

Doxastic Modality as a Means of Stance Taking in Colloquial Sinhala

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1. Introduction.

What has been traditionally studied as the involitive construction in Colloquial Sinhala involves a verb form broadly indicative of non-volitionality (Gair, 1970; Inman, 1993). However, Inman (1993) categorizes another usage of the Sinhala involitive as doxastic (Kratzer, 1981). Doxastic modality indicates eventualities that occur counter to speaker expectations. Previous explorations of stance in linguistics and anthropology have examined a number of features including evidentials, discourse markers, reported and indirect speech, indexicals, prosody, and affect. In this paper, I add to previous investigations of stance by describing an additional means for evaluation and alignment in sets of recorded conversations between young professionals in Sri Lanka.

My analysis proceeds as follows: First, I give a brief introduction to the Sinhala language and the social setting of the research. Then, I gloss key concepts utilized in previous investigations of stance, including research on positioning, alignment, and evaluation. Next, I review the semantics of doxastic modals as an extension of the involitive paradigm and analyze conversational data of three Colloquial Sinhala speakers, focusing on the role doxastic modals plays in “games of stance” (Goodwin, 2006). Finally, working from Silverstein’s notion of indexical orders (Silverstein, 2003) and Eckert’s recent concept of indexical fields (Eckert, in press), I link stance taking moves to both local and global constructions of identity while discussing some difficulties concerning the connection between stance, identity construction, and the formation of social meaning.

2. The Sinhala Language

Sinhala is an Indo-Aryan language spoken in Sri Lanka, an island country off the southern tip of India. Spoken by the majority population, the Sinhala tradition reports that the original speakers of Sinhala came to the island around 544-543 B.C., with the

parinibbaana (the final passing) of the Buddha. Because Sinhala developed for over two millennia isolated from its sister Indo-Aryan languages of northern India (Hindi, Bengali, Marathi, Punjabi, etc.), the phonological and grammatical characteristics of Sinhala are very different from other Indo-Aryan languages (Gair, 1998:1). This is also due to the heavy influence of intervening southern Indian languages, specifically the geographical connectedness with the Dravidian language Tamil. Sinhala has a number of structural features that make it interesting to linguists including a morphological four-way deictic system, definiteness marking on nominals, causative and plural formation systems involving gemination, and a system of volitivity marking on verbal forms. The latter volitive marking system will be the primary concern of this study.

Sinhala is a strongly diglossic language, using two distinct language forms, Spoken Sinhala and Literary Sinhala. Literary Sinhala is primarily used in written forms of communication such as newspapers, literature, and government documents (Gair, 1998: 229). Spoken Sinhala is composed of formal and colloquial varieties which occur in everyday use. Formal spoken Sinhala may occur in university lectures, parliament addresses, or sermons in churches or mosques. The colloquial form (which exists in various dialects: Western: Colombo, Southern: Galle, Central: Kandy) is used in conversations between family and friends, with colleagues or subordinates, and on certain TV “soap operas” (Gair, 1998: 229). The data in this paper is solely Colloquial Sinhala.

The group of speakers I examine in this analysis, Arjuna (referred to as A in transcripts), Bathiya (B), and Chamara (C) all live and work in Kandy, thus speak a dialect of Colloquial Sinhala from central Sri Lanka. The three men, aging in their mid to late twenties (at the time of data collection) all work together. Having grown up in Kandy, two of them attended the same school throughout childhood and adolescence and as a group they can be described as close friends. Recordings of their conversations were made by the participants themselves during the course of a few weeks. During conversations, these young men take stances by making assessments and evaluating objects, persons, and actions that serve to define themselves and others.

3. Previous Studies of Stance

Stance is loosely defined by Du Bois as interacting linguistic features that mark a speaker’s orientation to ongoing talk (Du Bois, 2002). These linguistic features have important interactional and ideological implications because they relate to both emerging discourse and large-scale sociocultural values. Stance, in other words, is a method of identity construction and a means of policing normative social actions of group members.

Inquiries into stance have been approached by a variety of researchers under differing rubrics. These range from social psychological (Davies and Harré, 1990; Harré and Langenhove, 1992, 1999) and discourse analytic (Schiffrin, 1994, 2006; Ribeiro, 2006) approaches to positioning, linguistic anthropological (Besnier, 1993; Haviland, 1991; Maynard, 1993; Ochs, 1996; Shoaps, 2002) and conversation and discourse analytic discussions of evaluation (Conrad and Biber, 2000; Hunston and Sinclair, 2000; Hunston and Thomson, 2000; Lemke, 1998), and analyses of assessments and alignments (Pomerantz, 1984; Goodwin and Goodwin, 1992; Du Bois, 2002a; Heritage, 2002; Heritage and Raymond, 2005; Goodwin, 2006). Recently Du Bois (2007) has attempted

to bring cohesion to these various frameworks, pointing to the ways that each fit neatly under the umbrella term *stance*. As exemplified by his informal description of stance, “I evaluate something, and thereby position myself, and thereby align with you,” evaluation, positioning, and alignment are all different aspects of stance taking rather than disparate classifications (Du Bois, 2007: 163). They have the same analytical focus on how a speaker orients to talk in ongoing interaction through linguistic features. The definition of stance used here, then, follows Du Bois’ approach of bringing cohesion to these various frameworks. Stance, in other words, is “the display of evaluative, [or] affective, [or] epistemic orientations in discourse” (Bucholtz and Hall, 2005: 11).

In addition to the multi-faceted aspects of stance, Du Bois (2007) highlights three points important for fully understanding stance. (1) Researchers must locate the stance taker. Rather than merely being aware of the speaker, this also involves any available information listeners have on the speaker’s previous utterances, relationship with co-present others, accent, voice quality, intonation, regional, ethnic, gender categories, community associations, and other salient factors. (2) Researchers should locate the object of stance, or what speakers are evaluating. (3) And finally, researchers should be attentive to what stance (or counterstance) a stance taker is responding to and why such a stance is being taken under present conditions.

Along with considerations of evaluation, positioning, and alignment, Du Bois’ three points play an integral part in analyzing how doxastic modals contribute to stance taking in Sinhala. Prior to such an analysis, though, I give a brief overview of the semantics of doxastic modals, describing the conditions for their occurrence.

4. The Sinhala Involitive as a Doxastic Modal

Contrasts in volitivity marking on Sinhala verbs have been recognized in grammars dating from the early to mid 19th century (Chater, 1815, Lambrick, 1834, Carter, 1860, 1862) and have been a feature that by and large has drawn the attention of many scholars (Geiger, 1938, Gair, 1970, 1971, Premarante, 1986, Wijayawardhana, et al 1991, Inman, 1993). Particularly, Colloquial Sinhala verbs labeled *volitive* are generally taken to express volitional action, and involitive, non-volitional action as below (from Coates, 1972: 471):

(1)

B: *Wiiduruwak binduna noona.*
 glass.INDEF.SG break.INV.PST madam
 ‘A glass got broken, madam.’ (Involitive)

N: *Kohomə də eekə binde?*
 how Q it break.VOL.PST
 ‘How did you break it?’ (Volitive)

B: *Mamə binde næə, noona eekə binduna*
 1ST.NOM.SG break. VOL.PST NEG madam it break.INV.PST
 ‘I did not break it madam – it got broken.’ (Volitive/ Involitive)

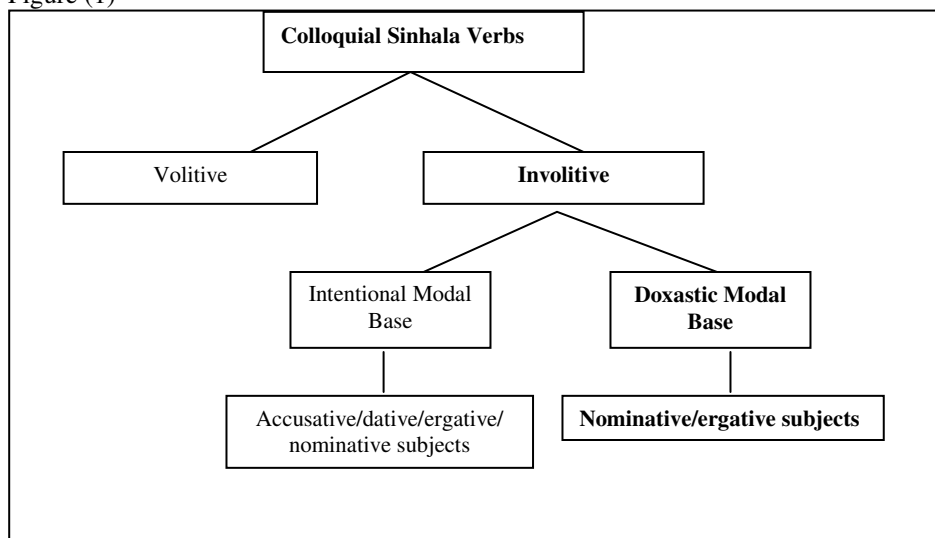
The distinguishing morphological feature between the volitive and involitive is a contrast of thematic suffix and stem-vowel backness (Inman 1993). Verbs referred to as involitive are morphologically complex, derived from volitive verbs in the present tense by fronting of the vowel in the stem and stem final consonant gemination (except with certain morphemes) and stem vowel fronting and final augmentation for past tense verbs (Inman, 1993:23).

In addition, involitive verbs occur with a range of non-nominative subjects where varying degrees of non-volitionality are expressed depending on the case marking of the subject. Case marking of subjects in prior studies (Inman, 1992; Inman, 1993) show them to be marked accusative with intransitives (only overtly marked on animate subjects), ergative with transitives¹, and dative with transitives and intransitives. Crucially, though, nominative and ergative subjects occur with involitive verb morphology with a non-volitional reading signaling an action counter to speaker expectations. Inman (1993) terms this the 'doxastic' modal base (following Kratzer (1977, 1981)).

He (Inman 1993) argues that the Sinhala involitive is an intensional operator that expresses possibility (its modal force) with two types of modal bases, the traditionally studied intentional modal base that represents a proposition evaluated based on the intentions of the actor and a doxastic modal base where the proposition is evaluated based on speaker expectations. More specifically, the intentional modal indexes the speaker's knowledge regarding the intention of the subject in performing the action of the verb and the doxastic modal indexes the speaker's expectations that the subject would perform the action of the verb. As mentioned, each type of modality is distinguishable in Sinhala based on variations in case-marked subjects accompanying the verb. As shown in the chart below, the doxastic modal occurs with nominative and ergative subjects.

¹ Inman (1993) also identifies the involitive as occurring with instrumental subjects. Speakers from Zubair and Beavers (2008) did not accept instrumental subjects as grammatical. This inconsistency most likely has to do with the growing divide between Formal Spoken Sinhala and Colloquial Sinhala, where English is increasingly replacing younger generation's knowledge and study of Formal Sinhala. Earlier research with one older speaker showed that instrumental subjects were occasionally acceptable, while all younger subjects counted them as ungrammatical.

Figure (1)



Noticeably, doxastic and intentional modal bases overlap with verbs of ergative and nominative subjects. Thus, verb class and context are a key factor in distinguishing occurrences of modal base. For example, certain verbs occurring with the involitive morpheme are difficult to get unintentional readings with, such as ‘cooking’ or ‘giving a speech.’ In addition, involitive constructions can be classified by speakers as intentional acts where volitional modifiers are acceptable as drawing out the doxastic reading. Context also provides essential clues.

Now turning to an example of doxastic modality as it occurs in conversational usage, the way it marks speaker expectations is clear. In this example, Arjuna comments on the lunch Bathiya brings to work, telling him it smells bad and asking him what it is. Bathiya responds by saying that he cooked his lunch himself, to which Arjuna expresses disbelief and teases him that in fact his mother forced him to cook.²

(2)a.

A: *Meka gandai machang ((laughter))*
 that smell.PRES dude
 ‘Smells bad, dude.’ (*Bathiya’s lunch*)

b.

B: *Maməmə kəəmə iyuwwa.*
 1st.NOM.S.REFL food cook.PST.
 ‘I cooked (it) myself.’

² As shown by the longer excerpt in the appendix, Arjuna’s teasing is somewhat put to a stop when Bathiya relays the reason for this atypical action, that his mom could not cook because she was at the hospital with his grandmother.

c.

A: *Nææ, oyaa iyuwwa? Lokudə? ((laughter))*
 NEG 2nd.NOM.S **cook.PST** big-Q
 ‘No, you cooked? Is that a big deal?’ (**no doxastic modal**)

d.

A: *Uyənəwadə? Oyaa atin iwenəwa nææ.*
 cook.NPST-Q 2nd.S ERG **cook.DOX** NEG
 ‘(You) cooked? You cook, no.’ (**doxastic modal**)

e.

A: [*Oyaa ammath eka iyuweuwa.*
 2nd.NOM.S mother with DEF **cook.CAUS.NPST**
 ‘Your mother made you cook.’ (**no doxastic modal**)

Arjuna uses the involitive doxastically as highlighted in (2d) to indicate that Bathiya’s cooking is counter to his expectations. Based on knowledge of Bathiya’s routines and his normative ideas of who usually cooks in a household, Arjuna uses the doxastic modal to express his beliefs that Bathiya would not usually cook for himself.

We can identify this doxastic usage through morphological, semantic and contextual clues. Morphologically, *iwenəwa* is recognizable as an involitive verb through the fronted stem vowel /i/, which changes from /u/ in the present volitive verb stem as bolded in (2d). The ergative subject indicates that a doxastic reading is available. Considering that the verb *cook* is very difficult to get a reading of non-intentionality, requiring an agentive subject, the intentional modal base seems unlikely. Further, looking at the context of the utterance, we see that Arjuna has already established through his questions in line (2c) and (2d) that Bathiya has intentionally cooked himself lunch. Thus the involitive cannot be a marker of non-intentionality, but rather a way for Arjuna to express his surprise at the act. Similar extensions of non-volitionality by speakers to orient themselves towards real-world knowledge, cultural, or speaker-based expectations have been documented in Halkomelen Salish by Gerdt (2008).

Markers on Salish verbs that express limited control or situations involving accidental, unintentional, or involuntary actions, are shown to be a morphological device for a speaker to express a viewpoint about a situation. Specially, Gerdt defines them as a way to indicate that an event falls outside the range of usual behavior as judged by the speaker’s real-world knowledge or cultural based-expectations given a certain context. The extension of limited control markings on verbs to express a speaker’s expectations have been additionally discussed in Tagalog (Dell, 1983; Himmelman, 2004, 2006).

Having established the presence of doxastic modality in Colloquial Sinhala and similar semantic extensions of non-intentionality in other languages, in the next section I discuss the interactional implications of using the doxastic modal base.

5. Doxastic Modality as a Stance Taking Device

The doxastic modal is important for interactional stance in that it is a key indicator of a speaker's evaluation of another's action. The doxastic modal serves an important role in beginning the chain of entailment relationships³ that leads to interactional stance. In the example below, Arjuna and Bathiya disapprovingly comment on a picture in which Bathiya's brother is wearing a pink shirt. The doxastic modal occurs in line (1).

(3)a. ((looking at a picture))

A: *Machang umbe aiyya rosa paTə shirt ekak ændalenəwadə?*
 dude 3rd.GEN.S brother pink color shirt DEF wear.DOX -Q
 'Dude, is that a pink shirt your brother is wearing?' (doxastic modal)

b. ((laughs))

B: *Machang eka thamə mamə kiyuwe.*
 dude that what 1st.NOM.S say.PST
 'Dude, that's what I said.'

c.

B: *Eyaa eka "peach"mə kiyəla kiyənəwa.*
 3rd.NOM.S DEF peach.EMPH say.PST.PERF say.NPST
 'He insists it's peach.'

d.

A: *Monəwawunath eka rosa paTə shirt ekak andalənəwa.*
 Whatever DEF pink color shirt DEF wear.NPST
 'Whatever, he's wearing a pink shirt.' (no doxastic modal)

e.

B: *Hari hæbai eyaath ekka eka gəne monəwath kiyanne epaa.*
 okay but 3rd.NOM.S that DEF about anything say.NPST NEG
 'Okay, but don't say anything to him about it.'

Arjuna uses the modal verb *ændalenəwa* in (3a) in the context of a question. As Arjuna sees that Bathiya's brother is wearing a pink shirt through observation of a photo, the question is not a request for information but a way for Arjuna to point out what he notices as strange. The doxastic modal evaluates the subject's (Bathiya's brother's) act as surprising in relation to Arjuna's expectations. This positions Arjuna as counter to Bathiya's brother. Arjuna's alignment is evident across turns as Bathiya reacts to Arjuna's evaluative statement. In (3b), Bathiya laughs and expresses a reaction similar to Arjuna's, thus the two are aligned in their stance taking concerning the oddity of Bathiya's brother's pink shirt.

³ What I am calling the "entailment relationship" begun by an evaluative utterance is expressed by the directional arrow in DuBois' (2007: 163) stance triangle.

Considering DuBois' three points regarding stance, locating the stance taker, the object (or subject) towards which stance is being taken, and how the stance relates to previous stances, we have answered the first two questions. Arjuna takes a stance regarding Bathiya's brother's shirt. DuBois' third question, what is the prior stance?, is not as easy to locate within the interaction as the first two. Tentatively suggesting that the prior stance Arjuna responds to in commenting on the pink shirt is the idea that young men normally do not wear pink and girls do, points to cultural norms as held by the speaker. This is an issue I consider further in the next section. Focusing on how Arjuna's relates to the actions of non-present others, however, leads to an important distinction.

Thus far, we have been preoccupied with how the doxastic modal has interactional implications. Line (3a), in isolation, though, is an evaluative proposition, or an act of propositional stance (Agha, 2007), that we can segment from the interaction and still clearly understand its evaluative function in marking the pink shirt as non-normative. Often times propositional and interactional stance in regards to the doxastic modal are conflated, as in Example (2), when stance is being taken towards a prior utterance. In these cases, speakers' positioning and alignment follows seemingly automatically from evaluation. In Example (2), Arjuna's propositional reaction to Bathiya's cooking immediately positions him as disaligned with respect to Bathiya. For Example (3), the way stance operates at the propositional level, containing evaluative content, can be separated from positioning and alignment at the interactional level because when Arjuna evaluates an object rather than a prior utterance, he must wait for Bathiya's subsequent evaluation of his comment and the object under scrutiny before the interactional positioning or alignment is clear, both of which are necessary components of interactional stance.

Looking at another example, we see that the doxastic modal can be used as a counterstance taking device (which is of course a stance as well), in that Chamara uses it to evaluate and show disalignment with Bathiya's previous claim. In the following, Arjuna, Bathiya, and Chamara discuss a recent near accident Chamara had involving a three wheeled vehicle⁴ (three wheeler). Chamara tells the story of how the three wheeler driver cut him off causing him to slam his brakes and jam his wrist into the steering wheel. In the selected excerpt Arjuna points to the oddity that Chamara hit bad traffic as he usually leaves work early. At this point, Bathiya jumps in with an explanation as to why Chamara was late at work, namely he was taking the opportunity to look at adult websites. Chamara counters this claim using the doxastic modal.

(4) a.

C: *Havelock pare mara traffic eda.*
 Havelock road great traffic that
 'It was heavy traffic that (day) on Havelock Road.'

b.

A: *Aei parakku wela eheng giye?*
 why late happen.PST there go.PST

⁴ Used as taxis in Sri Lanka, Thailand, etc.

‘Why did (you) leave there so late?’

c.

C: *Stuck,* [*machang.*
stuck dude
‘Stuck, [dude.]’

d.

B: *Okkoməla* *gedara* *giyaaTə* *passe* *porn* *bəluwa.*
everyone home go.PST after porn watch.NPST
‘when] everyone left (he) **looks** at porn.’ (**no doxastic modal**)

((laughter))

e.

C: *Ouu* *machang* *okkoməla* *gedərə* *giyaaTə* *passe*
yes dude everyone home go.PST after
‘Yeah, dude, when everyone leaves....’

f.

C: *mamə* *atin* *wəla* *bəlenəwa.*
1st.S ERG porn watch.DOX
....I **look** at porn (**doxastic modal**)

The doxastic modal in line (4f) occurs as a double-voicing of Bathiya’s previous accusation with an important incongruency of the verb *watch*, changed to a doxastic modal. The modal helps to signal that the words Chamara uses are against his own beliefs, or against expectations that he as a subject watches porn. Thus, the doxastic modal aids in the stance of defensiveness⁵ (or counterstance) that Chamara takes against Bathiya. By evaluating his voiced action as non-normative, Chamara counters Bathiya’s claim, positioning himself against him and in disalignment.⁶

In summary, Examples (3) and (4), exemplify how the doxastic modal is an important evaluative device that allows speakers to position themselves in relation to interlocutors and non-present others as well as align across turns. Reviewing the similarities in the uses of the doxastic modal in all three examples, we see that propositionally the doxastic modal expresses actions counter to expectations, and contextually always contributes to a negative evaluation by the speaker.⁷ Interactionally, when the evaluation targets the utterance of a prior speaker who is a participant in the conversation, as with Example (2) and (4), the modal contributes to disalignment with that speaker.

⁵ Whereas I am tentatively naming this ‘defense’, I found this instance of stance particularly hard to classify with a single term as it depends on asymmetry with the previous utterance and tropically plays on expected norms of male behavior.

⁶ As Sinhala is a prodrop language, Chamara need not have included *mamə* (I) in line (11). As we see in (10), Bathiya dropped the subject pronoun *he*. Chamara’s inclusion of *mamə* (I) adds minimal difference from Bathiya’s previous utterance, which Chamara repeats. Its presence is an emphatic means indicating Chamara’s double-voicing and aiding in the counterstance.

⁷ Though the modal could conceivably be used for a positive evaluation.

6. Stance, Identity, and Social Meaning

In Section (5), we pinpointed the doxastic modal as an evaluative device that is a key component in triggering stance. Because the doxastic modal indicates that a situation is against a speaker's expectations, it marks another's action as non-normative at the same time it expresses the speaker's beliefs concerning normative behavior. As Goodwin (2006) suggests, stance taking's role in policing normative beliefs is one way it can be connected to identity. This requires a link between micro-level processes of interactional stance and locally salient and macro-level identities (Bucholtz and Hall 2005), an intuitive connection that is however difficult to operationalize.

Because locally salient and macro-level identities must exist in groups and communities, pinpointing ideologies that typically correlate social meaning is a first step. To do so requires finding evidence of the categories of social meaning speakers have internalized and are often unable to express. Agha's (2003) work on enregisterment (the solidification of social meaning) along with studies similarly linking social meaning and linguistic form at the macro-level (Zhang, 2005, Johnstone, et al 2006), have relied on representations in public discourse, such as when a specific variable is voiced by the same character type over and over, linking speech with a common stance or characterological trait in the minds of acculturated language users.

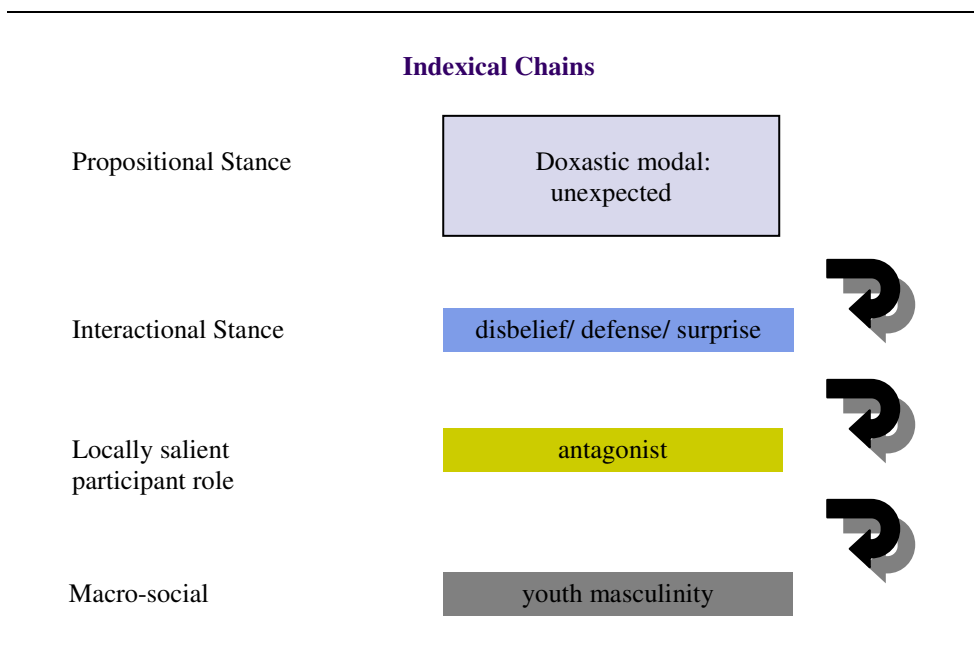
Such public discourses provide evidence of links between indexical orders, according to Silverstein (2003: 193), "the concept necessary to showing us how to relate the micro-social to the macro-social frames of analysis of any sociolinguistic phenomena." Indexical orders are the relationships between indexes that create social meaning by connecting a variable, a stance, and an identity category. Crucially, though, to uncover a relationship of indexical ordering requires sociohistorical evidence, often in the form of metapragmatic construals of variable in public discourses. The studies on social meaning mentioned above (Agha. 2003, Zhang, 2005, Johnstone et al, 2006) all examine identities that have been historically cemented, or enregistered. The question remaining is how to capture social meaning that is either being enregistered or exists in the absence of metapragmatic construals in easily identifiable places (such as the media)?

Whereas I have no clear answer to this dilemma, as in the case of my data, clear associations between identities and ideologies exist in accordance with the use of the doxastic modal. Thus to talk irreproachably of identity and cultural ideologies requires evidence of how the doxastic modal contributes to the speech of other male speakers in their mid twenties, language attitudes accompanying this, and any meta talk in print or the media. In the absence of this, I will describe correlations of meaning in the data, with the idea that this is still an important step in studying identity and social meaning.

In examining DuBois' third stance question (what is the prior stance?) for Example (3), we saw how gender ideologies played a role in stance taking. Arjuna does not expect a man to wear pink because that is color associated with women. In Example (2), Arjuna does not expect Bathiya to cook because that is an activity for women. And in Example (4), Chamara refutes Bathiya's assertion that he engages in stereotypical male behavior of looking at pornography. Gendered patterns are nonetheless easily identifiable without the examination of reflexive activity to support the availability of such cultural ideologies.

In the absence of a sociohistorical analysis, we cannot call the link between the doxastic modal, interactional stance, participant roles, and macro-social identity indexical orders. Thus, I have provided a visual representation of the *indexical chain* that clearly occurs in the data.

Figure (2)



As we have seen, the doxastic modal, on a propositional level, always indexes an unexpected action, while on an interactional level, it contributes to and triggers stance that relates participants. Locally, each use of the doxastic modal base is a device for the speaker to employ an antagonistic role in regards to the object, person, or proposition being assessed. Considering that each speaker role is filled by a male antagonist speaking to another male on gendered topics, topics that range from gender expectations surrounding activities of cooking, looking at pornography, and wearing certain colors, interactional stance on a macro-level becomes a way of policing gender norms (Goodwin, 2006) relating to larger level constructions of a particular youth masculinity.

Furthermore, any reinforcing or opposition of social norms is a site for a speaker to construct identity. Considering individual speaker identity, we can locate such construction in the range of interactional stances that occur when the doxastic modal is employed. Returning to Example (2), Arjuna's use of the doxastic modal interactionally functions to show disbelief that Bathiya cooked. Arjuna's questioning of Bathiya's claim of cooking in line (2c), "No, you cooked?," indicates a disbelief. The doxastic modal in (2d) further supports the stance of disbelief by marking the action as unexpected.

Moreover, the negative tag, “no,” in line (2d) expresses *disbelief*, tying the modal to this stance.

In Example (3), the doxastic modal is used within a question. As mentioned, the question is not a request for information since Arjuna sees in the photo the color of the shirt. Rather, it contributes to a stance of *surprise* at the non-normative behavior.

Finally, Example (4) is unique in that Chamara uses the doxastic modal to take a counterstance against the stance expressed in the previous turn. Interactionally, Chamara is taking a stance of *defense* against Bathiya..

Arjuna and Chamara use the doxastic modal for a range of speaker stances, each of which construct local forms of interactional identity. This indicates a range of pragmatic construals available to the doxastic modal, its indexical field. Indexical fields are a concept that emphasize that “the meanings of variables are not precise or fixed but rather constitute a field of potential meanings—an indexical field, or constellation of ideologically related meanings, any one of which can be activated in the situated use of the variable” (Eckert, in press). Though the doxastic modal functions at the propositional level to show unexpectedness, we have witnessed in the examples its variable meanings depending on speaker characteristics, role, and context. In the lunch example, the modal indexes a stance of disbelief, in the three wheeler example, it indexes defense, and in the pink shirt example, it indexes surprise. The list, of course is not exhaustive as the doxastic modal may pragmatically function in other means of stance taking (stances x, y, or z). Crucially, the meaning a speaker chooses relates to interactional identity construction.

Though researchers must further work out the relationship between micro and macro processes, the patterns in the data described above serve as a tentative connection. The doxastic modal participates in an indexical chain in which it moves from propositional stance to interactional stance to a fixed participant role to macro-social identity. To label this process indexical ordering perhaps requires examination of a larger data set (in the tradition of studies of enregisterment), but conflated in sociocultural time and space, these conversations show a recognizable trend that leads to the construction of a macro-level youth masculinity. Also, on the level of the interaction, each speaker exhibits a range of stances through their use of the doxastic modal. Choosing one meaning from available alternatives in the indexical field is one way speakers construct identity on the local level.

7. Conclusion

In propositional isolation, the doxastic modal is simply an index of unexpectedness. Yet, its interactional use has a range of meanings that creates various stances. Available as an evaluative device, the doxastic modal is tool for speakers to express their opinions in a way that organizes relationships among participants. By extension, the doxastic modal’s evaluative reference to persons and objects, is a way for speakers to state, reinforce, or oppose sociocultural values.

Having briefly discussed the indexical chain from micro to macro levels of meaning as well as how variation in use contributes to the local construction of identity in my data, the difficulty of linking interactional moves to overarching cultural ideologies still remains

an important topic of discussion. Whereas indexical ordering is a step in solving this, a researcher studying social meaning that is not historically solidified and traceable in the public sphere must use means other than widely circulating reflexive activity to uncover it. Explanations of local patterns that may latter be linked to macro processes are still a promising way to aid in understanding social meanings. Across conversations and research, stances may show patterns that serve as evidence of marco-level social meaning absence of evidence present in public discourse. Hoping my study contributes in this way, I have explored uses of doxastic modality by three male professionals in Sri Lanka.

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