

In the absence of epistemic certainty: On the Finnish dubitative particle *muka*

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Evidentiality—grammaticalized in some languages by means of evidential morphology—conveys information about the information source (e.g. visual, auditory, hearsay, inferential, Aikhenvald 2004). Since different information sources differ in their strength/reliability, evidentials also affect a *speaker's level of commitment* to the target proposition. E.g., visual evidence is judged to be more reliable than hearsay evidence: Uttering a sentence with a visual evidential exhibits a higher level of commitment to the target proposition than a hearsay evidential (e.g. Faller 2002, Davis et al. 2007). This raises the question of whether an evidential-marked proposition is asserted, presupposed or put forward as a possibility without a commitment to its truth. If a speaker only has a weak level of commitment to a proposition—e.g. expresses it with a hearsay evidential—treating that proposition as an assertion (that the speaker is proposing to add to the common ground) may be too strong. Indeed, prior work proposes a range of claims and implementations (e.g. Faller 2002, Davis et al. 2007, Matthewson et al. 2007, Sauerland & Schenner 2013).

I bring new data from Finnish to bear on these questions. I discuss the dubitative particle *muka* (roughly *supposedly, allegedly, as if*) which does not provide information about information source but *signals the speaker's level of commitment to the target proposition*. *Muka* indicates that the speaker strongly doubts the truth of the proposition (Kangasniemi 1992, Kuiri 1984, Nordlund/Pekkarinen 2014). There are 2 disparate uses of *muka*, which I argue can be unified:

Use 1: Expressing doubt. Kangasniemi (1994) notes that *muka* signals the speaker received the information from someone else and doubts its truth or does not agree with it. Ex.(1a) is felicitous when (i) the claim that Liisa lives in Lahti has been made by someone other than the speaker and (ii) by using *muka*, the speaker indicates s/he doubts this. In (1b), *muka* indicates the speaker doubts the data from google analytics about the people visiting the blog.

(1a) Liisa asuu *muka* Lahdessa. (Liisa lives MUKA Lahti-INESS)

'Liisa MUKA lives in Lahti' ~ 'It has been claimed that Liisa lives in Lahti but I doubt this'

(1b) ... analytiikan *mukaan* mun blogia lukee *muka* enemmän miehet kuin naiset. (www)

'according to the analytics claiming my blog is read MUKA more by men than by women.'

Use 2: Intentional pretense. *Muka* also has a seemingly distinct use where the speaker is saying something s/he *knows to be false* but someone (at least the speaker, maybe others) pretends to be true. This covers (i) make-believe contexts involving children's pretend-play (2a) and (ii) contexts where one person pretends to do something and hopes others (not the addressee) will think it is real (2b). The speaker uses *muka* to indicate to the addressee that the proposition describes a pretense. This use of *muka* does *not* require that anyone falls for the pretense.

(2a) Context where a child pretends to be an airplane: Nyt hän on *muka* lentokone. (Kangasniemi 1992)

Now he/she is MUKA airplane 'Now s/he is pretending-to-be an airplane.'

(a) *p* = he/she is an airplane. (b) *reality* = he/she is a toddler

(2b) Katselin *muka* näyteikkunoita (www)

Looked-at-1st MUKA shop-windows. 'I pretended-to look at shop windows.'

(a) *p* = I looked at shop windows (b) *reality* = I was surreptitiously looking at people around me

While these two meanings of *muka* have largely been treated as distinct in prior work, I suggest that they can be captured in a unified way by a straightforward adjustment in one aspect of the meaning that I propose for *muka*. There are two key ingredients relevant to this claim. **First**, I propose that part of *muka's* meaning is as shown in (3a): it signals that the proposition *p* is not part of the *x's* doxastic alternatives in world *v* (cf. Schenner & Sauerland 2013 on the Bulgarian dubitative. Let us assume that *x* and *v* are bound by the context variables for the matrix clause, i.e. the context of the speaker uttering the sentence, following Schenner & Sauerland 2013's analysis of Bulgarian. (For now, I focus on main clauses. *Muka* can also be embedded but even then it is largely speaker-oriented.). Intuitively, this captures the epistemic dubitative contribution of *muka*. (I show below that this meaning is not-at-issue.)

(3a) $p \not\subset \text{Dox}(x,v)$

(3b) $\exists y.y \text{ says/conveys that } p$

The **second** key ingredient is in (3b). On the doubt usage, *muka* cannot be felicitously used with out-of-the-blue propositions: It allows the speaker to express doubt about a proposition already uttered by (or otherwise conveyed by) someone else. Uttering (1a) in a context where no one has claimed that Liisa lives in Lahti is infelicitous. But how does this second ingredient help us unify the doubt use and pretense use of *muka*? I propose that both the doubt and pretense usage share the meaning components in (3a-b), but differ in terms of *whether the person who does not believe p (x) is the same person who says p (y)*, shown in (3c-d). This captures the intentional pretense and doubt uses of *muka*. On the pretense use, the speaker accomplishes (3a) and (3b) at the same time. (See also Pancheva & Rudin 2019 on reportative evidentials in other languages.)

(3c) $y = x$ [pretense use]

(3d) $y \neq x$ [doubt use]

What is the semantic status of these meaning components? I provide 3 pieces of evidence that doxastic contribution of *muka* (3a) is not-at-issue (NAI), while the proposition *p* modified by *muka* contributes at-issue meaning. (I assume (3b) is presupposed; space precludes a fuller discussion.) **#1 QUD:** *Muka* provides information that does not answer the QUD (ex.4b)—i.e. it is NAI—whereas the base proposition *p* modified by *muka* can answer the QUD (ex.4a).

(4a) **A:** *Mitä Matti tekee juuri nyt? (QUD) / What is Matti doing right now?*

B: *Se lukee muka tentteihin. / He is studying MUKA for exams.*

(4b) **A:** *Matti on vähän laiska, mutta toisinaan se keskittyy opiskeluun ihan tosissaan. Uskotko, että se opiskelee juuri nyt? (QUD) / M. is a bit lazy but occasionally he concentrates on his studies. Do you think he is studying right now?* **B:** *# Se lukee muka tentteihin. / # He is studying MUKA for exams.*

#2 Further evidence for *muka*'s NAI status comes from the direct *deniability/challengeability* test.

The meaning of *muka* cannot be directly denied, but *p* can be (ex5). **#3** The meaning of *muka* is not *defeasible/cancellable* (like other NAI content), but the proposition it modifies is (ex.6).

(Examples use a mix of colloquial *se*/formal *hän* pronouns, the distinction is irrelevant here).

(5) **A:** *Matti lukee muka tentteihin. / Matti is MUKA studying for exams.*

(5a) **B:** *Höpsistä! Se surffaa netissä. / Nonsense. He is surfing on line.*

(5b) **B:** *#Höpsistä! Sinä tiedät aivan hyvin, että hän todellakin lukee pääsykokeita varten. / #Nonsense. You know perfectly well that he really is studying for the entrance exams.*

(6a) *Matti lukee muka tentteihin, mutta oikeastaan hän surffaa netissä.*

Matti is MUKA studying for exams but actually he is surfing on line.

(6b) *# Matti lukee muka tentteihin, ja minä tiedän ihan varmasti että hän lukee tentteihin.*

Matti is MUKA studying for exams, and I know for sure that he is studying for exams.

So far, we have evidence that *p* contributes *at-issue* meaning, and *muka* contributes NAI meaning (3a-d). I propose that in sentences with *muka*, *p* is not asserted. It would be contradictory to assert something one doesn't believe (3a). Instead I suggest *p* is *presented*, or *put forward* in Faller's sense (2002/2012): *p* is introduced into the discourse without the speaker committing to its truth. This analysis can be extended to explain how *muka* can occur with the hearsay evidential *kuulemma* (7). A probabilistic account à la Davis et al. (2007) could be extended to uses of the hearsay *kuulemma* in matrix clauses (7), with *muka* contributing the meaning in (3).

(7) *Liisa asuu kuulemma muka Lahdessa. / Liisa lives KUULEMMA_{hearsay} MUKA in Lahti.*

This work offers a novel analysis of dubitative *muka*, provides a uniform account of its two meanings, and supports Faller's notion of the illocutionary move *present/put forward*.

Selected References. Aikhenvald 2004. *Evidentiality* | Davis et al. 2007. *Pragmatic values of evidential sentences* | Faller 2002. *Semantics and Pragmatics of Evidentials* | Kangasniemi 1992. *Modal Expressions in Finnish* | Kuiri 1984. *Referointi Kainuun ja Pohjois-Karjalan murteissa* | Nordlund/Pekkarinen 2014. *Grammaticalisation of the Finnish stance adverbial muka* | Pancheva/Rudin 2019. *Speaker discourse roles and the discourse profile of reportative evidentials* | Schenner/Sauerland 2013. *On Embedding and Evidentiality in Bulgarian*.