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FRENCH EXPRESSIONS OF PERSONAL OPINION: JE CROIS / PENSE / TROUVE / ESTIME / CONSIDÈRE QUE P

Laurent Gosselin

1 INTRODUCTION¹

French expressions of personal opinion, like *je crois que* 'I believe', *je pense que* 'I think', *je trouve que* 'I find', *je considère que* 'I consider', and *j'estime que* 'I reckon', have been studied extensively from different points of view – as parentheticals from a syntactic perspective (Blanche-Benveniste 1989; Apothéloz 2003; Blanche-Benveniste and Willems 2007; Avanzi and Glikman 2009; Haßler 2014; Schneider, Glikman and Avanzi 2015), as metarepresentational prefixes in a pragmatic and cognitive framework (Récanati 1981, Récanati 2000), as conventional implicatures from a pragmatic point of view (Jayez and Rossari 2004), as evidential markers (Dendale and Van Bogaert 2007), or as epistemic operators from a logical perspective (Martin 1987; Martin 1988) – while *je trouve que* was analysed by Ducrot (1980) as a marker of *prédication originelle* 'original predication'.

These expressions have the particularity of indicating that the judgement that they introduce falls within *the personal opinion of the speaker* (for a discussion of this notion, see Tuchais 2014). As such, they belong to the general category of expressions with modal values, specifically markers of individual subjectivity (referring to the subjectivity of the speaker, see Martin 1987; Borillo 2004). This class includes not only propositional attitude verbs (*croire, trouver estimer ...*), in the first person and present tense, but also propositional phrases (*selon moi, à mon avis, à mes yeux, pour moi* 'in my opinion', and so on; see Borillo 2004; Coltier and Dendale 2004). These expressions are generally (see Haillet 2004: 3) regarded as expressing epistemic modalities that apply to a propositional content (as part of the *modus / dictum* opposition according to Bally, 1932) and as discourse markers of mitigation. This attenuative value is due to a general principle explained by Borillo (2004: 31):

¹ I am grateful to Gerda Haßler and an anonymous reviewer for their helpful comments and suggestions.

Pour le locuteur, signaler le point de vue subjectif du propos qu'il énonce est une manière d'en affaiblir la portée. Il manifeste ainsi une certaine prudence, soit par rapport à la vérité de ce qu'il avance, soit par rapport aux jugements évaluatifs qu'il introduit dans son discours.

[For the speaker, to indicate the subjective character of what he states is a way to weaken it. He thus manifests some caution, either with respect to the truth of what he says, or in relation to evaluative judgements he issues in his speech.]

The purpose of this article is to challenge the “unitary view” of the semantic and discursive role of verbal expressions of personal opinion. We want to show 1) that the expressions studied each have a specific meaning and therefore are not always substitutable for one another, 2) that though they all indicate the speaker's personal opinion, they do not systematically operate an attenuative modalization, and 3) that, contrary to what their syntactic similarity suggests, not all of them express an epistemic modality that applies to the propositional content (as it is generally admitted; see Thompson and Mulac 1991: 313; Boone 1996: 48; Apothéloz 2003: 252; Haßler 2014: 6).

The analyses are carried out in the framework of the Modular Theory of Modalities (Gosselin 2010), which will be discussed here informally. We will successively present the theoretical perspective (Section 2), the semantics of *je crois que* and the mechanism that leads to the attenuation effect (Section 3), the semantics of *je trouve que* (Section 4), that of *je considère / estime que* (Section 5), and finally that of *je pense que* (Section 6). The conclusion will summarize the differences by means of a table.

2 MODALITY IN A WIDE SENSE

We classically distinguish judgements of reality from value judgements. A judgement of reality states what the case is (it describes a situation), while a value judgement consists of speaking well or ill of an individual or situation. A judgement of reality can be objective, in the sense that it is presented as true regardless of the subjective point of view of the speaker (ex. 1), or subjective, i.e. depending on the speaker's point of view (ex. 2).

(1) *Cette table est rectangulaire;*
'This table is rectangular'

(2) *Ce champ est assez grand*
'This field is quite extensive'.

The judgement expressed by (2) is subjective since it assumes a norm of evaluation, which remains implicit, and depends on the speaker.

A value judgement cannot be objective, but depends either on the subjectivity of individuals (e.g. 3) or on a system of conventions (moral, ideology, religion, etc.), as in (4):²

- (3) *Ce pain est bon*
‘This bread is good’
- (4) *Cet homme est malhonnête*
‘This man is dishonest’.

These phenomena can be analysed in modal terms, provided that it is recognized, following Brunot (1922: 541) and Bally (1965, § 47), that the lexical constituents of the *dictum* can themselves express modalities (taken in a wide sense). In this case, Gosselin (2010: 102-114; 2015) speaks of *intrinsic modalities* (i.e. internal to the *dictum*). In this framework, we will say that (1) illustrates an alethic modality attached to the predicate of the sentence, (2) illustrates an epistemic one, (3) illustrates an appreciative one, and (4) illustrates an axiological one. The alethic modality corresponds to a judgement of reality presented as objective, epistemic modality to a judgement of reality made in a subjective assessment, appreciative modality to a value judgement about the (un)desirable character of an object or a situation, and axiological modality to a value judgement about the (blame) worthiness of an individual or situation.

These intrinsic modalities may be marked linguistically, as in the examples above, in which they are associated with tokens, or inferred on the basis of background knowledge. For example, statement (2) may have, in some contexts, a positive appreciative value (thus becoming a value judgement in addition to being a judgement of reality). Pragmatically inferred modalities have the specificity of being avoidable in some contexts (unlike linguistically marked modalities).

Intrinsic modalities can be embedded by *extrinsic modalities* (i.e. belonging to the *modus*), as in the statement

- (5) *Je crois que Paul est honnête*
‘I believe Paul is honest’.

Here an extrinsic epistemic modality, expressed by *je crois que*, applies to an intrinsic axiological modality associated with the predicate in the complement clause (*honnête*).

3 JE CROIS QUE AND THE LOGIC OF CONVICTION

The expression *je crois que* ‘I believe’ expresses an extrinsic epistemic modality, which is compatible with all sorts of modalities, intrinsically associated with the predicates: alethic (7a), epistemic (7b), appreciative (7c), or axiological ones (7d)³:

² This distinction corresponds to the opposition between appreciations and judgements (Martin and White 2005: 35-36), and also to the distinction between judgements referring to personal norms and judgements referring to a system of social norms (Asher, Benamara and Mathieu 2009: 283).

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- (7) a. *Je crois que cette table est rectangulaire*
'I believe this table is rectangular'
- b. *Je crois que ce champ est assez vaste*
'I believe this field is quite extensive'
- c. *Je crois que ce pain est bon*
'I believe this bread is good'
- d. *Je crois que cet homme est malhonnête*
'I believe this man is dishonest'.

The role of this expression (*je crois que*) is to introduce the judgements as belonging to the individual subjective opinion of the speaker (her belief). It has long been observed (see Benveniste 1966: 264; Borillo 1982; Vet 1994) that this expression plays the role of mitigator of an assertion (as a rhetoric–pragmatic function). We will try to explain this effect.

Imagine that you are in your office, and you are asked on the phone if your colleague is there. If you answer

- (8) *Je crois qu'elle est ici*
'I believe she's here',

your interviewer will think that you are not sure. One might assume that this is because *croire que p* expresses a relatively low degree of belief, but this explanation is not satisfactory. Indeed in this case, statement (9),

- (9) *Pierre croit que sa collègue est ici*
'Peter believes his colleague is here',

should imply that Peter is not sure of it. But it is false. This statement is compatible with the assumption that Peter is convinced that his colleague is here. In fact, *croire* is a verb that only indicates that the speaker of the utterance does not presuppose the content of the completive. Moreover, what is remarkable and at first sight paradoxical is that even if the speaker uses expressions that literally mean certainty, it is understood that she is not absolutely sure of what she says:

- (10) *Je suis certaine / sûre / convaincue / persuadée qu'elle est là*
'I am confident she is here'.

These phenomena can be explained in the light of the *logic of conviction* (Lenzen 2004). Lenzen (2004: 973) posits that if a subject is convinced that p, if she is really certain of it, she believes that she knows that p.

³ In order to control rigorously the interaction between modalities, we have constructed examples and we judge their acceptability by introspection. A study based on corpora would be more convincing, but it would have required a far longer discussion.

Principle of conviction: “C (a,p) → B(a,K(a,p))”
a: person; C: “is convinced”; B: “believes”; K: “knows”.

It follows that “knowledge and conviction are subjectively indiscriminable in the sense that person *a* cannot tell apart whether she is ‘only’ convinced that *p* or whether she really knows that *p*” (Lenzen 2004: 973).

On the other hand, among epistemic verbs, a distinction is classically made between factive verbs (which presuppose the truth of the propositional contents of the complement clause) and non-factive verbs (which do not presuppose the truth of this content, see Karttunen 1973, Kreutz 1998, Korzen 2001). *Savoir que* ‘know’, *se douter que* ‘suspect’, and *ignorer que* ‘ignore’ belong to the first class and *croire que* ‘believe’ and *être certain(e) / sûr(e) / persuadé(e) que* ‘be confident’ to the second.

From all this follows that the speaker who is convinced that *p* will assert *je sais que p* ‘I know that *p*’, or even simply *p* (*p* and *je sais que p* being equipollent; see Gosselin 2014). Therefore, if a speaker uses non-factive epistemic expressions, like *je crois / suis certain(e) / persuadé(e) / convaincu(e) que* ‘I believe / am sure / persuaded / convinced that’, it triggers an implicature from the utterance. The interpreter will think that if the speaker has used not just *p* or *je sais que p*, it is because she does not believe that she knows that *p* and therefore she is not really convinced that *p*, hence the systematic mitigation effect, which may seem contradictory to what the statement says literally (as in the example 10). As Martin notes (1987: 57), it is “impossible de dire sans mauvaise foi *Je crois qu’il est à la maison si je sais pertinemment qu’il y est*” [‘impossible to say without bad faith *I believe he is at home if I know for a fact that he is*’].

This very regular inferential mechanism helps to explain why the degree of belief indicated by non-factive belief expressions is not weakened when belief is attributed to a third party (ex. 9): as belief is not attributed to the speaker of the utterance, the inferential mechanism grounded on the principle of conviction does not apply, and there is no implicature.

This inferential mechanism helps also probably to explain the origin of the weakening of epistemic adverbs (which refer to the belief of the speaker): *sans doute* ‘probably’ (lit. ‘without any doubt’), *certainement* ‘certainly’, and *sûrement* ‘surely’, which do not involve certainty, in contemporary French. We may assume that in the diachronic evolution of the meaning of these expressions, the implicature, systematically associated with the principle of conviction, has been conventionalized.

4 JE TROUVE QUE AS AN INDICATOR OF INDIVIDUAL SUBJECTIVITY

As Ducrot (1980) and Blanche-Benveniste and Willems (2007) observe, *je trouve que* ‘I find’ is not compatible with all sorts of predicates in a complement clause (unlike the expressions studied in the previous section). In terms of intrinsic modalities, we can say that this expression is not compatible with intrinsic alethic modalities, while it combines with epistemic, appreciative, and axiological ones:

(11) a. **Je trouve que cette table est rectangulaire*

- ‘I find that this table is rectangular’
- b. *Je trouve que ce champ est assez vaste*
‘I find that this field is quite extensive’
- c. *Je trouve que ce pain est bon*
‘I think that bread is good’
- d. *Je trouve que cet homme est malhonnête*
‘I find that this man is dishonest’.

Moreover, in discourse, *je trouve que* does not systematically express mitigation of the assertion. Tuchais (2014: 106) observes that, by presenting a judgment as a personal opinion, the speaker may mitigate her position or, conversely, cause other points of view to stand out and thus affirm that she is taking a very strong position. It depends on the situation of speech. One can even say that if a speaker chooses to indicate explicitly that she opposes the common opinion (e.g. *moi, personnellement, je trouve que* ‘I, personally, I find that’), it is a way of strengthening her position, claiming her refusal to follow the common opinion.

At the semantic level this expression only serves to clarify the nature of the subjectivity intrinsically associated with the predicate by restricting it to the *individual* subjectivity of the speaker. By default, an intrinsically subjective predicate refers to the collective subjectivity, to common opinion: by stating that *ce pain est bon* ‘this bread is good’, the speaker presents her judgement as referring to a collective subjective evaluation. However, by adding *je trouve que*, she indicates that the subjectivity is not *collective* but *individual*, related to the person of the speaker (it is her personal opinion).

Therefore, we will consider that *je trouve que* does not introduce an additional modality (in addition to the intrinsic subjective modality of the predicate), but serves to make clear the (individual) nature of the subjectivity of the predicate. The predicative lexeme and the phrase *je trouve que* together contribute to building the expression of individual subjectivity. Thus *je trouve que* is fundamentally different from epistemic modal expressions (*je crois / suis certain(e) / persuadé(e) que*). It is because *je trouve que* does not trigger the construction of an extrinsic epistemic modality, like *je crois que*, but specifies the intrinsic subjective modality of the complement clause’s predicate, that this expression imposes restrictions on predicates. It is not compatible with alethic ones, because they are objective. This is also why it does not systematically serve as an assertion’s mitigator: the mechanism founded on the principle of conviction, described in relation to epistemic modalities, does not apply.

We conclude with an example that illustrates the respective operations of these two types of expressions of personal opinion:

- (12) a. *Je crois que cette soupe est bonne*
‘I believe the soup is good’
- b. *Je trouve que cette soupe est bonne*
‘I find this soup is good’.

Statement (12a) expresses an individual belief of the speaker concerning a collective subjective evaluation. The inferential mechanism presented in Section 2 leads to a rhetoric-pragmatic effect of mitigation. This mitigated judgement may correspond to two distinct situations (at least):

– The speaker has not tasted the soup and expresses a personal opinion about the probability that the soup is good (since she knows the cook, the ingredients of the soup, what is said about it, etc.);

– She tasted the soup, but does not consider herself able to deliver a collective subjective evaluation of the soup’s flavour, for example, either because she is sick and unable to appreciate it or because this soup belongs to some exotic cuisine for which she does not know the evaluation criteria.

The same does not apply to *je trouve que* (12b), which is only used to restrict the judgement to the speaker’s individual subjectivity regarding the appreciative evaluation expressed by the predicate (*bonne*), which otherwise would refer, by default, to the collective subjectivity, to common opinion. According to the state of opinion of the participants in the conversation, this restriction concerning the nature of the subjectivity may correspond to its attenuation (the speaker indicates that she does not seek to impose her personal appreciative evaluation) or, conversely, to its strengthening (she signals, in this way, that she opposes her personal opinion to the common opinion).

5 *J’ESTIME / CONSIDÈRE QUE*: SUBJECTIVITY AND VARIABILITY OF JUDGEMENTS

The expressions *j’estime / considère que* ‘I reckon / consider’ are similar to *je trouve que*: they do not signal an extrinsic epistemic modality, but specify the nature of an intrinsic subjective modality (associated with the predicate). Consequently, they do not necessarily mitigate the assertion, and they are compatible with epistemic, axiological, and appreciative predicates but with much more difficulty with alethic ones:

(13) a. *??J’estime / ?? Considère que cette table est rectangulaire*

‘I reckon / consider that this table is rectangular’

b. *J’estime / considère que ce champ est assez vaste*

‘I reckon / consider that this field is quite extensive’

c. *J’estime / considère que ce pain est bon*

‘I reckon / consider that this bread is good’

d. *J’estime / considère que cet homme est malhonnête*

‘I reckon / consider that this man is dishonest’.

They differ, however, from *je trouve que* relative to the type of restriction made on the subjectivity of the predicate.

The opposition between subjective and objective judgments is based, according to the Kantian tradition, on the “variability in the validity of judgements” between subjects. If a judgement is true for *any* subject, whatever she may be when she is

endowed with reason, it is considered *objective*. It is *subjective* in the opposite case, when its validity varies between subjects. However, this dimension of “variability” has two characteristics that are relevant to our study. On the one hand, there are *degrees* of variability. For example, to say that an axiological judgement (such as 4) refers to a system of conventions implies that it is stable and shared *within this system*, which itself depends on the variability of ethics and ideologies. In other words, the axiological variability of judgements corresponds to an intermediate degree between objectivity of alethic (i.e. objective) judgements and unstable individual subjectivity. On the other hand, variability may concern not only subjects but also temporality, because a subject can change his mind or, on the contrary, remain steady in his convictions. And there are also different degrees of temporal variability of judgements: axiological judgements correspond to an intermediate degree of temporal variability, between alethic judgements and appreciative judgements (which are unstable).

Consider now the phrases *je trouve / considère / estime que*. It appears that *je trouve que* is perfectly compatible with the temporally varying individual subjectivity, while *j’estime / considère que* imply a certain temporal stability of judgement:

- (14) *Cette semaine, je suis grippé, et je trouve / ?? estime / ?? considère que le pain est bon et que le fauteuil est inconfortable*

‘This week, I am affected by the flu and I find / reckon / consider that the bread is good and that the chair is uncomfortable’.

Conversely, *je considère / estime que*, unlike *je trouve que*, are compatible with some alethic predicates that express a categorization along a continuum (15), or an approximate categorization (17), and are thus on the border between (objective) alethic and (subjective) epistemic predicates. In a situation of *crachin* ‘drizzle’ in Normandy, (15a) sounds more natural than (15b):

- (15) a. *Je considère / estime qu’il pleut*
‘I consider / reckon it’s raining’
b. *? Je trouve qu’il pleut*
‘I find it’s raining’.

Similarly, Tuchais (2014: 324) provides the example:

- (16) *Ma chambre, je considère que je l’ai payée* (Cl. Mauriac, *La marquise sortit à cinq heures*)

‘My room, I consider that I paid for it’.

In this example, it is possible to replace *considérer* with *estimer*, but much less naturally with *trouver*.

Even more clearly, regarding a table measuring 65 cm by 68 cm, one can say, by approximation,

- (17) a. *Je considère / estime qu’elle est carrée*

‘I consider / reckon it is square’

but with much more difficulty,

(17) b. ? *Je trouve qu'elle est carrée*

‘I find it is square’.

From all this, it follows that *je trouve que* marks a higher degree of variability of the judgement than *je considère / estime que*. This is why *je considère / estime que* are more appropriate for the expression of axiological judgements (based on convention systems, which are relatively stable), while *je trouve que* is more appropriate for appreciative judgements bound to particular time positions, as the contrast between (18a) and (18b) shows:

(18) a. *Je considère / estime / ? trouve qu'il est coupable*

‘I consider / reckon / find that he is guilty’

b. *Je trouve / ? considère / ? estime que la soupe est brûlante*

‘I find / consider / reckon that the soup is hot’.

It is remarkable that *trouver* becomes acceptable in (18a) in the case of moral culpability, whereas it is excluded in the case of legal guilt. Morality is more akin to collective subjectivity, while legal guilt rests on a system of stable and codified conventions.

As for the difference between *je considère* and *j'estime*, *considérer que* refers to a judgement that can be voluntary and subject to a decision, which is not the case for the expressions *j'estime / trouve que* any more than for *je crois / pense que*.

(19) *J'ai décidé de considérer / ?* estimer / ?* trouver qu'il était responsable de cette situation*

‘I decided to consider / reckon / find that he was responsible for this situation’.

6 THE DUAL FUNCTION OF *JE PENSE QUE*

Just like *je crois que*, *je pense que* ‘I think’ is compatible with all types of predicates (respectively alethic, epistemic, axiological, and appreciative ones in the following examples):

(20) a. *Je pense que cette table est rectangulaire*

‘I think this table is rectangular’

b. *Je pense que ce champ est assez vaste*

‘I think this field is quite extensive’

c. *Je pense que ce pain est bon*

‘I think this bread is good’

d. *Je pense que cet homme est malhonnête*

‘I think this man is dishonest’.

With alethic predicates, this expression has a value very close to *je crois que* 'I believe'. It expresses an epistemic modality, which has a systematic effect of mitigation of the assertion in discourse. In the situation described in Section 3, in which the speaker is asked if her colleague is here, the answer

- (21) *Je pense qu'elle est ici*
'I think she is here'

has, at first glance, effects similar to *je crois qu'elle est ici*. However, there are differences between *croire* 'believe' and *penser* 'think' in this construction (see Martin 1988; Dendale and Van Bogaert 2007). A judgement expressed by *croire* cannot be the subject of a decision (unlike *considérer*, see above), but it may be subject to a desire which is not possible with *penser*:

- (22) *Je veux bien croire / ?* penser qu'il ne m'a pas reconnu*
'I want to believe / think that he did not recognize me'.

In this respect, *croire* functions like *considérer*, while *penser* is akin to *trouver*, *estimer*:

- (23) *Je veux bien croire / considérer / ?* penser / ?* trouver / ?? estimer qu'elle est belle*
'I want to believe / consider / find / reckon she is beautiful'.

Moreover, the judgement denoted by *je crois que* must be based on knowledge about the situation, which gives positive reasons for belief, while the judgement expressed by *je pense que* may rely only on general knowledge and the absence of arguments against it. For example, if the speaker has not seen someone for a long time, she will use (24a) instead of (24b). The latter utterance would imply that the speaker has grounds, based on her knowledge of recent facts, to believe that her interlocutor remembers her:

- (24) a. *Je pense que vous vous souvenez de moi*
'I think you remember me'
b. *Je crois que vous vous souvenez de moi*
'I believe you remember me'.

Consequently, even in the situation described above (in which the speaker is interviewed about the presence of her colleague), the two answers, *je crois / pense qu'elle est ici*, do not have exactly the same value. The first (with *je crois que*) assumes that the speaker has positive reasons to believe in her colleague's presence – that is, for example, the result of an abduction (see Desclés and Guentcheva 2001) based on the observation of the presence of her car in the car park – while the second (with *je pense que*) may be grounded either on positive reasons or on a simple lack of information that would oppose the judgement: as this colleague is usually here and if the speaker has no reason to think otherwise, she says that she thinks (*pense*) she is here.

However, the main specificity of *je pense que* is that this expression works in a way comparable to *je crois que* when combined with an alethic predicate, but may also work

like *je trouve / considère / estime que* when combined with an axiological one. Thus, in the statement

- (25) *Je pense que cette décision est juste*
'I think this decision is right',

the expression "je pense que", in its most plausible interpretation, does not express an epistemic modality, but simply refers the axiological assessment to the speaker's *personal* opinion, without any effect of mitigation. In that case, *penser que* becomes almost synonymous with *trouver que, considérer que, and estimer que*.

With epistemic and appreciative intrinsic modalities (and also, to a lesser extent, with some axiological ones), two interpretations may appear, sometimes leading to ambiguity. For example, the utterances

- (26) a. *Je pense que ce champ est assez vaste*
'I think that this field is quite extensive'
- b. *Je pense que ce pain est bon*
'I think that bread is good'

can be interpreted either as expressions of belief (with a mitigation effect) in a judgement assigned to collective subjectivity (*penser* and *croire* are quasi-synonyms) or as a marker of individual subjectivity, not introducing any mitigation of the assertion. This second interpretation appears more clearly if we consider (26a) and (26b) as responses to the question *Qu'en penses-tu?* 'What's your opinion?'. *Je pense que* becomes almost synonymous with *j'estime / considère que* or *mon avis personnel est que* 'my personal opinion is that'. In other words, the speaker of (26b) either may not have tasted the bread and expresses a belief about its taste quality (with a mitigation effect) or may have tasted it and gives her personal opinion (with no mitigation effect).

We can summarize this analysis with a schema:

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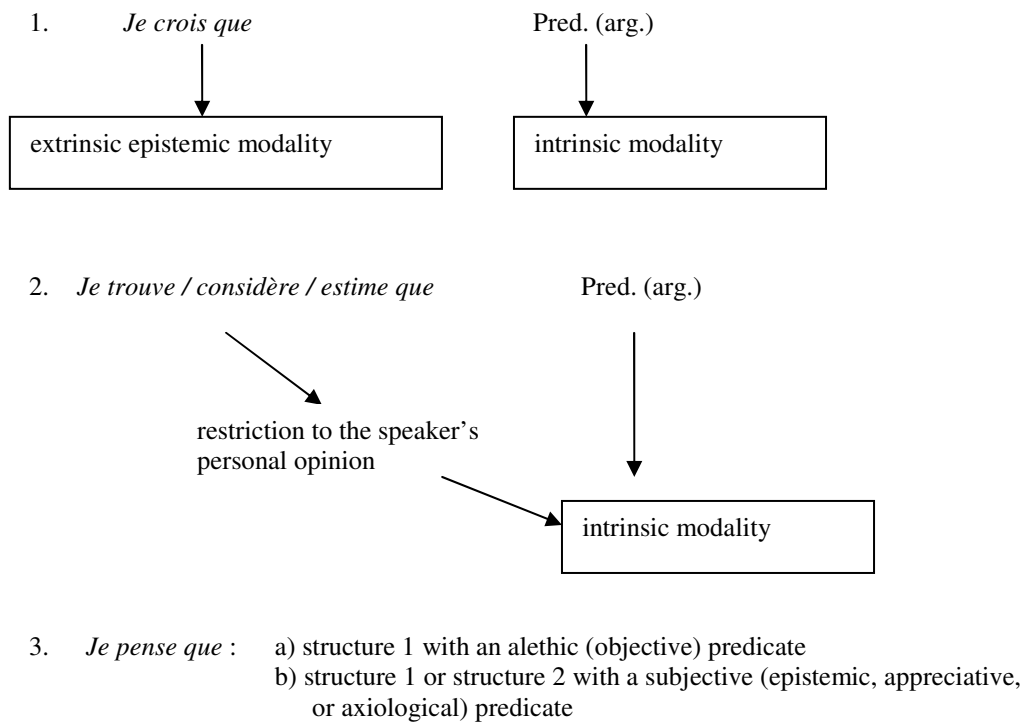


Figure 1

7 CONCLUSION

The syntactic similarity of expressions of personal opinion is misleading. They are likely to play two distinct roles: either they trigger the construction of an extrinsic epistemic modality (compatible with all sorts of predicates in the complement clause) or they specify the nature of the subjective modality intrinsically associated with the predicate (excluding in the same time objective ones). *Je crois / suis certain(e) / persuadé(e) ... que* belong to the first case and *je trouve / considère / estime que* to the second one. The peculiarity of *je considère / estime que* versus *je trouve que* is the fact that these terms are able to transform some alethic approximate categorization judgements into subjective judgments (e.g. 15–17). The expression *je pense que* may, depending on the context (and in particular on the modality intrinsically associated with the predicate), fulfill either of these two roles: sometimes it expresses extrinsic epistemic modality (in the manner of *je crois que*) and sometimes it restricts the inherent subjectivity of the predicate to the personal opinion of the speaker.

It is only when they express an extrinsic epistemic modality that these expressions systematically have a mitigating effect on the speaker's commitment. This effect results from a discourse implicature triggered on the basis of a principle of the logic of conviction (Lenzen 2004) saying that a subject who is really convinced that *p* "believes she knows that *p*". Accordingly, if the speaker does not use the factive epistemic modality *je sais que p* or does not simply say *p*, but uses a non-factive epistemic

modality (*je crois / pense / suis certain(e) / sûr(e) / convaincu(e) ... que p*), the interpreter will infer that, the speaker is, in fact, not really convinced that *p*.

Within these two subclasses of expressions of personal opinion, every expression has characteristics of its own, as the possibility of referring to a judgement which may result from a desire or decision, or, for epistemic modality, the requirement or not for positive reasons to believe that *p*.

Table 1 summarizes the main modal characteristics of these different expressions.

Table 1

| | <i>Je crois que</i> | <i>Je trouve que</i> | <i>Je considère que</i> | <i>J'estime que</i> | <i>Je pense que</i> | |
|--|---------------------|----------------------|-------------------------|---------------------|---------------------|------------|
| Expresses an extrinsic epistemic modality | + | - | - | - | + | - |
| Compatible with all sorts of predicates | + | - | - | - | + | - |
| Always a mitigator | + | - | - | - | + | - |
| Requires positive reasons | + | Irrelevant | Irrelevant | Irrelevant | - | Irrelevant |
| Compatible with some alethic predicates | + | - | + | + | + | - |
| Can be the object of a desire | + | - | + | - | - | - |
| Can be the object of a decision | - | - | + | - | - | - |
| Marks a high degree of variability of appreciation | Irrelevant | + | - | - | Irrelevant | - |

Finally, let us note also that the contrasts observed concerning the use of these expressions of personal opinion make possible the use of such phrases as tests to identify the intrinsic modal value of predicates (the compatibility test with *je trouve que* can be used to isolate alethic predicates).

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