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# Low Transitive Constructions as Typical Clauses in English: A Case Study of the Functions of Clauses with the Nonverbal Predicate *be* in Stance Displays

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**Abstract:** Low transitive constructions are ubiquitous in English conversation and as such can be considered "typical" clauses. This article furthers this claim by showing that these constructions are also most frequent in a different genre: arguments between participants at organized protests. It has been argued that one reason these constructions are so frequent is that they function to display participants' stances. Arguments are a type of interaction where stance displays abound. In fact, they are defined as sequences of utterances that display opposing stances. Thus, the study goes on to examine how the most frequent of the low transitive constructions in the data—clauses with the nonverbal predicate *be*—function to display opposition across utterances. Du Bois has analyzed stance as resonance across utterances, created from structural parallelism, and he argues that slight changes between linguistic forms can create differing focal points that index contrasts. This framework is used to analyze how participants use the multiple semantic functions of *be* clauses across interactional sequences to display and modify their stances in response to their opponent. It is suggested that the versatility and ambiguity of *be* clauses are especially useful in arguments where participants do not share a set of common beliefs.

**Keywords:** LT construction; protest argument; stance; copula; existential clause; equational function; categorizing function



**Citation:** Mayes, Patricia. 2024. Low Transitive Constructions as Typical Clauses in English: A Case Study of the Functions of Clauses with the Nonverbal Predicate *be* in Stance Displays. *Languages* 9: 372. https://doi.org/10.3390/languages9120372

Academic Editors: Ritva Laury and Tsuyoshi Ono

Received: 30 August 2024
Revised: 25 November 2024
Accepted: 26 November 2024
Published: 6 December 2024



## 1. Introduction

The purpose of this volume is to examine the notion of (a)typicality as it pertains to *the clause* by investigating the occurrence of different types of clausal constructions in situated interaction across languages. This issue is particularly pertinent with respect to how the term *clause* has been defined, understood, and used. Indeed, linguistics textbooks and scholarship often focus a lot of attention on transitive clauses, thus implying that they are "typical" clauses (see, for example, Brown and Yule 1983; van Valin and LaPolla 1997; van Valin 2001; Beck and Gergel 2014, and others). An example from van Valin (2001) is "the boy broke the clock" (p. 25). Focusing so much attention on such clauses may lead to the inference that they are the most frequent type of clause across situations and languages. Yet in their study of conversation, the most basic form of human interaction (Goffman 1983; Schegloff 1996), Thompson and Hopper (2001) found that such constructions were relatively rare, accounting for only 27% of the clauses in their data.

In their seminal work, Hopper and Thompson (1980) had redefined transitivity so that it would be useful when applied to naturally occurring discourse across languages. They began with the traditional definition:

> Transitivity is traditionally understood as a global property of an entire clause, such that an activity is 'carried-over' or 'transferred' from an agent to a patient. Transitivity in the traditional view thus necessarily involves at least two participants (a view which we shall later qualify), and an action which is typically EFFECTIVE in some way. (p. 251; their emphasis)

The "two participants" are often referred to as "subject" and "object", and the idea that an action is "effective" suggests that the object is somehow affected or changed by that action, as illustrated in the above example. This definition is based in prototype theory (Rosch 1973; Lakoff 1977, 1987), which suggests a continuous category with more and less exemplary members. However, in practice, transitivity has often been treated as binary: a clause is either transitive or intransitive. Hopper and Thompson sought to address this problem by identifying ten parameters that can be used to assess where a particular clause falls along the continuum between transitive and intransitive. Using this framework in their later study, Thompson and Hopper (2001) found that one-participant clauses, traditionally "intransitive", accounted for 73% of their data. It should be noted that this is a conservative estimate because "number of participants" is only one of the parameters they proposed. Indeed, when the other parameters were considered, English conversation was found to be quite low in transitivity. Given the frequencies of these constructions, we can argue that low transitive (LT) constructions are the "typical" clauses in English conversation.

The question of how frequent LT constructions are in other genres or types of situated interaction beyond conversation has received little attention. Are these constructions typical in other types of spoken interaction? The work of Biber et al. (1999) provides a broad overview of the distribution of lexical and phrasal resources and suggests that at least one type of LT construction (copular clauses) is very prevalent across genres and registers of English. However, to my knowledge, the frequency and functions of this and other LT constructions in specific genres have not been explored in depth. In this article, one of my goals is to show that LT constructions are more prevalent in another type of situated (English) interaction—arguments between strangers that took place at political protests—extending the claim that LT constructions are the typical English clause to a context beyond everyday conversation. Although "conversation" itself is quite varied, much of the existing research centers on cooperative interaction, among intimates or casual acquaintances. Indeed, more work is needed to understand how the practices found in these cooperative contexts are deployed in arguments and contexts involving conflict (Reynolds 2011).

Arguments are defined as sequential utterances that display opposing stances (Maynard 1985; Hutchby 1996), and participants obviously use sequential structures to create and deploy such opposition. For example, Reynolds (2011) showed that participants use the sequential patterning afforded by adjacency pairs to produce a first, uncontroversial question to which the opponent responds and is simultaneously positioned as the recipient for the next, explicitly oppositional action. Thus, sequential positioning at the level of the utterance is a straightforward resource for displaying opposing stances. At the level of structure, Du Bois (2014) argues that "stancetaking" is accomplished through sequentially positioning linguistic resources in ways that "resonate" with prior utterances, and this is another way of displaying opposition. What has not been explored much is which grammatical and lexical resources are most useful for displaying opposing stances and how this process is carried out.

Thompson and Hopper (2001) have suggested that in conversation, the function of LT constructions is to display subjective stances concerning "identities", "attitudes", and even "views of the world" (p. 53). These are exactly the types of projects the participants who are arguing over politics at protests are engaged in. Thus, this ubiquitous resource would seem to be particularly useful for displaying the different attitudes and views that constitute such opposition. To learn more about this process, I use video recordings of protest arguments collected from YouTube to explore the following questions: (1) What is the frequency of LT constructions in these data, and how does that frequency compare to Thompson and Hopper's (2001) findings with respect to conversation? (2) How is the most frequent of the LT constructions used to advance participants' opposing positions in these arguments?

The paper is organized as follows. In order to provide some background, I briefly summarize a few of the important findings about LT constructions in English conversation

in Section 2. In Section 3, I discuss stance, focusing in particular on Du Bois' dialogic framework, as a useful way to define and analyze the sequential production of stances. Section 4 outlines the data and methods of analysis. Sections 5 and 6 present results: Section 5 addresses the first research question, presenting the distribution of clause types in the data. Section 6 addresses the second question, presenting my analysis of how participants use the most frequent LT construction—clauses with the nonverbal predicate *be*—to build opposition across interactional sequences. Section 7 discusses the findings and explores some reasons for why this construction may be especially useful for stance displays in English interaction. Section 8 presents some concluding remarks.

## 2. LT Constructions in English Conversation

As explained above, Thompson and Hopper (2001) found that two-participant (traditional "transitive") clauses, such as *Sam fixed the stove*, were much less frequent than one-participant clauses (*Sam slept*) in English conversation. In addition, when the relation between transitivity and grammar is defined more comprehensively, according to the model proposed in their earlier work, they found that even those clauses with two participants were not highly transitive according to other measures (e.g., volitionality and potency of the "A", and individuation and affectedness of the "O"). Indeed, some clauses coded as "two-participant" were V-O compounds, which are common in English conversation. These clauses may consist of any or all of the following: a lexicalized verb and object, a non-referential object, and a low-content verb (Thompson and Hopper 2001). Examples from Thompson and Hopper's data include *have fun*, *get a picture*, and *wait a minute*, among others (p. 33). They make the point that if V-O compounds were removed, only 22% of the clauses in their database would be considered to have two participants. Summarizing their overall findings for two-participant clauses, they say, "we found no clauses that could be coded as 'High' for each of the ten transitivity parameters" (p. 33)[1].

As mentioned, the other 73% of the clauses in Thompson and Hopper's study were one-participant clauses. Most frequent were "verbal predicates with one participant (*they pay in advance*); copular clauses, including predicate adjective (*Trish is pregnant again*), predicate nominal (*that's the whole point*), and predicate oblique clauses (*it was from me*); and epistemic/evidential clauses" (pp. 37–38). Epistemic/evidential clauses, such as *I think* or *I don't know*, have traditionally been analyzed as independent clauses linked to an embedded "complement", and thus two-participant clauses (e.g., *I don't think it's workable*) (p. 39). However, Thompson and Hopper counted epistemic/evidential clauses as having one participant, arguing that they should be considered separate structures from the following "complement" clause. Indeed, further research has suggested that the initial introductory "clause" is basically a fragment or "epistemic phrase" that functions to display the speaker's stance on the proposition in the following clause (Thompson and Hopper 2001; Tao 2001; Thompson 2002; Kärkkäinen 2009). In this sense, the following "embedded" clause is at least as important as the introductory structure expressing the speaker's stance. In addition, Kärkkäinen (2012) has argued that, not only does the epistemic clause express a participant's stance rather explicitly, the information in the following clause also functions to display a stance. Thus, these utterances, as a whole (introductory epistemic phrase and the material that follows), are a conversational format for stancetaking actions. What this perhaps suggests is that these so-called "complex complement-taking" clauses are unified not by their grammatical structure but rather by their function as stancetaking actions.

## 3. Stance

Biber et al. (1999) are widely credited for pointing out that there are different types of stance, most notably, "epistemic" stance (concerning the quality of information in terms of its certainty) and "attitudinal" or affective stance (concerning personal attitudes and emotions). These types seem to be mostly speaker-focused and do not consider the fact that speakers take stances not only to display their own subjectivities, but also in response to a recipient or audience (Du Bois 2007; Johnstone 2018). In addition, Du Bois (2007) and

Du Bois and Kärkkäinen (2012) point to some of the limitations of such a "disjunctive approach": it may be impossible to tease apart the subtle differences between stance types and doing so would likely lead to an increasingly long list, without many new insights. Biber et al. also show that there are many different resources for marking stance, some of which convey more than one type. As Du Bois argues, a unified theory of stance must take into account all of the components and be able to account for how stances are realized in particular interactional contexts. Du Bois and Kärkkäinen (2012) argue in favor of "specif[ying] a conjunction of prototypical features of stance as social action" (p. 439). Drawing on these ideas, Johnstone (2018) defines stancetaking as "the methods, linguistic and other, by which interactants create and signal relationships with the propositions they give voice to and the people they interact with" (p. 156).

The above definition highlights Du Bois' (2007) insight that the components of stance form a "triangle" or a set of the three relations: (1) Who is the stance-taker? (2) What is the object of stance? (3) What stance is the stance-taker responding to? (pp. 146–49). In essence, two actors take stances by evaluating an object and effectively positioning themselves along a continuum between alignment and disalignment with respect to one another and in relation to the object of stance. Thus, stancetaking is accomplished through sequentially positioned linguistic resources that "resonate" with prior utterances, thereby expressing alignment or opposition (Du Bois 2014). Du Bois (2014) elaborates on the idea of "dialogic resonance", which is "the catalytic activation of affinities across utterances", and he notes that affinities can be either similarities or differences that "link the paired utterances along multiple dimensions of linguistic form and meaning" (p. 360). Participants in any particular conversation use lexical and structural resources, which are then "primed" to be taken up and used again in parallel environments, and they may achieve meanings that vary from alignment to opposition. The notion of meanings that vary between alignment and opposition is not meant to be static and binary, but rather negotiated along a continuous scale between a prior stance and the presently realized one: "Participants deploy subtle and often elusive signals to articulate the complex and highly variable mapping of the stance–alignment relation" (Du Bois and Kärkkäinen 2012, p. 440). Reproduction of structures or parts of structures creates structural parallelism within and between utterances, which also creates resonance across utterances. Structural parallelism also sets up the opportunity for contrast by creating a frame with a particular focal point, and when a different focal point is highlighted within the same structural frame, this indexes a contrast. Such shifts in focus are often accomplished prosodically in English (Du Bois 2014, pp. 381–82). Example (1) illustrates some of these points. B had approached some protestors and was arguing that shutting down the workforce in the entire city (Oakland) was inappropriate because it would affect people who were not members of the elite class ("the one percent"):

(1) Occupy Oakland (Please see Appendix A for a list of transcription conventions.)

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| 01 P: --> | [if the sho:e ˆfi:ts]= | |
| 02 B: | [you're not shutting] down the one [percent-] | |
| 03 P: --> | | =[put it ˆon]. |
| 04 | (.9) | |
| 05 B: --> | the shoe ˆdoesn't fit | |

In lines 1 and 3, P uses a modified version of the idiom *if the shoe fits, wear it* to criticize B's point. In line 5, B uses parallel forms, thus staying within the frame set up by P, while opposing his stance. This is accomplished with stress on contrasting focal elements in lines 1 ("ˆfi:ts") and 5 ("ˆdoesn't fit"). The diagraph (Du Bois 2014) in (2) shows this more clearly:

(2) Diagraph of Example (2)

| | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| P: | if | the | sho:e | | ˆfi:ts, |
| B: | | the | shoe | ˆdoesn't | fit |

This simple example illustrates the power of parallelism and the selective reproduction of linguistic elements to index a participant's subjectivity at any particular moment, as

they position themselves with respect to a prior utterance. In addition, the predicates in this example *fit* and *put on* are metaphorical and do not refer to a transitive action. This is perhaps not surprising given the prevalence of LT constructions in English conversation (Thompson and Hopper 2001), but it hints at how useful this resource is for displaying opposing stances.

## 4. Data and Methods

The data and methods of analysis are presented below.

### *4.1. Data*

The data consist of four video-recorded protest arguments that were downloaded from YouTube and transcribed. The people in these videos are apparently strangers, who argue opposing views, usually with respect to some aspect of the topic of an organized protest. To make it easier to reference and understand the examples discussed in Section 6, I have named each protest. I also provide some background information and labels for the relevant participants in the list below.

**Occupy Oakland:** This protest occurred in Oakland, California, and was linked to the larger "Occupy Wall Street" movement of 2011, which concerned issues of inequality and wealth distribution. In this movement, protestors made a distinction between the majority (including themselves), whom they referred to as *the ninety-nine percent*, and very wealthy people, referred to as *the one percent*. In the recording considered here, there were four participants who were arguing and are referred to in the examples below: P is a protestor who is holding a sign that says "shut down the 1%"; B approaches P and is primarily arguing that the content of the sign is disingenuous; M is a protestor, who defends P and argues with B, while W is another protestor, who agrees with M, and also argues with B.

**"Act 10" Labor Protest**: This protest is one of many labor protests that occurred in the state of Wisconsin over a four-month period after the governor signed legislation eliminating collective bargaining for public employee unions in 2011. The recording took place after a protest had ended and concerned the statement "workers of the world unite", which had been written in chalk on a monument near the protest site. In the recording, there were four participants: D is a man who is trying to wash the chalk off the statue. S is filming the process of cleaning the monument, while C and T are two protestors who walk by carrying signs. S engages the protestors, and an argument ensues.

**G20 Protest**: This protest took place at the G20 summit in Toronto, Canada, in 2010. Although there are various people visible in the recording, some of whom interject occasional comments, the argument is between E, a man protesting environmental issues and lack of action related to climate change, and K, a counter-protestor, who was protesting "anarchists".

**Healthcare**: In this protest, people were protesting the national healthcare bill in the U.S., known as the Affordable Care Act. In the recorded excerpt, H is a counter-protestor, who approaches some protestors and attempts to engage them. G is a protestor who responds, and they argue briefly.

### *4.2. Methods of Analysis*

My first research question concerns how the protest argument data compare to English conversation with respect to transitivity and, in particular, the frequency of LT constructions. I examined 437 clauses, eliminating incomplete clauses and a small number of fixed expressions (e.g., *let's see* and *there you go*). Each clause was coded according to the types below, which are based on the practices outlined by Thompson and Hopper (2001) and discussed in Section 2 above.

One-participant clauses

Type 1: Clauses with nonverbal predicate (*be*)

*that's right*

*I'**m** not a communist*

*they'**re** the ones with the guns*

Type 2: Epistemic clauses

***I know** how much I make*

***I don't think** that "workers of the world unite" is a communist slogan*

***I just think** it's a bit remiss*

Type 3: Clauses with verbal predicates

*because things are gonna **change***

*you **came** here*

*this should never **happen***

Two-participant clauses

Type 4: Clauses with V-O compounds

*you **have a right** to stand here*

*we've **got a lot** of government programs*

*not everybody **makes** as much **money** as you make*

Type 5: Clauses with other predicates

*and people have been **defacing** the monument a lot*

*they'll **pollute** the environment*

*I **fought** them twice*

Type 1 are one-participant clauses and include both copular and existential constructions. All of the Type 1 examples listed above are copular clauses. The clause *there's two sides to every story* is an example of an existential. Although existential constructions differ syntactically and semantically from copular constructions, which have a number of functions, these two types of clauses are similar in that they are one-participant clauses with the nonverbal predicate *be* (Bentley 2017). As such, they are canonical LT constructions. Type 2 are epistemic phrases that have only one participant and function to introduce and display the speaker's stance on the following complement clause, which is counted separately, following Thompson and Hopper (2001). Type 3 are one-participant clauses with verbal predicates that specify an action or event. Type 4 are V-O compounds. As mentioned, these include lexicalized verb and object compounds, non-referential objects, and low-content verbs (Thompson and Hopper 2001). Therefore, while counting them as two-participant clauses, I have listed them separately because they can be considered LT constructions based on these (as well as other) parameters. Type 5 are other two-participant clauses with lexical verbs. As such, they are the only possible candidates for the label "transitive clause".

As discussed, arguments are sequential utterances that display opposing stances. In the protest arguments, these stance displays are often quite explicit, perhaps because the participants (apparently) are strangers. In the next section, I present the distribution of clause types in the data and show that LT clauses are much more frequent than clauses that are high in transitivity. This suggests that, as in conversation, LT clauses are typical in these arguments.

## 5. Transitivity and Clause Structure in the Protest Arguments

Table 1 shows the overall distribution of clause types in the protest argument data.

**Table 1.** Distribution of clause types.

| Clause Type | Percentage (of Total) |
|---|---|
| One-participant | 67% (293) |
| Type 1 (Copular and Existential) | 39% (170) |
| Type 2 (Epistemic) | 14% (60) |
| Type 3 (Other) | 14% (63) |
| Two-participant | 33% (144) |
| Type 4 (V-O Compounds) | 12% (52) |
| Type 5 (Other) | 21% (92) |

As shown, 67% are one-participant clauses, and 33% are two-participant clauses. This differs a little from Thompson and Hopper's findings (73% to 27%), but it still shows a preponderance of one-participant clauses. It is notable that 39% of all clauses are "*be* clauses", which accords with Biber et al. (1999) who found that across registers, "[t]he primary verb *be* in its role as a main verb is the single most common individual verb . . ." (p. 359)[2]. The majority of *be* clauses in my data are copular clauses (160), and they account for 37% of all clauses. Thompson and Hopper reported that copular clauses accounted for about one-third of the one-participant clauses in their data. Indeed, copular clauses were a frequent and important resource for stancetaking in the protest arguments, a point that will be discussed more in the next section.

With respect to the two-participant predicates, those in the Type 5 category are most likely to be higher in transitivity. The clauses in this category would be considered "transitive" in traditional terms. However, even the examples listed in Section 4 would not be considered transitive on all nine transitivity parameters outlined by Thompson and Hopper. For example, although the clause *people are defacing the monument* could perhaps be considered a kinetic action involving an agent and an object that is individuated and affected, it is both atelic (not yet completed) and non-punctual, meaning that there is a "transitional phase between inception and completion" (Thompson and Hopper 2001, p. 35). Similarly, the clause *they'll pollute the environment* is atelic and non-punctual. The mode is irrealis, and the object is not individuated." It is also not clear that *pollute* refers to a physical action (kinesis), although it could be understood as referring to a set of actions occurring over time. Finally, while *I fought them twice* would seem to be a good example of a clause that is high in transitivity, this does not seem to be true when the context is considered. The speaker was using this construction to say that he had been deployed to serve in the military during two wars. Therefore, the clause does not necessarily refer to a specific kinetic action, and the object is not individuated. Furthermore, it is not even clear that there is a specific affected object because the reference to *them* is not made clear. With respect to high transitivity, the clearest examples in the data are the two below:

(3) pick up a si:gn
(4) ^take your ma:sk off.

These clauses would be highly transitive with respect to all but one parameter: mode. As imperatives, they specify actions that have not been realized (irrealis). Much as Thompson and Hopper reported, "there are no clauses of 100 percent High Transitivity" (p. 33).

## 6. Nonverbal Predicate *be* Clauses and Stancetaking in the Protest Arguments

So far, I have shown that the protest arguments are similar to everyday conversation with respect to the fact that LT constructions are the most frequently used clausal resource, but the question that remains is how these forms are used to build opposing stances. To begin addressing this question, I focus only on the most frequent clause type: clauses with the nonverbal predicate *be*. I begin with copular clauses, not only because they are the most

prevalent of all the LT forms, but also because, as will be shown, they are flexible. They have several semantic functions that are useful in creating dialogic resonances and can be used to invoke opposing interpretations.

### *6.1. Copular Clauses*

Copular clauses have the form of a subject NP, followed by *be*, which is then followed by a predicate adjective (PA), a prepositional phrase (PP), or most frequently (Biber et al.), a predicate nominal (PN). Various functions have been attributed to these different forms. For example, Altay (2019), citing Higgins (1979), uses the following list: "predicational, specificational, equative, and identifical". However, these functions are not very clear, especially considering that some seem to overlap (e.g., predicational and specificational). In a discussion aimed at clarifying the terms and concepts used to describe the functions of nonverbal clausal constructions, Haspelmath (2024) proposed terms such as "attributional" (*the bird is small*), "equational" (*Kim is my mother*), and "classificational"[3] (*Lee is a baker*)", as well as others (p. 1).

Several studies of naturally occurring discourse have also cited equational and categorizing functions, associated specifically with PN constructions. Dawkins et al. (2019) discussed these functions in a corpus of written English, created by combining the Brown and LOB corpora[4]. Bybee and Thompson (2022) also found that in English conversation, most PN constructions function either to equate or to categorize the subject referent with respect to the PN. Both studies mention that the definiteness of the PN is what determines whether the function is equational or categorizing. As I illustrate below, the participants in the protest arguments used these differences to index stances that varied from and contrasted with those of the people they were arguing with.

Bybee and Thompson also make the point that functions such as equational and categorizing are semantic, and they go on to argue that all the copular constructions they investigated—PNs, PAs, and PAN (Predicate Adjective Noun)—also have functions at the interactional level, such as assessing and informing. This is an important point for the data examined here as well, since displaying opposing stances is an interactional function. What is of interest here is how the participants employ copular clauses with the different semantic functions to do so. For consistency, I use the following terms to discuss the semantic-level functions discussed above: "attributional", as in (5), "equational", as in (6), and "categorizing", as in (7):

(5) it- it's horrible,
(6) that ^is the role of government.
(7) it's a ^Civil War monument,

#### 6.1.1. The Attributional Function

Haspelmath defines attributional clauses as attributing a property to the subject referent, noting that, as is the case in English, these are often clauses with a PA. In their analysis of this form, Bybee and Thompson (2022) distinguish between this predicating function and the "attributive" function of adjectives, when they precede a noun, which they modify. In comparing the functions of PAs and PANs, they point out that, in a PAN, the adjective is syntactically part of the NP that constitutes the predicate, as in "it was atypical weather" (p. 4). Thus, the question is whether the adjective in a PAN is only functioning to modify the noun it precedes. They found that, indeed, the semantic functions align with the structural differences between these two types of clauses: PAs are attributional, ascribing a property to the subject referent, but PANs can be either equational or categorizing, like the PNs that they are syntactically similar to. However, at the interactional level, they found that PANs function more like PAs than PNs, and both PANs and PAs were used to assess.

Bybee and Thompson comment that PA constructions are frequent in their conversational data, but in the protest arguments they are infrequent. When they did occur, they were used to assess something such as an action or utterance. The example below is a bit

complex in that one participant appears to be trying to predict the reaction of his opponent to a claim he made:

(8) G20 Protest
01 E: so, ˆninety percent of the species in the ocean are being extinct. tha- that's not- that's
02 --> a false fact. that's not really true,
03 K: so, who-
04 E: that's being pedaled by the liberal media? is that what [you're saying?]
05 K: [so, what do you]
06 want (.) to happen.

E questions K's interpretation of the claim "we're (.) right now in the greatest extinction (.) since the dinosaurs" previously made by E. To do so, E paraphrases his own claim in line 1 and follows it with what might be K's interpretation in lines 1–2 and 4. In line 4, he ends his utterance with a slightly higher pitch, indicating that it is a question, and then uses a polar question to ask explicitly, *is that what you're saying?* In lines 1–2, he first uses a PAN construction to categorize K's interpretation of the claim as *a false fact*, following with a PA (line 2), which assesses the claim as *not really true*. This example aligns with the findings of Bybee and Thompson that PAN constructions often function semantically to categorize, while PA constructions ascribe a property (*not really true*) to the referent (the claim, *ninety percent of the species in the ocean are being extinct*). Yet, as Bybee and Thompson found, the interactional function of each of these clauses is assessing, which is an explicit stancetaking action. In questioning the assessments he has attributed to K, E indexes his own opposing stance.

In (9), S is filming, as C and T approach:

(9) "Act 10" Labor Protest
S: well, can I ask you (.) what you think of (.) the: graffiti (.) o:n the monument.
C: --> I think it's ˆawful (.) it's a shame.

In this example, C uses the PA construction *it's awful* to voice his assessment about the graffiti, thereby taking an explicit stance. He then follows this assessment with the PN *it's a shame*, which semantically categorizes the referent, *the graffiti on the monument*. In this case, the category itself, "shame", has a negative meaning, and categorizing the referent in this way confirms C's assessment. In the subsequent interaction, he reiterates this stance, saying *I don't like this*, while gesturing toward the graffiti on the statue. This example shows how various copular constructions work together to display a participant's stance.

#### 6.1.2. The Equational Function

Equational constructions are duo-nominal clauses with two definite nominals, in other words, a subject NP and a definite PN. Although they can be divided into four subtypes, the unifying characteristic is that they all express some type of equational (or identity) relation between the two nominals (Haspelmath 2024, p. 3). The fact that the predicate nominal in equational clauses tends to be definite, as in example (6), has been shown in the studies that examine naturally occurring discourse. For example, Bybee and Thompson state that "the semantic function of equating is nearly always done with a definite predicate NP" (p. 7), and Dawkins et al. found that 89% of the clauses with definite PNs were equational. In the protest data, too, the copular constructions that had definite PNs functioned equationally, as shown in (10):

(10) Occupy Oakland
B: look at you people on the street (.7) there's just ˆa few of you.
(.6)
B: --> you are ˆthe point one percent.

B initially uses an existential construction not only to identify the protestors as his focus but also to express his opinion that they are few in number. He then reiterates this stance with the equational construction *you are the point one percent*, which explicitly contrasts with

the identity of "99 percent" that had been claimed by the protest participants. Another example is shown in (11):

(11) Occupy Oakland
B: and I'm dissenting from you because you ^don't [represent me.]
P: --> [that's ^your right.]
B: absolutely.

P uses an equational construction to equate dissent and B's right. As in the previous studies, here too the PNs are marked for definiteness, with the definite determiner in (10) and a possessive pronoun in (11). There are two examples in which the PN is not marked for definiteness:

(12) "Act 10" Labor Protest
C: was it ^cha:lk (.) or what the heck did they u:se.
(.)
D: --> it's cha:lk, but you know, it gets into [the gra:nite].
C: [the granite]

(13) "Act 10" Labor Protest
S: I'm (.6) I'm trying to say that there- (.) there are ^two: problems (.6)
one i:s (.) that
--> it's graffi:ti

Both of these clauses function equationally. In (12), D responds to C's question, confirming that the material used in "the graffiti" is chalk. In the utterance in (13), the clause *it's graffiti* would traditionally be considered a "complement clause", but, as Thompson (2002) has argued, it is by no means "subordinate". Indeed, it stands alone, as S uses an equational PN construction to identify it as one of *two problems*. Unlike the majority of equational constructions, these clauses are not marked for definiteness, but this may be explained by the fact that both of the PNs are noncount nouns, which usually are not marked as definite/indefinite.

Although the equational function of definite PNs is usually apparent, in some cases, this function is less obvious, as is shown in the longer excerpt below:

(14) G20 Protest
01 E: --> ^they're the ones with the guns.
02 ^we don't have guns.
03 --> the police are the ones with the billion dollar[s-]
04 K: [^wa]it til tomorrow,
05 you'll see the violence.
06 (.)
07 E: I ^see it.
08 it's right there (.) they're the ones with the guns.
09 K: no, no, [nah]
10 E: [(we d-)]
11 K: well, ^of course, of course they got guns.
12 --> they're ^cops. they're supposed to have [guns.]
13 E: [yeah]
14 and who do they protect.

The construction used in lines 1 and 3 (*X is the one with Y*) is similar to the reverse *wh*-clefts, such as *they're the ones who* . . ., mentioned by Biber et al. (1999, p. 961). In the examples here, prepositional phrases, *with the guns* (line 1) and *with the billion dollars* (line 3), instead of relative clauses (*who have guns* and *who have the billion dollars*, respectively) are used to identify the referents of *the ones*. Biber et al. point out that reverse *wh*-clefts are used contrastively (pp. 960–61), which is what we see in this example: *they*, referring to *the police* is contrasted with *we* (the protestors). The primary stress on *they* in line 1 and then on *we* in line 2 further indexes this focus. Lambrecht (2001) discussed the features and functions

of cleft constructions, including reverse *wh*-clefts. Using the example, *she was the one who wanted to keep Reagan from appearing anywhere in public*, he argued that the semantic relation between the pronoun and relative clause in such constructions is equational[5]. On analogy with the canonical reverse *wh*-cleft, it seems that the constructions in lines 1, 3, and 8 also function equationally.

This excerpt continues with K's prediction *wait til tomorrow, you'll see the violence* (lines 4–5), and E responds by confirming what K has said, but also changing the timeframe to the present and repeating the equational construction *they're the ones with the guns* (lines 7–8), thereby linking the police and *the violence*. K seems to interpret this utterance equationally, as he initially responds with a direct denial *no, no, nah* in line 9, but in line 12, he uses a copular construction with an indefinite PN, a construction more often associated with the function of categorizing (Bybee and Thompson 2022). Shifting to this function at this point in the argument is advantageous because he can define the category "cops" as one that is *supposed to have guns*.

In addition to equating the subject referent to a particular PN or categorizing it as a member of the category referred to by the PN, all the examples discussed so far also function interactionally to display the participants' opposing stances. As (14) suggests, the semantic functions of equation and categorizing are used together in these displays. Mayes and Tao (2019) argued that categorizing is a ubiquitous activity that is used in creating stances, whether aligned or opposed. This is one reason copular constructions are such an important resource in the protest arguments. Next, I discuss the categorizing function in more detail.

#### 6.1.3. The Categorizing Function

Clauses that function to categorize the subject NP have often been referred to as "predicational": They "express the membership of the (definite) subject referent in the class denoted by the (indefinite and non-referential) predicative nominal" (Haspelmath 2024, p. 3). This definition suggests that the PN is often marked as indefinite, as already mentioned. Below are several examples of the categorizing function from the protest data:

(15) E: Saudi Arabia is a dictatorship (.) right?
(16) C: I- I'm a private sector (.) attorney
(17) B: yeah, (.) I'm a lawyer.
(18) M: it's ˆnot a fact that could be true or false. it's- it's an (.) intent.

Here, (18) illustrates a strategy sometimes used by protest participants to perform categorizing: juxtaposing a category that they claim the subject referent is not a member of (*a fact that could be true or false*) with the category that they claim the referent is a member of (*an intent*). This strategy indexes the participants' contested views of reality and the ongoing opposition.

As was mentioned with respect to example (14), it is not always immediately obvious whether a PN is functioning to equate or categorize. Thus, a primary goal of the Dawkins et al. (2019) study was to investigate claims in previous literature that PNs can be ambiguous with respect to these semantic functions. In particular, this point had been raised in materials designed to teach mathematics and, therefore, their study was designed to compare a corpus of mathematics textbooks with the Brown/LOB corpus. Some examples from the math texts illustrate the possible ambiguity. Examples such as "a square is a regular quadrilateral" are definitions, meant to express the meaning that the subject and predicate NPs are identical (the equational function). On the other hand, "a square is a rectangle" is meant to convey a "conditional relationship: if an object is a square, then it is a rectangle" (p. 120). This is the categorizing function in that it expresses the idea that the subject (*a square*) is a member of the category referred to by the PN (*a rectangle*). The authors go on to show that clauses that can be interpreted ambiguously occur in both corpora and which determiner precedes the noun may provide a clue that indexes the intended meaning. This is particularly true when the predicate NP is marked for definiteness. As was noted

before, their findings from the Brown/LOB corpus support this claim: 89% of the clauses with a definite PN (specifically, those with *the*) have an equational function. On the other hand, although the indefinite determiner precedes the PN more often in clauses that serve a categorizing function, this pattern is less frequent, found in only 78% of the Brown/LOB corpus. The authors go on to say that "the '[subject] is [noun]' grammatical structure often entails semantic ambiguity that is only partially resolved by other grammatical cues (articles and conjunctions)" (p. 126).

In the protest arguments, the ambiguity discussed by Dawkins et al. seems to provide a point of departure, whereby changing constructions ever so slightly indexes different, often contrastive, meanings. This affords participants the opportunity to choose which interpretation they give to a particular utterance in constructing their response, perhaps even changing the course of action away from the ongoing project, as illustrated in (19):

(19) Occupy Oakland

| | |
|---|---|
| 01 B: | the point ˆi:s (.8) you have a ˆri:ght (1.1) to sta:nd here, |
| 02 | (.8) |
| 03 B: | and tell a ˆlie. |
| 04 | (1.0) |
| 05 B: | and that's what you're doing. |
| 06 | (1.0) |
| 07 B: | [okay.] |
| 08 M: | [see] how's it a ˆlie? |
| 09 | that's a ˆstatement. |
| 10 M: | [shut down the one percent.] |
| 11 W: | [what- (it's) a statement.] |

There are five copular constructions in this example (lines 1, 5, 8, 9, and 11). The first one, beginning with *the point is*, is similar to epistemic phrases, such as *I think* and *I know*, that explicitly display the speaker's stance (see Section 2) in that it is used to introduce the following clauses (lines 1 and 3). Much as Kärkkäinen (2012) has argued with respect to constructions that begin with epistemic phrases, this entire structure (introductory copular clause and what follows) functions as a conversational format for stancetaking actions. The semantic function here appears to be equational and characterizes the activity that the protestors are engaged in as *standing here and telling a lie*.[6] As such, the "stance object" (Du Bois 2007) is the protestors' actions, with particular focus on the content of the sign held by P, "shut down the 1%". In line 5, B uses a second copular construction, a "demonstrative *wh*-cleft", which is "typically [used] to sum up what has been said or written in the preceding discourse" (Biber et al. 1999, p. 963). Essentially, B's message is framed by copular clauses, as he introduces that message in line 1 and reiterates it in line 5.

Referring to the protestors' actions as *telling a lie* (line 3) implicitly categorizes the statement on the sign as "a lie", because that NP is embedded inside a V-O compound. B's use of a copular construction has primed that form to be used again, and M does so in line 8, along with an indefinite PN that explicitly contests the category "lie". This action changes the stance object and the course of action from the one B had initiated—characterizing the protestors' actions—to a different activity: explicitly categorizing the content of the sign. In line 9, M uses the same form (subject *is* indefinite PN) to recategorize the message on the sign as *a statement*, effectively moving from equational to categorizing functions, and the project of categorizing the message on the sign continues for several turns, even beyond W's concurring contribution in line 11. As Du Bois argued, the reproduction of structures or parts of structures creates structural parallelism that resonates across utterances. The ambiguous functions of copular constructions make it a particularly useful resource for contesting stances because a slight change (e.g., in a determiner or prenominal modifier) indexes a contrast and even reframes the entire course of action. For example, line 5, "and that's what you're doing", functions equationally and suggests that B's point in lines 1–3 is a fact. Starting in line 8, M uses a copular construction with an indefinite PN to unpack and contest this point by shifting the activity to categorizing. In this way, participants use

the dialogic principles of syntactic similarities as resources to highlight specific points of departure from the stances of other participants. Using Du Bois' diagraph technique to display a portion of example (19) shows how repetition of particular forms and parallelism, as well as overlap, with slight changes in determiners and stress can be used to create both similar and contrasting stances:

(20) Diagraph of Example (19)

| | | | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| B: | and | | that | 's | what | you're | doing. okay. | |
| M: | | see | how | 's | it | | a | ^lie |
| M: | | | that | 's | | | a | ^statement. |
| M: | | | [shut down the one percent.] | | | | | |
| W: | [what- | | (it) | 's | | | a | statement.] |

Example (21) is another case in which a referent is implicitly categorized by the speaker S. As in (19), her opponent, C, responds by explicitly disagreeing with this categorization, and further categorizing actions unfold from that point:

(21) "Act 10" Labor Protest

| | |
|---|---|
| 01 S: | but what do you think more generally about using a: (.8) communist uh: |
| 02 | (.8) ^slo:gan in: connec[tion] |
| 03 C: | [I don't] think |
| 04 S: | [with this uh:] |
| 05 C: | [that workers of the world unite,] |
| 06 S: | protest. |
| 07 C: | is a ^communist slogan. |
| 08 S: | you don't think [work(.)ers: (.) of the world uni:te?]= |
| 09 C: | [workers of the world unite,] |
| 10 S: | =i:s |
| 11 C: | is a communist slogan. what's communist about ^worke:rs. |
| 12 S: | i- isn't it the ^quote from *The Communist Manifesto*. |

This example concerns "the graffiti" on the monument, previously mentioned in (9) and (13). Here, S designs a question that on the surface appears to ask C's opinion about the content of what was written on the monument, but she uses the term *a communist slogan* (lines 1–2), which presupposes that the referent is a member of this category. In response, C uses the epistemic introducer *I don't think* (line 3) and a copular construction to explicitly contest the categorization of *workers of the world unite* (line 5) as *a communist slogan* (line 7). As we saw in (19), C's use of the copular construction with an indefinite PN changes the ongoing project to one in which the participants are explicitly categorizing the stance object, *workers of the world unite*. C's interactional work has primed this structural frame to be used again with different focal points that index a contrast. In line 7, C stresses *communist*, while in line 8, S repeats C's assertion with rising intonation and lengthening on *unite* and especially on *is* (line 10), indexing contrast and disbelief. Meanwhile, C repeats the main point that he is contesting in line 9 (in overlap with S) and line 11. Then, in line 11, C uses another version of the already primed structural frame to make explicit and question the referents included in the "communist" category: *what's communist about workers*. In doing so, C once again shifts the focal point, stressing "^worke:rs" rather than *communist*. In line 12, S apparently attempts to make stronger the case for categorizing *workers of the world unite* as a "communist slogan": still using the copular construction, but this time with an equational function, she uses the definite PN *the quote from The Communist Manifesto* to claim that *workers of the world unite* is identical to a particular "^quote" (stressed as the focal point) in the book *The Communist Manifesto* and is, therefore, *communist*.

This example demonstrates the flexibility of copular constructions and how participants are able to switch seamlessly between the different functions to index contrasting messages, capitalizing on subtle differences and similarities, such as overlap and repetition. The use of the form "i:s" in line 10 is particularly interesting in that it seems to function as

a pivot, around which different constructions and meanings are created. In (22), parts of example (21) are represented with a diagraph:

(22) Diagraph of Example (21)

| | | | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| S: | you | | think | more generally about | using | a: | communist | ˆslo:gan, |
| C: | I | don't | think | that workers of the world unite | is | a | ˆcommunist | slogan. |
| S: | you | don't | think | that [work(.)ers: (.) of the world uni:te?] | | | | |
| C: | | | | [workers of the world unite] | | | | |
| S: | | | | | i:s | | | |
| C: | | | | | is | a | communist | slogan. |
| C: | what | | | | 's | | communist | about ˆworke:rs. |
| S: | | | | it | is (n't) | the ˆquote | from *The Communist* | *Manifesto*. |

It is also notable that the copular form most in play in (21), *a communist slogan*, is a PAN rather than simply a PN. As mentioned, Bybee and Thompson found that PAN constructions are parallel to PNs in terms of semantic function. In other words, definite PANs function equationally, and indefinite PANs function to categorize. They also found that a few PAs are used to ascribe what seem to be viewed as more permanent characteristics with respect to human subjects. Thus, they argued that these PAs function to categorize the subject referent. Line 11, *what's communist about workers*, in (21) can be considered an example, as C argues that workers are not members of the category "communist", an adjective in this construction.

Example (23) is perhaps a clearer demonstration of the use of this type of PA in categorizing, and it shows how a PN construction may be used in a similar way:

(23) Occupy Oakland

| | |
|---|---|
| P: | I (can) sit here because I'm ˆAmerican, and I can st- |
| B: | and I was talking to you cause I'm an ˆAmerican. |

By ascribing the characteristic of being *American* to himself, P performs a categorizing action, thus the PA functions much as an indefinite PN would, essentially categorizing the subject referent. This becomes clear when B responds with an indefinite PN, categorizing himself as *an American*.

Mayes and Tao (2019) argued that when conversational participants are involved in categorizing activities, they are often expressing their stances via categorizing people or objects. Here, I have argued that the categorizing function is especially useful for arguing and displaying opposition. It is clear that although categorizing is primarily performed with indefinite PNs, other copular constructions may also be used, and they all work together. Indeed, it is the flexibility of *be* clauses, with their multiple functions and possible ambiguities, that make the copula a very useful resource for arguing in this context. A copular construction might be considered to "prime" (in Du Bois' sense) different possible strategies for creating resonance across utterances and indexing opposition.

A few of the clauses with the nonverbal predicate *be* were existential clauses. They will be discussed in the next section.

### *6.2. Existential Clauses*

Although existential clauses were few in number (less than 6% of the *be* clauses), they had the important function of introducing and presenting the speaker's position on a particular point. According to Biber et al., grammatically, existential clauses have *there* as the subject, followed by *be*, and they predicate the existence of the NP that follows *be*. Typically, this NP is indefinite, but when the existential clause introduces a series, the NP is often definite, as in (27). In addition, there can be an optional adverbial, following the NP. Although they note that *be* can be present or past tense, present tense seems to be more common, and in conversation, present-tense *be* is usually contracted and singular, even if the following NP is plural (pp. 943–44). Below are some examples from the protest data:

(24) there's just ˆa few of you.
(25) there's ninety percent of people ˆworking in the city
(26) there is (.7) black white and gray to every issue
(27) there are ˆtwo problems

As the description of Biber et al. predicts, in (24)–(27), *there's* is followed by an indefinite NP. In (27), *there are* is being used to introduce a series of two, thus the definite NP. The primary discourse function of existential clauses is to present new information, and they may also be used to bring information that was introduced previously (back) into focus (Biber et al. 1999, p. 953). These are somewhat general functions related to information flow. What they appear to have in common is that they are a way of focusing the recipient's attention on the NP that follows *there is/are*. In the protest data, they functioned to bring into focus a point that the speaker presents as a fact, which they then used to launch a further argument. For example, the clause in (24), previously presented as (10), is repeated here:

(10) Occupy Oakland
B: look at you people on the street (.7) there's just ˆa few of you.
(.6)
B: you are ˆthe point one percent.

B uses the existential *there's just a few of you* to draw attention to the protestors and suggest that their numbers are sparse. Then, he uses a PN with an equational function, *you are the point one percent*, to begin his argument that the protestors are not "the 99%", as they claim to be. In (27), S follows *there are two problems* with the specification of what she considers problems: *one is that it's graffiti*. Later, she argues that the second problem is her claim that the content of the graffiti is a *communist slogan*, as discussed in example (21). Similarly, (25) and (26) were followed by clauses designed to further the speaker's argument. Many of the examples from conversation in the Biber et al. study seem to focus on introducing an NP as a topic in an uncontroversial way (e.g., *there's a bear on the chair* or *there's a girl at work*). On the other hand, in the protest arguments, the NPs that are introduced with the *there is/are* construction are the speaker's subjective opinion, framed as if it is a fact and, therefore, uncontroversial and obvious to everyone. The use of an existential clause appears to index the idea that the statement is a fact, a point that existential clauses and PNs with the equational function have in common.

## 7. Discussion

I have argued that in English conversation, LT constructions are the most frequently occurring type of clause. Therefore, LT constructions are the typical clauses. However, the linguistics literature has often focused on two-participant clauses that are high in transitivity, as if they were the typical clauses in English, disregarding frequency, function, and genre. Here, I examined the question of whether LT constructions are also the most frequent clauses in a small database of protest arguments. As in conversation, I found that LT constructions are most frequent and may be typical clauses for this genre.

I went on to explore how this linguistic resource was used to display the opposing stances that are a defining feature of the protest arguments (and of arguments, in general). In particular, I focused on the most frequent of the LT constructions, clauses with the nonverbal predicate *be*. These clauses are useful in displaying stance in general—both aligned and opposing stances—but they seem particularly well-suited for creating and demonstrating opposition because of their ambiguity and versatility. Indeed, as discussed, not only are there a few different types of nonverbal predicate clauses, including those with existential and attributional functions, but it is also true that copular clauses with PNs (or PANs) can be ambiguous in terms of the equational and categorizing functions. Participants can use the common linguistic elements in these clauses to create resonance across utterances, indexing opposition and even redirecting the course of action, as was shown in (19) and (21). For example, in (19), counter-protestor B characterized protestor P's actions as *lying*, invoking the equational function of a copular clause. In response,

another protestor (M) used a copular clause and some of the same linguistic forms to invoke the categorizing function and reframe the referent as a *statement* rather than a *lie*. In effect, this changed the course of action away from the one begun by B toward the activity of categorizing.

B's utterance, framing P's actions as lying in lines 1–5 of (19), suggests a characteristic of the protest arguments that was particularly striking: the participants made a lot of explicit statements about their beliefs and what they thought the world was (or perhaps should be) like. As mentioned in Section 6.2, existential clauses are used to convey information that is presented as if it is a fact. Similarly, copular constructions of the form *NP is/are PN* can invoke the equational function and are often used to convey general truths or facts. Thus, participants can use the existential and equational functions of nonverbal predicate clauses to mask stance statements, making the utterance seem factual rather than the speaker's opinion. On the other hand, simply adding an indefinite determiner to the PN can change the function of a construction of the form *NP is/are PN* to one of categorizing. Although categorizing utterances are also statements about what the world is like, they are also useful in contesting the categorizations presented by others, especially when those categorizations are embedded or presupposed. In addition, this function of the copular construction is very important in advancing a participant's side of an argument because it allows the speaker to redirect the course of action away from the prior speaker's action toward categorizing actions, thereby displaying opposition at the more basic level of how the world can be understood in terms of categories.

One additional reason constructions with the nonverbal predicate *be* are so useful for displaying stance is that they appear to be ready-made for generating the dialogic resonances, discussed by Du Bois (2014). Recall that he defines these as "the catalytic activation of affinities across utterances [that] link the paired utterances along multiple dimensions of linguistic form and meaning" (Du Bois 2014, p. 360). Because the clauses I have been discussing have different potential functions, yet they use the same nonverbal predicate with a syntactic template that is structurally similar across functions, they contain several linguistic resources that are useful for "priming" and creating resonance across utterances. This template could be expressed as NP-subject + *be* + NP/Adj, where the subject NP can include the so-called dummy subject *there*, and the predicate NP (i.e., PN) can be a clause.

These structural correspondences allow participants to readily deploy forms that seem similar but index different meanings. This is illustrated in examples (8), (9), (10), (14), (19), and (23), in which participants deploy the various functions—existential, attributional, equational, and categorizing—via repetition and slight shifts in linguistic resources. As an utterance unfolds, deploying a different construction can change the function, but what seems to be at least as important is that the resonance created by repetition of these forms can produce almost imperceptible shifts between stances and subtle opposition. Repeated here, (23) illustrates this point:

(23) Occupy Oakland
P: I (can) sit here because I'm ˆAmerican, and I can s-
B: and I was talking to you cause I'm an ˆAmerican.

Following Bybee and Thompson, I argued that when the adjective seems to describe a more enduring trait, a PA construction has a categorizing function, as seen here for *I'm American*. When B responds, he uses the indefinite PN form *I'm an American*, which is the form typically associated with categorizing. Across these two utterances, there is repetition and parallelism: both speakers are essentially saying the same thing and might be said to agree. However, even though they both claim to have what could be seen as the same identity, *American*, the change from a PA to a PN construction is a difference and can be understood to index differing points of view. Repetition with slight changes that index difference seems to make these differences stand out more than they might if exactly the same forms were repeated.

## 8. Conclusions

Mayes and Tao (2019) argued that categorizing activities are common when participants are involved in displaying and negotiating stances, whether those stances are aligned or opposed. To learn more about how the LT clauses that are typical of English discourse are used in stance displays, I examined how the most frequent subset of LT constructions was used to create opposing stances in a small database of protest arguments. I found that all the nonverbal predicate (*be*) clauses are used to index participants' stances, but they are used in different ways: some express the speaker's stance more explicitly than others. Indeed, *be* clauses with an attributional function were not common in these data and were mostly associated with explicit stance displays. Clauses with the nonverbal predicate *be* and an existential or equational function make statements that are framed as facts about how the world is, which is an implicit display of stance. On the other hand, when *be* clauses function to categorize (typically, an indefinite PN), they can be used to present one's own view and to contest the categories presented by others. As argued, the primary reason all these clauses are so useful for stance displays is that their structural similarities make them good resources for creating the dialogic resonances used to express participants' stances in relation to others.

Overall, the categorizing function appears to be especially useful for displaying opposing stances. Participants can use it to question or deny a prior speaker's implicit characterization of an object or person and produce their own, alternative characterizations. This effectively redirects the course of action toward categorizing so that participants can express how the world is from their perspective. This function may be particularly important in the case of arguments such as these, which occur between strangers in politically polarized situations. These participants do not share a "common ground" (Clark 1996) and must spell out everything—not only their opposing stances, but also information that may be taken for granted in other situations.

**Funding:** This research received no external funding.

**Institutional Review Board Statement:** In accordance with the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee Institutional Review Board policy at the time of data collection (2011–2013), online research involving publicly available data from sites such as YouTube did not require review. Current policy remains the same: https://uwm.edu/irb/wp-content/uploads/sites/127/2024/01/OnlineResearch_V2.pdf, accessed 5 May 2013.

**Informed Consent Statement:** Not applicable, according to IRB policy regarding publicly available data.

**Data Availability Statement:** The original YouTube URLs from which the video recordings were downloaded are listed for three of the four protest arguments. For Occupy Oakland, the original URL is no longer available. "Act 10" Labor Protest: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=at2yD2w88Zk, accessed on 16 March 2013. G20 Protest: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9NJKk_IJbUg, accessed on 16 March 2013. Healthcare: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ip8qy5l_R0o, accessed on 16 March 2013.

**Conflicts of Interest:** The author declares no conflicts of interest.

## Appendix A. Transcription Conventions

| | |
|---|---|
| [ ] | overlap |
| : | prosodic lengthening |
| ˆ | primary accent/stress |
| . | final intonation |
| , | continuing intonation |
| - | cut-off |
| = | one turn latched to another |
| (.) | short pause |
| (n.n) | timed pause |
| ( ) | uncertain hearing/best guess |

## Notes

[1] The transitivity parameters include *number of participants*, as well as a number of features pertaining to the action or event described in a clause, including *kinesis* (action/non-action), *aspect* (telic/atelic), *punctuality* (punctual/non-punctual), and *mode* (realis/irrealis). Other measures pertain to the O participant, specifically whether it is *affected* and *individuated*, and others still pertain to the A participant, specifically whether it is *volitional* and has *agency* (potency). The final parameter proposed in their 1980 study (*affirmation*) was not included in the 2001 study because it "has not been shown to correlate strongly with other measures of transitivity" (pp. 32–36).

[2] Many scholars consider *be* a nonverbal predicate (cf. Haspelmath 2024). However, Biber et al. (1999) classified it as a "primary verb", along with *have* and *do*, which can all "function as either main verbs or auxiliary verbs" (p. 358).

[3] I use the term "categorizing" to refer to this function.

[4] Dawkins et al. refer to the equational function as expressing "identity" between the subject NP and a PN, and the categorizing function is referred to as "predication".

[5] Lambrecht (2001) uses the term *identification* to refer to the equational function (p. 482).

[6] Haspelmath (2024) breaks the equational function into four subtypes, one of which is "characterizational" (p. 4).

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