Mental Spaces, Conceptual Distance, and Simulation: Looks/Seems/Sounds Like Constructions in English

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Inferential Evidentiality, and Conceptual Distancing

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This talk aims to see whether conceptual distancing involved in the construal of inferential evidential constructions is cognitively real.
Inferential Evidentiality and Conceptual Distancing
“[I]inguistic devices that mark and specify type of the evidence on which a statement is based—whether the speaker saw it, or heard it, or inferred it from indirect evidence, or learnt it from someone else” (Aikhenvald 2003:1).
(1) It is raining.

(2) Seems like it is raining.

(3) \textit{pi-ka o-n-ta}
\par rain-Nom come-Non.past.Impf-Decl
\par ‘It is raining.’

(4) \textit{pi-ka o-napo-ta}
\par rain-Nom come-\textbf{Ev.Infr}-DE
\par ‘seems like, it \textbf{is} raining.’

**Examples: Inferential Evidentiality**
“English ... marks eventiality lexically for example by an adverb such as clearly, apparently or in a clause introduced by it seems that.” (Aijmer 2009:63)

“... seem straddles the boundary between perception (an evidential category) and epistemic modality” (Aijmer 2009:64).

**Seems like as an Evidential Element**
The construal of inferential constructions necessarily involves conceptual distancing concerning epistemic grounding of the speaker’s viewpoint with relation to the protagonist’s (grammatical subject) viewpoint (Kwon 2012a).

For instance, because of the covert interaction, a first person subject is normally not licensed

(5)? Seems/looks like I’m washing dishes

(6)? nay-ka selkeciha-napo-a
I-Nom dishwash-Inf.EV-Indic
‘(seems like) I’m washing dishes.’
… unless there is the interlocutor’s extra effort to create conceptual distance between the speaker and the observed event (for more discussion, see Kwon 2012b, 2012c).

(7) “Hm… I seem to be rained into the cafeteria. Good thing I have an hour of laptop battery left.” (ME, Sep 01, 2012 on Facebook)

(8) cinan-pam-ey nay-ka selkeciha-ss-napo-a
last-night-Loc I-Nom dishwasher-Ant-Inf.EV-Indic

[The speaker, who drank much, does not remember what she did last night; she finds that all the dishes are clean]
‘(seems like) I washed dishes last night.’
To better grasp the inferential evidential constructions, we need look into the created conceptual distance resulting from interaction between a speech-act event, a perception event, and an event that is observed.

**INFERENCE**
- perceiver
- event perceived
- mode of access (inference)

**SPEECH ACT**
- speaker
- addressee
- origin: the person who disseminates the info

**FOCAL EVENT/PROCESS**
- agent/actor
- patient
(9) Kate untangled the thread.
(10) Seems like Kate untangled the thread.
Simulation
## Aspect in English

Marked grammatically

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Imperfective</th>
<th>Perfective</th>
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<td>Simple Past</td>
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<td>was VERB+ing</td>
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Experiments show that aspect can constrain the way we conceptualize events (Matlock 2012)

### Simulation: Aspect (Matlock 2012)
(11) Mark Johnson is a Senator in the United States Senate. He is up for re-election. He graduated from the University of Texas, Austin with a degree in political science. Mark’s first term as a United States Senator is almost complete. Last year, Mark had an affair with his assistant and took hush money from a prominent constituent. (n=92)

(12) Mark Johnson is a Senator in the United States Senate. He is up for re-election. He graduated from the University of Texas, Austin with a degree in political science. Mark’s first term as a United States Senator is almost complete. Last year, Mark was having an affair with his assistant and was taking hush money from a prominent constituent. (n=98)

1. Will this candidate be re-elected? (yes, no)
2. How confident are you about your decision regarding re-election

Simulation: Aspect (Matlock 2012)
Results

More people were highly confident about “no” decisions when actions were described with past progressive (77%) vs. those in the simple past condition (47%)

Simulation:
Aspect (Matlock 2012)
looks/seems/sounds like constructions

Hypothesis:

In these constructions, conceptual distance is encoded because the speaker poses his/her epistemic stance such as positively weak epistemic stance and conjecture, toward an event at Issue. Simulation of the conceptual distance thus affects people’s measuring of physical distance.

Simulation:
Distancing in Evidentiality
Sample

(13') Kate untangled a thread.  (14') Seems like Kate untangled a thread.

How long? (inch)  How long? (inch)

NN₁  ND₁

If there is a consistent difference between the two groups, the priming of the conceptual distance encoded by the seems like construction affects the subject’s measurement of physical distance.

Simulation:
Distancing in Evidentiality
Settings

Two groups of linguistic stimuli (17 sets, including 3 control sets) are exposed to two groups of subjects (35 people each; undergrad students at UNM), respectively.

Assumption:

In English, the expressions *seems/ looks/ sounds like* mark inferentiality or inferential evidentiality based on the origo’s indirect experience.

Simulation:
Distancing in Evidentiality
Settings

(15) Tony kicked the soccer ball last night.   Seem like
(16) There are still people in front of us.   Looks like
(17) The intervals between street trees are the same.   Looks like
(18) Kevin swam at a pool this morning.   Seems like
(19) Kate untangled a thread.   Looks like
(20) Mary jogged in the morning.   Seems like
(21) John drew a line on the floor.   Looks like
(22) I untangled the thread last night.   Looks like
(23) I kicked the soccer ball last night.   Seems like
(24) A train passes by us.   Sounds like

Simulation:
Distancing in Evidentiality
(15) Tony kicked the soccer ball last night. How far? (yard)
(16) There are still people in front of us. How many?
(17) The intervals between street trees are the same. How far? (feet)
(18) Kevin swam at a pool this morning. How far? (yard)
(19) Kate untangled a thread. How long? (inch)
(20) Mary jogged in the morning. How far? (mile)
(21) John drew a line on the floor. How long? (inch)
(22) I untangled the thread last night. How long? (inch)
(23) I kicked the soccer ball last night. How far? (yard)
(24) A train passes by us. How many couches?
### Settings

#### Removing outliers

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### Simulation:

**Distancing in Evidentiality**
Simulation:
Distancing in Evidentiality

Results: average of the numbers

- Tony kicked the soccer ball last night.
- There are still people in front of us.
- The intervals between street trees are the same.
- Mary kicked the soccer ball last night.
- Kevin swam at a pool this morning.
- Kate untangled a thread.
- Mary jogged in the morning.
- Mary jogged in the morning.
- John drew a line on the floor.
- I untangled the thread last night.
- I kicked the soccer ball last night.
- A train passes by us.

[Bar chart shows distanced and neutral statements for each sentence.]
Results

#1. There are still people in front of us (9.76) vs. Looks like there are still people in front of us (9.41)
→ Shows the reversed pattern: the semantics encoded in this pair is related to quantity, not distance necessarily

#2. Uses of the first person subject and the third person subject

(15) Tony kicked the soccer ball last night. (21.49)
(15a) Seems like Tony kicked the soccer ball last night. (23.79)

(23) I kicked the soccer ball last night. (17.4)
(23a) Seems like I kicked the soccer ball last night. (24.68)

Discussions
#2. Uses of the first person subject and the third person subject

Additional effort to pose a distanced stance toward the speaker herself?

**Results**

Neutral stimuli with *Tony* and *I*:
21.49 > 17.4

Distanced stimuli with *Tony* and *I*:
23.79 < 24.68

**Discussions**
Results

The subjects exposed to the target sentences with *seems/looks/sounds like* answered higher numbers than those to the neutral ones.

It is noted, however, that magnitude of the responses from the ND1 condition were not significantly greater than (that of the responses from) NN1 condition.

However, binominal test showed that the probability of observing greater numbers from ND1 condition out of 17 is only 0.003%, suggesting that the ND1 condition consistently showed greater responses.

Discussion
Concluding Remarks
The subjects exposed to the target sentence with *seems/looks/sounds like* answered higher number than those to the neutral ones. This pattern is accounted for consistently in most of the sets, which suggests that the conceptual distance created by the added-up layer of a mental space in inferential evidential constructions is related to the cognitive ability to measure physical distance.
Thank you
Settings

Two groups of linguistic stimuli (10 sets, including 1 control set) are exposed to two groups of subjects (12 people and 34 people; undergrad students at HUFS, respectively.

Comparison: the Korean Inferential EV (Kwon In preparation)
-Napo- Construction

[In Korean]

(23) Tony kicked a soccer ball last night (/napo-). (meter)
(24) There are still people in front of us (/napo-). (person)
(25) The intervals between street trees are the same (/napo-). (meter)
(26) Kevin swam at a pool this morning (/napo-) (meter)
(27) Kate untangled a thread (/napo-). (centimeter)
(28) Mary jogged in the morning. (kilometer)
(29) Alex walked around the lake. (kilometer)
(30) Todd drew a line on the floor. (meter)
(31) Charles unfolded a toilet tissue role. (khan ‘unit’)

Extension: Distancing of the Korean Inferential EV
(Kwon In preparation)
Results

Extension: Distancing of the Korean Inferential EV (Kwon In preparation)
Results

The similar result: the subjects exposed to the target sentence with -napo- answered higher number than those to the neutral ones.