Belief verbs are pragmatically ambiguous

Depending on the context, mental state verbs can - indicate that someone holds a belief without necessarily committing to its truth

(1) A: What is this?  
B: I think it’s a tiger.  
- have a parenthetical interpretation, politely softening an assertion (Rooryck 2001, Simons 2007)

(2) A: It’s a lion.  
B: I think it’s a tiger.  

Pragmatic hypothesis for explaining why children have difficulty with belief verbs

Lewis et al. 2013

QUD  (Where is Swiper?)

Exp:  Dora thinks that Swiper is behind the toy box.

Child:  No—he’s behind the curtain!

Experiment 1: tunes in isolation

Experiment 2: tunes in context

Does prosody help distinguishing these two uses?  
Kurumada (2013) provides evidence that prosody helps in a similar pragmatic contrast: It looks like a ZEBRA (and is) vs. It LOOKS like a zebra (but isn’t)

Experiment 1 tests 5 tunes in isolation for how certain the speaker sounded.

Experiment 2 tests whether listeners used the prosodic differences when determining a speaker’s intent in context.

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