Temporality, stance ownership, and the constitution of subjectivity

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ABSTRACT

This article examines the constitution of subjectivity through the analytic lens of John Du Bois' notion of stance. Understanding subjectivity requires taking into account longer timescales in order to better capture 1) the embeddings of stances and 2) the play of stances one with another across time. Attending to these longer timescales points to a further trouble with Du Bois' conception of stance and its relationship to subjectivity – what Du Bois calls *stance ownership*. Based on a consideration of an example in which a participant's stance is transformed across time, I propose three means of characterizing stance ownership: intersubjective recognition, embodied indexical icons, and the stance of things.

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1. Introduction

In this article, I take up one particularly well developed analytic for understanding how language entails evaluation, namely Du Bois' notion of stance. I consider this notion of stance in order to develop it as an analytic for understanding the constitution of self and subjectivity in interactional practice. I start with the issue of timescale, considering how we might enrich our understanding of the relation of stance and subjectivity by expanding the timescale of our analyses beyond the handful of turns of talk based on which Du Bois conducts his analyses. This consideration of stance across longer timescales then opens a second concern regarding the linkage between stance and subjectivity, or what Du Bois calls stance ownership. Using an example from Du Bois work and one from my own work, I explore how attending to temporal processes across longer timescales can illustrate how this linkage between stance and subjectivity is accomplished through the interplay of stances across time. Through these examples, I show how "fashions of stancetaking" come to be implicated in the constitution of selves across interactional time.

2. Stance

Du Bois defines stance as a "triune act." As Du Bois (2007) [1] puts it: "In taking a stance, the stancetaker (1) evaluates an object, (2) positions a subject (usually the self), and (3) aligns with other subjects." The three key terms here are evaluating, positioning, and aligning. Du Bois defines *evaluation* as "the process whereby a stancetaker orients to an object of stance and characterizes it as having some specific quality or value" (p. 143). *Positioning* is defined by Du Bois as "the act of situating a

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[1] All subsequent references to Du Bois refer to Du Bois (2007) unless otherwise noted.

social actor with respect to responsibility for stance and for invoking sociocultural value" (p. 143). Finally, with regard to *alignment* Du Bois writes, "alignment can be defined provisionally as the act of calibrating the relationship between two stances, and by implication between two stancetakers" (p. 144). These three acts thus involve relating (1) objects to subjects (evaluation), (2) subjects to objects (positioning), and (3) via the mediating object, subjects to other subjects (alignment).

Some simple examples that Du Bois gives of the evaluative moment of stance include: "I'm amazed," "that's horrible," "I'm glad," "I know," and "I don't like those." Although, the objects of these stances are not immediately present (more on that in a minute), these examples illustrate the basic act of evaluation that then positions a subject as having a particular relation to an object, and which can then become a moment of alignment with a subsequent speaker. Thus, taking the example of "I don't like those," we can see how subsequent speakers can align themselves with the first speaker by positioning themselves with respect to the object, as in the following exchange:

> (*This Retirement Bit* SBCO11: 444.12-446.30)
> SAM;   I don't like those.
>   (0.2)
> ANGELA; I don't either.

As noted above, and as Du Bois notes, the object of a stance of being "amazed" or "glad" or "knowing" may not always be present in the stance utterance itself. In order to recover the object of these stances – i.e., the thing about which the stance subject is "amazed" or "glad" or "knowing" – one needs to look beyond the single turn utterance. Thus, with the example of "I'm just amazed," Du Bois first offers the following[2]:

> (*Lambada* SBC002: 665.79-667.35)
> MILES; I'm just ama:zed.

With only this utterance to work with, one wonders what is it that Miles is amazed about? Du Bois points us to a few turns earlier where the speaker, Miles, first made mention of what will become the object of his "I'm amazed" stance:

> (*Lambada* SBC002: 660.75-667.35)
> 660.75 663.35   MILES;   Cause there're a lot of women out there who apparently don't believe in using
>   condoms.
> 663.35 664.35   (1.0)
> 664.35 665.19   PETE;   Hm.
> 665.19 665.79   (0.6)
> 665.79 667.35   MILES;   I'm just ama:zed.

As Du Bois writes, "Clearly, the stance act of affective self-positioning (as *glad* or *amazed*) is incomplete until we include the object of stance" (p. 155). In paraphrasing Miles' stance, Du Bois writes "Miles' stance amounts to something like *I'm just amazed (that) there're a lot of women out there who (apparently) don't believe in using condoms*" (p. 155). Du Bois' reasonable conclusion following this example is rather simply put: "Subjectivity takes an object" (p. 156).

Importantly, in this elaboration of the stance analytic, Du Bois demonstrates how stance acts are not confined to the singular utterance. Du Bois quite effectively points out how stance acts are accomplished across multiple turns and often between different speakers. Moreover, the import of a given stance, as an act to which others can align or not align, often requires a consideration of more than just a singular turn of talk. From this perspective, the prototypical stance act often involves a timescale that stretches across at least three turns – a stance utterance, a prior utterance that includes the stance object, and a subsequent utterance that indicates how a second speaker is aligning (or not) with the stance utterance, or, as Du Bois writes, "There are no private stances" (171), and "From a dialogic perspective, no stance stands alone," (p. 172). Thus, in this view of stance, stance is itself an intersubjective and dialogical phenomena that signals relations between people through the alignment (or not) of their relations to some object.

2.1. Stance, subjectivity, and some troubles of timescale

In Du Bois' development of the concept, stance indexes subjectivity, first by the indicated relation (evaluation) to a stance object, and second by indexing a relation (alignment) to another subject via their relation to that object. It is in this sense that Du Bois appears to be seeking to outline a dialogical, relational, and intersubjective conception of subjectivity. As Du Bois writes: "Despite popular conceptions of subjectivity as purely internal, solipsistic state of the individual psyche, we see from the evidence of stancetaking that the presence of a subjective element in no way precludes the presence of an objective element as well. In the end, subjectivity proves meaningful only when subject and object are defined in relation to each other"

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[2] This example, which will be treated in greater detail below, comes from a corpus of recordings that can be publicly accessed online (see Du Bois et al., 2000 for the website where the transcript and the recording can be accessed). In the analysis that follows, I draw from these materials in order to consider the broader context from which this example was taken.