THE CASE OF EVIDENTIALS IN ENGLISH: SEMANTIC-FUNCTIONAL AND PRAGMATIC ISSUES OF EVIDENTIALITY

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Abstract: In recent years, evidentiality has come to be generally considered a "semantic functional" domain, covering a range of meanings that may serve both referential and non-referential purposes. My paper reviews recent research on evidentiality and expressions of evidential meanings, and argues that evidentials do not contribute to propositional content and/or to the truth conditions of an asserted proposition, but are rather illocutionary modifiers.

Keywords: evidentials, referentiality, semantic, pragmatic, perfomatives

The non-truth conditional view of epistemic modality has often been challenged (Papafragou, 2006) by linguists who claim that epistemic modality contributes to the truth conditions of the utterance. On the other hand, several linguists argue that epistemic modality expresses a stance on the proposition expressed by the utterance and marks both the extent and source of the speaker's commitment to the embedded proposition. In this sense, it represents the speaker's assessment of probability that is external to the content, being an attitude towards his own speech role, that of a "declarer" (Halliday 1970: 349). Epistemic modality also points to the speaker's commitment to the proposition (Palmer 1986: 54–55) or to the truth of a proposition (Bybee and Fleischman, 1995:6). Despite the increasing number of studies on evidentials and evidentiality, it is still not clear whether it is possible to consider evidentiality a linguistic category situated at a specific level within grammar and whether evidentials contribute to propositional content or, for that matter, represent a speaker's comment on that content.

Ever since Palmer (1986) epistemic modality has been inclusive of two sub-systems: (1) *Judgments* and (2) *Evidentials*, further subdivided into *Speculative* (opinion) and *Deductive* (conclusion) for (1) and into the *Quotative* (indicating report) for (2) respectively. Such taxonomy rests on his conviction that both opinions and conclusions involve the speaker's judgments, whereas reports indicate the kind of evidence one has for what one is saying. The fact that the evidential system is inclusive of *Quotatives* (reports) indicates what the speaker has been told by others. In addition, he places 'sensation' within this system and identifies some connection between sensation and modality in English (despite the fact that in this language, epistemic modality consists of Judgments only). According to him, with *can* one can resort to a common way of expressing what one sees, hears, feels, tastes, smells, etc.(*I can see the leaves falling; I can smell something burning.*)

The *quotative*, as distinct part of *evidentials* is apparently wholly objective, in that it indicates not what the speaker believes, rather what he has been told by the others. However, if it is to be taken together with the other evidentials for instance, those that indicate the observation, visual or non-visual, on which the statement is based, it becomes clear that the purpose of

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evidentials is to show the degree of the speaker's commitment. The piece of information the speaker offers qualifies its validity in terms of the evidence he has. Hence, it may be argued that evidentials are not indicative of objective modality rather, they are entirely subjective because they indicate the proposition with regard to the speaker's commitment to it.

With Givón (1984:24), evidentials are embedded in the three types of proposition that can be recognized within epistemic modality:

(a) Unchallengeable propositions that are taken for granted by the hearer and which require no evidentiary justifications by the speaker (*declaratives*);

(b) Propositions asserted with relative confidence, that are open to challenge by the hearer and which require or admit some evidentiary justification (*evidentials*);

(c) Propositions asserted with doubt as hypotheses, being beneath both challenge and evidentiary substantiation (*judgments*).

Lyons (1977) makes a subjective–objective distinction which is illustrated in the different interpretations of the following example, depending on whether the statement is made by a layman or a meteorologist (Lyons 1977), for example: *It may rain tomorrow.*

However, on the subjective reading level, the sentence expresses someone's view based on personal (perhaps incomplete) evidence; on its objective reading level, on the other hand, a conclusion is stated based on (far more reliable and complete) scientific data and measurements. Lyons suggests in this sense that objective interpretations contribute to truth conditions, marking an inference that can only be guaranteed by a stable and reliable body of data. To support such a view, he uses the *assent/dissent diagnostic tests* that show that the content of an epistemically interpreted modal cannot be challenged or endorsed by the hearer and hence belongs to a different level of meaning from the truth-conditional meaning of the utterance. He points out that while the subjective interpretation of the sentence fails the scope and tests, the objective reading passes the tests (qtd in Papafragou, 2006:1692) as in: *If it may rain tomorrow, people should take their umbrellas; It is surprising that it may rain tomorrow, since there was no sign of a cloud all day today; The weather forecast told viewers that it may rain tomorrow; Is that so? (Is it the case that it may rain tomorrow?)*; *I don't believe it. (I don't believe that it may rain tomorrow.)*; *That's not true. (It is not true that it may rain tomorrow; I agree. (I agree that it may rain tomorrow.)*

Obviously, at another level of interpretation, subjective epistemics bear certain similarities to performatives. Lyons argues that subjective epistemic modality qualifies the illocutionary act in much the same way that a performative verb parenthetically qualifies and/or modulates the utterance tagged on to it (1977:805). A similar explanatory evidential system is inclusive of 'the person who knows about the situation under discussion' (see Hensarling 1982), a system with the following possible options: Speaker [+], Hearer [+], Gloss {remind}, *I did it a week ago, as you know;* Speaker [+], Hearer [-], Gloss {inform}, *I tell you he did it a week ago*; Speaker [-], Hearer [+], Gloss {ask}, *Is that the way it is?;* Speaker [-], Hearer [-], Gloss {doubt },*Who knows if he did it just now?*; Speaker [-], Hearer [?], Gloss {speculate},*'I wonder if he did it,' he thought.* In this system, 'Remind' relates what both the speaker and the hearer know; 'Inform' what the speaker knows, but the hearer doesn't; 'Ask' what the hearer knows, but the speaker doesn't; 'Doubt' what neither know; 'Speculate' what the speaker doesn't know.

Albeit complex and far-ranging, the evidential system remains two-dimensional with Lowe (1972, qtd in Palmer, 2001:63), involving both *event verification* (individual and

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collective) and *speaker orientation* (inclusive of observation, deduction and narration). Within this system, such glosses are possible: *individual observation* (I tell you what I saw him do); *individual deduction (*I am reporting to you my inference of an action that I consider must have happened because of something I saw)**;** *individual narration* (I was told that a certain action took place)**;** *group observation* (I am reporting what the hearer[1] and I saw someone do)**;** *group inference* (From what the speaker and the hearer saw, they infer that a certain action must have taken occurred)**;** *collective narration* (Both the speaker and the hearer were told that a certain action took place). To further illustrate these systemic distinctions, an active verb, such as *play*, may be used to indicate the following degrees of commitment: he played/he must have played/I was told that he played/both you and I saw that he played/he played, as inferred from what I saw/it was told us that he played, etc.

More recently, evidentiality has come to be generally considered a "semantic functional" domain (Diewald and Smirnova, 2010), covering a range of meanings that may serve both referential and non-referential purposes. It may be described as consisting of markers pointing to the source and evidence of the information in the proposition (Bybee 1985:184) and understood in terms of an existing source of evidence for some information with the specification of what type of evidence there is (Aikhenvald 2004:1). According to Anderson (1986), evidentials are indicative not only of the kinds of evidence a person has for factual claims but also of how that person obtained the information on which her/his assertion rests (Willet 1988: 55). However, it has been generally agreed that the fundamental feature of linguistic evidentiality is represented by the explicit encoding of evidence used by the speaker to produce the primary proposition of the utterance. In recent years, considerable research on evidentiality and on the expression of evidential meanings in language has been made, particularly on the growing acceptance of evidentiality as a self-standing semantic-functional domain, and not a sub-division of epistemic modality. Many linguists agree that evidential markers and evidential systems in languages are in principle, notwithstanding the empirical fact of frequent overlap, an *independent category* (de Haan 2001; Aikhenvald 2004).In more specific terms, Aikhenvald claims that a quarter of the world's languages display some type of grammatical evidentiality, as every statement is connected and must specify the source on which it is based (whether/when the speaker saw, heard, inferred it from indirect evidence, or heard it from someone else). Following her typology, two major types of evidential marking are thus possible: indirectivity ("type I") and evidential marking ("type II").The first type (*indirectivity*) is indicative of whether there is evidence for a statement, yet does not specify what kind of evidence, whereas the second type (*evidentiality proper*) specifies the nature of evidence (in terms of whether such evidence is visual, reported, or simply inferred). More specifically, such evidence can be categorized according to such criteria: Hearsay; Quotative; Assumed; Witness vs Non-witness; Firsthand vs Secondhand vs Thirdhand; Visual vs Nonvisual (i.e. olfactory, auditory, etc.), Hearsay, etc. In English, the mandatory elements of grammatical evidentiality systems may be in the following range: *I hear that*; *I see that*; *I think that*; *it looks like; as I can see; as I can hear; as far as I understand*, *it turns out that; they say*; *it is said*; *it appears that*, *alleged*, *stated*, *allegedly*, *reportedly*, *obviously*, etc.

1 The term 'hearer' is not strictly accurate here because the person concerned is the one that is being spoken to, not anyone who might accidentally hear; the term 'addressee' is more accurate in this respect and may be sometimes used instead of 'hearer'.

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To further prove our (and Aikhenvald's) point, evidentiality analysis calls for an integrated form, meaning and use describable as *a model of evidentiality*. Such a model has not yet been fully developed ot explored, however recent attempts have been converging towards an inclusive typology of evidential systems across languages. In point of (morpho-syntactic) form, such typology has tried to identify and include both evidentiality encoding and all other morphosyntactic regularities within a language or across languages. In point of meaning (semantics), it is not yet clear which meanings of evidentials are typically specific to evidentiality, which of these interact or not with tense/aspect/mood systems and which meanings can be clearly attributed to independent mechanisms such as: aspect, modality, or perspectival information. Moreover, evidentiality rests on a source of evidence (which forms the basis for a knowledge state) as well as a witness (which represents the basis for a perspectival state). These two features are apt to describe all evidential markers, hence they can be considered to be "evidential universals" (McCready, 2007). While much research on evidentials tends to focus on their occurrence in root contexts, arguably less attention, we claim, has been paid to evidentials patterned in embedded contexts (for example, Schenner 2008). On the other hand, reportative evidentials represent the most common type of indirect evidence and may be contrasted along clear parameters (see Schwager 2010), including the strength of the report (strong vs. weak reportativity), the source of the report ("person parameter"), and the logical type of the reportative (propositional vs. illocutionary).

From a pragmatic (use) point of view, the most clarifying aspects of the typology of evidential systems must focus on the presuppositions attached to evidentials, as well as the felicity conditions that may constrain their context-of-use. Coming full circle, the pragmatics of evidentiality would similarly help explain how, at speech act level, evidentiality is used to implicate other meanings. More to the point, from the viewpoint of perspectival information, the presence of a contextually determined judge is required (McCready 2007, 2010), however analysis of extended uses in discourse has also indicated that other kinds of meanings can also be expressed, see for example, the evidential expression *look like* that can be used to express irony (Gilmour, Gonzales and Louie 2010). In the same line of pragmatic research, Peterson (2010) has tentatively explored how evidentiality contributes to both the mirative (grammatical marking of a proposition for new and surprising information to the speaker, see DeLancey 1997; 2001) and metaphorical interpretations and uses of sentences.

By way of context, applicative studies on evidential systems in several languages have been conducted recently, a significant one being that of Vladimir Plungian (2010). His overview of several grammatical evidential systems is based on generalizations proposed in the typological studies. He examines a cross-linguistic classification both of evidential values and evidential systems, whereby a "basic" system is taken as a point of departure and is considered the prototypical realisation of a generalized typological idea of evidentiality in a most neutral way. Plungian considers the relation between evidentiality as two different semantic domains that are closely related both synchronically and diachronically, and hence proposes a distinction between "modalised" and "non-modalised" evidential systems. A more recent and interesting contribution to the study of evidentiality brings Whitt (2010) to the results of a corpus-based analysis of evidential meanings of English and German perception verbs. He focuses on the semantic issues of such verbs, covering the Early Modern period up to the present and addresses the importance of distinction between subject-oriented and object-oriented perception expressed by such verbs.

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He manages to show that the verbs of perception for instance in English and German are polysemous and can express a wide range of evidential meanings, ranging from direct/perceptual to inferential and to hearsay evidential values, some of which being restricted to specific construction types. Shifting focus from written-monologic-language to spoken-dialogic-discourse, Cornillie (2010), extends this study and shows that, although epistemic and evidential adverbs in most uses of written language exhibit the function of qualifying the proposition according to factuality values (in the case of epistemic markers), or according to information nature and sources (in the case of evidentials), they all display a variety of additional functions in conversational contexts.

The variety and complexity of such studies point to different ways of linguistic realization of evidentiality that display both lexical means for expressing evidential meanings and grammaticalised markers (such markers are, in many cases, tightly organized grammatical paradigms, in line with other typologically acknowledged evidential systems). They by and large emphasize that evidentiality must be seen as a semantic-functional (conceptual) domain which is not restricted to grammaticalised markers, rather it can be realized by different linguistic expressions of varying illocutionary force. Moreover, evidentiality and epistemic modality represent two largely independent categories which are often intertwined in individual languages and expressions.

Aikhenvald is the first to contribute to the development of an encompassing typology of evidential systems based on a large number of languages. A recently emerging branch of research is developing a more theoretically informed and testable methodology for investigating evidential categories (cf. Faller 2002, 2006, Matthewson et al. 2008), by observing more closely the not-at-issue and at-issue components of assertion (showing, in principle, that whereas the evidential contribution is not directly challengeable or up for negotiation, the propositional contribution, the 'main point' of the sentence, is directly challengeable and up for negotiation). Contemporary semantic and pragmatic theory of evidentials allows for more efficient instruments for investigating and explaining evidential meaning as illocutionary modifiers, based on the firm conviction that implicatures are not triggered by degrees of informativeness, but by degrees of strength of evidence.

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