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RISK COMMUNICATION AND STANCE: STRATEGIC FRAMING IN RISK DISCOURSE¹

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Abstract: This study offers a socio-cognitive approach to discourse analysis, allowing a multifaceted exploration of stance and stancetaking in contemporary American risk discourse. Integrating features of immediate and mediated discursive activities, stance is seen here as both a subjective and an intersubjective discourse construct, inseparably connected with situational framing and formation of situational identities.

Key words: frame semantics, frame analysis, framing, risk society, risk discourse, stance, stancetaking.

1. Introduction

In 2012, seven Italian scientists were convicted of manslaughter for what they said and did not say when informing people of the approaching earthquake in a small town of L'Aquila. A few years earlier, in 2009, regional government officials issued a press release proclaiming there would not be a big earthquake. This message proved out to be more than inadequate, because six days later L'Aquila was ravaged by a potent earthquake that killed 300 people, injured 1500 people, and made thousands of people homeless. Thereafter, the survivors issued a claim blaming the experts who, in their

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opinion, had knowingly neglected their responsibility to properly inform the population about the risk at hand.

On the one hand, Italian experts did not want to trigger panic, but on the other hand, the wording of their announcement made the city residents resist their established habit of fleeing their homes during tremors because of a reassuring message from the distinguished commission.

The described case is unique in that it was linguistic formulation of the expert report that became the reason for criminal verdict. The accusation has had a pronounced metapragmatic character, being based upon the specification of the felony act in terms of a speech act – through the pragmatic evaluation of "a language and its semantics as a referent, or object of description" (Silverstein 1976: 16). The crime was, essentially, that the way the scientists linguistically formulated their stance on risk did not have the intended effect. The recipients did not get the intended message from the statement and, therefore, the scientists were at fault for putting the residents in harm's way.

Inspired by this example from Italy that showed a criminal outcome for faulty risk communication, this article offers an analysis of discursive stancetaking in contemporary American risk discourse. How are risks communicated in modern media? How is the discourse of risk created and how does it influence our perceptions of risk? How do experts inform the public about risks without scaring people but at the same time making them take necessary measures of precaution? How do public speakers formulate their stances on risks and how are their stances interrelated with the stances of their audience? These are the research questions this article seeks to answer.

Interest in risk in modern society in general – and in academia in particular – is motivated by our recognition of the multiple unknown consequences humanity is facing as a result of its haphazard activities. Moreover, this interest is motivated by awareness of ordinary people's dependence on political action or a lack of it, which can

have important life-sustaining or life-threatening effects not only on humans, but also on the environment.

When this article had already been written and was under peer-review, the whole world unexpectedly found itself in the situation where risk discussion became a daily routine for every single person on the planet due to an unprecedented outbreak of a novel coronavirus and the ensuing COVID-19 pandemic. All-pervading risk discourse has literally overwhelmed national and international media around the world, which makes the **topicality** of this research exceptionally salient and undisputable.

Until lately, linguistics played an insignificant role in scholarly achievements of risk studies, although it is linguistics that can offer insights into how risk is construed, framed and communicated. The **purpose** of this work is to disclose the linguistic specificity of risk framing in modern American media through analyzing pragmatic and cognitive features of stancetaking on risk as a way of socio-semiotic creation of contemporary American risk discourse.

2. Theoretical background: Risk society, risk discourse, and stancetaking

Risk communication produces risk discourse and, in turn, is influenced, or framed by it. Uncertainty and alternativity, danger and fear, expectation of eventual harm or possible excitement over imagined gains are central to risk discourse and, consequently, to a "risk society", a term coined by German sociologist Ulrich Beck in 1999. Ever since, there have been multiple attempts to disclose the secrets of "risk" and "risky behavior", but very few of them concerned language. During a fairly long period of time, risk had mainly been researched by economists, financial analysts and scholars of business. Lately, the focus has shifted to the humanist sphere of academic interests, involving sociologists (Beck 1999; Luhmann 2005), psychologists (Ильин 2012; Slovič 2010), media researchers (Sandman 1992; Schehr 2005), and linguists (Ефимова 2000; Ущина 2016; Fillmore & Atkins 1992; Ushchyna 2018; Zinn 2010; Zinn & McDonald 2018).

As an object for research, *risk discourse* became central to academic debate in 2010 at the CADAAD (Critical Approaches to Discourse Analysis across Disciplines) forum. "Risk discourse" can be defined as a communicative activity of the language speakers associated with discussing various aspects of risk. This definition is based on its thematic orientation or topicality, seen as a dominating and differentiating feature of discourse (Демьянков 2002). The theme of *risk* involves a variety of discursive practices including cognition and social interaction, and thus, becomes its constitutive quality when approached from a socio-cognitive perspective (Dijk 2008).

Based upon the proceedings following the above-mentioned event (Zinn 2010), as well as my own additional observations, I claim that risk discourse can be found in two forms: (1) risk discourse proper – *in situ* discursive interaction of individuals, taking place under the circumstances of a risky choice (henceforth will appear as "communicative situation of risk – CSR") and (2) discourse about risks, organized as a communicative event *ex situ*, in which stance-takers discuss their previously taken stances on risk in mediated discourse (henceforth will appear as "meta-communicative situation of risk – MSR"). The latter is in the focus of my attention in this work.

As a reference point and topical centerpiece of risk discourse, *risk* is a highly abstract notion, very often approachable and interpretable only through the use of language. One of the most elaborate linguistic analyses of *risk* was fulfilled in the theoretical grounding of Frame Semantics (Fillmore 1982; Fillmore & Atkins 1992; Fillmore et al. 2003), where the notion of "frame" means a cognitive structure that organizes human experience and can be activated by various linguistic signals (Fillmore 1982; Fillmore & Atkins 1992). According to Fillmore and Atkins, "individual word senses, relationships among the senses of polysemous words, and relationships between (senses of) semantically related words are linked with the cognitive structures (or "frames"), knowledge of which is presupposed for the concepts encoded by the words" (1992: 75). In other words, in accordance with Frame Semantics, we think in terms of conceptual frames, any of the specific parts or which can be activated by particular

lexical meanings or lexical and syntactic patterns. The groups of related words (e.g., *risk, danger, threat, peril, hazard, chance*, etc.) are mentally organized in terms of frame structures, based on common knowledge, beliefs or experience.

My understanding of situational *framing* in social and media discourse owes not only to Frame Semantics, but also to Frame Analysis by Goffman, who uses the notion of "frame" as a metaphor for setting, context or situation (1986[1974]: 10-11):

"I assume that definitions of situation are built up in accordance with principles of organization which govern events – at least social ones – and our subjective involvement in them; frame is the word I use to refer to such of these basic elements as I am able to identify. That is my definition of frame. My phrase "frame analysis" is a slogan to refer to the examination in these terms of organization of experience".

"Our subjective involvement" in social situations, as mentioned by Goffman, is especially important when we deal with discursive situations of risk, because risk is a highly subjective phenomenon in its non-objective, non-statistical understanding. Risk is not something that has an ontological status or exists in material reality, but rather is constructed interactively in complex and multilayered discursive activities of social actors. Risk communication presupposes an act of *stancetaking* – socio-cognitive process of discursive construction of one's attitude towards the object of discussion. Stancetaking in the situation of risk can be equaled to decision-making, and, thus, is never isolated from the physical world and sociological existence of a stance-taker, but quite the opposite, is molded by the situation on the one hand, and frames the reality on the other one.

In the last decades, *stance* has become a popular object for linguistic investigation (Mopo3oba 2011; Du Bois 2007; Englebretson 2007; Jaffe 2009; Johnstone 2009; Kiesling et. al. 2018) due to its ability "to bridge what happens in actual interactions with the big patterns of language we find, and it helps explain why we find those patterns" (Kiesling, *s. a.*). The term was introduced by Biber and Finegan in their article "Styles of stance in English: Lexical and grammatical marking of evidentiality and

affect" (1989). According to their definition, stance is "the lexical and grammatical expression of attitudes, feelings, judgments, or commitment concerning the propositional content of a message" (ibid., 124).

In this study, stance is defined as a speaker's way to manifest his or her knowledge and the level of certainty about the verbalized proposition(-s) (epistemic stance), as well as emotional and evaluative attitude to his or her own and others' message(-s) (affective stance) by means of specifically chosen and designed linguistic and non-linguistic resources. For example, in the statements "*I know*" (Napolitano 2020: 190) or "*I don't know*" (Ramos 2019: 230), the speaker informs his or her listener about the level of his or her knowledge concerning the object of interaction. This is an epistemic stance. In the statements "*that's a great question*" (Napolitano 2020: 217) and "*I'm feeling particularly guilty*" (Cook 2005: 325) the speakers are constructing their affective stances. In the former sentence, the reference to the object of stancetaking is realized via the demonstrative pronoun *that* and a positively colored epithet *great*. In the latter utterance, the speaker explicates his emotional state with "*I'm feeling particularly guilty*". All the above statements contain the information about one or the other component of already formed stance, presenting the result rather than the process.

The representatives of the dynamic approach to discourse analysis (Mopo3oba 2008; De Fina 2011; Du Bois 2007; Englebretson 2007) focus on intersubjectivity of stancetaking. According to this view, stances are in constant change, upgrade, and alignment, and the central role is given to interaction as an inherent component of stancetaking.

E.g., PAMELA: ... *it's really interesting*.

JENNIFER: *I don't agree with you. That was dumb* (SBC).

In the above fragment of a conversation, taken from the Santa Barbara Corpus of Spoken American English, Pamela and Jennifer declare their opposite evaluations of

the same stance-object, thus, construct different stances *"really interesting"* and *"was dumb"*. Evaluation here is seen as an interactive process during which the stance-takers orient themselves in relation to this object, evaluate it and then characterize it, basing their evaluative characteristics on their pre-existing background knowledge. In a sentence *"I don't agree with you"*, a stance alignment takes place. The stance-taker not only acknowledges the presence of her interlocutor, but also aligns her stance with the stance of her communicative partner. Consequently, the stance predicate *"agree"* belongs to stance-constructing rather than stance-expressing language resources.

Thus, stance is a contextually dependent and interactively formed discursive construct containing information about knowledge of the speakers concerning the object of stancetaking and their emotional attitudes towards it. Stance seems to be crucially meaningful discursive category due to its explicative potential that enables understanding non-linguistic social processes and phenomena through analyzing linguistic patterns of stancetaking.

Any native speaker of a language is also a representative of his or her culture and ideology, which can be discernible in his or her stancetaking. Linguistic resources for the expression of stance include modal, evaluative, emotive, evidential, and attitudinal expressions. These expressions are indexical not only of the speaker's (writer's) stance, but also of his or her "construal of the event" (Langacker 2002), as well as of his or her "contextual" (Crystal 2010: 50) or "situational" (De Fina 2011: 268) identity that incorporates their linguistic, cognitive, and sociolinguistic repertoire (Bamberg et al. 2011; Benwell & Stokoe 2006).

Pragmatic and rhetorical approach to the analysis of stancetaking presupposes taking into consideration both its subjectivity (Biber & Finegan 1989; Ochs 1990; Martin & White 2005) and intersubjectivity (Kärkkäinen 2003; Keisanen 2007; Kiesling et al 2018; Verhagen 2005). The linguistic studies of subjectivity are primarily concerned with the expression of self (Lyons 1995; Marin-Arrese 2010), in which the speaker's /

writer's point of view is explicitly encoded (e.g., in deixis, modality, discourse interaction, etc.) (Traugott & Dasher 2002: 22). The intersubjectivity echoes with Bakhtin's notion of "dialogicality" (2010), Voloshinov's interest in "a word as a shared knowledge" (1973), and Goffman's "deconstruction of the speaker" (1981). In investigating intersubjectivity of stancetaking the focus is on interaction – mutual involvement, adjustment, alignment of stances.

Thus, discursive articulation of stance in different situational domains in general and in risk discourse in particular, is treated as a product of interactive meaning creation – dialectic merger of cognitive processes of context conceptualization, communicative processes of pragmatic intentions realization, and social processes of ideologies, cultures and values transmission.

3. Methods and data

This paper is a longitudinal qualitative multiple-case study. The research setting is the American risk discourse with the following topical dominants: risks of vaccination, risks of Internet addiction, environmental risks and coronavirus risks.

Among multiple approaches to discourse, CDA (Critical Discourse Analysis) offers the widest range of tools for the analysis of public discourses that have high power potential (e.g., political or media discourse). Fairclough's view of discourse as a complex three-dimensional activity seems to be the most compliant with the needs of a current study (1992: 4):

"Any discursive event (i.e. any instance of discourse) is seen as being simultaneously a piece of text, and instance of discursive practice, and an instance of social practice. The "text" dimension attends to language analysis of texts. The "discursive practice" dimension, like 'interaction' in the 'text-and-interaction' view of discourse, specifies the nature of the processes of text production and interpretation [...]. The 'social practice' dimension attends to issues of concern in social analysis such as the institutional and organizational circumstances of the discursive event and how that shapes the nature of the discursive practice, and the constitutive / constructive effects of discourse".

Fairclough's methodological instrumentarium allows analyzing various levels of stancetaking as a complex discursive activity, not only framed by the situation of communicative interaction, but also framing it.

As has been mentioned above, the constructivist approaches of Frame Analysis and Frame Semantics were used to examine *risk* as a situational setting for studying discursive stancetaking. FrameNet (<https://framenet.icsi.berkeley.edu>) – the network of frames created by Charles Fillmore in cooperation with his students and colleagues – provided the knowledge basis needed for framing the discourse situations as the situations of risk. In Fillmore and Atkins' article, *risk* is defined as "the possibility of an unwelcome event" (Fillmore & Atkins 1992: 79). The structure of the risk frame in FrameNet is based upon analysis of the semantic valence of frame-evoking items (including derivatives of "risk lexemes", such as *venturesome*, *riskily*, *hazardous*, etc.). Each word or word combination (including idioms) of the risk frame is associated with the context construal of the situation of risk:

*"An Asset (= something judged to be desirable or valuable which might be lost or damaged) is in a particular **Situation** (= the situation under which the Asset is safe or unsafe), which has the likelihood of leading to or inviting a **Harmful Event** (= an event that may occur or a state which could result in the loss or damage of the Asset)" (Risk scenario).*

The FrameNet risk scenario was extended and elaborated into a three-dimensional cascade model of risk discourse (Appendix, Fig. 1), consisting of a referential situation of risk frame (Appendix, Fig. 2), scenario of communicative situation of risk, and a frame of meta-communicative situation of risk (Fig. 1). The models were devised with regard to their linguistic features: lexical (e.g., words, collocations, and idiomatic expressions), grammatical (e.g., word classes and syntactic functions), and semantic (e.g., attribution of lexical and grammatical units to particular frame slots). For the reasons of space, I will not dwell on the step-by-step procedure of model designing here (for more details see УЩИНА 2016: 168-203).

Textual actualization of the risk discourse or at least one of the components of its models served as the main criteria for data selection. Lexical units of risk or their antonyms (e.g., *risk, peril, danger, chance, hazard, venture, jeopardy, gamble, caution, safety*, etc.), syntactical structures (e.g., conditional clauses *if / when, in case of*), or other (implicit) signs indexing distinguished ontological features of the situation of risk (e.g., *uncertainty, unpredictability, availability of choice, probability of chance, possibility of gains and losses, alternativity, necessity of decision making*) were used as content-related, topical, grammatical, and / or nominative actualizers of the situation of risk.

The data consists of media texts (editorials, expert reports, personal narratives, and media articles) gathered during the period between September 2018 and March 2020 from the hard and soft editions of the following media resources: The New Yorker, The Wall Street Journal, The New York Times, USA Today, and Pittsburgh City Paper. The materials (97 texts totaling 132 502 words) were gathered manually and by searching for risk frame keywords (Appendix, Fig. 2) from the newspapers' database search engines.

The integrated methodology of critical discourse analysis (Fairclough 1992; 1998; Wodak & Meyer 2009) and interpersonal pragmatics (Arundale 2013; Locher 2010) was used to reveal the discursive features of subjectivity and intersubjectivity of stance and to unveil their role in achieving pragmatic goals of risk communication. Based upon the analysis of epistemic (Aikhenvald 2015; Heritage 2012a; 2012b; 2013) and affective (Ильин 2012; Pinich 2019; Scherer 2005) components of stancetaking, the types of collective identities, constructed in MSR, were determined and analyzed.

This analytical framework allowed to shed light on the interactional complexity of stancetaking as a multi-party and multimodal discursive activity. Uncovering rhetorical means of stancetaking in meta-communicative situations of risk enabled disclosing its socio-semiotic potential.

4. Results and discussion

In meta-communicative situation of risk, which is in the focus of my attention in this work, the stance-takers construct not only their individual stances, but more often they represent collective positions of various communities (ethnic, religious, political), of publishing houses, business corporations, or even whole nations. The specificity of stancetaking in MSR is framed by the pattern of speakers' participation in this situation – discursive interaction in MSR is not immediate, but mediated.

4.1 Stancetaking in meta-communicative situation of risk

The stance-takers speak about previously taken stances in the *ex situ* conditions of the MSR in the form of personal narratives and commentaries, editorials and journalistic articles, expert accounts and reports, published in the media. In other words, stancetaking in the MSR becomes meta-communicatively or meta-discursively considered. Stance-takers manifest their stances on previously taken decisions (or previously constructed stances) on risks. They can speak about their stances with a greater or lesser degree of certainty in the formulated proposition (epistemic stance), as well as with greater or lesser emotionality (affective stance) (Ushchyna 2014; 2015; 2018). Stancetaking is a contextually bound activity, which is why stancetaking speech behavior is always framed by the situation of interaction, or, rather, its subjective construct (Dijk 2008) or construal (Langacker 2002).

4.2 Strategic risk framing in American media

The frame of a meta-communicative situation of risk (MSR) is based on the frame of a referential situation of risk (Appendix, Fig. 1). It was expanded by introducing a meta-communicative element to it. This facilitated analytical alignment of the linguistic characteristics of speech behavior in a risk discourse situation with the subjective attitudes of the stance-takers as well as with a broader social context.

The stance subject is an active participant of the MSR. Being either an individual actor or a collective voice, he or she is not necessarily a risk subject. Their speech activities

determine the cognitive structure and linguistic form of the frame, for the manifested message reflects the result of their stancetaking on risk. Verbalized stances represent the subject's prospective or previously taken decisions on risk. They appear in the following frame: RISK OBJECT, RISK AIM, RISK SOURCE, and INSTRUMENT of the message.

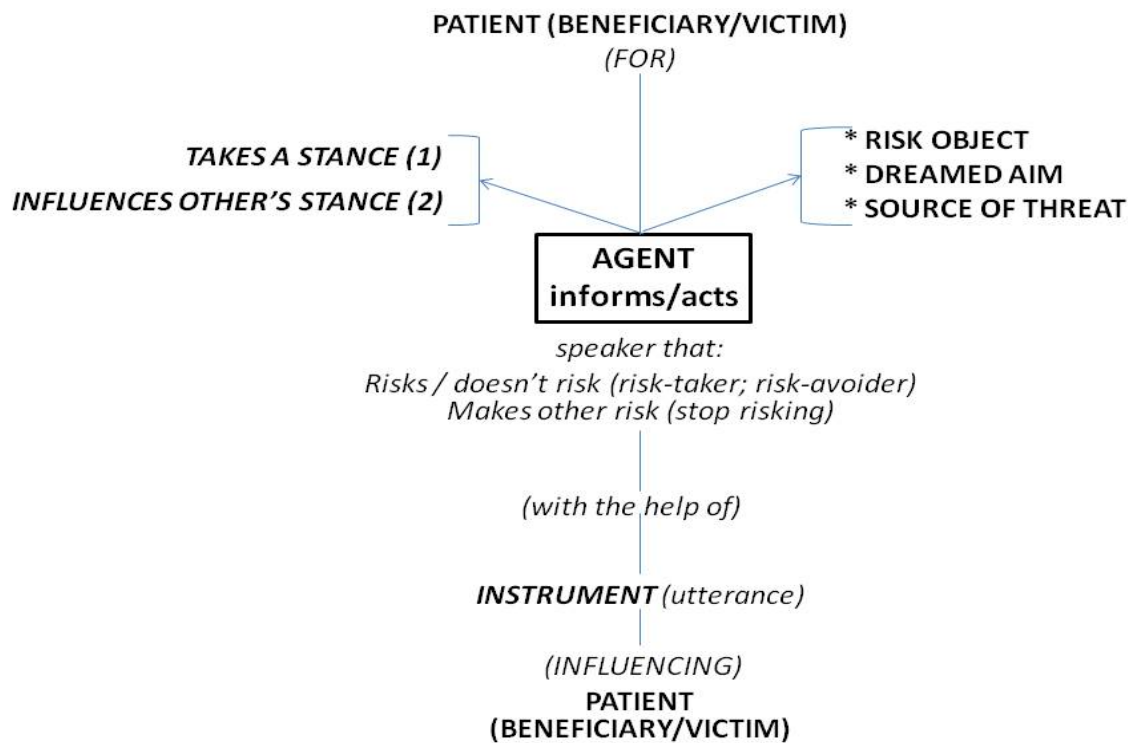


Figure 1. Frame of a meta-communicative situation of risk (Ushchyna 2018: 207)

The frame of MSR consists of a cluster of interconnected components that unite various abstract notions in the verb frame, treated as the basic constituents (or slots) of a frame: AGENT, PATIENT, BENEFICIARY / VICTIM, INSTRUMENT, DREAMED AIM, RISK OBJECT, SOURCE OF THREAT. An active role in the meta-communicative risk event belongs to the AGENT, who is the source of actions and a stance-taker. He / she produces an utterance (INSTRUMENT), by which he / she indicates his / her stance or aims on affecting the stance of the PATIENT in a meta-communicative risk situation. Manifesting his / her stance on the discussed risk / choice / decision, AGENT also outlines other components of a risk frame: RISK OBJECT, DREAMED AIM, SOURCE OF THREAT and RISK SUBJECT, which may be himself / herself, a PATIENT (VICTIM or BENEFICIARY) of a risky choice or the third party (Ushchyna 2018: 206-208).

E.g., *President Trump's health became a major issue when Fabio Wajngarten, the press secretary for the Brazilian President, Jair Bolsonaro, came down with covid-19 this week. On March 7, Trump stood shoulder to shoulder with Wajngarten and Bolsonaro when they visited Mar-a-Lago. Wajngarten dropped in on a birthday party for Kimberly Guilfoyle, the girlfriend of Donald Trump, Jr., which President Trump also attended. On Friday night, the Brazilian Embassy tweeted that Brazil's acting Ambassador in Washington, Nestor Forster, who sat at Trump's table on Saturday, at Mar-a-Lago, had also tested positive for the coronavirus. Trump's reluctance to take action regarding his own health was in contrast to Senator Rick Scott, the Florida Republican, who opted to go into isolation because he met with Bolsonaro and his delegation on Monday, in Miami. "The health and safety of the American people is my focus, and I have made the decision to self-quarantine in an abundance of caution", he said, on Thursday* (Wright 2020).

The author of a given fragment speaks on behalf of the AGENT, which in this case can be both "American people" and / or "The New Yorker". She informs her readers about the risks posed by the novel coronavirus (SOURCE OF THREAT) for the health of American President. Donald Trump is positioned as a RISK OBJECT, due to the fact that he was exposed to the risk of getting sick because of his close physical contact (*stood shoulder to shoulder with Wajngarten and Bolsonaro when they visited Mar-a-Lago*) with other political leaders that were tested positive for the coronavirus (*On Friday night, the Brazilian Embassy tweeted that Brazil's acting Ambassador in Washington, Nestor Forster, who sat at Trump's table on Saturday, at Mar-a-Lago, had also tested positive for the coronavirus*). In this situation, not only coronavirus, but also all the mentioned politicians are represented as a SOURCE OF THREAT.

Reference to the necessity of a decision-making (*to take action*) is another sign, indexing the risk frame (*Trump's reluctance to take action regarding his own health was in contrast to Senator Rick Scott, the Florida Republican, who opted to go into isolation because he met with Bolsonaro and his delegation on Monday*). Moreover, this sentence

is stance-formulating, as it contains the presupposition concerning the author's evaluative attitude towards the expected action (or rather – a lack of it) from Donald Trump who is positioned already as the RISK SUBJECT (*Trump's reluctance to take action regarding his own health was in contrast to Senator Rick Scott*), contrasting it with other politician's thoughtful behavior, presented metapragmatically, in the form of a quote (*"The health and safety of the American people is my focus, and I have made the decision to self-quarantine in an abundance of caution," he said on Thursday*). In quoted Senator Rick Scott's words, the RISK OBJECT "*health of the US President*" is substituted by the RISK OBJECT "*the health of American people*", which appears to be his DREAMED AIM (*The health and safety of the American people is my focus*). To reach this noble AIM he, unlike the President, decides to self-quarantine, and so to avoid risk.

It is interesting how the stance-taker "toys" with the agency of the MSR participants. At the beginning of this paragraph, President Trump was presented as a PATIENT of the situation, as it was *his health* that was at risk (*President Trump's health became a major issue*). Further, though, the author shifts the responsibility to Trump himself, making him an AGENT of the risky decisions, responsible not only for his own health but also for the health of the whole nation. In such a way, the stance-taker manipulates the perceptions of her readers, implicitly imposing her own negative attitude towards Trump's "risk-taking behavior", as opposed to a thoughtful "risk-averse behavior" of Senator Rick Scott.

Using the RISK frame for the analysis of stancetaking in political and media discourse allows for analyzing the risk context as an (inter-)subjective construct (Dijk 2008: 15) – a mental model of a situation that explains interrelation between an individual speaker, discourse and society. Unique cognitive processing of contextual environment is inseparably connected with broader social and cultural properties of discourse, shared by all the participants of discursive interaction. Frame analysis demonstrates that as institutional members, journalists have power and resources for creating a "needed" view of reality. They use discourse stancetaking strategically: to frame a particular perspective

of risk, to form a particular attitude towards risk agents, and, thus, to "steer" public perceptions and / or actions in a wished direction.

4.3 Stancetaking in MSR as identity construction

Stancetaking in risk discourse consists in speakers' tendency to take comparable stances and, as a result, to construct distinctive personal identities (risk-taking / risk-averse) in resembling situations of communication. As it were, stances comprise epistemic and affective components where 'epistemic' express information about the origin of the speaker's knowledge concerning the object of stancetaking (evidentiality) (Aikhenvald 2015; Chafe 1986) as well as the subjective reflexivity of the current situational context (modality) (Palmer 1979; Papafragou 1997). Affective components indicate the speaker's emotions, feelings, assessments, and attitudes towards the stance object as well as towards other communicative participants and their stances (Шаховский 2010; Nikonova & Boyko 2019). Epistemic and affective components of stancetaking are inextricably intertwined. Together they comprise the act of evaluation as a part of stancetaking: the speaker's emotional state activates his or her axiological exertion, motivating the epistemic evaluation in his or her stance statements. And vice versa, knowledge about the object of discussion, expressed by the stance-takers, causes the corresponding emotional reactions. Consequently, the speakers make their risk choices on the basis of discussion of their epistemic and affective evaluations.

It needs to be emphasized that in MSR, knowledge as a part of epistemic stance receives a special attention, no longer being a private cognitive state of an individual speaker but becoming a part of public realm. This may be partly ascribed to the attribution of knowledge in the public domain – instead of being attributed to an individual cognition, knowledge belongs to social organizations, representing their views and values, rights and obligations. Therefore, in MSR, knowledge is distributed according to the types of personas who take the floor and, thus, discursively construe their corresponding collective identities – **experts** (scientists, researchers, politicians), **lay** people (ordinary citizens without special knowledge in a discussed sphere), and **mediators** (journalists

and other media representatives). Consequently, in MSR, it is no longer significant whether the person is risk-averse or a risk-taker in his or her private life, but it is the level of their knowledge about the object of discussion that is of a particular importance. What experts know, what lay people know, and what journalists know about the discussed risks and how they reveal their knowledge – these are things that predetermine potential intensity of their social interaction with wide audiences.

4.4.1 Subjectivity of stancetaking in MSR

According to Finegan (1995: 1-2), subjectivity "concerns expression of self and the representation of a speaker's (or, more generally, a locutionary agent's) perspective or point of view in discourse" ("a speaker's imprint"). Subjectivity is a crucial feature of discourse, since it concerns "the way we construe the situation, which is essentially subjective" (Langacker 1999: 14). Studies on subjectivity have aimed at capturing the ways of expressing knowledge, affect and attitude towards the communicated propositions (Marin-Arrese 2010: 22).

As an engrained component of epistemic stance, knowledge is an important part of stancetaking in MSR. Following Heritage (2012a; 2012b; 2013), I distinguish between the speakers' epistemic stances and epistemic statuses. In short, an epistemic status is the speaker's access to a certain sphere of knowledge, while an epistemic stance is the way this knowledge is communicated in discourse through various linguistic and non-linguistic resources.

Before proceeding further, it would be appropriate to explain that as an analyst I am well-aware it is impossible to get into the speaker's head and 'read his or her mind' trying to find out what he or she knows, or does not know. But it is quite possible to study the linguistic resources they use to display their knowledge or a lack of it. There are two main markings of epistemic stance that index the source and level of speakers' knowledge as well as their confidence in the asserted proposition: (a) evidentiality – concerned primarily with the source of information, e.g., *I saw*; *I heard*; *they say*; *I read that*; and (b) modality

– the way of expressing the speaker's attitude to his or her knowledge and the level of confidence in what is asserted, e.g., *I know it's risky; it might be risky; I hope, it's not risky.*

Following Heritage (2012b: 4), I used the analytic instrument "epistemic gradient" (more knowledgeable [Kn+] or less knowledgeable [Kn-]) for describing relative epistemic statuses of the speakers and stratifying them through the verbal manifestation of different epistemic stances they construct in discourse. Heritage argues that the gradient can vary from low to high, in that there may be linguistic resources reflecting not only overall access of the stance-takers to information, but also indicating their knowledge of the discussed topic (ibid., 7). Along epistemic statuses, the level of subjectivity, or "commitment" (Kockelman 2004: 140) of stancetaking in MSR is of a particular importance. Compare:

(1) *"While I'm certainly no expert, this is an area I've always found particularly interesting. I enjoy discussing digital citizenship because it's so important yet often overlooked or only covered in one-off lessons. I am certain that digital citizenship education doesn't have to be hard and you don't have to be an expert. Students and teachers alike are online more than ever before. Mostly, this is a great thing but problems can occur. A proactive approach and a little forward thinking can help dramatically"* (Morris 2018).

(2) *"Some researchers have already found links between excessive screen time, particularly phone use, and attention deficits, behavioral issues, sleep problems, impaired social skills, loneliness, anxiety and depression. Balancing technology use with other aspects of daily life seems reasonable, but there is a lot of conflicting advice about where that balance should be. But to me, that resembles a moral panic, giving voice to scary claims based on weak data"* (Ferguson 2018).

(3) *"Just as frequently being around other people while they smoke can cause cancer, heart disease, lung disease and other ailments, what I call "secondhand screen time"*

could be endangering children. By not limiting their own phone use, parents and other caregivers may be unwittingly setting kids up to be addicted to screens" (Renstrom 2020).

In the first example, the excessive use of personal pronoun *I* points to a high level of subjectivity of stancetaking. The author also deploys pronoun *you* in addressing her audience by which she sets up the tone of solidarity and friendliness. Though she openly acknowledges the lack of expertise [Kn-] in the discussed field (*I'm certainly no expert*), her stance is still expressed with a fair degree of confidence and self-assurance (*I've always found; I'm certain*). The stance-taker mentions the *risks of Internet use* only vaguely by means of elusive generalized nomination *problems*, antithesized with the benefits (*Mostly, this is a great thing but problems can occur. A proactive approach and a little forward thinking can help dramatically*). By this, not only the speaker's stance is expressed but also a conversational implicature concerning the positive evaluation of Internet use for educational purposes is created.

In fragment (2), the stance, though critical, is manifested less subjectively. The stance-taker offers references to expert knowledge (*Some researchers have already found*), which usually serves the pragmatic purposes of epistemic status fortification. However, in this case, it is used by the author for displaying his disalignment with the expert opinion (*but there is a lot of conflicting advice*) that enhances his own epistemic stance [Kn+]. To emphasize his dissent, the speaker resorts to underlining his agency in the proclaimed stance (*But to me*), further explicitly criticizing the mentioned researchers, qualifying their stance as "*moral panic, scary claims based on weak data*" (*resembles a moral panic, giving voice to scary claims based on weak data*).

In the third example, the stance is expressed with the lowest degree of certainty, as well as with a lesser subjectivity than in the former fragments, though it does not necessarily mean the lack of knowledge [Kn+-]. Although the stance-taker does not seem to doubt the validity of her statement concerning the risk of secondary mobile phone exposure,

she uses modal verbs expressing uncertain modality (*could, may*), eventually trying to avoid "black-and-white" reasoning (*could be endangering; may be unwittingly setting kids up to be addicted to screens*). I would call this way of stancetaking "discursively cautious" – a communicative technique, characteristic to the stance-takers with insufficient epistemic status and / or those who prefer not to sound too downright unequivocal, biased or judgmental.

Although epistemic component of stancetaking is decisively important for construing collective identities in MSR, affective segment is also significant. While epistemic gradient is a coefficient of disproportion between linguistic realization of expert's, mediator's and lay person's epistemic statuses, affective gradient is seen as an imbalance between their verbalized affective reactions. The linguistic formulation of stances, as well as a degree of stance subjectivity in the MSR depend on the type of text (personal narrative, expert report or journalistic article) in which the stance subjects construct their collective identities. They also build upon circumstances of communication, including the author's wish and need to advocate his or her right to possess the information or alternately to disassociate himself or herself from it.

4.4.2 Intersubjectivity of stancetaking in MSR

Stancetaking is not only subjective but also an intersubjective, multimember, and multimodal activity. The formulation of 'intersubjectivity' is found in the work by Benveniste (1966 [1958]), for whom the relationship of intersubjectivity between the speaker (writer) and addressee (reader) is a condition for linguistic communication. In their stancetaking utterances, the speakers (writers) not only manifest their stances but they also reflect the complexity and interactionality of social meaning creation. They also form the socially consequential images of their communicative partners or other social actors. Inherent intersubjectivity of stance has been noted by Du Bois in his stance triangle (2007: 163), which facilitates considering not only subjectivity but also inter-subjectivity of stance. It presents stancetaking in three interdependent components (triangle apexes): (1) the stance subject (subject₁), (2) all other communicative participants (subject_{2,3,4...}), (3)

the stance object, which in this study is either risk itself or the risk subject, risk object or risk source. As Kiesling et al. put it, " [t]he advantage of this stance model is that there is a specific basis on which to ground inter-utterance alignments, namely, the structure of individual utterances of evaluation. Note that this model is not one based on a single speaker, but is inherently dialogic in the sense that it requires more than one utterance to really know what is going on with respect to stancetaking" (2018: 685-686).

Interlocutors deploy an array of linguistic resources to evaluate the stance object and position themselves in its regards. At the same time, they also consider stances of their conversation partners, no matter whether the latter participate in communicative exchange in person or are the unvoiced stances of the mass audience or the referred subjects (as often is the case with media discourse). White (2003: 260) calls it "heteroglossic engagement" – "the textual voice acts first and foremost to engage or to align itself with respect to positions which are in some way alternative to that being advanced by the text".

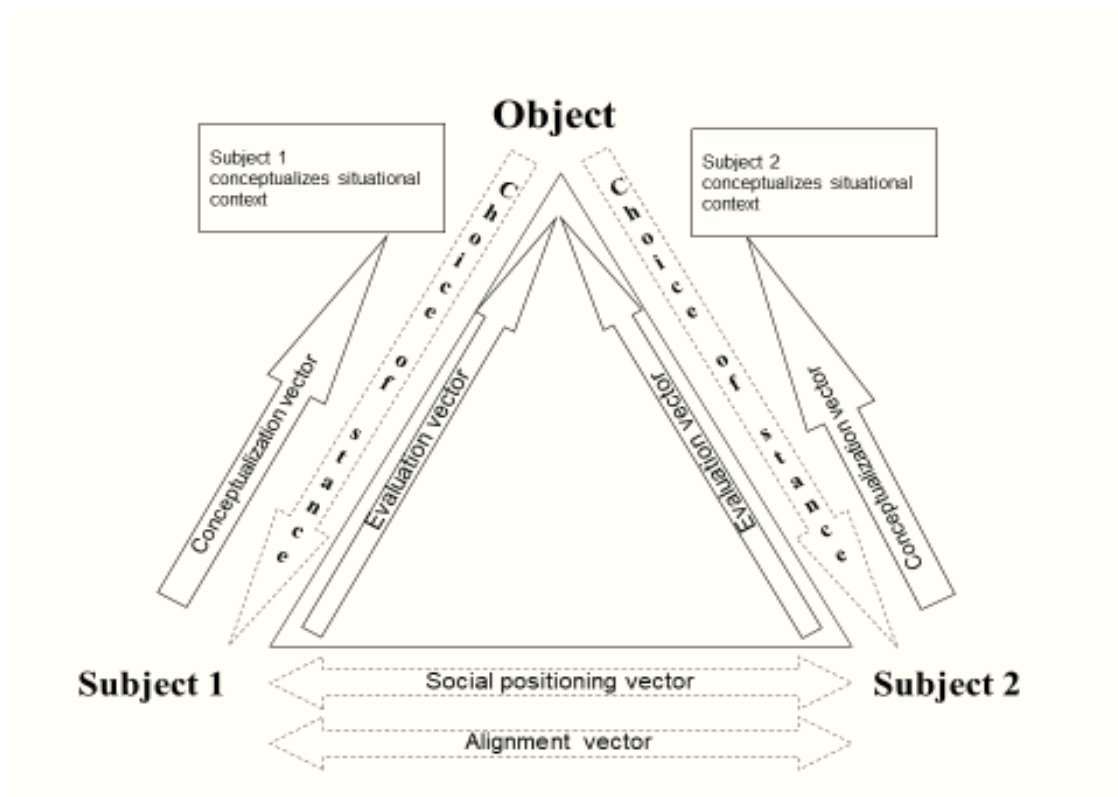


Figure 2. Model of stancetaking in discourse (revised version of Du Bois' "stance triangle", Du Bois 2007: 163)

To grasp the complexity of inherent interactionality of discursive stancetaking, I added two more dimensions to Du Bois' triangle – cognitive and pragmatic. This allowed me the finer-grained analysis of social meaning creation. According to my revised version, in the process of stancetaking, speakers simultaneously are engaged in the following discursive actions: 1) they conceptualize the situational conditions of interaction (cognitive dimension of stancetaking); 2) they evaluate the stance object both epistemically and affectively (pragmatic dimension); 3) they determine and formulate their own stances on the object of evaluation (speech dimension); 4) they identify social statuses of all the interaction participants (social dimension); 5) they align their own stances with the stances of their communicative partners (interactional dimension).

E.g., *"There's a better way. Instead of ignoring the risks of climate change, listen to the communities – conservative and progressive, rural and urban, rich and poor – that are not only paying for federal infrastructure with their tax dollars, but also living with the legacy of that infrastructure for decades"* (Drakin 2020: 2).

The above communicative situation is framed as a situation of risk by means of the lexemes from the RISK frame (Appendix, Fig.1), as well as by the whole conceptual structure of the article, including its headline *"How Climate Change is Hurting Americans Now"* and the lead *"Instead of ignoring risks of climate change, listen to the communities – conservative and progressive, rural and urban, rich and poor – that have been hurt"* that is repeated in the fragment above.

The author, Julia Drakin, is quite eloquent in expressing her stance, which is verbalized in the stance-expressing sentence *"There's a better way"*. This statement contains an evaluative proposition concerning her attitude towards the object of discussion (the risks of climate change). An adjective 'good', used in a comparative degree (*better*) makes her statement essentially intersubjective, as it implies "there is something worse than what is offered". In the sentence that follows, the author makes an intersubjective

reference to the actions that she evaluates as negative ones – *"ignoring the risks of climate change"*.

In the next sentence the stance-taker uses a direct address (imperative mood of a verb *'to listen'* (*listen to the communities*)). This grammatical form is characteristic for an actual dialogue, presupposing interaction between at least two participants. Though the implied addressee is presumably "American government", the message is meant not for them, but for the readers (or American people), mentioned in a rhetorically prominent way – by means of a chain of antithetical phrases, used in parallel syntactic constructions (*conservative and progressive, rural and urban, rich and poor*). So, the stance-taker disaligns her stance with one of her imagined addressees, and aligns it with another one.

5. Stance-takers' identities in MSR

Analysis of subjective and intersubjective features of epistemic and affective components of stance led to establishing of the following rhetorical formulas, characteristic for stancetaking in MSR: 1) expert – $EG > AG = Kn(+)As(+) > Em(-)Att(-)$, where EG is epistemic gradient, AG is affective gradient, Kn is the speaker's knowledge of discussed risks, As – verbal expression of assertiveness, Em – verbal expression of emotions, Att – explication of the speaker's personal attitude towards risk (subjectivity); 2) lay person – $EG < AG = Kn(-)As(-) < Em(+)Att(+)$; 3) mediator – $EG \diamond AG = Kn(+ -)As(+ -) \diamond Em(+ -)Att(+)$. Consequently, in expert stancetaking, epistemic gradient prevails over affective, while in lay people's stancetaking affective gradient preponderates. In mediators' stancetaking, both gradients are reasonably balanced. Let's consider their effectuation in the examples below.

5.1 Lay identities

Lay identities are often constructed in personal narratives where people share accounts of their former risk-taking experience. He or she lives in a space of public discursive practices that can be seen as the area where various discourses, stances, subjects, and

their identities meet, where individual and social stretches of human existence intersect. Discursive subjectivity of a personal narrative presumes explicit author self-identification, which makes stancetaking highly subjective and emotional.

E.g., *"Around the same time, I got married... Now this was a different life altogether. From a risk taker, I became a safe player like everybody around me.... and the years passed by....and the frustrations grew of adjusting to a life lower than my original plan or vision. I changed a few jobs in the ten years of my working in the corporate world. My original vision was to work for a couple of years and then do my own business. But those couple of years turned into ten years. Although I made good progress, in comparison to the people around me, as I was still taking more risks than others, yet the frustration and helplessness started showing on my body. I became overweight and looked older than my age, not to mention the nightmare that I became in my domestic life"* (Haseeb 2012).

The above example is a fragment of the personal narrative written by a man telling a motivational story about risk-taking. His apparent stance on risk is verbalized quite explicitly in self-identifying statement *"From a risk taker, I became a safe player"*. However, further discursive structuring of his story allows the reader to decode a presupposition about the author's real attitude to his "safety over risk" choice as something he did not like very much. Therefore, no matter what situational self-identity he himself proclaims, his actual stance on risk is indexed linguistically as risk-willing rather than risk-averse. His negative stance on safety is expressed lexically (*the frustrations grew; adjusting to a life lower than my original plan*) and syntactically (long, broken sentences, parallel constructions, irregular punctuation, aposiopesis (*and the years passed by... and the frustrations grew*)). The use of emotive syntax, explicit description of feelings (*the frustrations grew*), disclosing details of personal life (*I got married; I changed a few jobs in the ten years of my working*), and abundance of personal pronouns *I, my, me* make discursive structure of personal narratives highly subjective.

The stance-taker shares his expectations (*vision*) about his new risk-free life that eventually failed (*My original vision was to work for a couple of years and then do my own business*). And, finally, in the last sentence of this excerpt, the author explicates his stance, equaling risk-taking to "good progress" (*Although I made good progress, in comparison to the people around me, as I was still taking more risks than others*). Contrarily, risk-free life is evaluated quite negatively (*the frustration and helplessness started showing on my body*) through the description of its unfavourable outcomes (*I became overweight and looked older than my age, not to mention the nightmare that I became in my domestic life*). Thus, in this narrative, risk is framed as beneficial and progressive, while safety is painted as disadvantageous and detrimental. The overall tone of this fragment is characterized by a high degree of subjectivity and prevalence of affective stancetaking, which indicates the lay identity, discursively constructed by the author of a personal narrative.

5.2 Expert identities

In **expert** discourse, though, the epistemic component of stance becomes more prominent. Instead of emotions, the authors of expert articles focus their attention on pointing out their expert knowledge and high epistemic competence in certain areas of expertise.

E.g., "*The study, published in JAMA Pediatrics, shows that children who have more screen time have lower **structural integrity of white matter tracts** in parts of the brain that support language and other emergent literacy skills. These skills include **imagery and executive function** – the process involving **mental control** and **self-regulation**. These children also risk to have lower scores on language and literacy measures. [...]* The study involved 47 healthy children -- 27 girls and 20 boys -- between 3 and 5 years old, and their parents. The children completed standard cognitive tests followed by **diffusion tensor MRI**, which provides estimates of **white matter integrity** in the brain" (DeWitt et al. 2019).

The above fragment was taken from an expert report on the study held by Cincinnati Children's hospital concerning the risks for young children's brain development associated with excessive use of mobile phones. One can find numerous linguistic markers of the authors' high epistemic status (e.g., references to research data – *The study, published in JAMA Pediatrics*; use of numbers – *47 healthy children, 27 girls and 20 boys*; technical abbreviations – *JAMA, MRI*) and their high linguistic competence (e.g., complex syntactic structures, abundant use of terms – *structural integrity of white matter tracts, imagery and executive function, diffusion tensor MRI*). At the same time, in this piece of discourse, there are no markers of affective stance. Taken together, these features indicate the positive correlation between stancetaking in the MSR and the level of subjectivity. In expert articles and reports, where the author(s) is / are not personally involved into the described situation, the level of subjectivity is rather low and stancetaking is predominantly epistemic. Therefore, the expert identity, constructed in mediated risk discourse consists of non-affective, non-emotional, or "faceless" stances.

5.3 Mediator identities

Constructing **mediators'** identities in analytical articles about risks, journalists not only represent their stances on given problems but they also fulfill their important social function – being a link between experts (government officials, politicians, researchers) and lay citizens (the general, ordinary public). They advise their readers on matters of risk, warn them about possible hazards, help them make appropriate decisions, and criticize stances of other journalists and experts. Having access to wide audiences, journalists also get a special role in society: publicly proclaiming their stances, they influence the process of meaning-making, and so become agents of social semiosis. Regardless of general societal requirements to journalistic impartiality, media professionals often cannot escape emotional statements and judgmental evaluations.

E.g., *"Several drugmakers are racing to develop vaccines that could protect against the new respiratory virus originating in China, as **fears mount it could spread more widely.**" [...]*

*"There are no known vaccines or treatments approved specifically for the virus, dubbed **nCoV-2019**, which belongs to a family of coronaviruses responsible for outbreaks of severe acute respiratory syndrome, known as **SARS.**" [...]*

*"CEPI Chief Executive Richard Hatchett said in an interview the virus could turn into **"a very serious epidemic"** (Loftus & McKay 2020: 6A).*

The authors manifest their collective stance concerning the risk of the coronavirus epidemic of 2019-2020. In their seemingly neutral informing about the drug-makers' intent to *"develop vaccines that could protect against the new respiratory virus originating in China"* they use a progressive form of the verb *"to race"* that infers their evaluation of the described action as a bustling (and supposedly untimely) effort the drug-makers are taking to eliminate the risks of the epidemic. Assessing the risks of the possible disease spread, they mention *fears* as a possible SOURCE OF RISK (*as fears mount it could spread more widely*) that qualifies as the authors' subjective attitude towards a panicky emotional state of American society. Extensive use of terms (*nCoV-2019*; *acute respiratory syndrome, known as SARS*), as well as references to the expert qualifications (*CEPI Chief Executive Richard Hatchett*) and opinion (*the virus could turn into "a very serious epidemic"*) reflect the authors' eventual intention to support their epistemic status and, thus, influence the interpretations of their recipients. Unlike in personal narrative, the authors of the journalistic pieces (articles, editorials) try to hide their own affective reactions, concentrating on the other people's emotions (*as fears mount*) and evaluations (*the virus could turn into "a very serious epidemic"*) instead. In such a way, they seek to remain unbiased, distancing themselves from explicit judgments.

Thus, the level of personal involvement or subjectivity of stancetaking in the MSR determines the degree of emotional intensiveness of affective stance, which can be either emphatic or faceless. On the other hand, epistemic stances depend upon the level

of knowledge of stance-takers and their linguistic structure reflects the stance-takers' certainty in inferred propositions. Epistemic stances in the MSR can be either certain – verbalized by means of assertive modality and direct (experiential) evidentiality, or uncertain – verbalized by means of probabilistic modality and indirect (reportative, inferential, imaginative) evidentiality.

6. Conclusions

With each passing year, we become more and more aware of an unprecedented role language plays in organizing our lives on all social levels – from individual interaction in small social groups to our ongoing online contacts with global communities, authorities, media, and experts. Investigation of stancetaking in contemporary American risk discourse, fulfilled in this article, blends seamlessly into the socio-cognitive paradigm of critical discourse analysis.

Complex discursive approach to this multidisciplinary problem allowed discovering specifics of mutual identification of the English language speakers in different situational and cultural conditions. This research has also disclosed socio-semiotic potential of stance as a discursive formation uniting micro- and macro-levels of social interaction. Risk, risk perception, risk assessment, and risk communication have always been essential for our everyday experience, as we face risks every day – crossing the road, drinking alcohol or smoking. However, lately, we have become more aware of risk and risk communication due to some objective (e.g., COVID-19 pandemic or climate change) and subjective (e.g., wide use of Internet and social media as global means of communication) reasons.

The ways a lot of current events are framed linguistically influence the ways we perceive them and act in them. This work discovers cognitive and linguistic mechanisms of situational framing in risk communication, as well as pragmatic and rhetorical mechanisms of stancetaking behavior in these situational setting. The use of RISK frame in stancetaking analysis demonstrated that framing in American media is

realized strategically, rather than randomly. The choice of linguistic and rhetorical resources, used by the participants of risk discourse, reflect their pragmatic goals and index their social identities.

A special focus of this work was on stancetaking behavior of media representatives in their efforts to create a desired image of risk and motivate the necessary risk actions. It was revealed that risks can be framed and communicated professionally – by researchers, scientists, and politicians; and unprofessionally – by ordinary people. Media representatives take a special position in this arrangement, as they serve an intermediate link between professionals and non-professionals.

Stancetaking, realized in situational conditions of mediated interaction (meta-communicative situation of risk), is characterized by both subjectivity and intersubjectivity. The dimension of subjectivity was examined in terms of knowledge, assertiveness and commitment (epistemic stance), as well as intensity of emotional expressiveness (affective stance). The dimension of intersubjectivity was discussed in terms of inherent discursive dialogicality, interactionality, and alignment. The use of linguistic resources which are indexical of the stance-takers' subjectivity and intersubjectivity are also indexical of their identities.

In the meta-communicative situation of risk, discursively built identities include expert, lay, and mediator. Their epistemic stances can be certain or uncertain, while their affective stances can be either emphatic or faceless. Experts' stances are predominantly based on assertive epistemic reasoning, and are devoid of emotionality, or faceless. Lay peoples' stancetaking is more emphatic than epistemic. Mediators' stances are characterized by wide variability – they can be certain or uncertain, emphatic or faceless. The stance-formulating means they use attest not only to their individual views and positions but index collective voices of media and/or institutions they represent.

Contextual conditions of information era leave open various options for stance-takers' perceptual foci in their interpretations of risk. This study may help to expose the problems of contemporary humanity as a globalized "risk society", offering discursive analytic tools of solving some of them. The respective awareness of the speakers' stancetaking dynamics is vitally significant to take appropriate measures aiming at either removing real risks or discarding the virtual or false ones.

List of abbreviations

CSR – Communicative situation of risk

MSR – Meta-communicative situation of risk

SBC – Santa Barbara corpus of spoken American English. Available at: <https://www.kaggle.com/rtatman/santa-barbara-corpus-of-spoken-american-english>

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Résumé

The study focuses on disclosing interrelations between discursive stancetaking and strategic framing in risk discourse. Treating stance as an intersubjective, interactional, indexical, and context-bound discursive construct, this analysis embraces micro- and macro-properties of discursive interaction in an attempt to explain social semiosis of the "world risk society". The general theoretical framework for the study stipulates socio-constructionist understanding of discourse and social semiosis, according to which societal values, attitudes, and ideologies are shaped in discourse and by discourse. The problem of risk framing in modern American media is approached in the socio-cognitive paradigm of discourse analysis that allows encapsulating multidimensional aspects of discourse interaction in modern media: cognitive, pragmatic, rhetorical, interactional, and social. The analysed linguistic resources, used by stance-takers in risk discourse for framing and reframing situations of risk as well as for manifesting their corresponding stances, proved out to be indexical not only of their stances, but also of their situational identities: lay, expert and mediator.

Speakers construct their stances on risk, based on their knowledge about an object of stancetaking and the level of certainty / uncertainty in proclaimed propositions (epistemic stance), or consulting their feelings, attitudes, and dispositions (affective stance). In the course of analysis, it was revealed that in a meta-communicative situation of risk, it is knowledge that receives a particular importance. Different epistemic statuses of the speakers / writers become a source of imbalances and discrepancies between their stancetaking behaviours, which may facilitate better understanding of the key role stancetaking plays in social action and interaction. Analysis of linguistic formulations of subjectivity and intersubjectivity of stance enabled disclosing socio-semiotic potential and pragmatic-rhetorical patterns of speech behaviour in risk discourse.

Key words: frame semantics, frame analysis, framing, risk society, risk discourse, stance, stancetaking.

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Appendix

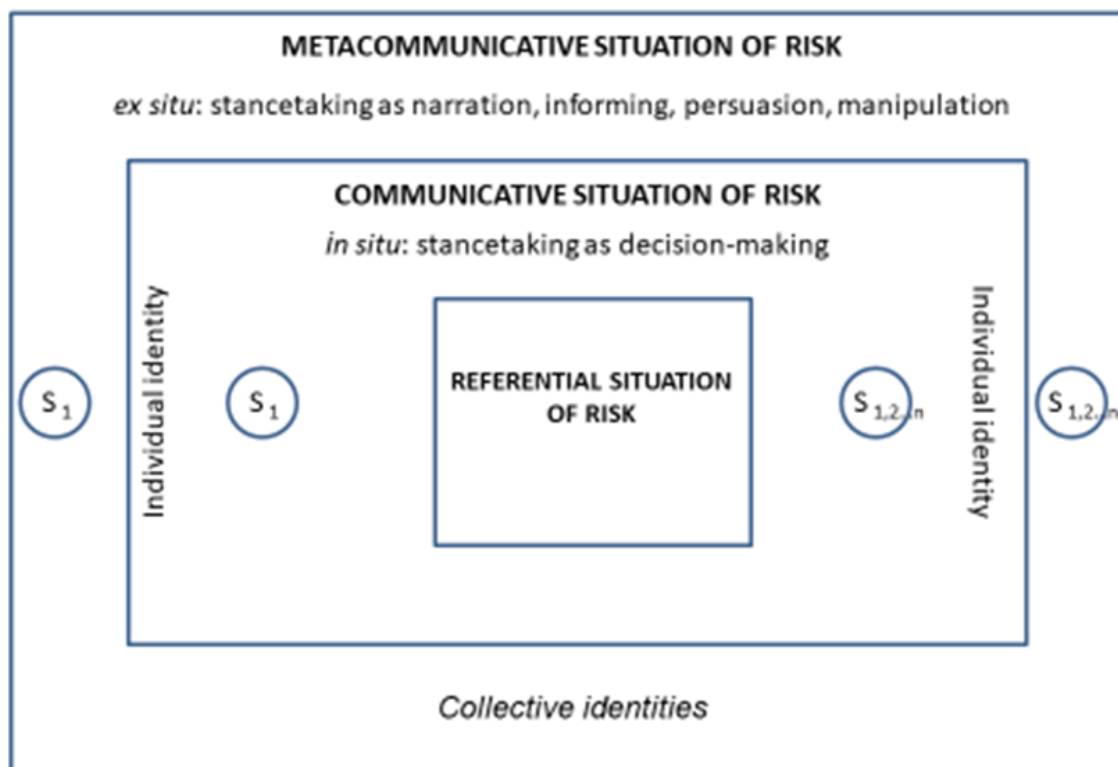


Figure 2. Integrated model of the risk discourse situation (Ущина 2016: 193)

Referential Situation of Risk:

risk, peril, chance, possibility, hazard, venture, uncertainty, speculation

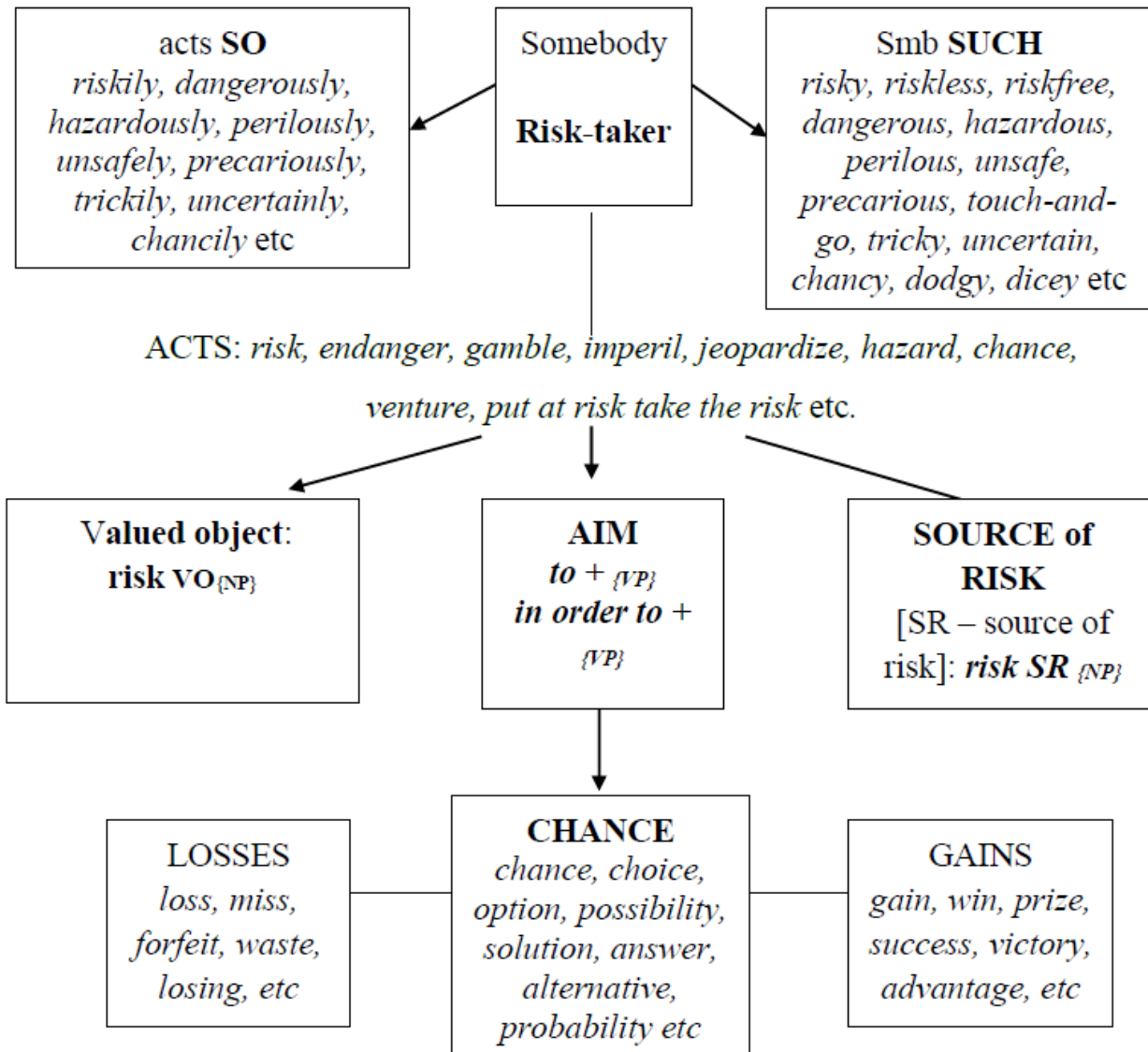


Figure 3. Frame of the referential situation of risk (Ущина 2016: 176)