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Doxastic Feel Like (That)

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Doxastic *Feel Like (That)*

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Abstract
Doxastic *feel like* is used to convey a belief or opinion, similar to *think*:

   (1)   I feel like your drawing is better than mine.

Doxastic *feel like* is an intriguing topic of study due to the potential for microsyntactic variation, along with the thick web of linguistic prejudice surrounding this construction. Doxastic *feel like* is primarily associated with stereotypes regarding age, gender, and intelligence. A survey was conduced to measure participants of diverse demographic backgrounds in their acceptability of *feel like* in different contexts. Overall, respondents were found to have high acceptability of this construction. In addition, respondents were probed for the gender, age, and intelligence stereotypes they may hold regarding speakers of *feel like*. Survey results conform with general public opinion that *feel like* is tied to people of younger age and can be seen as a marker of lower intelligence. In addition, an instance of microsyntactic variation is exhibited by some speakers, in which two complementizer-like elements appear:

   (2)   I feel like that your drawing is better than mine.

While the *feel like that* construction is encountered often in social media posts and radio shows, the respondents of this survey had low overall acceptability of the *feel like that* construction, and tied it to someone who may be a non-native speaker or someone of lower intelligence. This study furthers our exploration of the interaction between microsyntactic variation, linguistic prejudice, and grammatical diversity through the study of doxastic *feel like*.

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1. Introduction

I hope the thought at the forefront of the reader's mind is:

   (3)   I <u>think</u> this will be an interesting report!

Here, *think* is used as a verb that takes two arguments: the subject *I*, and the sentential complement *this will be an interesting report*. In syntactic theory, a sentential complement argument such as the one above must be joined to the verb via a complementizer. The complementizer can be null, as in (3), or overt:

(4)   I <u>think that</u> this will be an interesting report.

In this report, I will focus on a construction similar in distribution and meaning to *think*: the doxastic use of *feel like*.

(5)   I <u>feel like</u> this will be an interesting report.

The doxastic use of *feel like*, while infrequent in formal language, has become mainstream in informal settings. Historically, though, it has taken time for *feel like* to reach this level of prevalence, and even today speakers of *feel like* may be tied with certain stereotypes, namely along the lines of gender (Baker 2013) and age (Nunberg 2016). Moreover, opinion writers like Worthen (2016), Thibodeaux (2017), and Trent (2016) discuss how *feel like* is often perceived as a marker of being less intelligent. In order to investigate this web of prejudice and find out who really says *feel like*, I conducted a survey to measure acceptability of *feel like* in different contexts among respondents of diverse demographic backgrounds. In addition, a portion of the survey was dedicated to eliciting respondents' perceptions of speakers' age, gender, and intelligence based on usage of *think* vs. *feel like*.

In addition, I will explore an instance of microsyntactic variation exhibited by some speakers, in which multiple complementizer-like elements are present:

(6)   I <u>feel like that</u> this will be an interesting report.

This construction is elusive in that, while it is prevalent in the social media posts of strangers around the world, it is difficult to encounter in a personal exchange. Though the majority of respondents in my survey rated *feel like that* as unacceptable, the survey was able to grasp a few speakers of this construction. In addition to comparing the acceptability of *feel like* with *feel like that* across minimal pairs, I also evaluated respondents' perceptions of speakers' age, gender, intelligence, and status as a native speaker when using *feel like that*.

2. Background: *Feel Like*

Before diving into doxastic *feel like*, I list below a few of the other uses of *feel like*, which are not explored in this report:

(7)   *Other uses of* feel like
    a.   "I now <u>feel like</u> ending the matter...before we go back." ("feel, v." 2020)
         wish, desire
    b.   "I <u>felt like</u> a man who is neither old nor insensible." ("feel, v." 2020)
         subjective impression

Moreover, the elements *feel* and *like* are polysemous themselves. The Oxford English Dictionary ("feel, v." 2020) lists fifteen distinct meanings for *feel*, and linguists such as Siegel (2002) and D'Arcy (2005) have analyzed the syntactic and semantic development of discourse *like*. In this report, I focus solely on the doxastic use of *feel like*:

(8)   *Doxastic* feel like
    a.   She <u>feels like</u> his drawing is better.
    b.   They <u>felt like</u> I was avoiding them.
    c.   I <u>feel like</u> the capital of Bulgaria is Sofia.

The above examples show how the doxastic use of *feel like* alone is home to great variety. First, the subject pronoun can vary, and of course, as per the principle of copy-raising[1], the sentential complement of the raising verb *feel* contains a 'copy' of the subject, which will vary accordingly. Second, different tenses and aspects are possible for *feel like* sentences. Third, the sentential complement argument may be opinion-based (8a, 8b) or fact-based (8c). This may seem counterintuitive, as the construction has been dubbed *doxastic*. However, doxastic *feel like* is not named "doxastic" because the argument must be a belief. Rather, much like linguistic hedges, which act as markers of uncertainty or probability (Zadeh 1972), *feel like* may serve to transform any argument, opinion or fact, into a belief. Though *feel like* may fit more naturally in opinion contexts, it provides the ability to express a fact in a less absolute manner. My survey results show that speakers tend to favor the opinion-based usage of *feel like*; the fact-based usage is likely more linguistically progressive, as it is accepted primarily by younger speakers.

2.1 Online Opinion of *Feel Like*

The linguistic prejudice surrounding *feel like* is similar to that of upspeak, or "high rising terminal" (Cruttenden et al. 1997) and vocal fry, also known as "glottal fry" or "creaky voice" (Scherer 1989), which are both tied to women and persons of lower professional or intellectual capability (Chao and Bursten 2016). Several opinion pieces and blog posts have focused on linguistic prejudice surrounding *feel like* (Baker 2013; McDonough 2016; Nunberg 2016; Worthen 2016; Thibodeaux 2017), particularly with respect to gender, age, and intelligence of the speaker. Studies have shown that linguistic change may occur more rapidly in women than men (Labov 1990), and this is reflected with *feel like*'s public perception as a marker of women's speech (Baker 2013). In addition, usage and acceptability is influenced by age; younger speakers are found to most frequently use *feel like* (Nunberg 2016).

Moreover, many opinion writers and critics express that the doxastic use of *feel like* makes one's speech seem less intellectual or rational (Worthen (2016), Thibodeaux (2017)). In addition, Trent (2016) reports that he has encountered the sentiment that *feel like* should be used in speech to appeal to women, while *think* should be used with men, perhaps because emotional expression is associated more with women. Thus, though the gender and age biases may seem harmless at first, when paired with the question of intellectual viability, the prejudice is made more severe. In my survey, similar biases were found, particularly that respondents' perception of a speaker's intelligence was significantly lower when *feel like* was used as opposed to *think*.

Furthermore, if *feel like* were in free variation with *think*, it would be less compelling of an instance of linguistic diversity. With the additional use of softening a contentious or contrary opinion, or changing the very nature of a fact into something less absolute, like a belief or opinion, *feel like* expresses something extra that *think* could not on its own.

3. Background: *Feel Like That*

A variation of *feel like* exhibited by some speakers is *feel like that*, in which two complementizer-like elements appear:

(9)   I <u>feel like that</u> Jordan's drawing is better than Taylor's.

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[1]In copy-raising, the subject of the matrix clause and the subject of the embedded clause (here, the sentential complement) must refer to the same individual or entity (Asudeh and Toivonen 2012).

There are a few competing hypotheses for the syntactic structure of doxastic *feel like that*, which aim to account for the presence of not one, but two complementizer-like elements: *like* and *that*. Kaplan (2019) argues that *feel like* serves as a phrasal verb, in which *like* is a preposition that takes a sentential complement introduced by the complementizer *that*. In this analysis, as head of the prepositional phrase, *like* imposes selectional properties pertaining to the subsequent occurrence of overt complementizer *that*, which accounts for why some speakers of doxastic *feel like (that)* find *feel like that* to be grammatical and others do not.

3.1 Twitter Examples of *Feel Like That*

While the doxastic uses of *feel like* and *feel like that* are scarce in academic writing, they occur in abundance on social media sites such as Twitter, Reddit, and Quora. Rather than relying on artificially constructed examples, I present a number of naturally-occurring instances of *feel like that*, each taken from a different Twitter user:

(10) Anonymous Twitter examples

    a. I <u>feel like that</u> the last one would be me.

    b. I <u>feel like that</u> the renewal news is so close.

    c. I <u>feel like that</u> he doesn't know the answer either.

    d. I <u>feel like that</u> we as humans need to be there for one another.

    e. We <u>feel like that</u> we're going through a great time of distress.

    f. At least I <u>feel like that</u> the money is being allocated correctly.

    g. I agree with your overall point, I <u>feel like that</u> he needs to play regularly to continue his development.

4. Survey Procedure

The survey aimed to elucidate which types of people accept doxastic *feel like* and *feel like that*, and in which contexts. The expected time for the survey was 12 minutes. Respondents were primarily recruited through Facebook, but acquaintances and family friends were also recruited. The survey was set up as follows. In Section 1, respondents provided key demographic information relevant to the analysis, including age, gender, country of primary childhood residence, and parents' country of primary childhood residence. The sample size is $N = 62$, and there was a 3-to-1 ratio of women (72.6%) to men (27.4%). Almost half (43.5%) the respondents were in the 18-25 age group, and nearly a quarter (24.2%) were in the 60+ age group. In addition, about a quarter (25.8%) of
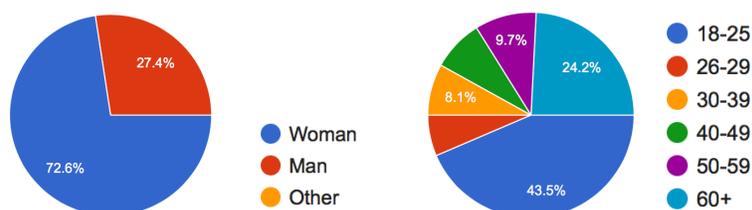
Figure 1. Demographic Representation in Survey

respondents either grew up in another country (outside the US) themselves, or have one or more

parents from another country. Since English is also the main language in Canada, Australia, and the UK, these three countries were ultimately not included as "other countries," and the proportion was reduced to 17.7%. These 17.7% will hereby be referred to as "foreign influence respondents."

Next, in Section 2, respondents answered a series of acceptability judgment questions using the same 5-point Likert scale as Zanuttini et al. (2018), where 1 is "totally unacceptable, even in informal settings" and 5 is "totally acceptable." Sentences to be specifically compared occur in minimal pairs:

(11) *Minimal pair example*
   a. I feel like they are avoiding me.
   b. I feel like that they are avoiding me.

Question order in this section was randomized, and sentence environments were varied with respect to verb tense, pronoun of the subject, and opinion- vs. fact-based argument. Each acceptability judgment question addressed one of the following categories: (1) possible environments of *feel like*, (2) possible environments of *feel like that*, and (3) filler sentences.

Finally, a third section (Section 3) of questions was given in order to approach the question of public opinion and stigma surrounding doxastic *feel like (that)*. Since they differ from the typical questions in such surveys, like those outlined by Zanuttini et al. (2018), these questions were launched as a pilot to analyze preliminary results before conducting future study. Section 3 of the survey presents quotes from a hypothetical genderless, ageless, nameless speaker. The quotes involve doxastic *feel like*, doxastic *feel like that*, and *think*, occurring in minimal pairs and with instances of both opinion- and fact-based thoughts. For each quote, and based only on that quote, respondents were asked to select which gender and age group they would guess the speaker falls into. They were also asked to share on a five-point scale how intelligent they thought the speaker was based solely on the quote, as well as whether or not they thought it was a native speaker of English.

5. Survey Results and Discussion

Survey results are explored in terms of the research questions discussed in the introduction. All analyses were conducted in SPSS (IBM Corporation 2017). Significance is established when the *p*-value is less than the conventional alpha value of .05 (corresponding to 95% confidence). Key results are summarized in Table 1, 2, and Figure 2.

	AGE	GENDER	FOREIGN INFLUENCE
feel like	Significant: favored by younger participants	Not Significant	Not Significant
feel like that	Not Significant	Not Significant	Not Significant

Table 1. Difference in Overall Acceptability by Various Factors

All combined measures (for example, holistic average of *feel like* or *feel like that* acceptability) were used only after affirming that their Cronbach's Alpha reliability score was greater than 0.7, indicating sufficient consistency to warrant averaging responses for the given set of survey questions.
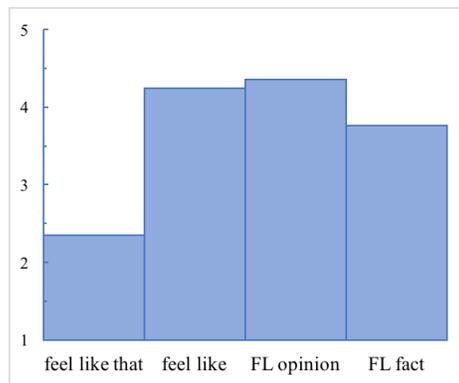
Figure 2. Mean acceptability *feel like that*, *feel like*, opinion-based *feel like*, fact-based *feel like*

	AGE	GENDER	INTELLIGENCE	NATIVE SPEAKER
Opinion feel like v. think	Not Significant	Not Significant	Not Significant	
fact feel like v. think	Significant: younger speaker for *feel like*	Not Significant	Significant: *feel like* stigmatized	
feel like v. feel like that			Significant: *feel like that* stigmatized	Significant: *feel like that* stigmatized

Table 2. Difference in Stigma Judgements by Various Factors

5.1 Who accepts *feel like*?

Despite the diversity in the sample, only 5 of the 62 respondents (0.08%) rated overall *feel like* acceptability as less than 3, indicating its widespread use today. A multiple linear regression analysis (Table 1) was conducted to identify the relationships of three demographic factors with overall *feel like* acceptability: age, gender, and whether or not one is a foreign influence participant. Overall, it was found that age, gender, and foreign influence status explain a significant amount of the variance in *feel like* acceptability ($F(3, 58) = 4.33, p = .008$). Specifically, the analysis shows that age has a significant relationship with *feel like* acceptability ($Beta = -.44, t(58) = -3.58, p = .001$), in the direction that as age decreases, acceptability increases. In other words, younger respondents significantly favored *feel like* as compared to older respondents. Though part of the social stigma surrounding *feel like* is gendered, there is no significant relationship between gender and *feel like* acceptability in our survey ($Beta = -.06, t(58) = -.47, p = .638$). Foreign influence does not bear a significant relationship with *feel like* acceptability, either ($Beta = -.12, t(58) = -.98, p = .329$).

5.2 In what environments is *feel like* accepted?

The primary environment question surrounding *feel like* acceptability is that of opinion- vs. fact-based arguments. First, an independent samples t-test was conducted to see if there is a significant difference between the average acceptability of the opinion-based statements as compared with that of fact-based statements (see 12).

(12) *Opinion- vs. fact-based* feel like
    a. I feel like they are avoiding me.
    b. I feel like the capital of Bulgaria is Sofia.

The analysis shows a significant difference between mean acceptability of opinion-based *feel like* ($M = 4.36$, $SD = .71$) and fact-based *feel like* ($M = 3.76$, $SD = 1.24$), $t(97.00) = 3.33$, $p = .001$. In addition, differences in mean acceptability of opinion- vs. fact-based *feel like* were taken for each participant. I conducted a linear regression analysis comparing age with these differences in opinion- and fact-based acceptability and found a significant relationship ($r(60) = .38$, $p = .001$). This result indicates that older respondents had a greater difference in their acceptability for opinion-vs. fact-based *feel like*. That is, older people regard the opinion environment (12a) as more acceptable than the fact environment (12b) for *feel like*.

Finally, I also conducted independent samples t-tests to see if there were differences in acceptability along the following three lines:

(13) past vs. present tense of *feel*
    a. I <u>feel</u> like he's avoiding me.
    b. I <u>felt</u> like he was avoiding me.

(14) subject of the sentence (*I* vs. *my friend*)
    a. <u>I</u> feel like Susan should stop spreading rumors.
    b. <u>My friend</u> feels like Susan should stop spreading rumors.

(15) opinion concerning *me* vs. *you*
    a. I feel like Susan should pick <u>me</u> for her team.
    b. I feel like Susan should pick <u>you</u> for her team.

All of these examples were opinion-based to control for the effect discussed above, in which average acceptability of opinion-based *feel like* was significantly greater than that of fact-based *feel like*. No significant differences were found in acceptability for any of the three categories (Table 3). This suggests that, rather than syntactic restrictions, *feel like* imposes contextual restrictions for some (mainly older) speakers.

5.3 What stigma surrounds *feel like*?

Stigma-related judgments were evaluated through Section 3 of the survey, in which quotes made by hypothetical speakers were presented, and respondents were asked to guess the speaker's gender, age, and intelligence, which are all possible areas of prejudice as highlighted by the opinion writers discussed in Section 2.1. I compared responses for quotes using *feel like* and those using *think*. The analyses were done separately for the opinion- and fact-based quotes, and the results are summarized in Table 2. First, chi-square analyses were conducted for the opinion-based *feel like* and *think* quotes with respect to the respondents' responses for perceived age ($\chi^2(1) = .008$, $p = .928$), gender ($\chi^2(2) = 4.12$, $p = .128$), and intelligence ($\chi^2(2) = 1.39$, $p = .499$). None of

	Mean Difference	SE Difference	t(122)	p
tense: past vs. present	-.15	.15	-.97	.332
subject: I vs. my friend	.31	.21	1.45	.149
about: me vs. you	-.11	.20	-.57	.569

Table 3. No Significant Difference in Syntactic Environments

these associations were significant. Next, the same chi-square analyses were conducted for the fact-based *feel like* and *think* quotes. There was a significant result for perceived intelligence, $\chi^2(2) = 11.97$, $p = .003$. More people expected the speaker of fact-based *feel like* to be in the lower intelligence category, and vice versa: more people predicted the speaker of fact-based *think* to be of higher intelligence. There was a significant result for age, as well, with $\chi^2(1) = 3.90$, $p = .048$. More people placed the speaker of fact-based *feel like* in the younger age group, and vice versa: more people regarded the speaker of fact-based *think* as a member of the older age group. However, there was no significant result for gender, $\chi^2(2) = 1.58$, $p = .453$. This indicates that the prejudice reflected in the survey results focuses on age and intelligence more than gender.

5.4 Who uses *feel like that*?

First, I conducted an independent samples t-test to compare acceptability of *feel like* and *feel like that*. Note that these sentences come in minimal pairs (either with *feel like* or *feel like that*). As expected, on the 5-point scale, mean *feel like* acceptability ($M = 4.24$, $SD = .79$) was significantly higher than mean *feel like that* acceptability ($M = 2.35$, $SD = .96$), $t(122) = 12.02$, $p < .001$.

Next, multiple linear regression analysis (Table 1) was conducted, similar to the analysis of *feel like*. Overall, age, gender, and foreign influence were not found to explain a significant amount of the variance in *feel like that* acceptability ($F(3, 58) = .62$, $p = .604$, $R^2 = .03$). Individually, none of the three predictors were found to have a significant relationship with *feel like that* acceptability, either.

5.5 In what environments is *feel like that* accepted?

The survey's reach was such that only five of the 62 respondents had average acceptability of 4 and above for *feel like that* sentences. Thus, environmental factors surrounding *feel like that* are not analyzed in as much detail as was done for *feel like*. Here, I examine differences in acceptability of opinion- vs. fact-based *feel like that*. For the first test, I include only those 12 respondents who had average *feel like that* acceptability greater than 3. There is no significant difference between mean acceptability of opinion- ($M = 3.95$, $SD = .64$) and fact-based *feel like that* ($M = 3.50$, $SD = 1.33$), $t(122) = 1.05$, $p = .308$, though the mean acceptability of opinion-based *feel like that* is still greater (albeit not significantly) than that of the fact-based version, as was the case for *feel like*.

A linear regression analysis was also conducted to compare the difference of acceptability of opinion- vs. fact-based *feel like that* and age. I found a significant relationship between the two ($r(60) = .25$, $p = .025$) in the same direction as before: younger people see less of a difference in acceptability of opinion- vs. fact-based *feel like that*.

5.6 What stigma surrounds *feel like that*?

Chi-square analysis (Table 2) was employed to compare responses to quotes using *feel like* and those using *feel like that* for two participant judgments: whether the speaker seemed to be a native speaker of English or not, and how intelligent the speaker seemed, all based on the given quote. First, I found a significant result for perception of native speaker status, $\chi^2(2) = 30.28$, $p < .001$. More respondents guessed that the speaker was not a native speaker of English when the quote included *feel like that* as compared with *feel like*, perhaps because it was ungrammatical to many of the respondents. Second, this analysis shows that more respondents assumed the speaker to be less intelligent when the quote contained *feel like that* as compared with *feel like*, $\chi^2(3) = 22.00$, $p < .001$. Although the previous analysis showed a deficit in perceived intelligence when using *feel like* as opposed to *think*, this effect is exacerbated with use of *feel like that*.

The survey's reach was such that only five of the 62 respondents had average acceptability of 4 and above for the *feel like that* sentences. Thus, for this study, it made more sense to focus on respondents' acceptability judgments related to *feel like* and their stigma judgments related to *feel like*, *feel like that*, and *think*.

6. Conclusion

The phenomenon of doxastic *feel like* is entwined with syntactic and sociolinguistic complexity and poses intriguing questions for grammatical diversity. The survey results reflect the general linguistic prejudice present in the online sphere that *feel like* is associated with younger speakers, and is a marker of lower intelligence. The instance of microsyntactic variation with *feel like that* also provides us with an opportunity to explore the syntactic nature of *like* as a preposition as part of the phrasal verb *feel like*. *Feel like that* is certainly a worthy topic of exploration in grammatical diversity, and future survey work should strive to reach more speakers of this construction. The survey results presented in this study are particularly useful to illuminate the prejudice carried by people who find *feel like that* to be unacceptable, namely, that those who use *feel like* may be non-native speakers of English and/or may have lower intelligence. This exploration of doxastic *feel like* provides a case-specific analysis of the co-existence of microsyntactic variation and linguistic prejudice, and how they inform our understanding of grammatical diversity.

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