HSR (LONDON),
HOUGHTON STREET REVIEW JOURNAL
ISSN: 2058-5519|Impact factor-15.9
http://houghtonstreetreview.com/index.php/hsr

THE IDENTIFICATIONAL AND SOCIAL-INDEXICAL FUNCTIONS OF MENTAL SUBSTANDARD VERBS IN DISCOURSE: AN ANALYSIS THROUGH A SYSTEM OF PRAGMATIC MARKERS

Bo‘riyeva Fayyoza Baxriddin qizi

Lecturer at the Department of practical English

Karshi State University

fayoza.buriyeva@icloud.com

Orcid Id: 0009-0006-2242-4930

Doi: https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.21994082

Abstract: This article examines the identificational and social-indexical functions of mental substandard verbs in discourse, focusing on forms that originate in or remain semantically connected with cognition, knowledge, inference, understanding, remembering, and epistemic judgment. The analysis concentrates on colloquial and stylistically marked expressions such as I think, I guess, I reckon, you know, I dunno, figure, get it, and related pragmaticized patterns. Drawing on sociocultural linguistics, indexicality theory, stance analysis, and research on pragmatic markers, the study develops a qualitative framework for explaining how mental-verb forms move beyond propositional cognition and become resources for identity work. The findings show that their social meaning emerges through recurrent alignments between pragmatic function, register, interactional position, and participant relations. Mental substandard verbs may index informality, solidarity, tentativeness, authority, localness, generational positioning, conversational authenticity, or resistance to institutional formality. Their identificational force is not treated as a fixed lexical property but as an interactional achievement mediated by stance and style. The article proposes a layered model linking lexical mental meaning, pragmaticization, stance, indexical cues, identity positioning, and social interpretation, and discusses implications for discourse analysis, sociopragmatics, translation, lexicography, and second-language pragmatic competence.

Keywords: mental verbs, substandard language, pragmatic markers, social indexicality, identity, stance, pragmaticization, discourse, colloquial speech, register, style, epistemic stance, interactional positioning, social meaning, indexical field, informality, solidarity, sociopragmatics, discourse markers, identity construction.

1. Introduction Mental verbs occupy a distinctive position at the interface of semantics, pragmatics, and social interaction. In their prototypical lexical uses, verbs such as think, know, guess, understand, remember, mean, reckon, and figure describe cognitive states or processes. In spontaneous discourse, however, many forms built from these verbs are only partly concerned with the representation of cognition. Expressions such as I think, I guess, you know, I mean, I dunno, I reckon, figure, get it, and know what I mean? can organize turns, mitigate claims, solicit affiliation, display epistemic caution, manage face, mark common ground, or project a particular interactional persona. Their contribution therefore extends from propositional meaning to the management of social relations.

The term substandard is used here in a functional rather than prescriptive sense. It refers to colloquial, vernacular, slang-like, reduced, strongly informal, or otherwise non-neutral realizations that contrast with the expectations of a formal standard register. This category is gradient. A form such as I think is not intrinsically substandard, yet its phonetic reduction, syntactic detachment, clustering

HSR (LONDON),
HOUGHTON STREET REVIEW JOURNAL
ISSN: 2058-5519|Impact factor-15.9
http://houghtonstreetreview.com/index.php/hsr

with other colloquial resources, or use in strongly informal interaction may participate in a substandard style. By contrast, I dunno, colloquial reckon in some varieties, or imperatival get it? may carry more salient register associations. The analytical focus is therefore not on labeling isolated words as 'incorrect', but on explaining how mental-verb resources acquire socially meaningful values in situated discourse.

This distinction is important because social meaning is rarely encoded by a single linguistic item in isolation. Sociolinguistic work on indexicality has shown that linguistic variables participate in fields of potential social meanings whose activation depends on context, style, speaker practice, and ideological interpretation (Silverstein, 2003; Eckert, 2008). A colloquial mental verb can thus index informality in one setting, local authenticity in another, generational affiliation in a third, and interpersonal solidarity or deliberate anti-formality in yet another. The same form may also be interpreted differently depending on who uses it, to whom, in what activity, and in combination with which other linguistic cues.

The identificational function addressed in this study concerns the use of linguistic resources to construct, negotiate, display, or attribute identities in interaction. Following a sociocultural linguistic approach, identity is treated not simply as a demographic attribute that precedes discourse but as an interactional accomplishment that emerges through stance, style, categorization, alignment, and relational positioning (Bucholtz & Hall, 2005). Mental substandard verbs are especially relevant because they simultaneously locate speakers epistemically and socially: they indicate how strongly a speaker knows, believes, infers, remembers, or understands something while also helping to shape how that speaker sounds as a participant.

Pragmatic markers provide the immediate functional environment in which this social work becomes visible. Research on discourse and pragmatic markers has demonstrated that expressions such as you know, I mean, well, I think, and related comment clauses can perform interpersonal, textual, epistemic, repair, turn-management, and face-related functions (Schiffrin, 1987; Fraser, 1999; Fox Tree & Schrock, 2002; Aijmer & Simon-Vandenbergen, 2004). Mental-verb forms are particularly prone to pragmaticization because first-person cognition and second-person knowledge naturally connect propositional content with speaker commitment and assumptions about shared knowledge.

Consider I guess. In a literal reading, guess denotes an inferential mental act under uncertainty. In interaction, however, I guess may soften disagreement, signal reluctant acceptance, reduce commitment, or construct a persona of non-imposition. Similarly, you know can invoke shared knowledge, invite an inference, seek alignment, or create conversational intimacy. I dunno may report lack of knowledge, but it can also delay a response, resist a question, soften a negative evaluation, or index casual speech. The social interpretation of these forms emerges from their repeated pragmatic uses and from the styles in which they cluster.

The problem becomes more complex when dialectal or regional mental verbs are involved. I reckon is a useful example because its social value varies substantially across English-speaking communities. In some varieties it is an ordinary colloquial stance marker; in others it can evoke regional, rural, traditional, or stylized identities. Its meaning cannot therefore be reduced to a universal equivalent of I think. The form belongs to an indexical field whose possible interpretations are constrained but not predetermined. This variability demonstrates why an adequate account of mental substandard verbs must integrate pragmatics with sociolinguistic indexicality.

HSR (LONDON),
HOUGHTON STREET REVIEW JOURNAL
ISSN: 2058-5519|Impact factor-15.9
http://houghtonstreetreview.com/index.php/hsr

Existing scholarship provides strong foundations but leaves a specific analytical gap. Studies of mental verbs and comment clauses have examined epistemicity, subjectification, pragmaticalization, and discourse function; studies of pragmatic markers have described multifunctionality and interactional organization; and sociolinguistic research has theorized identity, stance, style, and indexical order. Yet mental substandard verbs are less often treated as a coherent interface category whose pragmatic-marker functions systematically mediate social identification and indexical interpretation. In particular, the pathway from lexical cognition to pragmatic function and then to social-indexical meaning requires a more explicit model.

The present article addresses this gap by asking four questions: (1) Which pragmatic functions allow mental-verb forms to move from propositional cognition toward interactional meaning? (2) How do these functions contribute to the construction or attribution of identities? (3) Which social meanings are recurrently indexed by colloquial and substandard mental-verb patterns? (4) How can lexical meaning, pragmaticization, stance, style, and social indexicality be integrated within a single analytical model?

The central argument is that mental substandard verbs do not identify speakers by mechanically encoding fixed social categories. Rather, they function as socially interpretable cues within bundles of linguistic practice. Their identificational value is mediated by pragmatic function: epistemic hedging, alignment, repair, resistance, turn management, face work, and stance-taking create recurrent interactional positions, and these positions become associated with styles and social personae. Social indexicality is therefore an emergent layer of meaning rather than a direct lexical feature.

The study is relevant beyond sociopragmatic theory. For translation, it clarifies why replacing I reckon, I guess, or I dunno with formally equivalent mental verbs may erase register and identity effects. For language teaching, it highlights the need to teach pragmatic and social meanings alongside dictionary definitions. For lexicography, it supports entries that distinguish cognitive, discourse-pragmatic, and social-indexical uses. For discourse analysis, it offers a framework for examining how apparently small mental expressions participate in broader identity work.

2. Methods The study adopts a qualitative discourse-pragmatic methodology informed by sociocultural linguistics and third-wave variationist sociolinguistics. Its purpose is theory-building and functional classification rather than frequency estimation. Accordingly, no invented quantitative distribution is reported. The analytical evidence consists of conventionalized and attested English mental-verb patterns widely documented in corpus-pragmatic, discourse-marker, stance, and sociolinguistic research, supplemented by carefully controlled illustrative contexts used to test functional contrasts.

The unit of analysis is the contextualized mental-verb construction rather than the isolated verb. Candidate forms were included when they met three criteria: first, they retained a transparent or historically recoverable connection with cognition, knowledge, inference, understanding, memory, or intentional meaning; second, they displayed a recurrent discourse-pragmatic function beyond straightforward propositional description; and third, they were capable of carrying register, stylistic, interpersonal, or social-indexical associations in at least some contexts. Core analytical forms include I think, I guess, I reckon, you know, I mean, I dunno, figure, get it, know what I mean?, and selected related patterns.

The analysis distinguishes lexical use from pragmatic-marker use. A lexical mental verb contributes to the propositional content and normally selects an argument or complement whose

HSR (LONDON),
HOUGHTON STREET REVIEW JOURNAL
ISSN: 2058-5519|Impact factor-15.9
http://houghtonstreetreview.com/index.php/hsr

cognitive relation it describes. A pragmaticized form is comparatively detachable, positionally flexible, semantically bleached or generalized, and primarily oriented toward the speaker's stance, discourse organization, addressee management, or interpersonal relations. This distinction is gradient rather than categorical, consistent with research on pragmaticalization and comment clauses (Brinton, 2008; Kaltenböck, Heine, & Kuteva, 2011).

Each example was analyzed across six dimensions. The first was lexical-semantic residue: what aspect of thinking, knowing, guessing, meaning, or understanding remained accessible? The second was pragmatic function: epistemic stance, mitigation, boosting, alignment, common-ground management, repair, turn management, face work, resistance, or discourse organization. The third was interactional position: speaker role, addressee orientation, sequential placement, and relation to preceding discourse. The fourth was register and style: formal versus informal orientation, vernacularity, reduction, and clustering with other colloquial features. The fifth was indexical potential: possible social meanings such as solidarity, casualness, authority, localness, youthfulness, authenticity, distance, or anti-institutional stance. The sixth was identificational effect: the persona, participant role, or relational identity made relevant in the interaction.

To prevent deterministic interpretations, the study applies an indexical-field principle. A form is not assigned one social meaning; instead, a constrained set of potential meanings is identified and then narrowed through context. For example, I reckon may index casualness across several contexts, but regionality becomes salient only where speaker background, audience expectations, contrast with alternative forms, or metapragmatic awareness makes it relevant. This procedure follows the view that variables have fields of social meanings rather than one-to-one social references (Eckert, 2008).

The analysis also incorporates indexical order. First-order associations may arise from recurrent use by particular communities or in particular interactional environments. Higher-order indexical meanings emerge when speakers or listeners become socially aware of these associations and use them stylistically (Silverstein, 2003). Thus, a mental verb may shift from being merely frequent in casual speech to becoming a recognizable resource for performing casualness, local authenticity, expertise, or deliberate non-formality.

Identity analysis follows Bucholtz and Hall's (2005) principles of emergence, positionality, indexicality, relationality, and partialness. The study therefore avoids treating identity as a stable category recoverable from one token. Instead, a mental-verb marker is examined as one cue among others through which speakers take stances and establish relations of similarity, difference, authority, alignment, distance, or authenticity.

Stance is operationalized as a mediating mechanism between pragmatics and identity. Following Du Bois (2007), stance involves evaluation, positioning, and alignment. A speaker who says I guess may position a proposition as uncertain, position the self as non-dogmatic, and align cautiously with an interlocutor. Repeated patterns of this kind can contribute to a recognizable interactional style. The analytical model therefore treats stance as the bridge connecting pragmatic marker function with social-indexical interpretation.

The procedure involved four stages. First, the lexical mental meaning and syntactic status of each construction were identified. Second, its discourse-pragmatic function was determined from the surrounding interactional context. Third, the form's register and stylistic associations were evaluated relative to plausible alternatives such as I believe, I do not know, understand?, or in my opinion. Fourth, the resulting stance and style were interpreted in terms of indexical potential and identity

HSR (LONDON),
HOUGHTON STREET REVIEW JOURNAL
ISSN: 2058-5519|Impact factor-15.9
http://houghtonstreetreview.com/index.php/hsr

positioning. Interpretations were kept at the level warranted by context; demographic claims were avoided unless a social association was independently conventionalized or explicitly made relevant.

Because the article is a qualitative framework study, the examples are intended to demonstrate mechanisms rather than statistical prevalence. This design is appropriate to the research question, which concerns how pragmatic functions can generate identificational and social-indexical meanings. Future corpus studies can operationalize the proposed categories for quantitative testing across varieties, age groups, genres, and institutional settings.

3. Results The analysis identifies a recurrent progression from mental semantics to pragmatic function and from pragmatic function to social interpretation. The progression is not unidirectional in every token, but it provides a robust descriptive architecture: LEXICAL MENTAL MEANING → PRAGMATICIZATION → STANCE/INTERACTIONAL FUNCTION → STYLISTIC VALUE → SOCIAL INDEXICALITY → IDENTIFICATIONAL EFFECT. The sections below describe the principal functional clusters.

3.1 Epistemic positioning and the identity of the cautious knower

I think and I guess are among the clearest examples of mental predicates developing stance functions. Compare I think the meeting starts at nine with The meeting starts at nine. The former explicitly frames the proposition through the speaker's epistemic perspective. In many contexts, I think lowers categorical force and constructs a speaker who presents knowledge as personally assessed rather than institutionally guaranteed. The identificational effect can be one of caution, modesty, reasonableness, or collaborative non-imposition.

I guess typically introduces a stronger association with inference, limited evidence, or reluctant commitment. In a response such as I guess we could try that, the construction may do more than express uncertainty. It can signal partial acceptance while preserving distance from the proposal. This stance positions the speaker as cooperative but not fully committed. In informal interaction, repeated I guess can also contribute to a conversational persona characterized by tentativeness or low-imposition alignment.

The social-indexical meaning depends on contrast. In an institutional setting, a speaker who systematically chooses I think instead of categorical declaratives may index collegiality and epistemic restraint. In peer talk, the same form may be unremarkable. Thus, epistemic stance becomes socially meaningful when it contrasts with available alternatives and participates in a recognizable style.

3.2 I reckon and the indexical field of locality, informality, and authenticity

I reckon demonstrates why mental substandard verbs require an indexical rather than purely semantic account. Semantically, it often overlaps with I think or I suppose. Pragmatically, it can mark personal judgment and moderate commitment. Socially, however, its associations differ across varieties of English. In some communities it is an ordinary colloquial stance marker; in others it may evoke regional, rural, traditional, or stylized speech.

Consider I reckon he'll be here by six. The propositional contribution is approximately an estimate or belief. Yet the form may also locate the utterance within a particular conversational style. If used by a speaker whose surrounding language is highly formal, I reckon may function as deliberate downshifting, creating accessibility or local authenticity. If it is habitual within a community, it may carry little markedness for insiders while remaining salient to outsiders.

HSR (LONDON),
HOUGHTON STREET REVIEW JOURNAL
ISSN: 2058-5519|Impact factor-15.9
http://houghtonstreetreview.com/index.php/hsr

Its identificational function is therefore relational. The marker can authenticate local belonging, perform informality, reduce institutional distance, or be used metapragmatically to stylize another social voice. No single interpretation is inherent in reckon; the relevant meaning emerges from the indexical field activated by speaker, audience, setting, and co-text.

3.3 You know as a marker of common ground and relational identity

You know originates in a second-person knowledge predicate but frequently operates as a pragmatic marker. Fox Tree and Schrock (2002) argue that its basic contribution can be understood in relation to inviting addressee inference. In discourse, this orientation toward the addressee makes you know especially powerful for relational identity work.

In It was, you know, kind of awkward, the marker does not straightforwardly ask whether the listener possesses knowledge. It can project an assumption of shared interpretive access, soften formulation, or invite the listener to co-construct the intended meaning. This establishes a micro-position of affiliation: the speaker treats the addressee as someone capable of understanding what is meant without exhaustive explanation.

Repeated use of you know can index conversational involvement and informality. In peer interaction it may support solidarity; in formal public discourse, frequent tokens can be evaluated as spontaneous, accessible, unscripted, or, under different language ideologies, insufficiently polished. The same pragmatic marker can therefore contribute to competing identity readings such as authentic speaker versus inarticulate speaker. The difference lies not in lexical semantics but in ideological interpretation of style.

3.4 I dunno: ignorance, resistance, informality, and interactional self-protection

I dunno is a reduced colloquial realization of I don't know, but its discourse functions exceed a simple report of absent knowledge. In response to a factual question, it may remain primarily epistemic. In evaluative or socially delicate contexts, however, it can delay commitment, resist the premise of a question, soften disagreement, avoid responsibility for a judgment, or signal reluctance to continue a topic.

For example, I dunno, that seems a bit much can function as a disagreement preface. The speaker first occupies a low-commitment epistemic position and then offers a negative evaluation. The marker mitigates confrontation while preserving the speaker's right to dissent. The resulting persona may be cautious, non-authoritarian, or conversationally understated.

The reduced form itself adds indexical information. Compared with I do not know, I dunno typically points toward informal spoken style. In contexts where standard articulation is expected, the reduction can signal deliberate casualness, generational style, intimacy, or resistance to institutional formality. Conversely, hearers may stigmatize it under ideologies that equate reduction with carelessness. Its identity effects are therefore socially contested rather than linguistically fixed.

3.5 Figure, get it, and the performance of cognitive competence

Colloquial mental uses of figure and get provide resources for displaying competence and evaluating the competence of others. I figured it out presents understanding as the successful resolution of a problem. I get it can display comprehension and close an explanatory sequence. In contrast, You don't get it can challenge the addressee's understanding and may escalate from epistemic description to interpersonal criticism.

HSR (LONDON),
HOUGHTON STREET REVIEW JOURNAL
ISSN: 2058-5519|Impact factor-15.9
http://houghtonstreetreview.com/index.php/hsr

The imperative Get it? occupies a particularly interesting boundary. Depending on intonation and context, it may be a comprehension check, an assertion of authority, or a threat-like demand for compliance. In a teacher-student interaction it can index asymmetrical epistemic authority; in peer conflict it can construct dominance. The mental verb thus becomes a vehicle for participant-role identification.

Similarly, figure can participate in styles associated with conversational reasoning rather than formal evidential argument. I figure we should leave now presents the decision as the speaker's practical inference. In some varieties it may sound markedly colloquial; in others it is routine. Its social meaning again depends on distribution, contrast, and audience interpretation.

3.6 I mean and the identity work of self-repair and conversational authenticity

Although mean is not exclusively a mental verb, its intentional and interpretive semantics place I mean within the broader cognitive-pragmatic domain relevant to this study. As a pragmatic marker, I mean frequently introduces reformulation, clarification, modification, or repair. Recent corpus-pragmatic research continues to show its strong association with editing and modification functions.

Self-repair has an identificational dimension. A speaker who uses I mean to refine an utterance can display reflexivity, precision, and responsiveness to the addressee. In spontaneous conversation, the marker also contributes to an unscripted style. Such spontaneity may index authenticity and interpersonal accessibility, particularly when contrasted with highly planned institutional discourse.

At the same time, high frequency of I mean may be negatively evaluated as dysfluency in settings governed by formal speech norms. The same marker can therefore support opposite identity attributions: careful self-monitoring or lack of fluency. This illustrates the ideological nature of social indexicality and the need to distinguish interactional function from social evaluation.

3.7 Pragmatic-marker clusters and cumulative social meaning

The strongest social-indexical effects often arise not from a single marker but from clustering. Consider I dunno, I mean, I guess we could maybe try it. The utterance contains several resources that lower commitment and reduce imposition. Together they create a stance of cautious negotiation. If this pattern recurs across interaction, it can contribute to an identifiable style of collaborative, hesitant, deferential, or youth-associated talk, depending on the community and context.

Conversely, I know, obviously, you get it? combines epistemic certainty with an addressee-oriented comprehension demand and may project authority or impatience. The social persona emerges from the configuration of markers, prosody, syntax, and sequential position. This supports a bundle-based account of identity: mental substandard verbs are components of styles, not standalone labels for social groups.

Pragmatic markers can also co-occur with phonetic reduction, intensifiers, quotatives, address terms, slang, and discourse particles. Such co-occurrence helps stabilize social interpretation because multiple cues point toward compatible meanings such as casualness, intimacy, expertise, defiance, or local authenticity.

3.8 A typology of identificational and social-indexical functions

Across the analyzed patterns, six recurrent social-indexical functions emerge. First, an informality-indexing function marks interaction as conversational rather than ceremonially formal. Second, a solidarity-indexing function constructs shared ground and reduced social distance. Third, an

HSR (LONDON),
HOUGHTON STREET REVIEW JOURNAL
ISSN: 2058-5519|Impact factor-15.9
http://houghtonstreetreview.com/index.php/hsr

epistemic-persona function presents the speaker as cautious, authoritative, uncertain, practical, reflective, or resistant. Fourth, a locality/authenticity function associates a form with a community, region, vernacular style, or socially recognizable voice. Fifth, a participant-role function constructs relations such as expert/novice, teacher/learner, peer/peer, or authority/subordinate. Sixth, an anti-formality or resistance function uses colloquial mental resources to distance the speaker from institutional, bureaucratic, or overly polished styles.

These functions are probabilistic and context-sensitive. They should be understood as indexical potentials rather than dictionary meanings. A single token can activate more than one function, and different audiences may assign different social interpretations to the same usage.

Table 1. Analytical mapping of selected mental-verb forms

Form	**Core pragmatic tendency**	**Possible indexical values**	**Potential identity effect**
I think	epistemic stance; mitigation	caution; reasonableness; collegiality	non-dogmatic knower
I guess	inference; weak commitment; reluctant acceptance	tentativeness; informality; low imposition	cautious/negotiating participant
I reckon	personal judgment	informality; locality; authenticity; stylization	local or deliberately informal persona
you know	common ground; inference invitation; alignment	solidarity; involvement; spontaneity	affiliative conversational participant
I dunno	lack of knowledge; resistance; delay; mitigation	casualness; intimacy; anti-formality	non-committal or resistant participant
figure	practical inference	colloquial reasoning; informality	practical reasoner
get it / Get it?	comprehension display/check; directive force	competence; authority; impatience	knower, evaluator, or authority figure
I mean	repair; reformulation; clarification	spontaneity; accessibility; conversational authenticity	self-monitoring, accessible speaker

HSR (LONDON),
HOUGHTON STREET REVIEW JOURNAL
ISSN: 2058-5519|Impact factor-15.9
http://houghtonstreetreview.com/index.php/hsr

4. Discussion

The findings support an interface account in which mental semantics, pragmaticization, stance, style, and social indexicality form analytically distinct but interacting layers. A mental verb first provides a cognitive semantic source. Recurrent interactional use can weaken or background its propositional contribution and strengthen speaker- or addressee-oriented functions. Those pragmatic functions position participants epistemically and relationally. Recurrent positions become recognizable stylistic resources, and styles acquire social-indexical values through community practice and ideological interpretation.

This model helps explain why a form such as I think can be socially meaningful without being lexically substandard. Its indexicality may emerge through frequency, reduction, syntactic detachment, sequential placement, and co-occurrence with other informal resources. Substandardness is therefore best understood as a contextual property of style rather than a binary lexical label. This is particularly important for international English, where forms differ in markedness across varieties.

The results also reinforce the distinction between social category and social meaning. A marker does not directly mean 'young', 'rural', 'working-class', 'female', 'expert', or any other demographic category. Instead, it can index qualities such as casualness, toughness, caution, localness, authority, friendliness, or nonchalance. These qualities may become associated with social categories in particular communities, but the association is mediated by ideology and practice. This interpretation is consistent with the indexical-field model (Eckert, 2008) and avoids sociolinguistic essentialism.

Silverstein's (2003) notion of indexical order further clarifies how mental-verb forms can become socially salient. A form may initially correlate with a context or community without strong conscious awareness. As the association becomes recognizable, speakers can exploit it stylistically. I reckon, for instance, may be used not merely because it belongs to a speaker's vernacular repertoire but because it evokes an accessible, local, or non-metropolitan voice. At higher orders of indexicality, the form can be stylized, commodified, parodied, or strategically adopted by speakers who do not ordinarily use it.

The mediating role of stance is central. Mental verbs are unusually well suited to identity work because they grammaticalize or lexicalize relations between speaker and knowledge. I think, I guess, I know, I dunno, and you know position epistemic rights and responsibilities. When speakers repeatedly present themselves as cautious, certain, affiliative, skeptical, resistant, or practically inferential, they build interactional personae. Identity is thus produced through recurrent micro-stances rather than announced only through explicit self-labels.

The pragmatic-marker perspective adds another important insight: social meaning frequently depends on functions that are not visible in dictionary definitions. I dunno as a resistance device, you know as an affiliation resource, or I mean as a repair marker cannot be adequately described by translating know or mean alone. The discourse function creates the interactional position from which indexical meaning develops. A socially informed lexicography should therefore represent at least three layers: lexical mental meaning, pragmatic function, and register/social meaning.

The analysis of you know illustrates the connection between common ground and relational identity. Invoking presumed shared understanding constructs an epistemic relation between speaker and addressee. This can reduce distance and create involvement, but it can also pressure the addressee to accept a perspective as obvious or mutually known. Thus, solidarity and coercive presupposition are

HSR (LONDON),
HOUGHTON STREET REVIEW JOURNAL
ISSN: 2058-5519|Impact factor-15.9
http://houghtonstreetreview.com/index.php/hsr

not mutually exclusive. The same marker can facilitate intimacy or strategically constrain disagreement, depending on sequential context.

I dunno demonstrates a parallel ambiguity between epistemic deficiency and interactional agency. On the surface, claiming not to know appears to reduce epistemic authority. Pragmatically, however, it can be a powerful resource for refusing a question, declining a stance, or resisting categorization. A speaker can use epistemic weakness to exercise interactional control. This inversion is particularly important for identity analysis because apparent uncertainty may function as strategic autonomy rather than genuine lack of knowledge.

The findings concerning get it? show that mental verbs can index institutional and relational asymmetry. Comprehension checks are not neutral when one participant has the recognized right to evaluate another's understanding. Teachers, supervisors, parents, and experts can use mental predicates to allocate epistemic status. Conversely, learners or subordinates may use I get it to claim sufficient understanding and close an explanation. Mental verbs therefore participate in the negotiation of epistemic authority and participant roles.

A major implication concerns the notion of authenticity. Colloquial pragmatic markers are often heard as more spontaneous than formal alternatives. Spontaneity can become an index of authenticity, accessibility, or sincerity, especially in public discourse where speakers seek to reduce distance from audiences. Yet authenticity is itself ideological: the same informal marker may be interpreted as unprofessional. Social-indexical analysis must therefore include evaluative regimes that determine which styles count as credible in a given field.

The framework also has consequences for translation. Translating I reckon simply as a neutral equivalent of think may preserve propositional content but erase local or informal positioning. Translating I dunno as a fully formal 'I do not know' can remove resistance, casualness, or interpersonal softening. Conversely, over-colloquializing a neutral I think may introduce social meanings absent from the source. Functional equivalence therefore requires attention to epistemic force, discourse role, register, and indexical value simultaneously.

For second-language pedagogy, the results argue for a shift from form-meaning pairs to contextualized pragmatic repertoires. Learners should encounter contrasts such as I think / I guess / I reckon / I dunno not only as semantic alternatives but as socially situated choices. Activities can ask learners to infer speaker relationships, degree of formality, stance, and possible persona from short dialogues. Such instruction can improve sociopragmatic competence while also warning learners that indexical meanings vary across English varieties and communities.

The model is equally relevant to media and digital discourse. Online interaction often intensifies the visibility of colloquial spellings, reductions, stance markers, and stylized vernacular forms. Written representations such as dunno reproduce features associated with speech and can deliberately construct conversationality. In social media, such choices may index intimacy, irony, youth-oriented style, anti-formality, or persona branding. The mental-verb source remains relevant, but the social meaning is amplified by orthographic stylization and platform norms.

Methodologically, the article demonstrates the value of keeping three interpretive claims separate. A pragmatic claim identifies what a form is doing in the local sequence. An indexical claim identifies the social qualities or styles that the form can evoke. An identity claim explains how those qualities contribute to the positioning of a participant. Collapsing these levels risks circular reasoning,

HSR (LONDON),
HOUGHTON STREET REVIEW JOURNAL
ISSN: 2058-5519|Impact factor-15.9
http://houghtonstreetreview.com/index.php/hsr

for example assuming that a form indexes youth simply because a young speaker used it. The layered model provides a more disciplined alternative.

The study has limitations. It is qualitative and framework-oriented, so it does not establish frequency differences across varieties or demographic groups. The category mental substandard verb is also deliberately broad and gradient, and some forms, especially I think and I mean, are not substandard in isolation. Their relevance arises from pragmaticized, colloquial, reduced, or stylistically clustered uses. Future work should test the framework with balanced corpora, interactional metadata, acoustic/prosodic analysis, perception experiments, and cross-varietal comparison.

A particularly productive direction would be to compare social evaluations of the same mental marker across World Englishes. Another would be to investigate whether L2 users reproduce the indexical values of native-community patterns or develop new local meanings. Longitudinal social-media data could further reveal how mental-verb spellings and constructions become enregistered, memetic, or associated with emerging digital personae.

5. Conclusion

This article has argued that mental substandard verbs and mental-verb-derived pragmatic markers constitute an important interface between cognition, discourse organization, stance, and social identity. Their significance cannot be captured by lexical semantics alone. Forms such as I think, I guess, I reckon, you know, I dunno, figure, get it, and I mean may retain traces of cognitive meaning while simultaneously performing interactional work that positions speakers and addressees.

The analysis identifies a layered pathway: LEXICAL MENTAL MEANING → PRAGMATICIZATION → STANCE/INTERACTIONAL FUNCTION → STYLISTIC VALUE → SOCIAL INDEXICALITY → IDENTIFICATIONAL EFFECT. This model explains how a mental expression can move from representing thought or knowledge to indexing informality, solidarity, caution, authority, locality, authenticity, resistance, or other socially interpretable qualities.

The central theoretical conclusion is that identificational meaning is emergent rather than inherent. Mental substandard verbs do not carry fixed demographic identities. Their social meanings arise within indexical fields and become relevant through contrast, clustering, participant relations, sequential position, community norms, and language ideologies. The same form can therefore support different or even opposing identity interpretations across contexts.

Pragmatic markers are the key mediating system. Epistemic stance, mitigation, common-ground management, repair, resistance, comprehension checking, and discourse organization create recurrent interactional positions. These micro-positions accumulate into styles, and styles become resources for identity construction. Stance thus provides the conceptual bridge between local pragmatic function and broader social indexicality.

The proposed framework contributes to sociopragmatics by integrating mental-verb pragmaticalization with social-indexical theory; to discourse analysis by specifying how small recurrent markers participate in identity work; and to applied linguistics by clarifying the importance of register and social meaning in translation, lexicography, and pragmatic competence. It also provides an operational basis for future corpus and experimental studies.

Future research should quantify the distribution of the proposed functions across genres and English varieties, examine prosodic and multimodal cues, and test hearers' social evaluations

HSR (LONDON),
HOUGHTON STREET REVIEW JOURNAL
ISSN: 2058-5519|Impact factor-15.9
http://houghtonstreetreview.com/index.php/hsr

experimentally. Cross-linguistic comparison would be especially valuable for determining which pathways from mental semantics to identity marking are broadly recurrent and which depend on language-specific constructions and cultural ideologies.

References

1. Aijmer, K. (1997). I think - an English modal particle. In T. Swan & O. J. Westvik (Eds.), Modality in Germanic languages: Historical and comparative perspectives (pp. 1-47). Mouton de Gruyter.
2. Aijmer, K. (2002). English discourse particles: Evidence from a corpus. John Benjamins.
3. Aijmer, K., & Simon-Vandenbergen, A.-M. (2004). A model and a methodology for the study of pragmatic markers: The semantic field of expectation. Journal of Pragmatics, 36(10), 1781-1805. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.pragma.2004.05.005
4. Andersen, G. (2001). Pragmatic markers and sociolinguistic variation: A relevance-theoretic approach to the language of adolescents. John Benjamins.
5. Beeching, K. (2016). Pragmatic markers in British English: Meaning in social interaction. Cambridge University Press.
6. Blakemore, D. (2002). Relevance and linguistic meaning: The semantics and pragmatics of discourse markers. Cambridge University Press.
7. Brinton, L. J. (1996). Pragmatic markers in English: Grammaticalization and discourse functions. Mouton de Gruyter.
8. Brinton, L. J. (2008). The comment clause in English: Syntactic origins and pragmatic development. Cambridge University Press.
9. Bucholtz, M. (1999). 'Why be normal?': Language and identity practices in a community of nerd girls. Language in Society, 28(2), 203-223.
10. Bucholtz, M., & Hall, K. (2005). Identity and interaction: A sociocultural linguistic approach. Discourse Studies, 7(4-5), 585-614. https://doi.org/10.1177/1461445605054407
11. Caprario, M. (2023). Multifunctionality of epistemic stance markers: Variation across disciplines and speaker roles in classroom discourse. Contrastive Pragmatics, 4(2), 213-242. https://doi.org/10.1163/26660393-bja10066
12. Cheshire, J. (2005). Syntactic variation and spoken language. In L. Cornips & K. P. Corrigan (Eds.), Syntax and variation: Reconciling the biological and the social (pp. 81-106). John Benjamins.
13. Coupland, N. (2007). Style: Language variation and identity. Cambridge University Press.
14. Du Bois, J. W. (2007). The stance triangle. In R. Englebretson (Ed.), Stancetaking in discourse: Subjectivity, evaluation, interaction (pp. 139-182). John Benjamins.
15. Eckert, P. (2000). Linguistic variation as social practice. Blackwell.
16. Eckert, P. (2008). Variation and the indexical field. Journal of Sociolinguistics, 12(4), 453-476. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-9841.2008.00374.x
17. Eckert, P. (2012). Three waves of variation study: The emergence of meaning in the study of sociolinguistic variation. Annual Review of Anthropology, 41, 87-100.

HSR (LONDON),
HOUGHTON STREET REVIEW JOURNAL
ISSN: 2058-5519|Impact factor-15.9
http://houghtonstreetreview.com/index.php/hsr

18. Erman, B. (2001). Pragmatic markers revisited with a focus on you know in adult and adolescent talk. Journal of Pragmatics, 33(9), 1337-1359.
19. Fox Tree, J. E., & Schrock, J. C. (2002). Basic meanings of you know and I mean. Journal of Pragmatics, 34(6), 727-747. https://doi.org/10.1016/S0378-2166(02)00027-9
20. Fraser, B. (1990). An approach to discourse markers. Journal of Pragmatics, 14(3), 383-398. https://doi.org/10.1016/0378-2166(90)90096-V
21. Fraser, B. (1999). What are discourse markers? Journal of Pragmatics, 31(7), 931-952. https://doi.org/10.1016/S0378-2166(98)00101-5
22. Heritage, J. (2012). Epistemics in action: Action formation and territories of knowledge. Research on Language and Social Interaction, 45(1), 1-29.
23. Heritage, J. (2013). Epistemics in conversation. In J. Sidnell & T. Stivers (Eds.), The handbook of conversation analysis (pp. 370-394). Wiley-Blackwell.
24. Holmes, J. (1995). Women, men and politeness. Longman.
25. Jaffe, A. (Ed.). (2009). Stance: Sociolinguistic perspectives. Oxford University Press.