Research Article

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Syntax in Social Interaction: Syntax, Conversation, Discourse-Pragmatics, Lexicon, and Mode in *if you ask me* Constructions

Abstract: The study analyzes the syntax of *if you ask me* (e.g., *she's not ready for that kind of responsibility if you ask me*) in a sample of 789 constructions from The Corpus of Contemporary American English. Special attention is paid to how the order of the protasis interacts with other domains in language use: speaker, function, lexicon, and type of communication mode. Using a predictive-modeling approach, we demonstrate that when the next turn's speaker is different from the current speaker, it is very likely that *if you ask me* will appear in preposed position in spoken and written discourse. On the other hand, when the speaker is the same, it is very likely that *if you ask me* will appear in postposed position. However, there is a significant difference between speaking and writing such that postposed position in spoken discourse is likely, but postposed position in written discourse is more likely. We also discuss prototypes of each position of *if you ask me* for which there seems to be an intriguing interaction between speaker, lexicon, and type of communication mode. We argue that these findings provide important implications for previous research on turn-taking and the semantic coherence principle.

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1 Introduction

The syntax of conditionals has been largely explored from a corpus-based and typological perspective. In particular, special attention has been paid to how the order of the protasis and apodosis interacts with other grammatical domains in language use.[1] For instance, cross-linguistically, there is a tendency in OV languages to place the protasis before the apodosis (preposed), while in VO languages both preposed and postposed protases are common (Diessel 2001, p. 442).[2] Other studies have explored how the order of protases and apodoses interacts with the position of the clause-linking device. Hetterle (2015, p. 120) shows that when the order of the protasis and the apodosis is flexible (preposed and postposed), clause-linking devices tend to appear at the beginning of the protasis. On the other hand, when the protasis occurs in preposed position, the clause-linking device tends to occur at the end of the protasis. The discourse functions of preposed and postposed protases have also received a great deal of attention in the literature. From a discourse perspective, both preposed and postposed protases serve to qualify the meaning of the associated apodosis. However, it has been shown that preposed protases do several kinds of discourse-management work that postposed protases do not, including but not limited to developing a discourse by introducing options or alternatives, establishing contrasts with information given earlier in the discourse, and repeating claims that were mentioned earlier in the discourse (Ford and Thompson 1986; Ramsay 1987; Ford 1993; Dancygier 1998; Dancygier and Sweetser 2000). The distribution of preposed and postposed protases in spoken and written discourse has also been the focus in the literature. Diessel (2005, p. 463) shows based on the analysis of English data that preposed protases are the most common pattern in both spoken and written discourse.

While the studies mentioned above have improved our understanding of the syntax of conditionals and its interaction with other domains in language use, they have only focused on single predictors in monofactorial studies or two-way interactions. The present study aims at exploring the syntax of conditionals by analyzing how the position of the protasis with respect to the apodosis relates to more

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1 We use protasis and apodosis to refer to the *if* clause and the main clause respectively.

2 The iconicity principle predicts that the linear ordering of main and subordinate clauses mirrors the sequential ordering of the situations they describe. Protases and apodoses tend to follow an iconic order (e.g., *if you study hard, you will pass the exam*). Put another way, protases tend to precede apodoses, because the protasis refers to a situation that is conceptually, or even logically, prior to the one expressed in the apodosis (Diessel 2008, p. 469). As for protases and apodoses that do not follow an iconic order (e.g., *you should go if you ask me*), Diessel (2005) mentions that this non-iconic configuration is dispreferred because the hearer may at first misinterpret the apodosis as a factual statement.

than one property of the construction's use in naturalistic data. In particular, we focus on one subtype of conditional construction, i.e., *if you ask me* constructions:

Ex. (1) MSNBC news (spoken discourse)
01 Speaker A: *I can't believe what happened yesterday. Why in God's name should Trump get a thank you? That was the epitome of narcissistic abuse **if you ask me!** The lowest point in US foreign policy I've witnessed in 52 years*.

In the example in (1), the clauses *if you ask me* and *that was the epitome of narcissistic abuse* are conditionally unrelated. Put another way, the assessment of a situation as an epitome of narcissistic abuse does not dependent on whether you asked me or not. These constructions are known in the literature as SPEECH-ACT CONDITIONALS.[3] It is well-known that speech-act conditionals differ from default conditionals in several ways (see Sweetser 1990). For instance, speech-act conditionals contrast with default conditionals (e.g., *if it rains, the lawn will get wet*) which tend to involve a causal link, condition or inference between two propositions, i.e., the content of the protasis must be interpretable as a cause of the content of the apodosis (Comrie 1986, p. 80). The causal relation is from the protasis as cause to the apodosis as effect. Accordingly, if one compares default conditionals with speech-act conditionals there is similarity in form but not so much in function.[4]

If you ask me constructions must be characterized as one specific subtype of speech-act conditional: SPEECH CONDITION-DEFINING-P CONDITIONALS. In this construction, the function of the protasis is similar to that of adverbials used as style disjuncts defining the conditions under which the speaker is speaking (e.g., *honestly, frankly, personally, seriously*; Quirk et al. 1985, p. 615). Following Sweetser (1990, pp. 118–119), *if you ask me* is similar to *if I may say so* in that it has become so idiomatic that it has no longer a conditional value; for most speakers it simply marks politeness rather than carrying its literal meaning.

The present study aims at exploring how the syntax of *if you ask me* constructions (the order of the protasis with respect to the apodosis) is correlated with other domains of language use: speaker (i.e., whether *if you ask me* is used by the same or a different speaker), function (e.g., positive or negative evaluation), lexicon (verb lemmas of the apodosis), and type of communication mode (spoken vs. written). We are doing so based on Usage-Based Construction Grammar (Usage-Based CxG), which has focused not only on internal properties of constructions (syntactic, lexical, and

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3 Speech-act conditionals have also been referred to as biscuit conditionals, a term derived from Austin's (1956) famous example: *there are biscuits on the sideboard if you want them.*
4 The interested reader is referred to Geis and Lycan (1993) and Lycan (2001) for a more detailed discussion of other features that distinguish speech-act conditionals from default conditionals (e.g., modus tollens, negation, and apodosis entailment).

semantic patterns; e.g., Stefanowitsch and Gries 2003), but also on external properties of constructions (situational, social, and intertextual factors; e.g., Günthner and Imo 2006; Fischer 2010; Enghels and Sansiñena 2021; Olguin Martinez & Gries 2024; Jensen and Gries 2025). That is to say, we see constructions as cognitive representations that not only contain lexical, semantic, and syntactic information, but also information about the social contexts in which they have been used (Bybee and Thompson 2021). Accordingly, the incorporation of external properties of constructions in the Usage-Based CxG approach aligns with its inherent non-modularity (or holism) (Goldberg 2013; Diessel 2019).

In what follows, we outline four expectations to determine which of the following predictors are correlated with, and predictive for, the syntax of *if you ask me* constructions: speaker, function, lexicon, and type of communication mode. Because the existing literature on *if you ask me* is rather scarce and because *if you ask me* constitutes a subtype of speech-act conditional, we motivate our expectations by drawing on previous research on speech-act conditionals.

From a syntactic perspective, protases of speech-act conditionals are attested in preposed position in interactional settings (Ford and Thompson 1986). In this scenario, they have the discourse-organizational function of allowing a speaker to present an opinion of a situation (Ramsay 1987). The strategy of presenting an opinion through a preposed speech-act conditional clause has the interactional significance of displaying an interpretation of prior discourse (Ford 1993, p. 43) and that of attention-getting at the start of turns at interaction (De Stefani 2021). We expect that preposed *if you ask me*, as other types of speech condition-defining-p conditional clauses, will also serve as an attention-getter at the start of turns at interaction, as in (2). A similar interaction between the position of a construction and its interactional function has been attested in the literature for other linguistic phenomena. For instance, Van Olmen and Tantucci (2022) note that, cross-linguistically, *look* tends to be used at the beginning of constructions and at the start of turns at interaction. These facts can be attributed to "*look*'s feature across languages of attention-getting in a broad sense, which is pragmatically geared toward pre-emptive interaction (Tantucci and Di Cristofaro 2021) and toward preparing the addressee for an ensuing statement" (Van Olmen and Tantucci 2022, p. 176).

Ex. (2) Star Wars rebels -Visions and voices (spoken discourse)

01 Speaker A:	*He said my name. He was right behind me. I mean, he was right there.*
02 Speaker B:	*Kid, I was standing next to you. There was nobody else there. Maybe it was some kind of, uh, Force vision.*
03 Speaker A:	*Mmm, maybe.*
04 Speaker B:	*Ah,* **if you ask me,** *I think he's just been working too hard.*

On the other hand, it has been shown that postposed speech-act conditional clauses in interactional settings do not form pivotal points in the organization of a conversation and tend to occur in cases where a speaker prolongs his turn (Declerck and Reed 2001, p. 356). In particular, this seems to be common in cases where the flow of information is being managed by a speaker through declarative main clauses and the conditional clause itself has only a peripheral role (Wash 2001, p. 454). In this scenario, postposed speech-act conditional clauses just indicate the speaker's emotional involvement with what is being said (see Van Olmen and Tantucci 2022, p. 151 for a similar observation with respect to other constructions). We expect that postposed *if you ask me*, as other types of speech condition-defining-p conditionals, will also serve as a device that helps a speaker prolongs his turn, as in (3). In the present study, we include this variable in our analysis to empirically check whether these previous observations are borne out and we use *speaker* as a cover term to refer to participants involved in both spoken and written discourse.

Ex. (3) NOS4A2-The gas mask man (spoken discourse)
01 Speaker A: *Yeah. Okay. All right. Wow, Ma. The yard looks really… looks really nice.*
02 Speaker B: *Cost me everything I made this week from the Gorsey house and Mrs. Supkin's, but it was money well spent **if you ask me**. Even the mailman said so.*
03 Speaker A: *That's great. Um, Ma, uh… Last night, I behaved like a stupid ass. I'm sorry.*
04 Speaker B: *It's fine. It's all right.*

As for their function, speech condition-defining-p conditionals can be characterized as a strategy that marks their attempt to share their evaluative interpretation (Sweetser 1990, p. 118). In its widest understanding, evaluative interpretation refers to the ranges of ways in which language users indicate their attitude with respect to a given situation. Evaluative interpretation may be expressed along various parameters including: "obligation/desirability, appreciation and judgment, emotive impact, relevance/importance, reliability, expectedness, comprehensibility, etc." (Pounds 2015, p. 1). Evaluative interpretation reflects the stance of a speaker. Speakers take stance when interacting with other people. They make assessments and they position themselves in relation to other interlocutors to mark their standpoint (Du Bois 2007). *If you ask me* constructions serve different functions, and we can distinguish the following types of evaluation: positive assessment and negative assessment, which can be used to get the addressee to do something (advice), as in the following examples:

Ex. (4) The Goldbergs -Barry Goldberg's day off (spoken discourse)

01 Speaker A:	*And I didn't want people to make fun of me. But I guess that's what I do. Instead of taking risks, I just keep my head down. Maybe that's why Barry bothers me so much. He's not afraid to look like an idiot.*
02 Speaker B:	*Well, **if you ask me**, you ought to spend more time worrying about yourself and less time worrying about your brother. Spend more time worrying about yourself will be good for you.*

Ex. (5) Billboard dad (spoken discourse)

01 Speaker A:	*Filthy rich Selling Max Tyler's knockoffs Knockoffs, knockoffs! - Nigel? - I did the mix. - Tell him how you've been forging. - And selling fakes to these people. That's ridiculous! I've been doing no such thing! Nigel? is this true?*
02 Speaker B:	***If you ask me**, you should send the two brats to boarding school. They deserve to suffer.*

However, they can also be used to express an assessment without getting an addressee to do something, as in the following examples:

Ex. (6) Face of hate: Curtis Allgier explained | Hatewatch | Southern (written discourse)

01 Speaker A:	*I seen this man interviewed on lockup, awesome show i might add, and he was not a hostile person, most people that kill in prison are not bad people **if you ask me**.*

Ex. (7) What do the people want? | The baseline scenario (written discourse)

01 Speaker A:	*Since that time the total cost of health care in the US has gone from 900 billion to nearly 2.5 trillion. That is epic fail of the part of the market **if you ask me**. Right now the market is causing disincentives for cost effective health care.*

We expect that preposed *if you ask me* involving positive and negative assessments will be used to get the addressee to do something (advice). Preposed *if you ask me* serves as an attention-getter that establishes joint attention (in the sense of Diessel 2006) and prepares the addressee for the suggested situation that should be performed. On the other hand, we expect that postposed *if you ask me* indicating positive and negative assessments will not be used to get the addressee to do something. Postposed *if you ask me* just serves as conversational device ensuring that the situation described by the apodosis is a personal opinion or judgment that does not require the addressee to do something.

From a lexical perspective, we expect that apodoses of *if you ask me* constructions will appear with verb lemmas that harmonize with its evaluative function (characterized as a positive or negative assessment). As for those constructions involving positive and negative assessments and in which someone directly gets the addressee to do something (advice), we expect that *if you ask me* will appear in preposed position (as mentioned before) and apodoses will appear with verbs denoting non-dictatorial functions (e.g., *should, ought to, recommend, suggest*; Leech et al. 2009, p. 116) given that advisers tend to opt for deontically weaker

formats out in advice-giving interactions (Põldvere et al. 2022, p. 22). With respect to those constructions involving positive and negative assessments without getting the addressee to do something, we expect that *if you ask me* will appear in post-posed position (as mentioned before) and apodoses will appear with verbs that convey epistemic judgment (e.g., *sound*, *look*, and *seem*) or propositional attitude (e.g., *think*, *believe*, *guess*) given that they profile the attitude or reaction of an interlocutor regarding a discourse-pragmatic situation.

As for type of communication mode, it is well-known that there are key structural and functional differences between spoken and written discourse in that grammar may develop differently under the pressures of face-to face communication versus planned, written production (Chafe and Tanne 1987; Mithun 2012). It has been shown that protases of speech condition-defining-p conditionals are not only attested in preposed position, but also in postposed position in spoken and written discourse (Diessel 2005, p. 463). Accordingly, we expect that *if you ask me* will appear in preposed and postposed position in both spoken and written discourse. Table 1 provides a summary of the expectations sketched before.

The remainder of this paper is structured as follows. We first discuss our corpus data and the variables for which *if you ask me* constructions have been annotated and then present the methods applied (Section 2). In Section 3, we present the results of our analysis and then round up this paper with a discussion of predicted probabilities of position (Section 4) and a discussion of prototypes of position (Section 5). In Section 6, we provide the implications of the paper. Section 7 offers concluding remarks and points to issues that remain to be investigated by future studies.

Table 1: Expectations of the present study.

Interaction	Expectation 1	Expectation 2
Syntax-speaker	Preposed *if you ask me* will appear with a different speaker	Postposed *if you ask me* will appear with the same speaker
Syntax-function	Preposed *if you ask me* involving positive and negative assessments will be used to get the addressee to do something (advice)	Postposed *if you ask me* indicating positive and negative assessments will not be used to get the addressee to do something
Syntax-lexicon	Preposed *if you ask me* will occur with non-dictatorial verbs	Postposed *if you ask me* will occur with epistemic judgment verbs and propositional attitude verbs
Syntax-mode	*if you ask me* will appear in preposed and postposed position in spoken discourse	*if you ask me* will appear in preposed and postposed position in written discourse

2 Methods

2.1 Data, Retrieval, and Annotation

We retrieved an exhaustive sample of *if you ask me* constructions from the Corpus of Contemporary American English (COCA). The data used here consist of examples of written discourse (e.g., newspapers) and spoken discourse (e.g., material from TV and movies subtitles). One comment on the spoken data used in the present research is in order here. As has been noted in the literature, Usage-Based CxG research has employed various types of spoken data to address different research questions, i.e., recordings of linguistic production in naturally occurring (often) noisy settings (Gries 2013). However, spoken data can include a variety of different registers, from informal dialogue between familiar speakers to written-to-be-spoken formal speeches of the kind that might be given in Congress. COCA's spoken data are derived from television and movie subtitles. While that language is obviously written-to-be-spoken, it is also written to approximate natural spoken language as much as possible (so that viewers of, say, sitcoms, do not feel alienated by stilted, unnatural-sounding speech). It is, thus, a defensible proxy to the informal dialogue a corpus linguist would ideally have access to.[5] While material derived from television and movie subtitles is obviously not perfect, we follow the practice of hundreds of studies based on COCA which is also one of the few corpora providing a sufficiently large number of *if you ask me* constructions to carry out any kind of quantitative analysis.[6]

The procedure for data retrieval was the following. An exhaustive concordance of *if you ask me* constructions was performed by searching COCA for the form *if you ask me*. This generated a large sample of constructions occurring with the phrase *if you ask me*. The resulting list of candidate constructions was then manually checked to exclude false hits such as those in examples (8) to (10):

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5 In that regard, the reliance on TV/movies as an approximation to normal speech is similar to the extremely widespread reliance on newspaper/news website or journalese as a reasonably good approximation to language in general because there, too, the written language produced by journalists must seem natural enough to readers of news articles etc. to not be unnatural and off-putting.

6 An anonymous reviewer recommended using the Spoken BNC2014 (Love et al. 2017), a publicly accessible corpus of present-day British English containing spontaneously produced speech in natural contexts. However, it was only possible to identify 22 instances of *if you ask me* constructions.

Ex. (8) Are we born to be religious? Scientific American (written discourse)
01 Speaker A: ***If you ask me*** *whether I believe that you can get something from nothing by nothing doing nothing to nothing, or by quantum fluctuations of nothing occurring in a realm of non-existence… I'm not entirely sure I believe that, either*.

Ex. (9) Men of a certain age (written discourse)
01 Speaker A: *Well, I don't sell cars, but **if you ask me** to find a wheel, I'm gonna go with something round*.

Ex. (10) The pursuit of happiness (spoken discourse)
01 Speaker A: *Can I say something? I'm the type of person **if you ask me** a question, and I don't know the answer I'm gonna tell you that I don't know. But I bet you what. I know how to find the answer, and I will find the answer. Is that fair enough?*

Such examples were disregarded from the present study because *if you ask me* does not function as a style disjunct (e.g., *honestly, frankly, personally, seriously*) in them. Instead, *if you ask me* carries its literal meaning.

The final sample of 789 attestations thus yielded then was coded for the relevant variables of our analysis:

- POSITION: the response variable encoding whether *if you ask me* appears in preposed or postposed position of the complex sentence construction;
- SPEAKER: whether *if you ask me* is produced by the same speaker to prolong his turn in a conversation (turn-holding) or whether *if you ask me* is produced by a different speaker to take her turn in a conversation (turn-taking);
- FUNCTION: whether the *if you ask me* construction indicates a positive or negative assessment and whether it involves giving advice or not;
- VLEMMAAPOD: the verb lemma that appears in the apodosis of the *if you ask me* construction;
- MODE: whether the *if you ask me* construction was found in spoken or written discourse.

These variables were manually annotated by inspecting each of the 789 *if you ask me* constructions. Table 2 exemplifies this sample with a very small excerpt of these data and in what follows we describe the variable levels sketched before and their annotation in more detail.

2.1.1 Syntax: Position of the Protasis

It is a well-known fact that protases of conditional constructions may appear in preposed or postposed position (Ford and Thompson 1986). As was discussed in Section 1, preposed and postposed protases serve different functions in interactional settings. Identifying the position of *if you ask me* with respect to its

Table 2: Excerpt of how *if you ask me* data was organized in the present study.

Source	Example	SPEAKER	POSITION	FUNCTION	VERB	MODE
Veterans & People All Over the Country Reporting Psychiatric	Nothing good can come of this. Why would you even TRY to use a kid in this manner, drawing or otherwise? It is somewhat sick if you ask me! I just hope no real children get hit as a result of people getting used to seeing and running over these things!	Same	Postposed	Negative (not getting the addressee to do something)	*be*	Written
3 things Colin Kaepernick does better than Alex Smith	3 year 24 million is a good deal for everyone. Gives the 49ers room cap wise and puts a fire under Smith to play well every year. Was brilliant by management if you ask me. In fact, imagine what kind of production you would get from every player if they played under one year contracts?	Same	Postposed	Positive (not getting the addressee to do something)	*be*	Written
Homeland-Clarity	#It always seems like Aunt Carrie is going somewhere, and my mom couldn't depend on her. Do you know what kept her out of the house so much? #I think she's trying to save our democracy, which is a pretty good thing, if you ask me. Josie, have you noticed any changes in Franny recently? Some, yeah. Can you give the court an example? She's gotten really quiet. I've noticed that. Anything else? At night, she crawls into bed with me.	Different	Postposed	Positive (not getting the addressee to do something)	*be*	Spoken

Table 2: (continued).

Source	Example	SPEAKER	POSITION	FUNCTION	VERB	MODE
Scandal- The Belt	I wonder what the Eighth Amendment would have to say about this. #If you ask me, I think it's a clear violation… Tom. T… Tom! Tom! Hey! Quiet. I need to talk to that man. You're not talking to anyone. Please, I'm begging you. I'm not gon na hurt him. I just… I… He… He… He's the reason I'm in here, him and his lies. If I can just…	Different	Preposed	Negative (not getting the addressee to do something)	*think*	Spoken

apodosis was rather straightforward. However, there were a number of cases where *if you ask me* was not preceded or followed by an apodosis as in (11):

Ex. (11) Homeland-Clarity (spoken discourse)
01 Speaker A: *It always seems like Aunt Carrie is going somewhere, and my mom couldn't depend on her. Do you know what kept her out of the house so much?*
02 Speaker B: *I think she's trying to save our democracy, which is a pretty good thing.*
03 Speaker A: *Well, **if you ask me**.*
04 Speaker B: *Have you noticed any changes in Franny recently?*

Such examples were discarded from the analysis. At first glance, such examples can be characterized as insubordinate clauses, defined as the "recruitment of main clause structures from subordinate structures, or synchronically as the independent use of constructions exhibiting prima facie characteristics of subordinate clauses (like English *If you could fill this out please!* or *That he could say such a thing*!)" (Evans and Watanabe 2016, p. 2).

2.1.2 Speaker

It has been shown that turn-taking is one of the most basic cornerstones of social communication (Dingemanse and Liesenfeld 2022). The turn-taking system "organizes speakers so as to minimize overlap and is highly flexible with regard to the number of speakers or the length of turns" (Levinson 2015, p. 6). Turn-taking has been characterized as a mutual understanding process in which interlocutors explicitly share positive and negative evidence of understanding to build common ground (Dingemanse and Liesenfeld 2022). Mutual understanding is argued to require several components: the entrainment of mental representations, the updating of mutual understanding with new information, and the continuous checks and repairs of the shared understanding (Dingemanse and Liesenfeld 2022).

As was mentioned in Section 1, *if you ask me* can serve as a device for a participant to prolong his turn in a conversation (turn-holding) or it can serve as a device for a participant to take her turn in a conversation (turn-taking) (Declerck and Reed 2001, p. 356). Determining these conversational functions of *if you ask* me constructions was an easy task for most examples retrieved from written discourse in that they are usually organized into speaker-addressee formats, as in (12).[7] Accordingly,

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7 It is worth noting that most examples from written discourse are cases of writing-that-represents-speaking.

this enabled us to have access to the sequential organization of the interaction.

Ex. (12) The most evil men in history (written discourse)
01 Layla Phelps: *This is nuts. How is it Stalin and Hitler after what catastrophy they caused be*
                        *hailed as 'heroes'? They were wack jobs **if you ask me**. Sorry but American*
                        tragedies are not even near this craziness.
02 Robert: *I agree with this.*

However, for a number of constructions retrieved from spoken discourse (52 examples), identifying whether examples were produced by the same or different speaker was one of the most arduous parts of the data analysis given that these examples were not organized into speaker-addressee formats, as in (13).

Ex. (13) Designated survivor/who cares? (spoken discourse)
01   *Maybe I'll be able to persuade you. Are you threatening me? Oh, I wouldn't say that.*
                        *No, **if you ask me**, I'd say I'm managing my pain.*

In these cases, we had to watch the original source (e.g., Netflix series) to identify turn-taking and turn-holding instances, i.e., the sequential organization of the interaction. By following this procedure, we were able to organize examples as in (13) in the following way:

Ex. (14) Designated survivor/who cares? (spoken discourse)
01 Speaker A: *Maybe I'll be able to persuade you.*
02 Speaker B: *Are you threatening me?*
03 Speaker A: *Oh, I wouldn't say that. No, **if you ask me**, I'd say I'm managing my pain.*

2.1.3 Function

As we discussed in Section 1, we adopted a 4-level classification of *if you ask me* constructions based on their functions. First, *if you ask me* constructions can be used for expressing positive assessments (15) or negative assessments (16) by which they get the addressee to do something (advice).

Ex. (15) Beyblade-Drum arc (spoken discourse)
01 Speaker A: *I started training every day. I've felt very good so far.*
02 Speaker B: ***If you ask me**, you should continue doing it.*

Ex. (16) Beyblade- Victory Valtryek's miraculous awakening! (spoken discourse)
01 Speaker A: ***If you ask me**, you should stop drinking that.*
02 Speaker B: *No way!*

Second, *if you ask me* constructions can be used for expressing positive assessments (17) or negative assessments (18) without getting the addressee to do something.

Ex. (17) 90210 -We're not in Kansas anymore (spoken discourse)
01 Speaker A: *I can't believe this. I came all the way from Kansas and he wouldn't even look at me.*
                    And, what, he's some kind of celebrity rap artist or something?
02 Speaker B: *Well, **if you ask me**, dating Adrianna Tate-Duncan really put him on the map*.
03 Speaker A: *So, wait, Adrianna's famous, too?*

Ex. (18) Elementary -Be my guest (spoken discourse)
01 Speaker A: *Caving a security guard's skull in for a baseball card is grotesque, **if you ask me***.
02 Speaker B: *Listen to me. I didn't have anything to do with this*.
03 Speaker A: *Please, Mr. Charles, if you keep swearing you're innocent, it's only gonna be worse for*
                    you when we find the stolen merchandise in your car, in your house or wherever.

Identifying positive and negative evaluative functions was quite labor-intensive because it is not sufficient to analyze biclausal constructions as in (19) without taking into account their conversational context.

(19) **If you ask me**, *Tyson did it*.

Without the conversational context of (19), it is not clear whether this construction should be characterized as involving a positive or a negative assessment. However, by looking at preceding and/or subsequent stretches of discourse of the biclausal constructions, it was possible to determine that the example in (19) involves a negative assessment, as can be seen in (20). This means that positive and negative evaluations reside at the discourse level (as opposed to being part of the construction's semantics). However, as is well-known in the Usage-Based CxG literature, over time certain discourse functions could end up being entrenched as part of the core semantics of *if you ask me* constructions (see Divjak 2019).

Ex. (20) Beyblade-Battle in the sky (spoken discourse)
01 Speaker A: *I can't believe someone did this to her*.
02 Speaker B: ***If you ask me, Tyson did it***. I think it was a bad decision.

2.1.4 Verb Lemmas of Apodosis

We annotated each construction with regard to the verb lemma occurring in the apodosis of *if you ask me* constructions, but there also were examples of apodoses that did not occur with any verb lemma, as the following:

Ex. (21) From Mrs. to Mama: Do you have a plan? (written discourse)
01 Speaker A: Also there are some huge incentives in the form of a giveaway going on for participating. Prizes include an ipad, amazon gift card, and more! ***Pretty big if you ask me***.

For examples showing this pattern, we were not able to identify the missing verb lemma. Accordingly, these patterns have not been considered in the present study.

2.1.5 Type of Communication Mode

Identifying the communication mode of each example (i.e., whether a given example is attested in spoken or written discourse) was rather straightforward. This stems from the fact that COCA provides information about the communication mode of examples.

In the following section, we outline the statistical approach we used to analyze the data in more detail.

2.2 Statistical Analysis

In order to determine which of the predictors discussed above are correlated with, and predictive for, the variable POSITION (*preposed* vs. *postposed*) of *if you ask me* relative to the apodosis, we opted for a predictive modeling approach that has by now become fairly widespread in corpus linguistics and maybe especially so in cognitive/usage-based approaches, generalized linear mixed-effects modeling (see Gries 2021a, 2021b for detailed discussion and exemplification). In our regression model,

– the variable POSITION will be the binary response variable;
– the variables MODE (*spoken* vs. *written*), SPEAKER (*different* vs. *same*) and FUNCTION (*eval_neg* vs. *eval_pos* vs. *eval_neg_with_advice* and *eval_pos_with_advice*) will be fixed-effects predictors and we will include all three pairwise interactions between them in the initial model as well;
– the variables VLEMMAAPOD (*be* vs. *think* vs. *should* vs. …) and SOURCE (the original corpus source) will be considered for random-effects variation.

Since regression modeling of this kind makes some assumptions regarding the distribution of the data, we began our statistical analysis with a thorough exploration of the distributions of predictors and the random effects on their own and with the response variable POSITION. Most cross-tabulations of the fixed-effects predictors with the response were unproblematic, but the four levels of the predictor FUNCTION were so unevenly distributed that they led to a combination of data sparsity and nearly complete separation with the two levels involving the presence of advice; for that reason, *eval_neg_with_advice* and *eval_pos_with_advice* were conflated into one level called just *advice*, resulting in FUNCTION now being a three-level predictor. Also, the distribution of the random effects indicated that

– there were hardly any repeated measurements for the variable SOURCE, meaning all but seven sources contributed only one data point and no source contributed more than two data points, which is why SOURCE was not included as a random effect;
– there were multiple repeated measurements for the variable VLEMMAAPOD, meaning it had to be included as a random effect, but >75 % of the verb lemma types were attested 3 or fewer times, meaning the only feasible way to include VLEMMAAPOD as a random effect was via varying intercept adjustments – random slopes cannot be reliably estimated with so few data points for the vast majority of verb lemmas.

The response variable POSITION was nearly uniformly distributed, which means that the no-information rate of always predicting the more frequent level of POSITION (*postposed*) would only result in an accuracy of 50.44 %; the null deviance of POSITION was 1093.724.

We then used R 4.5.1 patched (R Core Team 2025) to do a backwards model selection process using `lme4:glmer` (see Bates et al. 2015) and *p*-values based on `base:drop1`-based likelihood ratio tests). As per the above, our initial model `m_01` had the following structure:

```
m_01 <- glmer(POSITION ~ 1 +      # POSIION as a function of
  (MODE + SPEAKER + FUNCTION) ^ 2 + # fixed effects: predictors
  (1 | VLEMMAAPOD)                  # random effects: intercepts
                                    per verb
```

It returned model results but (i) these came with a convergence warning and (ii) `drop1` indicated that the interaction SPEAKER:FUNCTION was ns (*p*>0.29). Deleting this interaction led to model `m_02`, which came with no convergence warning anymore but still indicated that the interaction MODE:FUNCTION was ns (*p*>0.062).

Deleting this interaction led to model `m_03`, which also converged unproblematically but still indicated that the predictor FUNCTION was ns ($p>0.69$). Deleting this predictor led to a final model `m_final`, which converged unproblematically as well and which indicated that the fixed effect(s) to be discussed was only the interaction MODE:SPEAKER ($p<0.00034$).

3 Results

What are the results of `m_final`? The model's coefficient summary is shown in Table 3.

However, to appreciate its results better, we minimally need two kinds of results: (i) an assessment of its discriminatory (and, ideally, predictive) power and (ii) an overview of the predictions that the model makes for all combinations of variable levels of MODE:SPEAKER. Let us begin with those aspects of the results before we also dig a little deeper.

One way of quantifying model power/performance is via R-squared values. In the case of generalized linear mixed-effects models, two R-squared values are often reported: $R^2_{marginal}$ and $R^2_{conditional}$, which both range from 0 (bad model) to 1 (perfect model) and which indicate the discriminatory power of the fixed effects only and the discriminatory power of all effects respectively. In our case (and using the methods implemented in Bartoń 2025), the result is quite promising, because $R^2_{marginal}$ is already quite good (even though our fixed effects comprise only one interaction of two binary predictors) with a value of 0.467 and because $R^2_{conditional}$ is not that much higher with a value of 0.64. This means that the fixed effects do most of the predictive heavy lifting. It is not the case that all the model does is express verb-specific preferences. A related way of quantifying this would be McFadden's R-squared, i.e., how much the final model's deviance (464.856) is reduced by all model component relative to the null deviance, and this value comes out as a very good 0.575.

Table 3: The coefficients of `m_final`.

	b	*se*	*z*	$p_{\text{2-tailed}}$
Intercept (MODE: *spoken* & SPEAKER: *different*)	2.2352	0.331	7.186	$<10^{-12}$
MODE$_{spoken\rightarrow written}$	0.4289	0.3999	1.072	0.2835
SPEAKER$_{different\rightarrow same}$	−3.034	0.3134	−9.682	$<10^{-15}$
MODE$_{spoken\rightarrow written}$: SPEAKER$_{different\rightarrow same}$	−1.8164	0.5238	−3.467	≈0.0005
Standard deviation of VLEMMAAPOD (82 groups)	1.256			

Table 4: The confusion matrix resulting from `m_final`.

|	**Pred.: POS: *postposed***	**Pred.: POS: *preposed***	**Sum**
Obs.: POS: *postposed*	**351**	47	398
Obs.: POS: *preposed*	42	**349**	391
Sum	393	396	789

The bold values are the correct predictions of the model.

The other main way of quantifying model power/performance is via its predictions. To that end, we computed from the model the predicted probability of POSITION: *preposed* for each case and converted this into a categorical prediction: *preposed* if this predicted probability was $\geq$0.5, *postposed* if this predicted probability was <0.5. This allowed us to compute the final model's C-score, a score between 0.5 and 1 that indicates how well the predicted probabilities map onto the observed choices. Typically, one wishes to see values >0.7 or even 0.8, but in our case we scored an excellent score of C=0.943. In addition, we can compare the predicted positional choices to the ones observed in the data in a so-called confusion matrix as in Table 4, which then permits the computation of several metrics of predictive accuracy.

Table 4 shows that the model achieved an accuracy of 351+439=700/789, which corresponds to 88.72 % and which, according to a one-tailed exact binomial test, is significantly better than the baseline of 50.44 % (p<10^{-115}). More importantly, this corresponds to nicely high values of Cohen's κ of 0.744, all of which indicate that the model's predictive accuracy is very good (especially for only one two-way interaction).

The way to interpret such models is by interpreting the predictions they make. In this case, we have a two-way interaction of two binary predictors, i.e., four different predicted probabilities of POSITION: *preposed*, which can therefore be visualized from two different perspectives: what MODE (*spoken* vs. *written*) does for each level of SPEAKER and what SPEAKER (*different* vs. *same*) does for each level of MODE. We generated effects displays (see Fox 2003; Fox and Weisberg 2019) and Figure 1 represents both of these perspectives – one in each panel – together with 95 % confidence intervals of the predictions and point sizes representing the (logged) frequency of combinations in our data.

The left panel indicates clearly that:

– when the speaker is different, POSITION: *preposed* is very likely regardless of the mode (there is no significant difference between speaking and writing);
– when the speaker is the same, there is a significant difference between speaking and writing such that
    – in speaking, POSITION: *postposed* is likely;
    – in writing, POSITION: *postposed* is significantly more likely.
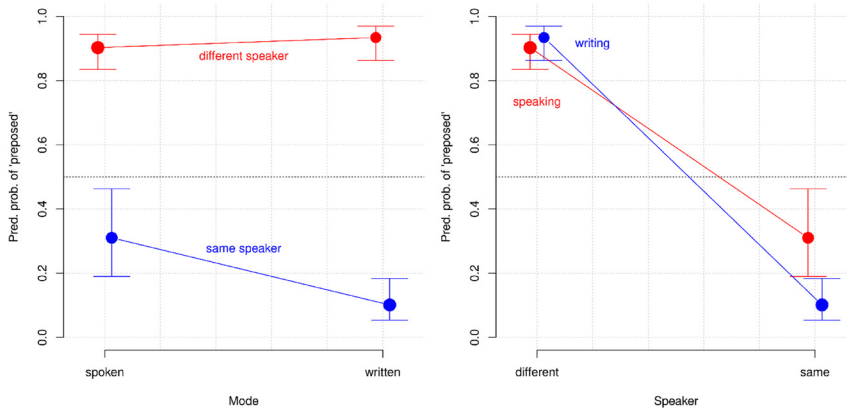
Figure 1: Predicted probabilities of POSITION: *preposed* for MODE:SPEAKER.

On the other hand, the right panel highlights more clearly that:

– speakers being different always makes POSITION: *preposed* much more likely than speakers being the same, but …

– that difference is significantly stronger in writing than in speaking.

Crucially, while FUNCTION played no significant role, the varying intercept adjustments indicate that different verb lemmas have different preferences:

– the six verbs with the strongest preference for POSITION: *postposed* (all intercept adjustments are <-1) are *feel* (strongest), *look*, *sound*, *seem*, *compensate*, and *deserve*;

– the five verbs with the strongest preference for POSITION: *preposed* (all intercept adjustments are >1) are *say* (strongest), *like*, *need*, *side*, and *blame.*

More interesting is, on the other hand, to look at what might be considered the prototypes of POSITION: *preposed* and POSITION: *postposed*. Generally speaking, we consider a prototype to be an abstract combination of features that have a high, or the highest, salience for a category, where salience may in turn be defined via cue validity: the cue validity of a feature f for a category c is very high if most or all members of c have f and nearly none or no members of c do not have f. With the kinds of data we have, we can follow the general logic of Bernaisch et al. (2014) and operationalize PROTOTYPES as the theoretically combinations of variables with the highest predicted probabilities for each construction. We generated all possible combinations of all variables in our final model and see that:

– the prototypes of POSITION: *postposed* are in writing, with SPEAKER: *same*, and the lemmas *feel*, *look*, *sound*, *seem*, *compensate*, *deserve*, *become*, and *get* (all predicted probabilities of *postposed* (!) are greater than 95 %);

–   the prototypes of POSITION: *preposed* are mostly in writing as well, with SPEAKER: *different*, and the verb lemmas *say*, *like*, *need*, *blame*, *side*, *think*, *screw*, *hear*, and *guess* (all predicted probabilities of *preposed* are greater than 96.87 %).

4 Predicted Probabilities of POSITION

In this section, we discuss the predicted probabilities of POSITION presented in Section 3. Let us first consider predictions of those cases in which *if you ask me* is produced by a different speaker to take her turn in a conversation.

As we discussed in Section 3, when the speaker is different, it is very likely that *if you ask me* will appear in preposed position in spoken (22) and written discourse (23) (there is no significant difference between speaking and writing). This stems from the fact that most examples from written discourse are cases of writing-that-represents-speaking. These results align with our predictions formulated in Section 1 in which we expected that *if you ask me* will appear in preposed position at the start of turns at interaction (different speaker) and in both spoken and written discourse. *If you ask me* in preposed position and involving a different speaker serves as an attention-getter and orients someone else to a common focus of attention (De Stefani 2021).

Ex. (22) First day (spoken discourse)

01 Speaker A:	*Yes, I'm afraid it's true. I purchased it through the post and it just isn't as comfortable as it looks. This is terrible.*
02 Speaker B:	*Maybe we're just not sitting it right.*
03 Speaker A:	*Come on, baby. Come on, baby. Come on, come on, baby! It's just not comfortable.*
04 Speaker B:	**If you ask me**, *you should throw it away.*
05 Speaker A:	*Oh, well, yes, that's what I'm on my way to do.*

Ex. (23) Could Nebraska start a B1G Hockey Team? -Corn Nation (written discourse)

| 01 Speaker A: | *I'm still desperately hoping that at the last minute we'll get a repeat of that scenario where the director and all their prepwork gets pushed aside and they reboot the franchise from square 1 with a whole new crew.* |
| 02 Speaker B: | **If you ask me**, *it's the best case scenario right now.* |

The discussion now turns to predictions of those cases in which *if you ask me* is produced by the same speaker to prolong his turn in a conversation.

As was shown in Section 3, when the speaker is the same, it is very likely that *if you ask me* will appear in postposed position. This aligns with our

predictions sketched in Section 1 in which we expected that *if you ask me* will appear postposed to the apodosis when a speaker prolongs his turn in a conversation. Preposed *if you ask me* in this scenario would disrupt the flow of the story line of the speaker given that the flow of information is usually managed by a speaker through declarative main clauses. Note that, as was discussed in Section 3, there is a significant difference between speaking and writing such that final position in spoken discourse is likely (24), but final position in written discourse is more likely (25). This does not align with our initial predictions in that we expected that postposed *if you ask me* will be equally frequent in spoken and written discourse. As to why postposed position is more likely in written discourse than in spoken discourse, this is puzzling given that, as was mentioned above, most examples from written discourse are cases of writing-that-represents-speaking. Accordingly, such results are not expected. This remains to be investigated by future research.

Ex. (24) The Resident-Haunted (spoken discourse)

| 01 Speaker A: | *You know where it ends up. In the pocket of our CEO. Claire Thorpe makes $3 million a year.* |
| 02 Speaker B: | *Yeah. She's not even a doctor. Seems like she's a complete incompetent **if you ask me**. I mean, all that nonsense about transparency. Exposes us to lawsuits, forces us to practice defensive medicine.* |

Ex. (25) Travel: The edge of the world - INSPIRER.nu Magazine-INSPIRER (written discourse)

| 01 Speaker A: | *Also deaths are well covered by the media, which made it even more tempting for people to come and jump off.* |
| 02 Speaker B: | *Have no fear though, if you go there you will not be a suicide witness, since 1979, the death rate has gone down, 124 deaths then &; only 20 now, that's progress **if you ask me**.* |

5 Prototypes of POSITION

We now turn our attention to the prototype results presented in Section 3. This analysis is important because, as we show here, positions of *if you ask me* clauses interact not only with mode and speaker, but also with verb lemmas occurring in the apodosis of this complex sentence construction. Accordingly, the inclusion of another analytical layer of analysis (i.e., verb lemmas) is in line with the main goal of the paper which is to provide a more comprehensive understanding of the syntax of conditional constructions.

Let us first discuss prototypes of preposed *if you ask me* clauses. As was shown in Section 3, the protype of this pattern involves: written discourse, different speaker, and the verb lemmas *say*, *like*, *need*, *blame*, *side*, *think*, *screw*, and *hear*. While it is clear the motivation behind the co-occurrence of preposed, written discourse, and different speaker in this configuration (see Section 4), the functional

motivation behind the occurrence of verb lemmas in this configuration is not clear at first glance. From a Usage-Based CxG perspective, it is well-known that there are associative connections between individual lexemes and specific slots of constructions (Goldberg 1995, p. 50; Stefanowitsch and Gries 2003; Gries and Stefanowitsch 2004). The co-occurrence patterning of lexemes and constructions is functionally motivated, which gives rise to a joint distribution of lexemes in constructions that are known in the literature as FILLER-SLOT RELATIONS (see Goldberg 1995; Diessel 2019). Accordingly, a more detailed discussion regarding the use verb lemmas in the apodoses of preposed *if you ask me* clauses follows here.

As was predicted in Section 1, we expected that preposed *if you ask me* will appear with apodoses realized with verbs denoting non-dictatorial functions (e.g., *should*, *ought to*, *recommend*, *suggest*; Leech 2009, p. 116). This stems from the fact that we predicted that preposed *if you ask me* will be used to get the addressee to do something (advice) and in this scenario, speakers tend to opt for deontically weaker formats in advice-giving interactions (Põldvere 2022, p. 22). Preposed *if you ask* serves as an attention-getter that establishes joint attention that prepares the addressee for the suggested situation that should be performed. However, the only verb lemma that aligns with this prediction is *need*, as can be seen in the example in (26) (See Section 3). This indicates that our prediction regarding preposed *if you ask me* and non-dictatorial verb lemmas is not strong.

Ex. (26) Why we need to compare flight rates? (written discourse)
01 Speaker A: *What should I do in this case?*
02 Speaker B: *If you ask me, you **need** to call them as soon as possible and provide travel dates,*
                  departure and arrival cities, and passenger details.

Instead, a closer look at the data has revealed that there is a significant attraction of agreement verbs and accountability verbs which function in the expression of positive or negative assessments (not getting the addressee to do something). For instance, the apodoses of the examples in (27–28) occur with the agreement verbs: *like* (27) and *side* (28) and are used for indicating agreement and a positive assessment of a given situation. By agreement is meant a concurring stance to a preceding action or position taken by another speaker, indicating that an addressee shares the speaker's attitude about that action or position (Pomerantz 1984; Sacks 1987).

Ex. (27) Relationships with other people (written discourse)
01 Speaker A: *I think you should spend more time with people who see you more clearly than you see yourself.*
02 Speaker B: *If you ask me, I **like** what you're saying.*

Ex. (28) Who won the second presidential debate? - Southampton patch (written discourse)
01 Speaker A: *I think I speak for most middle class people when I say I'm more interested in their domestic policies than their foreign policies…*
02 Speaker B: *And if you ask me, I **side** with HighHat when he said if anything, Candy's statement saved Romney from the hole he was obviously digging himself.*

As for accountability verbs (i.e., *blame* and *screw*) in preposed *if you ask me* constructions, they are used for expressing a negative assessment, as can be seen in the examples in (29–30). Accountability can be characterized as an expressive function, i.e., a function indicating that person or thing is responsible for something bad that has happened or can potentially happen (Levinson 1983, p. 236).

Ex. (29) Yilb – 15 Year Old Student Jumps In Front of Train; Posts a final tweet (written discourse)
01 Speaker A: *Jack never said she was suicidal, he was just speaking his point of view.*
02 Speaker B: *If you ask me, I **blame** the people around her, the other students, maybe her parents, the staff at her school. There are signs of depression. I guarantee if someone would just have talked to this girl it prob would not have happened.*

Ex. (30) Nanny (written discourse)
01 Speaker A: *Well, she is only fourteen. And every time Brighton cracks a joke, she's sending him off to boarding school.*
02 Speaker B: *Which, if you ask me, at his age, could **screw** any kid up for life.*

What these results indicate is that preposed *if you ask me* is an attention-getter that is not only reserved for getting an addressee to do something (advice), but also for other types of evaluative functions that do not get an addressee to do something (i.e., positive or negative assessment).

The discussion now turns to prototypes of postposed *if you ask me* clauses. As was shown in Section 3, the protype of this pattern involves: written discourse, same speaker, and the verb lemmas *feel*, *look*, *sound*, *seem*, *compensate*, *deserve*, *become*, and *get*. The co-occurrence of postposed, written discourse, and same speaker is functionally motivated as was explained in Section 4. Accordingly, what remains to be explored is the functional role of verb lemmas in this prototype. Some examples follow here.

As was predicted in Section 1, we expected that postposed *if you ask me* will occur with apodoses realized with epistemic judgment verbs (e.g., *sound*, *look*, and *seem*) or propositional attitude verbs (e.g., *think*, *believe*, *guess*). Unlike preposed *if you ask me*, postposed *if you ask me* is not an attention-getter used at the start of turns at interaction to get an addressee to do something. Instead, it just profiles the attitude or reaction of an interlocutor regarding a discourse-pragmatic situation. This makes epistemic judgement verbs and propositional attitude verbs a natural fit to this pattern. Of these, the only verbs occurring in the apodosis of postposed *if you ask me* clauses are epistemic verbs (i.e., *feel*, *look*, *sound*, *seem*; see Section 3), as is shown in the following examples:

Ex. (31) Dallas (written discourse)

| 01 Speaker A: | *You've got five years to seal up the Wells and tear down the rigs. **Feels** like a giant pain in the ass if you ask me.* |
| 02 Speaker B: | *Much better we should leave them for the seagulls.* |

Ex. (32) Vodkapundit » Laughing all the way to the White House (written discourse)

| 01 Speaker A: | *All this is true, yes; but well, Big O went to a dog eating at Clooney's place just two days after completing his evolution on homosexual marriage and collected $15 million in contributions in one evening. That **looks** like exquisite timing if you ask me.* |
| 02 Speaker B: | *Well said, and I agree wholeheartedly that we should mock Obama relentlessly, and also confront the leftist media for their nonsense directly.* |

Ex. (33) Mainers vote to continue Election Day registration – Politics (written discourse)

| 01 Speaker A: | *Maine voters sent a clear message: No one will be denied a right to vote.* |
| 02 Speaker B: | *No one was denied anything! It **sounds** like a bunch of excuse ridden lazy people if you ask me. Get off your butts and register. You have the entire year to register, and that is only if you move, turned 18, etc. You people make a big stink about the stupidest thing.* |

Ex. (34) Why do so many Catholics support marriage equality? (written discourse)

| 01 Speaker A: | *I think they have just twisted her words as many do the Bible, St. Joan of Arc and many other of the Saints. I have always avoided Fr. Greeley's books at bookstores because he **seems** to have a one track mind – down in the gutter most of the time if you ask me.* |
| 02 Speaker B: | *I will take Pope John Paul II's "Theology of the Body" any day over this trash, and I do mean trash.* |

Other verbs occurring in prototypes of postposed *if you ask me* are *compensate*, *deserve*, *become*, and *get*. Although these verb lemmas are not epistemic as the verbs: *feel*, *look*, *sound*, *seem*, they are used in the expression of positive or negative assessment, as in the following examples:

Ex. (35) Information, the basis of reality - Rod Dreher (written discourse)

01 Speaker A:	*Upon my return to San Francisco, I shall pledge myself to the Abolitionist cause, because I owe my life to a self-freed slave literally in the book &; because I must begin somewhere.* **Compensates** *Weimar fitting if you ask me.*
02 Speaker B:	*You guys understand this is all abstract math. That these words are like the shadows on the wall of the cave – verbal interpretations of complex mathematical formulas describing various forces can only be interpreted but not understood*

Ex. (36) It's pretty clear Governor Romney is going to be the nominee (written discourse)

01 Speaker A:	*Kowtowing to everybody and his uncle just to get elected smacks of impropriety and is disingenuous.*
02 Speaker B:	*If Romney ends up going down the same path Obama did (and no doubt Obama will do again in 2012), he* **deserves** *to lose in November if you ask me. He needs to stand on principle and not become weak-kneed in the face of opposition.*

Ex. (37) Review of contemporary fiction-Beckett is alive: Texts to myself (written discourse)

01 Speaker A:	*To keep from losing his mind, he tried to keep his wife from talking. It's hard to imagine what my friend was thinking then about his novel and ideal perfection. He* **became** *even crazier by failing to shut up his wife if you ask me.*

Ex. (38) Rielle hunter on her affair with John Edwards: ^Do you really think (written discourse)

01 Speaker A:	*It all becomes subject matter for heinous attacks. Don't get me started on the psych evaluations going around. Piers' interview with Janet Jackson* **got** *sort of disrespectful if you ask me.*
02 Speaker B:	*He tends to go into things that are just rude to dig at and he does dig and pry. John cheated with this girl, and she has a book and shows no remorse.*

6 Implications

The findings discussed in Sections 4 and 5 may provide important implications for previous research on turn-taking and the semantic coherence principle.

First, the present research differs from previous studies dedicated to the analysis of turn-taking in one major respect. Most studies on turn-taking have focused on transition times from one turn to the next. It is well-known that transitions from one turn to the next turn may show a slight gap between them. For instance, corpus-based studies in individual languages (e.g., Heldner and Edlund 2010, p. 557) and large-scale empirical work has confirmed that turn transitions may approximate 200 ms (e.g., Stivers et al. 2009, p. 10588). In particular, they have shown that changes in word duration over the course of turns seem to play an important role in transitions (e.g., Rühlemann and Gries 2020). Here we did not pay attention to turn transition times as previous studies. Instead, the focus was on how syntactic factors trigger the use of specific conversational patterns, how syntactic factors trigger the use of specific discourse-pragmatic patterns, and how syntactic factors trigger the use of specific lexical choices.

Second, the fact that the meaning of a construction tends to harmonize with the meanings of the lexical elements that typically occur in it is referred to as the SEMANTIC COHERENCE PRINCIPLE (Goldberg 1995, p. 50). A well-known illustration of this principle is provided by ditransitive constructions (e.g., *she gave John a cake*) and prepositional dative constructions (e.g., *she gave a cake to John*). Although these constructions are semantically and pragmatically related, they attract different verb lemmas. Ditransitive constructions attract verb lemmas such as *give*, *tell*, and *show*, which align with the transfer meaning of the construction (Stefanowitsch and Gries 2003, p. 212). By contrast, prepositional dative constructions attract verbs such as *bring*, *play*, *take*, and *pass*, which are compatible with their caused-motion semantics (Stefanowitsch and Gries 2003, p. 240). The present study demonstrates that additional constructional properties can further influence the compatibility of lexemes occupying specific constructional slots. For example, if the analysis had focused solely on the range of verb lemmas attracted by the apodosis slot of *if you ask me* constructions, the result would have been a list of significantly attracted lemmas, as is common in traditional simple collexeme analysis (see Stefanowitsch and Gries 2003). However, by simultaneously considering multiple grammatical domains, it was possible to achieve a more fine-grained account of verb-lemma distribution in *if you ask me* constructions. More broadly, the findings offer a novel perspective on a long-standing theoretical question: how do syntax, semantics, discourse, conversation, and the lexicon interact within a unified model of linguistic architecture? These results pose a challenge for formal linguistic theories in which a strict distinction between lexicon and syntax has traditionally played a central role (Diessel 2019, p. 20).

7 Conclusions

7.1 Summary

In the first part of the study, we discussed the predicted probabilities of position of *if you ask me*. We demonstrated that when the speaker is different, it is very likely that *if you ask me* will appear in preposed position in spoken and written discourse. We argued that in this scenario *if you ask me* serves as an attention-getter and orients someone else to a common focus of attention. On the other hand, when the speaker is the same, it is very likely that *if you ask me* will appear in postposed position. However, there is a significant difference between speaking and writing such that postposed position in spoken discourse is likely, but postposed position in written discourse is more likely. We argued that preposed *if you ask me* in this scenario would disrupt the flow of the story line of the speaker given that the flow

of information is usually managed by a speaker through declarative main clauses. This is why postposed *if you ask me* is preferred in this pattern.

In the second part of the study, we investigated prototypes of position of *if you ask me*. As for the prototype of preposed *if you ask me* clauses, it involved: written discourse, different speaker, and the verb lemmas *say*, *like*, *need*, *blame*, *side*, *think*, *screw*, and *hear*. Based on these verb lemmas, we proposed that preposed *if you ask me* is an attention-getter that is not only reserved for getting an addressee to do something, but also other types of evaluative functions that do not get an addressee to do something (i.e., positive or negative assessment). As for the prototype of postposed *if you ask me* clauses, it involved: written discourse, same speaker, and the verb lemmas *feel*, *look*, *sound*, *seem*, *compensate*, *deserve*, *become*, and *get*. By considering these verb lemmas, we were able to determine that postposed *if you ask me* is used for expressing positive or negative assessments and by which they do not get an addressee to do something.

7.2 Where to go From Here?

There are a number of issues that the present study could not address. Accordingly, they remain to be investigated by future studies. First, at the current stage of our work, the role of prosody in *if you ask me* constructions is not clear to us. It is well-known that prosody plays an essential role in conveying different discourse functions in spoken communication (e.g., Bolden 2006). It remains to be explored how prosody interacts with other analytical layers of *if you ask me* constructions.

Second, the present study only considered constructions with the following form of the protasis: *if you ask me*. However, the form of the protasis can also appear with the following form: *if you ask us* (e.g., *if you ask us, it seems a little more likely that someone didn't watch the trailer all the way through before sticking it with Finding Dory*). It remains to be analyzed whether this pattern shows similar interactions as to those attested for *if you ask me*.

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