

## Epistemic Positioning and Participation Frameworks in Assessments in a Basketball-Themed Talk-Show Game

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### Abstract

This paper analyzes assessments in a basketball-themed talk-show game in which players took turns to pick the top shooters in the league. Using conversation analysis, we show that, through assessments and responses to assessments, participants index their epistemic access and primacy as well as their interactive roles. We show how participants employ various linguistic resources for claiming epistemic primacy, invoking shared knowledge, and aligning or competing with a prior speaker's epistemic primacy, thereby achieving epistemic congruence, contest, and collaboration. Based on the findings, we discuss this study's implications for language learning and teaching with respect to the use of conversation analysis and authentic materials.

### Introduction

English language learners seeking to learn from authentic materials have at their disposal a wide array of multimedia resources online, including video podcasts about sports on Youtube. There is much to be learned from these samples of authentic materials. This paper aims to examine naturally occurring video podcasts in which participants talk about National Basketball Association (NBA) players in the context of a talk-show game to pick their top five shooters. As the participants play the game, they use interactional practices to announce their selections, give assessments of the picked players, and respond to their competitor's selections and assessments. This makes such materials a rich resource for learning how to make assessments and respond to others' assessments. Further, since the participants compete to pick their best players in a talk show designed to inform and entertain, their assessments are not done in neutral ways but are colored by their epistemic stances and their orientations to their own and others' roles in the talk-show game's participation framework. This paper analyzes how these dynamics are concretely achieved in talk.



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The paper first reviews the practices of assessments, responses to assessments, and epistemic management in social interaction. It then presents an analysis of eight excerpts from a video podcast on YouTube in which participants picked the best NBA shooters. Toward the end of the paper, we discuss the implications of the findings for English language learning and teaching.

### **Assessment, Affective Display, and Epistemics Management**

Participants in conversations often produce assessments to positively or negatively evaluate persons, objects, surroundings, or events (called the *assessables*, Goodwin & Goodwin, 1992). Assessments are often expressed by evaluative adjectives (e.g., “so good”) and expressions (e.g., “I love it”) (Goodwin & Goodwin, 1992; Pomerantz, 1984; Thompson et al., 2015). By producing assessments, speakers index a particular perspective or stance towards what is being assessed as well as the extent to which they have *epistemic access*, *epistemic primacy*, and *epistemic responsibility* to what is being assessed. Thus, assessments also express speakers’ affiliative stances, role orientations, and claims of expertise toward the assessable.

Assessments can be *unmarked*, *downgraded* or *upgraded* (Heritage & Raymond, 2005). Unmarked assessments usually take a declarative format and do not strengthen or weaken the speaker’s epistemic rights toward the assessable (e.g., “this weather is perfect for a barbecue”). Downgraded assessments often involve evidential verbs (e.g., “sound” and “look”) or tag questions. Upgraded assessments may use negative interrogatives (e.g., “isn’t that gorgeous?”).

Importantly, through assessments, participants perform and negotiate *affect displays* such as alignment, affiliation, resistance, or competition (Goodwin & Goodwin, 1992). Once a first assessment is produced, recipients can offer a second assessment, and this is where alignment, affiliation, disagreement or contest can be achieved. *Agreement* is usually conveyed through a second, upgraded assessment and is the preferred response to first assessments, while *disagreement* is often delivered with delays, questions, reluctant markers, agreement prefaces (e.g., “yeah but”) (Pomerantz, 1975, 1984; Heritage & Raymond, 2005; Pillet-Shore, 2017). Producers of second assessments also need to index their access to the given assessable in ways that take into account the epistemic claims by the producer of the first assessment regarding access and authority. To align with the first assessment producer’s epistemic claims, the second assessment producer may use a simple affirmative expression (e.g., “yeah”) or declarative formats to match the first assessment such as “I think so too” in response to “the weather is perfect for a barbecue.” In contrast, the second assessment producer may present independent knowledge, use a negative interrogative format, or prosodic changes (e.g., slower tempo and shifted pitch contour) to assert their own epistemic claims toward the assessable, thus competing with the first assessment producer’s epistemic claims (see Heritage, 2013; Ogden, 2006).

Another important aspect of assessments is the management of *epistemic stances*. Simply put, epistemic stances are speakers’ positionings regarding their degrees of knowledge about some information (Heritage, 2013). Participants in conversations can take epistemic stances by orienting to their own and others’ (1) *epistemic access* (knowing or not knowing, direct or indirect knowledge, and degree of certainty); (2) *epistemic primacy* (relative authority and rights based on quality of knowledge); and (3) *epistemic responsibility* (obligations to respond and design turns according to one’s knowledge) (Stivers et al., 2011). Speakers can express their *epistemic access*, or

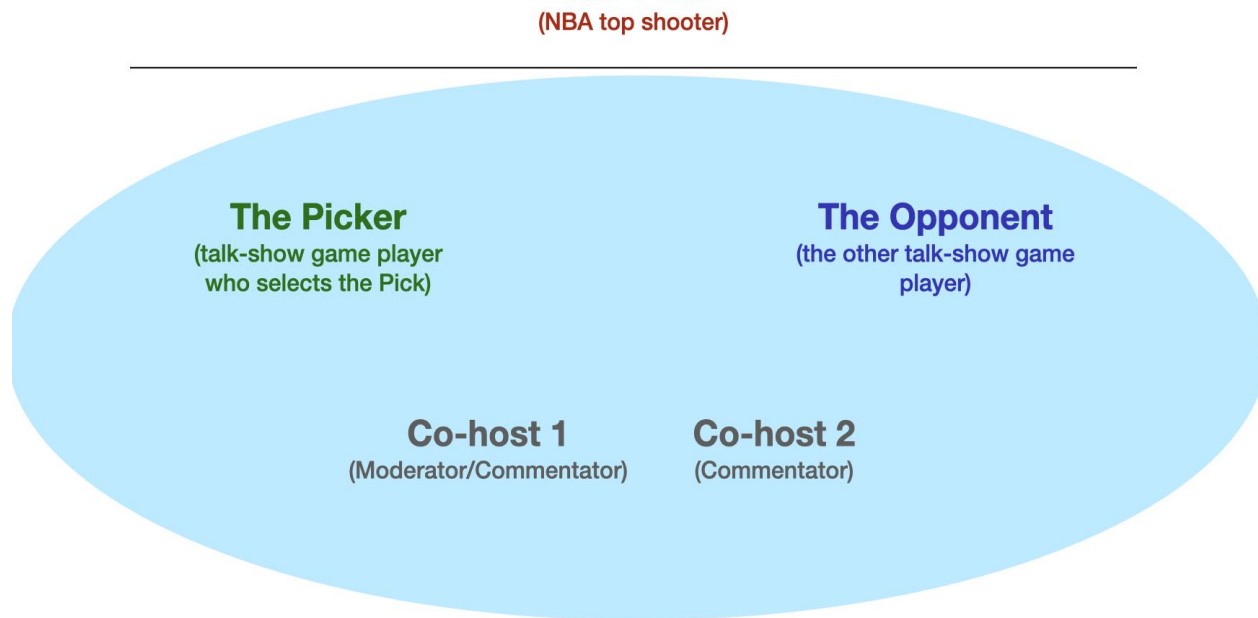
the quality of their knowledge via upgrades, downgrades, expressions of certainty and uncertainty, or naming the source of their information. Speakers may claim *epistemic primacy* by making an assertion in first position, whereas in second position, an agreement token such as “yeah” implies inferior epistemic position and alignment with the first-position speaker’s epistemic primacy (Heritage, 2002). Notably, a way for speakers in response position to resist the first-position speakers’ claim of epistemic primacy is to assert their independent knowledge about the topic at hand (Heritage, 2002). Finally, speakers in conversations orient to their own and others’ *epistemic responsibilities*, or the rights and responsibilities to know certain things according to their interactional roles. They usually design their turns in ways that treat others as being accountable for knowing certain things, such as what they will or will not recognize. It is important to note that when participants align with each other regarding who knows and who does not know certain information, how well they know that information, and who has higher authority regarding certain knowledge claims, they have *epistemic congruence* (Stivers et al., 2011). Although participants’ assumptions about each other’s epistemic access, primacy, and responsibilities are not always in alignment, in general, when encountering epistemic incongruence, participants in conversations work to achieve epistemic congruence (Stivers et al., 2011).

In our analysis of the players’ assessments of their top shooters in the talk-show game, we will focus on how the players claim epistemic access and primacy toward the top shooters being picked either by themselves or their opponent, while also orienting to their interactional roles in the participation framework of the game.

### Context

The talk-show game analyzed in this paper is from a YouTube video channel produced by National Basketball Association (NBA) star player Paul George, entitled “Podcast P with Paul George” (released on Sep 21, 2023). Accompanied by two co-hosts, Dallas Rutherford and Jackie Long, Paul George produced a series of podcasts by inviting various current NBA players to join his team in the studio to pick the top players in the league at the time. The conversation analyzed in this paper is from a podcast with current NBA player Klay Thompson as the guest. In the podcast, Paul George (Host) and Klay Thompson (Guest) took turns to pick their best shooters, while Dallas Rutherford (Co-Host 1) acted as the moderator and commentator and Jackie Long (Co-Host 2) as a commentator. The participants sat in a semi-circle in chairs and couches, with Klay and Paul facing each other and Dallas and Jackie in the middle. A stationary microphone was placed in front of each speaker. We will refer to the talk-show game player whose turn it was to pick their top shooter as the *Picker*, and the other talk-show game player as the *Opponent*. (Since the players took turns to pick their top shooter, the Picker and Opponent roles alternated.) The basketball player chosen by any competitor will be referred to as the *Pick*. Figure 1 is a visual representation of this participation framework. The blue oval represents the talk-show game setting, where the alternating Picker and Opponent as well as the Co-hosts were present.

Figure 1  
*Participation framework in the basketball-themed talk-show game*



The analysis will focus on five game rounds in which a Picker named and assessed a Pick and the co-participants responded to this selection.

### **Research Questions**

The analysis below aims to address these two interrelated questions:

1. How do participants manage epistemic access and epistemic primacy in their assessments?
2. How do participants orient to their interactional roles in the game’s participation framework through these assessments?

### **Methodology**

The part of the podcast in which Klay and Paul took turns selecting their “Starting 5” lineups of the best shooters was 7.5 minutes long and included five rounds. Each round consisted of two half-rounds in which Klay and Paul took turns to pick their five best shooters. Thus, each half-round is a selection sequence. In two half-rounds (in Rounds 2 and 3), Klay picked himself and his opponent (Paul), making these an anomaly compared to the rest of the data, and these two selection sequences were omitted.<sup>1</sup> As a result, we have eight half-rounds (eight selection sequences) for analysis. In each selection sequence, a participant selected a top shooter and assessed him, while others responded to the selection and assessments.

We transcribed these segments using the Jefferson (2004) system and analyzed them using Conversation Analysis (CA) (Have, 2007; Hutchby, 2017; Wong & Waring, 2021). CA uses a bottom-up approach to look at how language is used through interactional practices. It is also required that analysts take an emic, or “participant relative,” perspective (Mori & Nguyen, 2019,

p. 227). The analysis of data begins with the question “why that now,” followed by the identification of patterns in the transcript(s), finding support for patterns with more data, and explaining deviant cases (Schegloff, 2007).

### Analysis

Typically, each selection sequence (half-round) has the following overall organization:

- Invitation by host to a player to pick his top shooter, making this player the Picker
- Pre-announcement assessment in which Picker foreshadows the Pick to be named
- Picker’s announcement of the name of his Pick
- Opponent’s acknowledgement and recognition of the Pick
- Picker’s assessment of the Pick
- Opponent’s and hosts’ responses to Picker’s assessment with agreement, assessments or tellings
- Picker’s upgrade of his assessment and/or addition of descriptions or tellings about the Pick
- Opponent’s and co-hosts’ minimal responses to Picker’s description/telling
- Sequence closing

The ways that co-participants respond to a first assessment by the Picker who just named the Pick can be considered to fall into three categories: (a) alignment, (b) competition and (c) collaboration with the first assessor’s expertise claims, with one segment potentially containing more than one of these categories. Further, the sequential organization of these assessments are also jointly achieved in ways that index the participants’ relative roles in the game’s participation framework.

### Alignment with First Assessor’s Epistemic Access and Primacy

After the first assessment of the Pick by the Picker, the Opponent can align with the Picker’s claims of epistemic access and primacy by agreeing with the Picker’s assessment without claiming his own independent knowledge. This pattern of *consistent epistemic congruence* is illustrated in Excerpts 1-2.

Excerpt 1 is from the first round, when Dallas as the moderator invites Klay to make the first pick. We will show that the Picker (Klay) is the only one who claims independent knowledge about the Pick (Wardell Curry), while the Opponent (Paul) and the Co-Host (Jackie) do not claim their own independent knowledge about the Pick. In Excerpt 1 and other excerpts, bold type is used for turns of particular relevance to the analysis. The relevant turns by the Picker are in blue, those by the Opponent are in purple, and those by the Co-Hosts are in orange.

Excerpt 1: Klay’s pick in Round 1 ([video clip](#) at 1:00)

- 1 D: since we ha:ve one of the **greatest** shooters (.)
- 2 [of **all** time. in Klay Thompson >with us today:.
- 3 K: [°oh thank you.°
- 4 D: we're going to be goin back< and forth you and pea (('P' for Paul))



A similar pattern can be observed in Excerpt 2, when Paul picks his top fifth shooter and Klay aligns with Paul's epistemic access and primacy throughout.

Excerpt 2: Paul's pick in Round 5 ([video clip](#) at 7:23)

1 D: okay who do you got at the five. pe[a. ((P for Paul))  
 2 P: [at the five?  
 3 (.)  
 4 → P: **ima go::: and this is another sleeper.**  
 5 (0.2)  
 6 P: ima go::: (.) Myles Turner at the five.  
 7 → K: **ah yeah.**  
 8 (.)  
 9 P: **Myles**  
 10 → K: °Myles can shoot.°  
 11 → P: **Myles can- i've played with Myles.**  
 12 (.)  
 13 → P: **i've seen him like. (.) work on his shot like.**  
 14 K: **[yeah.**  
 15 → P: **[he can shoot >the shit out of it< like at a hi:gh clip.**  
 16 (0.2)  
 17 P: ima go Myles at my five.  
 18 (0.2)  
 19 → P: **his uh: [his**  
 20 → K: **[where's Myles at now.**

Similar to Klay in Excerpt 1, Paul provides a positive assessment in line 4 prior to naming his Pick. Here, he uses the term “sleeper,” referring to “someone who is secretly a badass at something but doesn't let anyone know” ([JavaLime](#) on Urban Dictionary, May 1, 2020). He then reveals his Pick in line 6, Miles Turner. In response, Klay uses the token “ah yeah” to display recognition and alignment with Paul's epistemic primacy. In line 10, Klay again aligns with Paul's assessment, “Myles can shoot.” This turn is not a competition of expertise with Paul, as Klay uses soft voice and does not provide specific information about Myles. After agreeing with Klay via a partial repetition of Klay's turn, Paul displays his knowledge of the Pick in lines 11-15, revealing that he has “played with Miles” and “seen him like work on his shot” and assessing Miles's shots with emphasis, “he can shoot the shit out of it like at a high clip.” This is a direct and strong claim of epistemic access and primacy. During Paul's turn, Klay only displays his agreement in line 14 with a minimal token “yeah,” thus aligning with Paul's epistemic position. Klay shifts the topic in line 20 by asking about Myles, thus not claiming knowledge of the Pick and, instead, constructing Paul as the expert.

Here again, we see the participants' orientation to the responsibilities of their interactive roles: The Picker (Paul) produces the most substantial assessment turns while others keep their assessments and turns to a minimum.

Sometimes, the Opponent may initially align with the Picker's epistemic primacy but then competes for epistemic primacy at a later point before epistemic congruence is finally restored. This pattern is analyzed in the next section.

### Initial Alignment and Subsequent Contest with First Assessor's Epistemic Access and Primacy

Excerpts 3-4 illustrate how an Opponent may claim independent knowledge in response position after initial alignment with the Picker.

Excerpt 3 takes place in the first round, when Paul gets to pick his top shooter. Although Klay first aligns with Paul's claim of epistemic access and primacy in the first-position assessment, he later competes for epistemic primacy by displaying his independent knowledge.

Excerpt 3: Paul's pick in Round 1 ([video clip](#) at 1:43)

28 P: [current players.  
 29 MY ↑POINT u:::hm imma go with uh::: (0.2) i think the  
 30 >only person< that. (0.5) at the point guard spot. (0.9)  
 31 with ra:nge and can shoot >at that level is-<  
 32 is- gotta go Dame.  
 33 K: yeah..  
 34 P: gotta go Dame.  
 35 J: yes agree. [agree.  
 36 → P: [his range:, his shootin'.  
 37 → K: it's pretty effortless with Dame shoots too.=  
 38 → P: =it's pretty effort[less. like.  
 39 K: [yea:h ye::ah  
 40 → P: he got the same shot. (.) fifty feet out. forty feet out. [xx]  
 41 → K: =i respect Dame. he did a lot for the city of Portland.  
 42 J: [hh.  
 43 → P: i: [i- I hav- ↑you see who i ↑pi:ck. ↑you see who i ↑pi:ck.  
 44 J: [you know about a real good (pick), ah yes uh you did good.  
 45 → P: ↑respect. respect it.

Similar to the pattern in Excerpts 1 and 2, Paul begins here by providing a positive pre-announcement assessment of the player he is about to name: “the only person that. (0.5) at the point guard spot. (0.9) with ra:nge and can shoot >at that level” (lines 30-31). After announcing his Pick, Dame (Damian Lillard), Paul gives an account by mentioning Dame's range and shooting strategies (line 36). In response, Klay agrees with an upgraded assessment, “pretty effortless” in line 37. Klay's response elaborates on Paul's assessment by adding a description of Dame's manner of shooting, thus supporting Paul's assessment rather than claiming independent knowledge. Paul seems to orient to this alignment by repeating Klay's assessment (line 38).

After agreeing with Klay, Paul produces yet another upgraded assessment by describing the exceptional distance of Dame's shot (line 40). By giving this specific detail, Paul is displaying his independent knowledge about the Pick, and in doing so, claiming back epistemic primacy.

At this point, instead of aligning with Paul's epistemic primacy (such as via an agreement token “yeah”), Klay adds a specific detail about Dame that has not been mentioned, displaying and claiming his independent knowledge about Paul's Pick (“I respect Dame. he did a lot for the city of Portland,” line 41). It is noteworthy that Paul does not align with Klay's epistemic position via any agreement token, but treats Klay's turn as known information to him and construes it as supporting his pick (“you see who I pick,” line 43). In doing so, Paul reclaims his epistemic primacy about the shooter he picked. Paul's higher pitch, stress, and repetition in his turns (lines



43, 45) intensify his reclaim. In line 44, Jackie, as the Co-host, assesses Paul's pick, which serves to close the sequence. Thus, Paul, as the Picker, has the last say in the selection, restoring his claim to epistemic access and primacy. This may also be his orientation to his responsibility and entitlement as the picker in this half-round.

Excerpt 4 shows a similar progression from epistemic congruence to challenge and back to congruence. It is in the fourth round, when Klay gets to pick his fourth best shooter. Here we also see Klay leading the assessments about his pick and displaying his epistemic access and primacy about the Pick in first position, while Paul agrees and does not add independent knowledge about Klay's Pick until later in the sequence.

Excerpt 4: Klay's pick in Round 4 ([video clip](#) at 5:33)

1 D: all right. you're at the four now. Klay?  
 2 (.)  
 3 K: **i hh. gotta see k- say Kay Dee. ((Kevin Durant)) >like. come on:<**  
 4 → **like (.) su- si:x eleven, (.) seven feet, [he's xxx**  
 5 → P: **[he's ratchet.**  
 6 → K: **easy money, ((KD's nickname))**  
 7 (.)  
 8 → K: **i seen him shoot,**  
 9 (.)  
 10 → K: **a game winner,**  
 11 (.)  
 12 → K: **think everybody >did it. over LeBron.<=left wing.**  
 13 (0.7)  
 14 → K: **.hh thirty feet out,**  
 15 → P: **yeah**  
 16 → K: **at seven feet.=they weren't doing that in the eighties.**  
 17 **nighties. >you know.<**  
 18 P: **right.=**  
 19 J: **=yeah.**  
 20 → K: **it's like a: pst! WHAT?**  
 21 D: okay:,,=  
 22 → K: **=PULL UP AND TRANSITION?**  
 23 D: **yea:h.**  
 24 → K: **transition. three for game?**  
 25 → P: **DA:GGER.**  
 26 J: **don't even [think about it.**  
 27 K: **[crazy.**  
 28 → P: **that was one of the swaggiest shots. [too.**  
 29 J: **[right?**  
 30 → P: **↓DAGGER.**  
 31 D: xxx play a lot (in town). play:,  
 32 → K: **there's some block- there's some unblockable shot**  
 33 **[too. you know?**  
 34 P: **[yeah.**  
 35 (0.2)  
 36 P: okay.  
 37 D: alright,

Klay names his Pick, KD (Kevin Durant), in line 3. In the same turn, Klay assesses the Pick positively for his height, thus displaying his independent knowledge. Paul's response is an upgraded assessment in overlap (line 5). By referring to KD as "ratchet" (meaning an extremely good shooter), Paul is aligning with Klay's choice of shooter and positive assessment of the shooter without adding new information about the shooter.

Klay then produces a series of assessments about KD in lines 6-14, using the extreme-case formulations "easy money" and "game winner" ('easy money' refers to Kevin Durant's nickname due to his ability to score from anywhere on the court). Klay also claims direct epistemic access with the phrase "I seen him shoot" (line 8). The pauses in between Klay's assessment turns (line 7, 9, 11, 13) indicate that the co-participants yield the floor to him to continue, that is, they align with his expertise claim and display. As Klay continues with his assessments, Paul and Jackie show further alignment in the form of minimal agreement tokens "yeah" and "right" (lines 15, 18, 19, 23). In line 25, when Paul gives an upgraded assessment with an extreme formulation, referring to KD's shot as "dagger" (a definitive shot that ends the other team's chance of winning), he is aligning and agreeing with Klay's description of KD's shot up to that point in the conversation. Similarly, Jackie's turn "don't even think about it" (line 26) aligns with both Klay's and Paul's assessments of KD. Up to this point, the participants have been building epistemic congruence among themselves.

However, there seems to be some competition of epistemic primacy near the end of this segment. After Klay closes his assessment with an upgrade in the form of an extreme-case formulation ("crazy," line 27), Paul adds an assessment about KD's shot that indicates independent knowledge and is marked as an addition to Klay's ongoing assessment of KD with the word "too" in "that was one of the swaggiest shots too" (line 28). With Paul's contesting of his epistemic primacy, Klay does not produce any agreement token but adds another detail about KD that is an upgrade from Paul's assessment, "there's some unblockable shot too. you know?" (lines 32-33). Paul's agreement token "yeah" (line 34) indicates his alignment with Klay's epistemic primacy. Thus, Klay's addition of an assessment after Paul's independent display of knowledge may be an attempt to restore epistemic congruence, an action to show Klay's epistemic responsibility in his interactive role as the Picker in this part of the game.

As seen in Excerpts 3-4, an assessment series can start with epistemic congruence then evolves into competition of expertise displays and ends with restored epistemic congruence. The next section focuses on segments in which a competition of expertise display starts sooner after the naming of a Pick by the Picker.

### **Competition with First Assessor's Epistemic Access and Primacy**

When a Pick names his top shooter and displays knowledge about that shooter in a first-position assessment, the Opponent may compete with that display by exhibiting his own independent knowledge about the Pick in the second position. Eventually, participants settle with epistemic congruence when the Picker reclaims epistemic primacy at the end of the sequence. This can be seen in Excerpts 5-7.

In Excerpt 5, after the Picker's (Paul) first-position assessment, the Opponent (Klay) claims independent knowledge about the Pick. When the Picker reclaims his epistemic access and

primacy by producing further assessments, the Opponent aligns with the Picker's epistemic stance as the sequence closes.

Excerpt 5: Paul's pick in Round 2 ([video clip](#) at 2:26)

- 1 P: at my two:::, ima go::: (2.0) >ima go< Brad.  
 2 =ima go [Bradley Beal.  
 3 → K: [oh ↓yeah:. Brad yeah. great job.  
 4 → P: Bradley Beal's a hell of [a three point shooter.  
 5 D: [((breathy)) oh that's a good one too.  
 6 → K: led the league in scoring one season,=  
 7 → P: =led the league in [scoring one seas[on. =i think  
 8 D: [okay.  
 9 J: [that's a good one.  
 10 → P: his off the bounce three point ga:me.  
 11 J: ye[ah:.  
 12 → P: [i think that's probably the most impressive.  
 13 [is- is-  
 14 J: [that's a real good one P. ((Paul))  
 15 [=i wouldn't even think you'd pick Brad.  
 16 → P: [coz he got a wiggle.  
 17 J: yea:h.  
 18 → P: he got a little wiggle to 'im [to get to his three ball.  
 19 J: [yeah:.  
 20 (0.5)  
 21 → P: .hhh [so a- and he shoots the shit out of it.  
 22 J: [that's a good one.  
 23 K: yeah.  
 24 P: so ima go Brad.  
 25 D: there ya go:

After Paul names his Pick, Bradley Beal, in lines 1-2, Klay shows recognition and praise of Paul's selection "oh ↓yeah:. Brad yeah. great job." (Note that Klay's assessment "great job" as well as Dallas (Co-Host)'s assessment a moment later in line 5, " that's a good one too." both refer to Paul's selection rather than the Pick himself). Paul then produces a first-position assessment of the Pick's shooting abilities in line 4, using an extreme-case formulation ("a hell of a") to index his direct and strong epistemic access and primacy.

Rather than agreeing with Paul's assessment and thus assuming an inferior epistemic position, in line 6, Klay displays his independent knowledge of the Pick in a second-position assessment, mentioning Beal's scoring record. Paul initially shows agreement with Klay's assessment via latched speech and exact repetition (line 7) but then immediately adds another assessment about Beal regarding his shooting strategy (lines 10-13). Paul's assessment thus could indicate a reclaiming of his epistemic access and primacy about the Pick. As Jackie (Co-Host) positively assesses Paul's selection of the Pick (rather than the Pick himself) (lines 14-15), Paul produces another assessment regarding Beal's shooting style, further displaying his independent knowledge of the Pick (lines 16-21). This assessment closes the sequence as Klay aligns and agrees with Paul (line 23), thus epistemic congruence is maintained. Paul's epistemic reclaim also indexes his orientation to his role as the Picker, who has the responsibility to assess the Pick.

In Excerpt 6, the Opponent (Klay) also produces a second assessment soon after the Picker's (Paul's) naming of the Pick.

Excerpt 6: Paul's Pick in Round 3 ([Video clip](#) at 4:49)

1 P: u:m. i'ma go:: h. (.) i'ma go:: h.  
 2 D: hih hih hih hih hih  
 3 → P: this is a sleeper.= i'ma go Keegan Murray.  
 4 K: mm::. yea:h.  
 5 (.)  
 6 → K: he can shoot.=  
 7 → P: =he's elite at the three point.=  
 8 K: =he is.  
 9 P: like. (.) such a early (0.2) and (.) i- uh: (.)  
 10 >hopefully this is not just one of those< one-offs  
 11 >where he's just has a< (.) [hell of a rookie season,  
 12 K: [yeah he gonna a  
 13 K: nah: he's gonna be a good player.=  
 14 P: =but (.) he's got a cannon.  
 15 K: [yeah:  
 16 P: [he- he can shoot the shit out of it.  
 17 → K: and he's (.) six (.) like. (.) ni:ne six [ten.  
 18 P: [BIG [BIG=  
 19 D: [tall.  
 20 K: =yeah.=  
 21 P: big wing. [yeah.  
 22 K: [xxx  
 23 → K: yeah. he was great [in the playoffs too=for a rookie (.) uh: (0.4)  
 24 D: [okay,  
 25 that's a lot.  
 26 (.)  
 27 P: [yeah.  
 28 K: [to beat the impact?  
 29 P: ri:ght.  
 30 K: >>cause leaving 'em-<<  
 31 (0.8)  
 32 K: i'm like (.) i: uh:: (.) measure a guy like  
 33 >how comfortable you feel leaving 'em< open,  
 34 [>you know<?  
 35 P: [right.  
 36 K: i don't feel comfortable leaving [Murray open.=  
 37 P: [mm  
 38 → P: =<at all>.  
 39 K: yeah.  
 40 → P: at all.=  
 41 K: =>he's going in ya know?<=  
 42 → P: =even if he's semi like.  
 43 K: yea:h.  
 44 P: he's still cashing it.  
 45 K: yeah.  
 46 K: that's a good one.  
 47 (.)  
 48 D: alright. you're at the four now. Klay?

Paul's first assessment of the Pick is in the pre-announcement slot (line 3). Klay, as the Opponent, first shows recognition of the Pick (Keegan Murray) and agreement (line 4), then adds his own assessment that shows his independent knowledge of the Pick, "he can shoot" (line 6). Paul produces an upgraded assessment "he's elite at the three point" (line 7). In doing so, Paul is reclaiming his epistemic access and primacy regarding his Pick. Klay aligns with this reclaim in an agreement (line 8). From line 9 through line 19, Paul produces assessments of Keegan Murray with specific details, further displaying his epistemic access and primacy, while Klay aligns with Paul with agreement (lines 12-13, 15).

However, Klay produces an assessment about Murray's height (line 17), which shows his independent knowledge. Paul and Dallas align with Klay's exhibition of epistemic access and primacy by producing short assessments in agreement, not adding new information (lines 18-19, 21).

Klay continues his claim of epistemic access and primacy about Murray with a series of assessment turns, mentioning new specific details about Murray's performance in a particular game (line 23) as well as his assertive play style in relation to Klay's own play on the basketball court (lines 30-41). Throughout this time, Paul assumes a recipient role, producing minimal agreement tokens (lines 27, 29, 37) and an emphasized assessment that shows shared knowledge and agreement (lines 38, 40). Thus, Paul is aligning with Klay's epistemic displays here.

Paul reclaims epistemic access and primacy in lines 42-44, when he produces another assessment about Murray's overall abilities even when he is not at his best, using an extreme-case formulation "he's still cashing it." At this point, Klay aligns with Paul's assessment and epistemic displays, as seen in the minimal agreement tokens he produces (lines 43-45) and a praise for Paul's selection (line 46) to close the sequence.

In short, although the Opponent competes for epistemic primacy soon after the Picker's announcement, eventually, the Picker has the last say in evaluating his Pick.

Excerpt 7 presents a case in which the Opponent (Klay) produces the first-position assessment about the Pick, and the Picker (Paul) responds with an upgraded assessment in a competition of expertise displays.

Excerpt 7: Paul's pick in Round 4 ([video clip](#) at 6:05)

```

38   D: [pea. ((P for Paul))
39   P: [ima go: (0.2) tks! at my four. ima go >Michael Porter Junior<.
40 → K: ah: yea:h. he got a ni- he got bi- (.) he got a great jump shot.
41 → P: =he got a pretty jumper:, (.) same wi- wi- with Keegan.
42   like. (.) i- it- don't matter if you're on 'im or not on 'im.
43   K: =yea:h.
44 → P: like he's one of those guys <that's so damn ta:ll> like. you can't
45   get to that shot either.=
46 → K: =yeah.
47 → P: he shoots the >shit out of it.<
48 → K: yeah i know.=
49 → P: =e's efficient. like. waist, no dribbles.
50   like he's- he's just an efficient shooter from
51   >behind [the three point line.< so.
52   K:           [yeah:,

```

53 D: okay,  
 54 K: i agree.  
 55 D: al[right,  
 56 P: [em pea jay. ((MPJ, Michael Potter Junior))  
 57 D: alright?

After Paul selects “Michael Porter Junior” as his Pick (line 39), Klay immediately produces a first assessment about the Pick (“he got a great jump shot,” line 40), exhibiting his recognition of and independent knowledge about the Pick. Similar to Excerpt 5, Paul initially agrees by repeating part of Klay’s assessment (“he got a pretty jumper,” line 41), then immediately adds a new detail to upgrade his assessment while also showing his knowledge about the Pick (“no matter if you’re on him or not on him,” line 42). Paul produces two more assessments about Potter Junior’s height advantage (lines 44-45) and shooting strategies (lines 49-51), thus further claiming epistemic access and primacy. Klay responds with agreement tokens (lines 46, 48, 52, 54), thus aligning with Paul’s epistemic position and restoring the participation framework in which the Picker produces the most substantial assessments about the Pick.

Although epistemic contestation often occurs as seen above, the participants in the talk-show game also display their knowledge about the Pick collaboratively. This will be analyzed in the next section.

### Collaborative Displays of Expertise in Assessments

Collaborative displays of expertise can be observed when the participants design their assessment turns as the continuation of another speaker’s preceding turn or as a non-claim of independent knowledge. This can be seen in Excerpt 8a-c.

Excerpt 8a: Klay’s pick in Round 5, part 1 ([video clip](#) at 6:34)

1 D: alright? and at the fi::ve?  
 2 → K: it's hard >not to pick< Jokic ((pronounced as /jokɪk/))  
 3 after what he did.  
 4 D: yeah,=  
 5 → K: =in his playoff °run°.=  
 6 P: =yeah.  
 7 → K: he shot like. forty six percent from three.  
 8 (0.5)  
 9 → K: that's ridiculous.  
 10 D: =h::ow does he make `em.  
 11 → K: that- that <moon ball ma:n>?  
 12 D: [hhhh. it's crazy bro.  
 13 P: [hhh. you kid-  
 14 D: =you correct [see  
 15 → P: [from way up here. hhh.  
 16 (0.5)  
 17 K: cash, ((meaning he always makes the shot, referencing `money`))

Similar to the pattern seen above, Klay produces a pre-announcement assessment of his Pick even before naming the Pick in line 2: “it’s hard not to pick,” implying the Pick he is about to mention, Jokić, is a strong and obvious choice. Klay’s phrase “after what he did” invokes

shared knowledge, as it assumes the co-participants recognize Jokić's playoff performance. Indeed, Dallas displays recognition and alignment in line 4, and Paul in line 6, with the token "yeah."

Klay's next assessment of his Pick in lines 7-9 starts with specific factual statistics about Jokić's success rate ("he shot like. forty six percent from three") followed by an evaluative stance expressed by an extreme-case formulation, "ridiculous." This indexes Klay's epistemic primacy about his own pick. Dallas aligns with Klay's assessment via an affective question, "how does he make them" (line 10), which affirms and acknowledges that "forty six percent from three" is, in fact, "ridiculous," while not challenging Klay's knowledge.

Subsequently, Klay produces an assessment of Jokić's specific shot, referring to it as a "moon ball" in line 11. His use of the distal indexical "that" implies that the recipients know what he is referring to, and the vocative "man" at the end of his turn indicates an affiliative stance. Likewise, Dallas's assessment in line 12 "it's crazy bro" also uses an affiliative vocative ("bro") and offers his evaluation of Jokić without challenging Klay's knowledge display. Similarly, Paul's assessment of Jokić in line 15 can be heard as an increment of Klay's assessment in line 11 ("that moon ball he hit" "from way up here"). As such, it builds on Klay's assessment and knowledge display with an affiliative stance without challenging it. This assessment sequence closes with Klay's upgraded assessment with an extreme-case formulation, "cash" (line 17).

A similar pattern of affiliative assessments is seen in the next segment, when Dallas produces the next assessment (Excerpt 8b).

Excerpt 8b: Klay's pick in Round 5, part 2 ([video clip](#) at 6:48)

18 → D:     that fade away ↑he ↑hit?  
 19    P:     xxxx  
 20 → K:     off the [right foot?  
 21    D:             [\$hhhhh\$.  
 22 → K:     so ↑gross?=  
 23    P:     =yeah.=  
 24 → K:     =i'm like(.) ↑[GO::D.  
 25    D:             [\$ahhhh\$.  
 26 → K:     that's: suppose [to: (fading) shot?  
 27 → P:             [that's a tough shot.  
 28             that's a tough [shot to do like.  
 29 → K:             [I've never seen that.  
 30    P:     [from the eighty.  
 31    D:     [fade away.  
 32    K:     =yeah.  
 33 → P:     <he does that shit> at the thr:ee point [°line°.  
 34    D:                             [yeah!  
 35    K:     =yeah.  
 36    P:     it [is-  
 37    D:             [how does he?=  
 38 → P:     =that's crazy.

In line 18, Dallas issues a new assessment about another shot strategy by Jokić. In the same fashion as Klay's assessment in line 11, Dallas also uses the distal indexical "that" to invoke

shared knowledge that his co-participants are assumed to know. His rising intonation invites the recipients' response (Brazil, 1997). Also similar to above, Klay joins Dallas's assessment (line 20) with an increment ("that fade away hit he made" ... "off the right foot"), followed by positive extreme-case formulations ("so ↑gross?" (line 22) and "i'm like(.) ↑[GO::D." (line 24)). By not adding new details about Jokić, Klay aligns and affiliates with Dallas in his assessment rather than competing for epistemic primacy.

Paul's assessment starting in lines 27-28 ("[that's a tough shot. that's a tough [shot to do like.]) introduces a new aspect of Jokić's shot and thus can index epistemic primacy. However, instead of competing with Paul, Klay aligns with Paul's epistemic status by expressing admiration and using the distal indexical "that" to indicate his recognition of what Paul is referring to (line 29). As Paul continues to display his knowledge about his Pick with further details (lines 30-33), Klay and Dallas agree with minimal token, thus aligning with Paul's epistemic primacy in this moment of the conversation.

As the segment continues (Excerpt 8c), Dallas leads the assessment and Paul and Klay align with his epistemic display.

Excerpt 8c: Klay's pick in Round 5, part c ([video clip](#) at 7:02)

39 D: **he acts like he's [like totally >°confident°<.**  
 40 K: **[(a skill of kind)**  
 41 D: **there's [no expression like.**  
 42 P: **[SHI::::t.**  
 43 D: whoa ma:n.=  
 44 P: =yeah.  
 45 D: **no just like.**  
 46 → P: **<he just [↓runs down>.**  
 47 D: [shhhh\$.  
 48 **like i could hit [one of tho:se**  
 49 → K: [(let's see if) you could (pad) your  
 50 game after the church league.  
 51 D: [I'll- I'll-  
 52 K: [let's beat Jokić ((pronounced as "jokits")) man.  
 53 D: I'll try m[y best.  
 54 K: [elevate your team.  
 55 D: we'll see what we can do.  
 56 K: you got the bo:d for it,  
 57 (0.3)  
 58 K: use it. ((imitates basketball moves with arm))  
 59 P: heh heh hah hah hah hah  
 60 K: [he's got the height.  
 61 P: [there you go,  
 62 D: hey. hey. this is supposed to be a po:sitive [podcast.  
 63 P: [right.  
 64 D: i:: we:: let's keep it [that way.  
 65 P: [hhhh.  
 66 D: okay. who do you got at the fi:ve. pe[a (('P' for Paul))



In lines 39-41, Dallas initiates a new assessment about Jokić, referring not to the technical aspect of Jokić's shot but to Jokić's personality. Paul exhibits his shared knowledge with Dallas (line 46) by describing the scene that illustrates what Dallas referred to, thus affiliating with Dallas rather than claiming independent knowledge. Klay then shifts the topic to be about organizing a game against Jokić (line 52) and the sequence ends when Dallas invites Paul to make his selection (line 66).

In short, throughout this half-round (Excerpts 8a-8c), Klay, Dallas, and Paul took turns to be the lead assessor while others affiliated with their assessments. Their assessments involve affiliative upgrading and increments, where participants reinforce and amplify each other's assessments to construct shared knowledge without challenging each other. In this manner, they aligned with each other rotating epistemic primacy status. The fact that Klay pivots to propose to Paul to team up against Jokić (line 49 onward) might be another indication of their mutual affiliation in this segment. Klay's proposal also brings the floor back to him as the main speaker, which might be his orientation to his role as the Picker in this half-round.

### **Summary and Discussion**

Our analysis of talk in a basketball-themed talk-show game has shown that assessments in conversations are imbued with speakers' epistemic positionings and role orientations vis à vis the co-participants. Once a game player has picked who he considers a top player, his assessments—which often involve the use of extreme-case formulations and first-person tellings—serve both as accounts for his selection and as claims of epistemic access and primacy about the selected player. In response, the co-participants, especially the talk-show game opponent, may sometimes align with this positioning through agreement tokens or upgraded assessments about the same quality of the picked player, thus establishing epistemic congruence. At other times, the opponent may withhold agreement and instead produce assessments about other qualities of the picked player, thus displaying independent knowledge and thereby contesting the first player's epistemic positioning. This contestation can happen soon after the first player's assessment or later, following some initial alignment with the first player's epistemic primacy. When this happens, however, the first player often reclaims epistemic primacy by adding assessments about yet other qualities of the picked player, thus having the final assessment in the selection sequence. In other instances, the talk-show game players and the co-host may take turns to produce assessments that display epistemic access about the picked player while also invoking shared knowledge. They also affiliate with one another via upgraded assessments or increments that build on the same point rather than showing independent knowledge.

This study's limitation lies in the small dataset from one single talk-show game with a small number of cases. It also deals with a very specific setting: a talk-show game by NBA players about NBA players. The video podcast itself was staged for public release and may not reflect how people talk in everyday conversations.

Although limited in scope, the findings bear useful implications for the learning and teaching of English as a second language. First, with authentic language samples as analyzed in this paper, learners can be guided to notice and use assessment practices such as using extreme-case formulations and first-person tellings to express epistemic access and primacy; upgrading, repeating, or producing agreement tokens to show affiliation and epistemic alignment; and

adding increments or descriptions that build on a prior assessment to collaboratively display shared epistemic access and primacy. Second, while several language expressions in the data are specific to basketball players' talk, they provide a realistic glimpse into how language can be used in real life. For learners interested in basketball, this type of data analysis can motivate them to engage more personally with the target language. For learners in general, analyzing data such as the segments above can reveal to them how vocabulary, pronunciation, and grammar can be playfully pushed beyond stable definitions and rules found in conventional dictionaries and grammar books. This can invite students to view the target language as permeable, dynamic, and fun.

### Note

Here is an excerpt from the half-round where Klay picked himself:

Klay's pick in Round 2 ([video clip](#) at 2:12)

26 D: okay. Klay. you got (.) the two now.  
 27 K: uhh:: can't pick myself?  
 28 D: you >can< pick yourself,=  
 29 K: =I'll go with myself.  
 30 J: \$>↑you ↑praisy [↑praisy baby:,<\$  
 31 D: [easy call.  
 32 K: there's no bias but hey:.  
 33 J: \$↑you praisy.\$  
 34 K: thank you.  
 35 P: you at the two?  
 36 K: yeah:  
 37 P: u:::h another understandable one,=uh [very understandable,  
 38 J: [hah HAH HAH HAH HAH

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