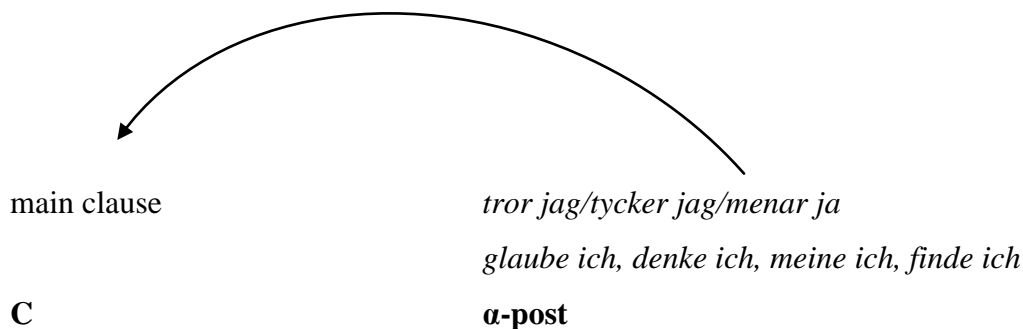
Our findings show that, despite the differences between the individual *verba sentiendi*, an overarching feature of pre-positioned stance-related expressions is that they have a prospective framing function: the speaker signals from the start that the content of the projected utterance should be seen as his or her personal opinion or as based on his or her individual

knowledge state (and in some cases also with reference to common knowledge). The stance marker projects a subsequent main clause as the core element.

The core element follows the  $\alpha$ -pre-element without delay, usually integrated into it prosodically. Owing to this integration and to the fact that the core element is projected, the transition between the two is not open to speaker–recipient alignment and offers no possibility for turn-taking.



The post-positioned variants also have stance-marking functions, but in a retrospective sense. (In the case of *mein ich/menar jag*, these functions are reduced to repair-marking.)



In the case of post-positioning, a claim has first been put forward whose validity is then reduced by adding a subjective stance marker. Post-positioned stance markers can therefore be practice for downgrading an assessment or a claim that otherwise might be interpreted as containing objective and indisputable information. The speaker may become aware of some facts that make such a stance adjustment advisable or become aware of a co-participant's projections of inferable disagreement with the position taken by the speaker. Our quantitative and qualitative analyses suggest that such retrospective adjustments of speaker contributions are called for, especially in the context of informal, multi-party conversations in which the speakers are continuously aware of other possible viewpoints because of the presence and (verbal or non-verbal) conduct of their co-participants.

The clauses preceding a post-positioned *verba sentiendi* expression are almost never marked by subordinating syntax, which suggests that the formal link between the core and the  $\alpha$ -post is weaker than in the inverse ordering. This is also reflected in the prosodic independence of post-positioned *verba sentiendi* expressions. As increments, they are added to an already complete utterance and can therefore be subject to the dynamics of turn-taking. It even happens that the stance marker is added after another speaker's next turn. On the other hand, these expressions can fill the gaps in turn-transition spaces where other speakers have failed to take up the turn. In sum, the transition between core and post-positioned stance markers is on all levels – syntax, prosody, sequential organization and turn-taking – less tight than in the opposite case of pre-positioned stance markers.

## 4. Conclusion

The analytic stance taken in this report suggests a shift from a static view of language and grammar with stable meanings toward a dynamic view in which the meanings of linguistic elements are sensitive to their position in conversational turns and sequences, which are related to the preceding and following sequential context and, not least, to turn-taking. As a case in point, we have discussed ‘left/right asymmetries’, which are not only a pervasive feature of (spoken) grammar, but also are central to an understanding of the temporality and interactional organization of grammar as embedded in the sequentiality of talk-in-interaction.

We have focused on syntactically less complex, but analytically tangible elements that precede or follow the core. Several important differences between the two ways of ordering these elements in time can be detected. To begin with, syntactic embedding is not exactly the same in pre- and post-positioning. The pre-positioned variants are generally more integrated with the following core (see our discussion of conditional clauses and *verba sentiendi* expressions above). Syntactically, they are linked more tightly to the core, which they project. The post-positioned variants, on the other hand, do not project more talk to come; on the contrary, they often signal or re-signal completion and are thus more oriented to negotiating turn-taking and inter-participant alignment. There also may be a difference of cognitive status: pre-positioned elements are arguably pre-designed features of the speaker’s contribution, whereas post-elements often appear as incremental expansions of possibly complete utterances. Orientation to the relevant next speaker uptake might therefore explain the larger quantity of post-positioned elements in more informal and multi-party interactions.

Pre-positioned elements contextualize the speaker’s contribution, while post-positioned variants re-contextualize it. Pre-positioning is much more frequent, at least with conditional clauses, conjunctive linkers and *verba sentiendi*, which suggests that it represents the ‘*ordo naturalis*’: it is more natural to frame the contribution at the outset, orienting the recipient to the kind of contribution to be expected, than to mark such a stance *ex post*. Working against the *ordo naturalis*, post-positioning may be used for more specific interactional tasks. As our examples show, post-positioning often has to do with re-adjusting or even repairing the contribution with an eye to appropriate understanding and relevant next-speaker uptake. This would suggest that post-positioning is more attuned to co-participants’ needs in the interaction and sense-making processes than is pre-positioning by overtly securing and heightening intersubjectivity, in the sense of addressee-accommodation (cf. Traugott 2014). Indeed, there is cross-linguistic evidence that such intersubjective meanings tend to be expressed in a final, rather than in an initial utterance position (Beeching & Detges 2014b, Ghesquière et al. 2014). In the end, the leaning towards (more) intersubjective effects in post-positioning (than in pre-positioning) is presumably one of the consequences of the above-mentioned re-contextualization work that the speakers may need to carry out in final utterance/turn position.

### Data

Swedish: GSM=Moderated discussions with highschool students on musical styles, recorded in Gothenburg, Sweden, in 1995; HUSA=Moderated discussions with high school students on societal phenomena, recorded in Helsinki, Finland, 1994; IVC=Interviews on television and radio on politics and sports, recorded in Sweden and Finland in 2005 (by courtesy of Camilla Wide and Pekka Saaristo); SÅINF=Conversation between elderly female friends, recorded in Uppsala, Sweden, in 1998.

German: BB = *Big Brother*, first German season (broadcast and recorded in 2000); CALLHOME = telephone conversations between Germans (mostly students) living in the USA to family and friends in Germany. Recorded ca. 2000.



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