



Voicing conflict: Moral evaluation and responsibility in a Sri Lankan Muslim family's conversations



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ABSTRACT

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This article builds on literature on language and positionality to explore the role of voicing in the way individuals configure social differences. Drawing on research during the last phase of the Sri Lankan civil war, I examine how a Muslim family employs voicing to evaluate other individuals and ethnic groups in a way that pertains to morality and responsibility. I suggest that in an atmosphere of enshrouding fear, responsibility is not only an issue in terms of people's accountability for what they say and do but is also central in the way people situate themselves in relation to others.

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1. Introduction

Scholars of language have long been interested in the role of voice in socially positioning speakers (e.g. [Agha, 2007](#); [Bakhtin, 1981, 1984, 1986](#); [Jakobson, 1960](#); [Irvine, 2001](#); [Voloshinov, 1973](#)). Voice, or the “linguistic construction of social personae” ([Keane, 2001](#), p. 268), is a broader category than reported speech because it includes other rhetorical strategies, such as prosody and intonation ([Hill, 1995](#); [Rumsey, 2010](#)). In his discussion of double voiced utterances, Bakhtin explains the twofold direction of voice: “It is directed both toward the referential object of speech, as in ordinary discourse, and toward another's discourse, toward someone else's speech” (1984, p. 92). The dual nature of voice provides speakers with a resource with which to evaluate others, which may have social or moral implications ([Keane, 2001, 2010, 2011](#); [Hill, 1995](#); [Rumsey, 2010](#); [Wortham and Locher, 1999](#)). These evaluations do not only draw upon widely circulating associations between ways of speaking and social types of person, which are related to social categories, such as class, gender, race, and ethnicity, but can also reinforce or solidify them ([Agha, 2007](#); [Keane, 2010](#)). Voice is also an intriguing interactional resource because making attributions of speaker responsibility for voiced utterances and the evaluations present within them is difficult by virtue of its embedding of speaker positionality ([Hill and Irvine, 1992](#); [Keane, 2001](#)).

In situations of state violence, people are often careful about what they say in the presence of others because of fear of accountability for their words and actions ([Devotta, 2009](#); [Nordstrom, 1997](#); [Suárez-Orozco, 1992](#)). I conducted fieldwork in an ethnically diverse urban center (Kandy) in Sri Lanka during the final phase of the civil war between the Sri Lankan government and a Tamil insurgency group, the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE),¹ from June 2007–August 2008. During this heightened moment in the over 25-year conflict (1983–2009), ethnic divisions among Sinhalese, Tamils, and Muslims, as incorporated into state structures, infused everyday interactions. In conversations that I observed as a white American female, I found that while a person's ethnic identity was almost always made evident in the way they were talked about by others, people tended to avoid explicitly critiquing other individuals or ethnic groups. This behavior may have been a result of general

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¹ For an account of the causes of the Sri Lankan civil war see [Spencer \(1990\)](#), [Tambiah \(1986\)](#) and [Thiranagama \(2011\)](#).

interactional tendencies at the time, as well as my presence in the interactions. However, I found that it was quite common for speakers to employ metapragmatic resources in their talk, such as voicing, to subtly position themselves in relation to others. Because these positions were implicit, it was more difficult for interlocutors to pinpoint exactly what the speakers were saying, as well as to hold them directly accountable or responsible for their utterances.² In this article, I build on literature on language and positionality to explore how members of a Sri Lankan Muslim family employ voicing in interactions that occurred in the home, and evaluate themselves in relation to other individuals and ethnic groups via this voicing. I demonstrate how attention to voicing in multi-party talk highlights the role of morality and responsibility in the way individuals draw on their complex linguistic repertoires to configure themselves in relation to others.

2. Southern Muslims and the configuration of difference

Often excluded from mainstream representations of the Sri Lankan ethnic conflict, Muslims comprise the nation's second largest minority group (8.3 percent of the population). Approximately three-quarters of the population (74.5 percent) is Sinhalese (Buddhist and Christian). Tamils are the largest minority group (Hindu and Christian). They are historically differentiated into two groups: North and East Tamils (11.9 percent), who are considered to be the historically oldest group; and Up-country Tamils (4.6 percent), who came from South India during the British period (1815–1948) to work as laborers on the plantations in the South-Central highlands. Muslims have deep roots in Sri Lanka that can be traced back to Indo-Arab and Persian maritime commerce across the Indian Ocean over the past millennium (McGilvray and Raheem, 2007; Thiranagama, 2011).

In the 1930s, ethnicity—as based on language rather than race, religion, or locality—emerged as the primary mode of socio-cultural and political identification for Sinhalese and Tamils (Rogers, 1994; Spencer, 1990). Though the majority of Muslims speak Tamil as a first language, they define themselves as a separate ethnic group from Tamils based on their religion alone.³ While Muslims first characterized themselves as a racially distinct group from Tamils in the struggle for separate political representation in the late 19th century, in the 20th century urban southern Muslims (then representing Sri Lankan Muslims as a whole) gradually constructed a pan-Islamic ethnic identity, which enabled them to stay aloof from the Sinhalese–Tamil conflict (Daniel, 1996; Thiranagama, 2011). As McGilvray and Raheem (2007, p. 13) explain, Muslims have an anomalous place in Sri Lankan ethno-politics because “they have defensively constructed an ethnic identity that is neither Sinhala nor Tamil, distinguishing themselves categorically from the island’s two ethnic adversaries.”

Socio-culturally, politically, and economically distinct from their counterparts in the war-ravaged North and East, southern Muslims live in scattered pockets throughout the Sinhalese majority South (the South). Rather than seeking their own political identity, southern Muslims aligned with the Sinhalese Buddhist majority government following independence, and therefore received economic and educational concessions. Though Muslims’ ethnic and political identities eventually merged with the formation of the Sri Lankan Muslim Congress in 1981, most southern Muslims continue to support mainstream parties. Changes in economic policies in the 1970s, combined with their growing interest in education as a vehicle for success in business and government employment, contributed to the growth of a sizable southern Muslim middle class. Labor migration to the Gulf States and the influence of transnational Islamic organizations strengthened their Islamic identity (McGilvray, 2008; Nuhuman, 2007; O’Sullivan, 1999).

Despite some relative economic prosperity and political leverage during the civil war and currently, Muslims have been in a difficult position as a small and vulnerable minority group situated between powerful Sinhalese and Tamil nationalists (Thiranagama, 2011). Southern Muslims are subject to discrimination from Sinhalese Buddhist nationalists, who do not see ethnic minorities (Muslims and Tamils) as belonging within the nation-state (Devotta, 2009; Imtiyaz and Hoole, 2011).⁴ The relationship between Muslims and Tamil minority groups is no less conflicted. Throughout the last three decades, eastern Muslims have been victims of brutal violence on the part of the LTTE and the Sri Lankan government (see McGilvray, 2008). In 1990, the LTTE, desiring a racially pure Tamil state (*Eelam*), expelled tens of thousands of northern Muslims from Jaffna, many of whom still reside in refugee camps (see Thiranagama, 2011). Somewhat removed from the immediate plight of northern and eastern Muslims, southern Muslims face their own challenges due to having to live and work in close proximity to Sinhalese and/or Tamils (Imtiyaz and Hoole, 2011). Mainstream southern Muslim politics dictates that Muslims coexist amicably with other ethnic groups while maintaining their distinct ethno-religious and cultural identity. Heightened moments in the civil war only increased Muslims’ feelings of uncertainty about their relationship with Sinhalese and Tamils.

From 2007 to 2009, the Sri Lankan government, seeking a military solution to the conflict, carried out a massive military campaign to take over the last LTTE-held regions in the northern “Vanni” region, at the cost of thousands of military and civilian lives. On May 16, 2009, the Sri Lankan army declared victory over the LTTE (Thiranagama, 2011).⁵ During the last

² Silverstein (1981) discusses how certain semiotic properties of language use make utterances more or less available for speaker metapragmatic awareness.

³ The fact that Muslim ethnicity is based on religion rather than language is incorporated into the national curriculum for government schools.

⁴ Since the end of the war, there have been several incidents of hardline Buddhist monks attacking Muslim communities in Sri Lanka (France-Presse, 2013).

⁵ A political solution to the conflict that meets the needs of Sri Lanka’s ethnic minority groups has not been found. Therefore, the ethnic conflict persists even though the war may be over (Bass, 2012).

phase of the civil war, though at a safe distance from the battle zones, Sri Lankans in the South lived in fear of civilian-targeted violence, such as suicide, bus, or roadside bombings. In addition, citizens were regularly arrested or disappeared for criticizing the government in the President Mahinda Rajapaksa-led majoritarian government. Independent journalists were particularly targeted; many were killed, faced death threats, or were bullied into self-censorship or resignation (Devotta, 2009). This sense of enshrouding fear caused Sri Lankans to be highly vigilant about what they said and to whom (Obeyesekere, 2011), not only in public spaces, such as the street or the bus, but also in neighborhoods and homes. Almost by accident, I discovered some intriguing examples of how members of a Muslim family employed voicing and other metapragmatic resources to subtly position themselves in relation to other individuals and ethnic groups.

As part of a larger project on how Kandy ethnic minority youth and adults negotiated social differences inside and outside of schools, I compiled over 20 h of recorded data of a Muslim family interacting in their home and other settings. I received assistance on the transcription, translation, and analysis of these recordings from my research assistant, an Up-country Tamil Hindu named Kausalya, my Sinhala teacher, and several other Sri Lankan friends and colleagues. The family is highly bilingual in Tamil and Sinhala, with some knowledge of English, which is typical among urban southern Muslims. They use Tamil and Sinhala in interactions outside the home. At home, they frequently mix Tamil with Sinhala, English, and Perso-Arabic words and phrases. However, while analyzing these data, I found only a few examples of a substantial codeswitch from Tamil into Sinhala. In these examples, speakers drew on metapragmatic features, including direct reported speech markers, volume, pitch, and poetic parallelism to represent the voices of Sinhalese, either as individuals or generalized ethnic groups. In addition, the Sinhala voices were associated with suspicion toward Tamils or ethnic minorities.

This article analyzes two rich examples of Sinhala voicing. I show how speakers evaluate others in relation to themselves pertaining to morality and/or responsibility via different voicing strategies. I also discuss the speakers' responsibility or accountability for these evaluations. In the first example, the speaker imitates the voice of Sinhalese who, in turn, voice the violent inner thoughts of Tamils toward them. This instance of embedded voicing not only creates a moral taxonomy of what Tamils, as voiced through Sinhalese, are capable of doing to others but also presents a position on the responsibility of Tamils for their thoughts and actions in terms of the source of the directive for action. In the second example, the speaker morally evaluates herself in relation to a Sinhalese security guard in the narrative retelling of an event via a voicing plus meta-commentary structure. This example highlights the use of voicing as an interactional strategy in multi-party talk. In conclusion, I discuss the consistency in the speakers' use of Sinhala voicing, as well as the role of morality and responsibility in the processes by which speakers configure themselves in relation to others.

Consistent with theories of transcription as ethnography (e.g. Briggs, 1984; Schieffelin, 2005; Urban, 1996), my analysis of these conversations is not just informed by the speech events themselves, but the subsequent circulations of the recordings and transcripts to my research informants. In circulating these data, I removed all identifying information on the recordings and used pseudonyms for all personal names on the transcripts, as I have done here as well. As a second language learner of Tamil and Sinhala, my ability to analyze the subtleties of some of the linguistic material is limited. In addition, multiple perspectives are also essential to understand the content and effects of voicing strategies. However, my research informants' experiences and histories impacted the interpretations of the interactions as well as my own. Before discussing the first example, I situate my discussion in the literature on voice, morality, and responsibility.

3. Voice, morality, and responsibility

In "The Voices of Don Gabriel" (1995), Jane Hill provides a defining account of how speaker's choices among linguistic forms (or voices) can "play a crucial role in defining speaker's character and even the ethical choices available to them" (Keane, 2010, p. 76). Hill shows how a Mexicano-speaking peasant, Don Gabriel, draws on multiple linguistic features to create a cacophony of distinct voices in a narrative about his son's death. She details how throughout the narrative, Don Gabriel succeeds in claiming a consistent moral position among "conflicting ways of speaking, weighted with contradictory ideologies, by distributing these across a complex of 'voices'..." (Hill, 1995, p. 98). Don Gabriel grounds his voice not in the Spanish-oriented world of individual urban capitalists, but in the traditional Mexicano subsistence way of life, which values kinship and reciprocity in the village (p. 109).

Building on Hill's (1995) analysis, recent studies have examined voice as a useful way to show how ethics or morality is located in and produced through language (e.g. Keane, 2010, 2011; Lambek, 2010; Rumsey, 2010; Sidnell, 2010). In contrast to Hill's focus on the internal dialogue of a single speaker, I explore how individuals employ voicing to evaluate themselves in relation to others in multi-party talk, which is in line with recent interest in the intersubjective and dialogic nature of speaker positionality (e.g. Dubois, 2007; Irvine, 2009; Jaffe, 2009; Kockelman, 2004). In addition to looking at the way in which voicing is taken up by the immediate interlocutors in the interactions, I also explore the subsequent circulation of the recordings and transcripts. In considering my research informants' reactions to the instances of voicing (i.e. transcription/translation suggestions or comments), I highlight how speech events are echoed, interpreted, and assigned new meanings across space and time (see Irvine, 2009; Moore, 2011). I thus emphasize the transcription, translation, and interpretation process as rife with social positionality and moral evaluation. I contribute to existing literature in linguistic anthropology by examining voice in relation to configurations of social difference in a conflict situation.

Recent literature in anthropology and other disciplines has contributed to the theorizing of morality (e.g. [Bauman, 1993](#); [Lambek, 2010](#); [Robbins, 2007](#); [Zigon, 2009](#)). For the purposes of this article, I characterize morality as what people are willing or obligated to do, think, or say regardless of whether they are motivated by an idea of virtue, the attainment of normatively desired goods, or by the conformity to normative rules ([Robbins, 2007](#)). In Example One, I analyze morality as grammatically encoded through the use of a deontic modal auxiliary verb. While examples one and two both embed positions on morality, Example One also embeds a position on a voice's responsibility for its attributed thoughts and actions.

I discuss responsibility in terms of the speakers' accountability or answerability for the evaluations produced through voicing. [Bakhtin \(1984, p. 74\)](#) states that in double voiced utterances, a conflict occurs; though a speaker represents the voice of another, these words are still layered with his own intonations. Hill and Irvine suggest that reported speech and other responsibility framing devices do not relocate responsibility away from the speaker, but rather “‘distribute’ responsibility, thinning out and socializing its central focus” (1992, p.13). They mention the possibility of “leakages,” or “when some participant in a speech event ‘sees through’ the framing of a report” (1992, p. 13). Building on [Hill and Irvine \(1992\)](#), I show how interlocutors associate speakers with the evaluations they produce through voicing, in the speech events and the circulation of the recordings and transcripts. Although discussions of positionality or stance can often be agent-centered (see [Irvine, 2009](#)), I try to avoid making assumptions about speaker intentionality in relation to voicing (for a discussion of the problems of attributing intentionality to speakers, see [Duranti \(1994\)](#), [Rosaldo \(1982\)](#), and [Schieffelin \(2008\)](#)).

4. Example One: “Must Kill Him in the Bus”

Kandy is a large town located in the heart of the tea plantation region in the South-Central highlands, 111 km northeast of the capital city of Colombo. The site of the last independent Sinhalese Buddhist kingdom, which the British took over in 1815, Kandy is a symbolic center for Sinhalese Buddhism and the Buddhist state. However, Kandy is also a highly multilingual and multiethnic economic and administrative center, with Sinhalese, Tamils (both North and East and Up-country), and Muslims living in the same residential neighborhoods ([Tambiah, 1986](#)). Though they have features in common with other southern Muslim groups, Kandy Muslims share a unique history. In the 16th and 17th centuries, the Kandyan Kingdom provided Muslims with protection from persecution by the Portuguese and the Dutch ([McGilvray and Raheem, 2007](#)). The relationship of Kandy Muslims with Sinhalese and Tamils depends on an individual's personal and family histories, home language (Tamil or Sinhala), occupation, residence, class, socioeconomic level, and other factors. However, Sinhalese/Muslim riots over trading interests in Kandy and surrounding plantation areas in colonial and post-colonial periods significantly strained the relationship of Muslims with Sinhalese.

I met the mother of the household, Meena, through her older sister, who is a teacher at Girls' College, a prestigious multilingual Buddhist national school where I conducted research for nine months. Meena, her husband, their four daughters (who studied in the Tamil-medium at Girls' College),⁶ and Meena's mother all live in a small rented house on one of Kandy's main commercial streets. Living across the street, I frequently visited in the evenings. Meena's husband is a van driver, and Meena runs a tailoring business from the home. Meena's older brother and his wife live in an apartment upstairs, and her younger brother, who plays a large part in this example, lives in the Muslim-majority town of Gampola. Though they regularly interacted with Sinhalese and Tamils in their neighborhood and elsewhere, the family seemed to be more familiar and comfortable with Tamils than Sinhalese as a result of their former business ties with Jaffna Tamil Hindus and their history studying in Tamil-medium schools and streams.

On June 6, 2008, I joined Meena, her mother, her sister-in-law (her older brother's wife), and her younger brother in the outdoor kitchen in the back of the house. Here daughters were doing their homework at the dining room table inside but were still in hearing range of the conversation. That day, two incidents of civilian-targeted violence had occurred, which the mainstream media attributed to the LTTE. A claymore mine exploded in a public bus near the University of Moratuwa in a Colombo suburb, killing 20 people and injuring more than 60. Later that afternoon, a bus exploded in Wattagama, a town 8 km north of Kandy, injuring more than 20 people. The Wattagama incident was significant to many, as it was the first time in recent years a bombing had occurred in proximity to Kandy.

Meena seated me on a plastic chair next to her younger brother, who I was meeting for the first time. All other participants stood around us. With their permission, I placed my recorder on the armrest of my chair and turned it on. Though the younger brother was the one who was unaccustomed to the recorder, he did not take any noticeable interest in it. In line 1, Meena's mother talks to me about the influential organizers behind acts of violence. In line 10, Meena, her sister-in-law, and her brother interject into the conversation. In my analysis, I explore the way participants draw on personal pronouns to position themselves in relation to Sinhalese and Tamils before analyzing Meena's brother's use of embedded voicing in [Section 4.1](#).

⁶ Sri Lankan government schools are organized based on language medium (Sinhala or Tamil) and religion. Girls' College offers Sinhala- and Tamil-medium streams with English-medium classes available at the secondary level. Muslims are placed into Tamil- or Sinhala-medium streams based on their home language and other factors ([Davis, 2012](#)).

[In the transcript,⁷ the Sinhala utterances are underlined. Personal pronouns are in italics.⁸ Changes in volume and pitch are marked.]

- | | |
|---|---|
| <p>1 Meena's Mother: <i>ivar</i> piDiccaa <i>ivar</i>
muuliyamaa visaarikka eellum daanee.
<i>ivar</i> pinnukku yaaru iikkudunnu.
<i>ivar</i> pinnukku.
<i>ivar</i> paNattukkaaha ceyRa veeladaanee
<i>ivar</i>.
appa <i>ivanga</i>Le periya aakkaL iruppaanga.</p> <p>2 Christina: oo, <i>avar</i> pinnukku periya
aakkaL iruppaanga.</p> <p>3 Meena's Mother: periya aakkaL
selvaakkulLavanga iruppaanga.</p> <p>4 Christina: oo.</p> <p>5 Meena's Mother: ini <i>ivar</i> ivanga
paNattukkaaha <i>ivangala</i> iyakkattilee⁹
seekkiRa.
seeraaTTi poonaa <i>ivanga</i>L kolRee.
appaDi modallarundu uvoru naaTTula
naDakkudu daanee.
anda iyakkattilee <i>avanga</i> seera veeNum.
seeraaTTi <i>avanga</i> kolluvaanga.
illayaa?</p> <p>6 Christina: mm...</p> <p>7 Meena's Mother: aanaa irundaalum
kuDimakkaL¹⁰ enna ceyvaanga?</p> <p>8 Christina: kuDimakkaL.</p> <p>9 Meena's Mother: kuDimakkaL kashDam
daanee.
ippa <i>naanga</i> teliva irundaa <i>naanga</i>¹¹ adula
ellaam seeradillaiyee.
<i>engaLukkum</i> paavam daanee.</p> <p>10 Meena: summaa uLLa manusara [aDicci
kolRa.]</p> <p>11 Meena's Sister-in-Law: [aDicci kolRa.]</p> <p>12 Meena's Brother: [illelle.
ippa <i>naanga</i> nenakkiRo summaa singaLa
aaLE ninaikkiRa illaa.
tamizh aaLum tiger solli.]</p> <p>13 Meena, her Mother, and her
Sister-in-Law: [inaudible talk]</p> <p>14 Meena's Brother: <i>naanga</i>NDa paavam
paakkiRa.
singalaa aakkaL pakkiRa illayee.
(volume ↓ pitch ↓) <u>busekee uuvΘ maranda
onee.</u>
<u>kapanDa oone.</u>
<u>kappanΘwaa uuvΘ.</u>
<u>uuvΘ naetikaranDa onee.</u></p> | <p>If you catch <i>him</i> you can inquire through <i>him</i>,
isn't it?
And find out who is behind <i>him</i>.
Behind <i>him</i>.
<i>He</i> is just doing it for the money, <i>him</i>, isn't
it?
Then there will be big people other than <i>him</i>.
Yes, there will be big people behind <i>him</i>.

Those big people may have lots of influence.

Yes.
So <i>these people</i> recruit <i>them</i> to the
movement because <i>they</i> have money.

If [they] don't join, [they] kill <i>them</i>.
Like this, from the beginning it happens in
every country, isn't it?
<i>They</i> have to join (transitive) the movement.
If [they] don't join, [they] kill <i>them</i>.
Isn't it so?
mm...
But even though, what can the citizens do?

Citizens.
It's difficult for the citizens, isn't it?

<i>We</i> are very much clear [about what this
movement is doing], so <i>we</i> do not join them.
<i>We</i> are also suffering, isn't it?
Innocent people, [[they] kill].

[[they] kill.]
[No, no.
Now, Sinhalese people don't think
the way <i>we</i> think.
[They] think all Tamils are Tigers.]

[inaudible talk]
<i>We</i>, of course, feel sympathetic to them.

Sinhalese people won't sympathize.
(volume ↓ pitch ↓) <u>Must kill him in the bus.</u>

<u>Must cut.</u>
<u>Will cut him (causative form).</u>
<u>Him must destroy.</u></p> |
|---|---|

⁷ The Madras University Tamil Lexicon transliteration scheme has been widely used to represent "written" Tamil in Roman script. I employ a modified version of the Madras Tamil Lexicon based on Annamalai (1980) that captures the wide range of sounds in "spoken" Tamil (such as the distinction between voiced and voiceless stops). Retroflex sounds are represented with capital letters, and the alveolar "l" is represented as "zh," as in "tamizh." I have used the same transliteration system for Sinhala, with the addition of /θ/, such as in "kappanΘwaa."

⁸ Tamil distinguishes between the inclusive (*naam*) and exclusive (*naanga*) first person plural. However, in varieties of Tamil spoken by southern Muslims, the inclusive "we" is rarely used.

⁹ In Sri Lanka, Tamil speakers widely refer to the LTTE as "iyakkam" (movement).

¹⁰ In Tamil, "kuDimakkaL" has a connotation very similar to the definition of "citizen" as "a native or naturalized member of a state or nation who owes allegiance to its government and is entitled to its protection" (Random House Dictionary, 2012).

¹¹ In this sentence, the use of "we" (*naanga*L) is generic. In contrast to the other uses of "we" in the transcript, rather than referring to the family or to Muslims, it refers to people in general, such as the use of "one" or "you" in English.

- | | |
|--|---|
| <p><u>naetikaran</u>Θwaa uuvΘ.
 <i>naanga</i> daan paavam.
 singala aakkaL paavam sollamaTTanga.</p> <p>15 Meena's Sister-in-Law: Illa.
 ippa yaazhpaaNattula pooyiTTu meelaavula ellaam
 aDikkiRanga.
 avaLoo peerayum kolRaanga.
 <i>avanga</i> ingaala aDikkiRaanga.
 adaan ceyRaanga.</p> | <p><u>Will destroy him.</u>
 <i>We only feel sorry.</i>
 But Sinhalese people won't say sorry.</p> <p>No.
 Now [they] go to Jaffna and attack from the sky.
 [They] are killing so many people.
 <i>They</i> are attacking this side.
 This is what [they] are doing.</p> |
|--|---|

The interaction between Meena's mother and me in lines 1–9 concerns the issue of responsibility or culpability for violent events and the suffering of innocent victims under LTTE violence. Throughout the discussion, Meena's mother employs the personal pronouns "we" and "they" to distinguish Muslims from Tamils. In lines 1–3, she mentions how influential organizers are behind the individuals who commit violent acts. This comment is consistent with Meena's remarks on other occasions that people who plant bus bombs are often just hired thugs, sometimes even Sinhalese. In line 5, Meena's mother comments that "they" (Tamils) are forced to join the movement (referring to the LTTE), and if they do not join, "they kill them." Her pointing to Tamil's lack of full culpability in acts of violence (in that they may have been forced to join the LTTE) may be interpreted as an expression of compassion toward Tamils in their current situation. Alternatively, this phrasing served as a way to talk about the conflict without making any direct accusations against Tamils. In line 9, Meena's mother explains (using a generic "we") that if people were clear about what this movement was actually doing, they would not join it. Switching to a conventional "we," she distinguishes Muslims from Tamils, stating, "We are also suffering, isn't it so?" She implies that even though Muslims, in direct contrast to Tamils, are not involved in the conflict, they still suffer.

In lines 10 and 11, Meena and her sister-in-law echo Meena's mother's comment, pointing out how innocent civilians are being killed in the conflict. As the discussion continues, Meena's brother attempts to take the floor. As the others continue talking, he states in line 12, "No. no. Now, Sinhalese people don't think the way we think. They think all Tamils are Tigers." This statement means that Sinhalese, in contrast to Muslims, think of all ethnic Tamils as Tigers. Notably, Up-country Tamils, who have had little historical involvement with the LTTE (Bass, 2012), were frequently being arrested by the government on LTTE suspicion at this particular time. As the other family members and I visibly turn toward Meena's brother and grow silent, he continues, stating in line 14, "We, of course, feel sympathetic to them. Sinhalese people won't sympathize." In this statement, he contrasts Muslims from Sinhalese in terms of their ability to feel compassion for Tamils, something that has moral significance. Following the first utterance in line 14, Meena's brother employs embedded voicing, which I analyze below. After these five phrases, he switches back to Tamil with the use of "we," rephrasing his earlier statement that Muslims feel pity for Tamils, while Sinhalese do not. In line 15, Meena's sister-in-law comments on the Sri Lankan army's recent air raids in the North. Though she references violence committed by the Sri Lankan government rather than the LTTE; this comment seems to be an immediate response to the discussion of the suffering of innocent civilians in lines 7–11, rather than Meena's brother's comments in lines 12 and 14. This response suggests that the participants may have—intentionally or not—simply skipped over Meena's brother's utterances.¹²

In the discussion in lines 1–15, Meena, her mother, and her sister-in-law criticize military bodies (the LTTE and the Sri Lankan government) for the killing of innocent civilians, but, as consistent with wider interactional patterns, avoid placing blame for violence on any ethnic group. Meena's brother's comments in Tamil in lines 12 and 14 deviate from this interactional pattern by directly contrasting Muslims from Sinhalese in terms of their ability to feel sympathy for Tamils. However, as I show in the following analysis, Meena's brother's use of embedded voicing in line 14 presents a richer and more complex evaluation of Muslims with respect to Sinhalese and Tamils, though more slippery and indeterminate than these more explicit statements.

4.1. Embedded voicing

When Meena's brother began the Sinhala utterances in line 14, I could not understand what he was saying because of the significant background noise in the outdoor kitchen. However, from the context of the conversation and his interactional cues—putting his head down and lowering his voice and tone—I had a strong impression that he was saying something of a dark or violent nature. When I returned home, I discovered that my recorder, which was positioned toward him on the armrest of the chair, had picked up his utterances very clearly. I mailed a recording of this interaction to my research assistant, Kausalya, who had moved abroad, without telling her anything about it. Several months later, she sent me the transcript in the mail. She transcribed the Tamil utterances in Tamil script. She represented the Sinhala utterances in roman script and provided an English translation, which she had not done on any of the other transcriptions. She also underlined the Sinhala

¹² The next day, Meena took me into her sewing room and apologized for her younger brother. However, this apology was not made in reference to anything he said in the interaction in Example One, but how he had later asked me to get him a job in the US. Though the family assumed that I had access to financial and other resources, they were careful not to directly ask for anything from me. Meena's brother, by asking me for this favor, violated the family member's rapport with me.

utterances, pointing my attention to them. Her transcript not only confirmed my initial impression about the violent nature of Meena's brother's utterances but also showed that she had found them significant as well. I present a word-by-word translation of the Sinhala utterances from line 14 below:

- (a) (volume ↓ pitch ↓)
busekee *uuvə* *maranda* *onee*
 in bus him kill must
 must kill him in the bus
- (b) *kapanDa* *onee*
 cut must
 must cut
- (c) *kappanəwaa* *uuvə*
 will cut (causative) him
 will cut him (by someone else)
- (d) *uuvə* *naetikaranDa* *onee*
 him destroy must
 him must destroy
- (e) *naetikaranəwaa* *uuvə*
 will destroy him
 will destroy him

Meena's brother's use of voice is distinguished from the rest of the utterances not only by a shift in code but also by a lowering of volume and pitch and poetic parallelism (as I discuss below). When I glanced at Kausalya's transcript, my first impression was that Meena's brother had voiced the violent inner thoughts of Sinhalese toward Tamils on the bus. Because the content of the evaluations made through voicing, as well as their relationship the speaker, are indeterminate by nature, some indeterminacy must remain in my analysis. However, re-listening to the recording and consulting a Sri Lankan colleague—an Up-country Tamil anthropologist fluent in Sinhala, Tamil, and English—Meena's brother, in an example of embedded voicing, likely employed the voice of Sinhalese who, in turn, voice the violent inner thoughts of Tamils toward them on the bus.¹³ This interpretation is consistent with Meena's brother's statement in line 12 that Sinhalese, in contrast to Muslims, think all Tamils are LTTE, and, as implied, potential bus bombers. In addition, he would not likely broadly attribute violent acts on the bus to Sinhalese in the sociohistorical context because bus bombings were widely linked to Tamils (acting on behalf of the LTTE). Nevertheless, they were certainly not the sole perpetrators, as alluded to by Meena's mother in line 1.

Drawing on Wortham and Locher's concept of "embedded metapragmatic constructions,"¹⁴ I define embedded voicing as when one voice is situated within another (1999, p. 2). As I show below, Meena's brother situates the voice or inner thoughts of Tamils (the second embedded voice) within the voice of the Sinhalese (the first embedded voice) in this example:

Speaker:	Meena's brother
First embedded voice:	Sinhalese (suspicious toward Tamils)
Second embedded voice:	Tamil's inner thoughts (murderous toward Sinhalese)

Embedded voicing is an intriguing interactional resource, as it enables the speaker to evaluate the second embedded voice, while placing responsibility for this evaluation on the first embedded voice (1999, p. 2). In this example, Meena's brother does not directly attribute murderous inner thoughts to Tamils, but shows that this voicing is how Sinhalese imagine them. Thus, he can make two evaluations via the embedded voicing structure: he depicts Sinhalese as suspicious toward Tamils, and Tamils, as embedded in the voice of Sinhalese, as having murderous inner thoughts toward Sinhalese. However, what is Meena's brother's relationship to these evaluations? As the other family members did not show any observable response to Meena's brother's comments in line 14, their opinion of his voicing is impossible to know, if they thought anything of it at all. However, a possible "leakage" occurred when I circulated the transcript to my Up-country Tamil colleague (Hill and Irvine, 1992). After reading line 14, he mentioned that Meena's brother, in contrast to the other family members, seemed "anti-Tamil," though he could not say why. He attributed this to the fact that Meena's brother lives in the Muslim-majority town of Gampola, rather than the multiethnic and urban Kandy. He explained that in Gampola, Muslims often propagate negative stereotypes about Tamils in their talk in shops or on the street.¹⁵ In addition to reflecting an interesting assumption about how Muslims in Kandy vs. Gampola talk about or view Tamils, his explanation indicates that he held Meena's brother accountable for his doubly embedded depiction of Tamil's inner thoughts, though he could not pinpoint exactly why. In the following

¹³ While scholars such Schieffelin and Jones (2009) distinguish reported speech and reported thought, I do not find this distinction necessary for this argument.

¹⁴ Wortham and Locher (1999, p. 2) define "embedded metapragmatic constructions" as when one metapragmatic expression (event of speaking) is embedded within another (e.g. "Bush said Clinton lied").

¹⁵ Kausalya (my research assistant) made a comment that Meena's brother "collects information from the average uneducated people talking on the road." However, her statement may have also been in response to comments he made at a later point in the interaction.

section, I present a detailed analysis of Meena's brother's embedded voicing, showing how his evaluation of the second embedded voice (Tamils) embeds morality and responsibility in terms of the source of the directive for action.

4.2. Morality and the directive for action

The subject of the five Sinhala utterances in lines a–e (see page 7) is dropped, which is not uncommon in spoken Sinhala and Tamil. The object is the spoken Sinhala singular third person, non-human animate pronoun “*uu*.” This pronoun is used to indicate an animate non-human (e.g. cow, dog, or insect), a derogatory human, or a very close friend (Gair and Lust, 1998). My Sinhala teacher, a native speaker of Sinhala, agreed with me that “*uu*” should be translated as “him” in the derogatory human sense. In this interaction, the use of “*uu*” shows that within their inner thoughts, Tamils (as voiced through the Sinhalese) view Sinhalese as inferior to them, and thus have no qualms about committing violent acts against them.

In addition to the shift in code, volume, and pitch, the five utterances are distinguished from the rest of the utterances by a high degree of parallelism in the repetition of lexical and grammatical features. Meena's brother repeats “*uu*” and alternates the phrases “must-do-x” (a, b, and d) and “will-do-x” (c (causative) and e). The verbs “cut” (b, c) and “destroy” (d, e) are also both repeated twice. In poetic parallelism, the repetition of structural features can have the effect of creating coherency at the level of meaning—the repetition or predictability of social or moral features (Jakobson, 1957). More than other features, the use of parallelism in these five utterances creates an internal consistency in the inner thoughts of Tamils. Thus, rather than representing the voice of one Tamil person, they represent the voice of Tamils in general, as a token or instance of a more general type (Silverstein, 2005).

In lines a, b, and d, Meena's brother employs the Sinhala auxiliary verb, “*onee*,” which, as such, gives information about the main verb that follows it: kill (a), cut (b), and destroy (d). The verb “*onee*,” which my Sinhala teacher and Up-country Tamil colleague both translated as “must,” is of the deontic modal type, as it indicates the second embedded speakers' (Tamils) commitment to the desirability or necessity of what he or she is predicting. An instance of the obligative form, the use of “*onee*” implies not that the action is done, but that it must to be done. Deontic modal verbs encode morality in that they concern what people are obligated to do, think, or say (Rumsey, 2010). Thus, the deontic modal auxiliary verb plus verb construction embeds morality in concerning what the second embedded voice (Tamils) is obligated to do or think (as such, it could be characterized as an example of a deontic stance (Robbins, 2007)).

Lines a–e could be interpreted as simply an expression of Tamil's internalized desires, as voiced through the Sinhalese. However, the use of the deontic modal auxiliary verb (*onee*) plus verb construction, along with the dropping of the subject, poetic parallelism, and the lowering of volume and pitch, suggest that these lines are the inner thoughts of someone who is preprogrammed by another to fulfill a duty or obligation. The speaker repeats orders, like a robot preprogrammed for a task—“must kill” (a), “must cut” (b), “must destroy” (d). The use of the causative verb in line c indicates that the “thinker” (Tamils) may be giving orders to another. This “thinker” may not be originating these directives, but simply relaying these preprogrammed directives to another collaborating in the same task. Thus, Meena's brother's embedded voicing can be read as representing Sinhalese' imaginings of the murderous inner thoughts of Tamils (or their directive to kill by planting bus bombs) as robotically preprogrammed by others. This representation indicates that in Meena's brother's voicing structure, Sinhalese do not consider Tamils as being in full control of their own actions, but as simply preprogrammed to commit acts of violence against them.

Meena's brother's embedded voicing does not only represent a moral taxonomy of what one group (Tamils) is capable of doing to another (Sinhalese) but also presents a position on the source of the directive for action. In his voicing structure, Tamils are not the Principal or the responsible agent, while they may enact murderous inner thoughts or actions. Thus, I have explored responsibility in terms of the second embedded voices' (Tamils) accountability for their attributed thoughts and actions, as well as Meena's brother's accountability for the evaluations he produces through voicing. This analysis demonstrates the intricate ways in which responsibility is embedded in moral evaluations, both in the speech event and its subsequent circulation. In the following, I look at another example of Sinhala voicing. Though not as rich in terms of the embedding of ascriptions of responsibility, this example demonstrates the speaker's use of another voicing strategy to morally evaluate herself in relation to others. In addition, as I discuss in Section 6, these two examples demonstrate consistency in the association of Sinhala voices with suspicion when taken together.

5. Example Two: “What's in the Bag?”

Over a month later, on July 15, 2008, I arrived at the house at approximately 5 pm and joined Meena's four daughters at the dining room table. I placed the recorder on the table and turned it on. Meena announced that instead of going to the kitchen to make tea, she would tell us a story (*kadai*). Sitting down at the table between her daughters and me, she started to recount an incident that had occurred at Girls' College that day. Because of security concerns, parents were restricted from entering the school. They had to wait to pick up their children at the upper or lower gates. That day, Meena had thought she had told her grade five daughter, Muna, to bring her grade one daughter, Naseeka, to the upper gate two hours early, at 11 am instead of 1 pm. Running errands on the way to the school, Meena arrived at the upper gate at 11 am carrying shopping bags filled with eggs, rice, and elastic for tailoring. However, the children did not show up and she waited outside the gate until 1 pm. As Meena was standing outside the gate, the Sinhalese security guard started to question her about the contents of her bags, apparently suspicious that she had a bomb. In line 5, she appealed to a Sinhalese mother to support her, but the mother

aligned with the security guard instead. I present the interaction below. In my analysis, I focus on how the voicing plus metacommentary structure invites her interlocutors to align with her moral condemnation of the security guard.

[In the transcript, Sinhala utterances are underlined. Changes in pitch are marked.]

- | | | |
|---|---|---|
| 1 | <p>Meena: <u>Naseekaakku naan elevenkku</u>
varassolla.
Naseeka vara illa.
ivukku one o'clock daanee viDuradu.
Muna ivaloDa seerndu, one-ten kku mella
vandaanga.
enDa time waste.</p> | <p>I told Naseeka to come at eleven.

Naseeka didn't come.
Her school finishes at one o'clock, isn't it?
She came after one-ten, with her [Muna].

I wasted my time.
Wasting too much time.</p> |
| 2 | <p>Christina: sariyaana time waste.</p> | <p>At the time of my going there, a security guard came. On the way to the school is a shop.</p> |
| 3 | <p>Meena: adula veeRa, security vandu, naan
pooraneeramee angannekke irukkakkuLLa
kaDai oNDu irukku.
naan muTTayum vaangikiTTu arisiyum
vangikiTTu meela geeTTu kku pooneen.
appa naan eleven la irundu irukkiReen
daanee.
security kku oru sandeeham.
<u>arə bag ekee monəwadə?</u> (pitch ↑)
<u>arə bag ekee monəwadə?</u>
enakku ippo koovam.
(pitch ↑) <u>arundə arində baləmu baləmu</u>
enDu.
enna ceyRatu?</p> | <p>I bought eggs, bought rice, and went to the upper gate.
Now I was there since eleven o'clock, isn't it?
The security guard was suspicious.
<u>"What's in that bag?"</u> (pitch ↑)
<u>"What's in that bag?"</u>
I was angry now.
(pitch ↑) <u>"Open, open. Let's see, let's see."</u>
[he] said.
What to do?</p> |
| 4 | <p>Christina: sonniingaLaa enDa naalu
piLLaihaL ingee paDikkiRaanga nnu.
[children laugh]</p> | <p>Did you say that your four children study there?
[children laugh]</p> |
| 5 | <p>Meena: [laugh] sonneen.
muTTaiyaala aDikka nenacciccu avanDa
muunjikki.
naan sonneen, (pitch ↑) <u>bittəra</u>
<u>tiyənəwaenDu.</u>
(pitch ↑) <u>bittərə?</u>
(pitch ↑) <u>bittəra monəwəTədə skooleTə?</u>
[children laugh]
ellaarum irundaanga daanee.
enakku oNDum solla elaadu.
vekkam.
peesaaaama irundee(n).
appa naan anganakkuLLa irunda Sinhalese
Lady kiTTa sonneen, (pitch ↑) <u>bittəra.</u>
<u>bittəra monəwəTədə skooleTə?</u>
<u>oyaa hahənDə eppaa, eyaa nee oyagen</u>
<u>hahaneenDu.</u>
(pitch ↓) <u>eekəTə uttəryək dannæænee.</u>

<u>Itin oyaa hari kiyənəkoo bittərə</u>
<u>monəwəTədə skooleTəenDu.</u>
appiDi irundoonna <u>anit bag ekee</u>
<u>monəwədə?</u>
[children laugh]</p> | <p>[I]felt like throwing the eggs in his face.

I said, (pitch ↑) <u>"I have eggs."</u>

(pitch ↑) <u>"Eggs?"</u>
(pitch ↑) <u>"Why did you bring eggs to school?"</u>
[children laugh]
Everybody was there, isn't it?
I couldn't say anything.
[I was] embarrassed.
I kept really quiet.
Then I said to the Sinhalese lady who was there, (pitch ↑) <u>"Eggs."</u>
<u>Why did you bring eggs to school?</u>
<u>"You don't ask. He is asking from you only,"</u>
[she] said.
(pitch ↓) <u>"I don't know how to reply to that."</u>
<u>"You have to sufficiently explain why you brought eggs to school,"</u> [she] said.
While we were like that, <u>"What's in the other bag?"</u>
[children laugh]</p> |
| 6 | <p>Muna: <u>monəwədə?</u>
[children laugh]</p> | <p>What?
[children laugh]</p> |
| 7 | <p>Meena: naan sonneen rice enDu.
(pitch ↑) <u>anit bag ekee monəwədəenDu?</u>

[children laugh]
elastic ennu.
<u>wire wage peenəwaenDaan.</u></p> | <p>I said "rice."
(pitch ↑) <u>"What's in the other bag?"</u> [he] asked.
[children laugh]
"Elastic," [I] said.
<u>"It seems like wire,"</u> [he] said.</p> |

- Nan sonneen Meemat tiyenθwadθ wire?
[children laugh]
angana paattaa piLLaihaL ellaam eppaDi
ippaDi vandu naan rooTTukku poonaa
horn aDikkiraan.
nan sonneen (**pitch** ↑) arθgollanθwθ
balθnnθ.
kochθrθ bombθ tiyenθwadθ dannææ.
- oyaa mage baaag ekθmθbalθnθwa.
meeke monθwa nææ enDu solliTTu,
tiruppi tiruppi naan ippa twelve thirty
aayiriccu.
enna ceyradu twelve thirtykku?
Innorukkaa.
(**pitch** ↑) oyaage bag ekθ balθmu.
One-aavariccu.
tiruppiyum.
enakku avanooDayum avooDayum
sariyaana koovam.
enakku inge vandoonnee paattaa daan
teriyum, naan daan morning solla ille.
naan elevenkku vaarenDu naan sonnaam.
- 8 **Meena's Sister-in-Law (came down from upstairs):** adukkiTTa sariyaa solli anupponumnu.
- 9 **Muna:** solla illa.
niinga sonniinga one o'clock-kku
NaseekaavooDa vankannu.
naan sonneen ummaa pannanDu
naappattanjikku ingaRundu vaangannu.
niinga ennannaa padinooru maNikki
ingaRundu vandiTTiinga.
- 10 **Meena:** aydaan.
appa naan daa(n) maRandu solli.

I said, "Is wire like this?"
[children laugh]
As I saw the children coming this way and
that way to the road, if I go to the other side
of the road, they will honk the horn.
I said, (**pitch** ↑) "Look at them."

We don't know how many bombs there
would be.
You are only checking my bag."
I don't have anything, [I] said again and
again. It got to be twelve-thirty.

What to do if it is after twelve-thirty?
Again.
(**pitch** ↑) "Let's see your bag."
It got to be one o'clock.
Again.
I was angry with him [the security guard] and
her [the Sinhalese lady].
When I came here, I realized that it was me
who didn't tell in the morning.
It seemed I told to come at eleven o'clock.

[You] need to tell her [the time] correctly.
[You] didn't tell.
You said, "[You] have to come at one
o'clock with Naseeka."
I said, "*ummaa* (mother), at twelve forty-five
you have to come from here."
But you have come at eleven o'clock from
here.
That's it.
Then I only forgot to tell.

In Example One, Meena's brother drew on Sinhala voicing to represent the voices and inner thoughts of generalized ethnic types (Sinhalese and Tamils). In this example, Meena uses direct reported speech markers to re-instantiate her interaction with two biographical persons, a Sinhalese security guard and a Sinhalese mother. Meena's narrative is a typical example of code-switching in a Sri Lankan context, as bilinguals usually quote interactions in the language in which they originally occurred (when I did not do this, people sometimes asked why not). In the speech event (Meena's interaction with her daughters and I) and the narrated event (the incident at Girls' College), Meena distinguishes her own voice from the voice of the security guard through direct reported speech markers, a raise in pitch, and poetic parallelism. Parallelism can be seen in the repetition of the following phrases: "what's in that bag?" (twice in 3); "what's in the other bag?" (once in 5; once in 7); "why did you bring eggs to school?" (twice in line 5); "let's see" (twice in 3; once in 7); and the word "egg" (seven times in 5). As my Sinhala teacher noted, Sri Lankan security personnel ubiquitously use these phrases at checkpoints. Meena's use of parallelism gives the security guard's voice a stereotyped quality, which serves to emphasize it and make it more colorful. As evidence of this stereotyping, her children laugh after the voicing of the security guard's utterances (in 5 and 7). In addition, in line 6, Muna repeats her mother's use of "*monθwθdθ*" (what). By contrast, Meena's voicing of the Sinhalese' mother's statement in line 4 is relatively less metapragmatically rich.

In the speech event, Meena accompanies her recounting of the interaction with the security guard with her metacommentary in Tamil. The voicing plus metacommentary structure not only shows her interlocutors in the speech event (her daughters and I) what happened, but shows how she was thinking and feeling at the time. For example, she expresses her anger at the beginning of line 5, saying, "I felt like throwing eggs in his face." She demonstrates her indignation in the middle of line 5, saying, "Everybody was there, you know? I couldn't say anything. [I was] embarrassed. I kept really quiet." This strategy invites us to align with her actions, responses, and feelings within the narrated event. Thus, rather than telling us about the security guard's behavior, she shows it to us, inviting us to see her moral perspective in contrast to that of the security guard as right or correct. Thus, the security guard appears to act improperly with Meena, subjecting her to unwarranted suspicion and harassment. While Meena's brother's use of voicing in Example One grammatically encodes morality, Meena's condemnation of the security guard's actions is moral by virtue of pertaining to just, correct, and appropriate behavior. As consistent with her and the other family member's avoidance of explicit critiques of other individuals or ethnic

groups (with the exception of Meena's younger brother in Example One), Meena's voicing plus metacommentary structure enables her to favorably contrast herself in relation to the security guard without making any direct accusations against the particular security guard, Sinhalese security guards in general, or Sinhalese' suspicious behavior toward other ethnic groups. In contrast to Example One, this interaction is a more typical example of the way speakers employ voicing and other metapragmatic resources to subtly evaluate themselves in relation to others while mitigating some responsibility for these evaluations.

In Meena's narrative, the source of the security guard's suspicion of her is unclear. At this heightened moment in the conflict, people were looked upon with suspicion for carrying bags and parcels because of the high frequency of parcel bombs left on buses. Thus, the security guard could have been suspicious of Meena simply because she was standing outside of the school with bags for a prolonged period of time. In addition, walking around public places with shopping bags is also considered uncouth for middle-class women, perhaps because they are supposed to do their shopping discretely (hiring an auto rickshaw). The security guard's suspicion may also have been related to her status as a Muslim evidenced by her *abaya* (long tunic) and *hijab* (scarf covering the head), or her perceived lower class status indicated by her thinness and simple black polyester dress.

Meena's positioning of herself in relation to the security guard was relevant to the interaction with her daughters and me in the speech event. The fact that the simple act of standing outside a school could make Meena an object of suspicion was an unfortunate reality of this heightened moment in the civil war. However, the incident would clearly have been avoided if Meena had given her daughters proper instructions that morning. Meena concludes the narrative in line 7 by admitting her fault in the incident. In line 8, her sister-in-law, who had just arrived from upstairs, interjects and says, "You need to tell her [the time] correctly." Muna immediately confirms her aunt's statement in line 9. If Meena had meant for the colorful narrative to distract her daughters from her culpability in the incident, it certainly failed to do so. As we see, rather than absolving her mother of blame, Muna, aligning with her aunt, simply restates the error. During the narrative, interactional cues point to Meena's different alignment with her daughters and me. When voicing the security guard's utterances, Meena glanced at her daughters and smiled. This smiling indicates her awareness that her imitation of the security guard's voice was amusing and entertaining to them. By contrast, Meena's metacommentary concerning how she was thinking and feeling at the time seemed to be more directed to me. In telling me the story and allowing me to record it, Meena may have wanted me in particular to be aware of the suspicion and harassment to which she was unjustly subjected as a Muslim, ethnic minority, or a Girls' College mother, which overshadows her communication blunder with her children. However, this intention is impossible to know for sure.

In her narrative, Meena reenacts a specific incident that occurred at a specific time. However, the voicing plus metacommentary structure and poetic parallelism seem to invite generalization. For example, uncertain how to translate some utterances, I sent a transcript of this interaction to a Batticaloa (eastern Sri Lanka) Tamil Hindu engineering student. Several days later, he emailed me a translation in English, with the following note at the top of the page:

I have tried my best. Some wordings I cannot understand. Anyhow I have prepared a conversation for you. These types of incidents are happening always among us. We are used to living with all these hell [sic].

This young man's use of "we" in the above note could refer to all Sri Lankans, but most likely refers to ethnic minorities, who were subjected to more questioning and harassment at checkpoints and elsewhere. For him, Meena's narrative represents the harassment and suspicion ethnic minorities were forced to endure in Sri Lanka at that time. Thus, while Meena's moral positioning of herself in relation to the security guard is made in reference to a particular incident, in the recirculation of the transcript it was read as a token of a more general type of experience (Silverstein, 2005).

6. Configuring ethnic difference

In examples one and two, the speakers draw upon different strategies to morally construe themselves in relation to ethnic groups or biographical persons. Though differing from one another in many ways, both examples involve metapragmatically rich depictions of Sinhala voices. In addition, Sinhala voices are viscerally associated with suspicion of others in both examples, whether Tamils, Muslims, or ethnic minorities. Meena's brother's use of embedded voicing in Example One paints Sinhalese as imagining Tamil's violent inner thoughts toward them on the bus. In Example Two, Meena shows us the Sinhalese security guard's suspicious behavior to her, which my informant saw as representing the "hell" that ethnic minorities must endure. My data included another intriguing instance of Sinhala voicing. In this example, Meena's eldest daughter Muna switched into Sinhala to imitate the voice of a Sinhalese girl asking her something about a bomb in a cell phone. However, this recording was too unclear to analyze in any specificity. Thus, we lack a sufficient number of examples to determine if the association of Sinhala voices with suspicion is a more entextualized phenomenon, i.e., an instance of typification (Agha, 2007; Keane, 2010). However, these examples illustrate the centrality of voicing in producing and reproducing particular configurations of ethnic groups. While Example One presents characterizations of ethnic groups, Example Two reiterates a specific incident involving biographical persons, but invites further generalization.

While these examples of voicing clearly associate Sinhalese with suspicion, the depiction of Tamils is less consistent. In Example One, Meena's mother and brother sharply differentiate Muslims from Tamils. In her discussion of the LTTE in lines 1–9 in Example One, Meena's mother absolves Tamils of some culpability or responsibility in relation to acts of violence. Meena's

brother, in his embedded voicing in line 14 (a–e), also takes a position on Tamil's responsibility for their actions or thoughts, depicting them as robots preprogrammed to commit violent acts, as voiced through Sinhalese. However, in contrast to Meena's mother's utterances in Example One, his absolution of Tamils of any role in their actions does not represent a tactful depiction of Tamils involved in the LTTE, but rather gives a dark reading of them as mindless killers. Thus, Meena's brother, in his utterances in lines 12 and 14, does not simply violate the family's established pattern of avoiding criticism of other individuals and ethnic groups, but presents a view of Tamils that the others likely did not share. Thus, while Sinhalese are depicted as broadly suspicious of other ethnic groups in these interactions, the representations of Tamils point to southern Muslims' complex and differing feelings toward Tamils, particularly in relation to their role as perpetrators of violence.

7. Conclusion

In conflict situations where people are concerned about accountability for their words and actions, voicing enables a participant to present complex evaluations of others in relation to themselves. However, though more subtle and indeterminate, voicing can be even more powerful than explicit statements as it can show, rather than tell, the core nature of individuals or ethnic groups, as these examples illustrate. In addition, voicing can play a significant role in inscribing characterizations of individuals or ethnic groups, as discussed above (Agha, 2007; Keane, 2010).

As examples one and two demonstrate, speakers are not absolved of responsibility for their voicing, even though the evaluations of others inherent in voicing is indeterminate. Although Meena's brother's evaluation of Tamils in Example One was embedded, he appeared to my Tamil colleague as "anti-Tamil." In Example Two, though we do not know if Meena's children held Meena accountable for her moral condemnation of the security guard, her colorful narrative certainly did not distract them from her culpability in the incident. Thus, while voicing distributes responsibility from speakers (Hill and Irvine, 1992), it may also highlight it or artfully call it into question.

In examples one and two, the speakers' positioning of themselves in relation to other groups or individuals pertains to morality. In lines 12 and 14 in Example One, Meena's brother positively contrasts Muslims in relation to Sinhalese in terms of their ability to feel pity for Tamils. In his voicing in line 14, Meena's brother presents two evaluations. He contrasts himself from Sinhalese, who he depicts as overly suspicious of Tamils. He also contrasts himself from Tamils, who he portrays (through the voice of Sinhalese) as having murderous inner thoughts toward Sinhalese. In Example Two, Meena positively contrasts herself from the Sinhalese security guard in terms of the correctness or appropriateness of their actions and conduct.

While both examples are intriguing, Meena's brother's embedded voicing in Example One demonstrates something particularly interesting about the way individuals evaluate others through voicing. It shows that responsibility was not only an issue in relation to what people say and to whom, but it was present in the very way people configured others in relation to themselves. Example One gives an account of what one ethnic group, as voiced through another, is capable of doing or thinking. In addition, it also demonstrates how the directive for action may come from elsewhere.

This article emphasizes the importance of a close attention to language, and voice in particular, in exploring how social differences are produced and reproduced. I advocate the treatment of voice and positionality as multi-party processes, where utterances are echoed and reinterpreted, both within a speech event and its subsequent circulation. In providing a study of voice in a conflict situation, this analysis reinforces the idea that there is truly no "view from nowhere" (Irvine and Gal, 2000, p. 79), that the way we configure others in relation to ourselves is intimately intertwined with accountability and responsibility.

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