Evidentiality and modality: the case of sentence final *punya* in Colloquial Malay
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Sentence final particle *punya* in Colloquial Malay has been described as indicating that the speaker is certain about the truth of the propositional content of the utterance (Koh 1990; Yap 2007a,b). It is sometimes referred to as a discourse particle because its use has an interactional overtone, with a "trust me" or "I'm telling you" type of meaning (Yap 2007b).

(1)   Ali   dah   tahu (punya).
         Ali   PERF know PUNYA
          'Ali knew it (for sure).'

In this paper, I present an empirical generalization involving the incompatibility of *punya* and questions that supports the current treatment of *punya* as indicating the speaker's certainty about the truth of the propositional content of the utterance. I show that in addition to the speaker's certainty, *punya* also signals the source of the information presented as of the inferential type. I show further that while the attitude holder is often the speaker, it can also be the external argument of verbs of saying and beliefs in embedded contexts.

Sentence final *punya* cannot appear in wh-questions and yes/no questions:

(2)   a.   Siapa-kah yang dia datang cari   (*punya)?
                 who-Q   that 3SG come look.for PUNYA
                 'Who did s/he come to look for? (*for sure)'
         b.   Dia datang cari   siapa (*punya)?
                 3SG come   look.for who   PUNYA
                 'Who did s/he come to look for? (*for sure)'
(3)   a   Dia ada-tak datang cari   kau (*punya)?
                 3SG have-Q come   look.for 2SG   PUNYA
                 'Did s/he come to look for you? (*for sure)'
         b.   Dia datang cari   kau (*punya) ke (*punya)?
                 3SG come   look.for 2SG   PUNYA Q   PUNYA
                 'Did s/he come to look for you? (*for sure)'

The incompatibility of *punya* with questions supports the treatment of *punya* as expressing the speaker's certainty about the truth of the propositional content of the utterance. Assuming that *punya* scopes over the question operator, *punya* is prohibited in questions because it is not possible to have confidence about questions, as questions are neither true nor false.

Punya also indicates that the speaker's knowledge that the proposition expressed is true is gained through inference. Thus, in a situation where A and B are at a party, and A saw Minah, but did not see Minah's boyfriend, and A knows that Minah does not go to any party without her boyfriend, A can utter (4) to B felicitously.

(4)   (#)Boyfriend Minah ada di sini punya.
             boyfriend Minah have at here PUNYA
             'Minah's boyfriend is here (for sure/inference).'

However, if A saw Minah's boyfriend at the party, A cannot utter (4) to B felicitously as the evidence source would be direct visual experience. As expected, (5) is unacceptable.

(5)   #Tengok. Boyfriend Minah ada di sini punya.
             look   boyfriend Minah have at here PUNYA
             'Look! Minah's boyfriend is here (for sure/inference).'

The same infelicity is found if the evidence source involves other senses. For example, in a situation where A is in a room, directly experiencing the temperature of the room, it is not felicitous for A to utter (6a) to B (whether or not B is in the same room):

(6)   a.   #Bilik ini panas punya.   b.   Bilik itu panas punya.
           room this hot   PUNYA   room that hot   PUNYA
           'This room is hot (for sure/inference).'   'That room is hot (for sure/inference).'

On the other hand, A may utter (6b) felicitously to B if s/he is not in the room, and is not directly experiencing the temperature of the room. A may infer the room's temperature through its level of sun exposure and the number of glass walls or windows it has, for example. That *punya* signals an inferential source is further supported by its inability to occur with statements of facts:

(7)   #Satu campur satu dapat dua punya.
      one plus   one get two PUNYA
    'One plus one is equal to two (for sure/inference).'

That the attitude holder is the speaker in simple sentences (and most complex sentences) is supported by (8). In (8), the speaker, being the attitude holder, cannot express confidence that the proposition [s/he knows it] is true, followed by a denial that the relevant proposition is true:

(8)   #Dia tahu punya. Tapi dia sebanarnya tak tahu.
     3SG know PUNYA but 3SG actually   not know
    '#S/he knows it (for sure/inference). But s/he actually does not know it.'

Doing so would lead to an expression of contradictory beliefs on the part of the speaker. In complex sentences involving verbs of saying (*kata* 'say') and beliefs (*ingatkan* 'think'; *fikir* 'think'), the attitude holder may be the external argument of such verbs. In (9), the attitude holder can be the external argument *mereka* 'they', who has confidence that the proposition [s/he knows it] is true. There is no contradiction for the speaker to deny the truth of the relevant proposition since the speaker does not hold the relevant attitude in this case:

(9)   Mereka kata dia tahu   punya. Tapi dia sebanarnya tak tahu.
     3PL   say 3SG know PUNYA but 3SG actually   not know
    'They said s/he knows it (for sure/inference). But s/he actually does not know it.'

The embeddability of *punya* under verbs of saying and beliefs suggests that *punya* is an epistemic modal as opposed to an illocutionary operator (following Matthewson, Davis and Rullmann 2007). Sentence final *punya* thus patterns like English modal *must* (von Fintel and Gillies 2010) in marking both quantificational strength and information source. The current analysis adds to the empirical base on the cross-linguistic patterning of the connection between modality and evidentiality (Matthewson, Davis and Rullmann 2007; McCready and Ogata 2007; Peterson 2010; Matthewson, in press), and supports the tight connection between epistemic modal and inferential evidence noted in von Fintel and Gillies (2010).

Selected references

von Fintel, Kai and Anthony S. Gillies. 2010. Must…stay…strong! Natural Language Semantics 18: 351-383.

Matthewson, Lisa, Henry Davis and Hotze Rullmann. 2007. Evidentials as epistemic modals. Linguistic Variation Yearbook 7: 201-254.

McCready, Eric and Norry Ogata. 2007. Evidentiality, modality and probability. Linguistics and Philosophy 30: 147-206.