

# Studying evidentiality in language

Samira Verhees

Project and research seminar

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[github/sverhees/site/other](https://github.com/sverhees/site/other)

# Outline

1. What is evidentiality?
2. Cognition and culture
3. Fieldwork on evidentiality

# Cognition and culture

Seminal study: *The acquisition of aspect and modality. The case of past reference in Turkish.*  
(Aksu-Koç 1988)

# Turkish indirectivity

- ▶ Basic past tenses in Turkish are *-dI* (direct, personal knowledge) and *-mIŝ* (indirect: inference or hearsay + mirative)
- ▶ *-mIŝ* has (present) perfect origins (Slobin & Aksu-Koç 1982: 188-192), but no longer used as finite perfect
- ▶ *-dI* and *-mIŝ* forms of auxiliary 'be' derive direct / indirect periphrastic tenses

# Turkish indirectivity

- ▶ Johanson (2018: 512) on Turkic in general:  
“*Indirectivity markers* do not fit into evidential schemes distinguishing between ‘the speaker’s non-firsthand and firsthand information’. Their primary task is **not** to express the external origin of the addresser’s knowledge.”

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“*Indirectivity markers* do not fit into evidential schemes distinguishing between ‘the speaker’s non-firsthand and firsthand information’. Their primary task is **not** to express the external origin of the addresser’s knowledge.”
- ▶ Their function is to state things indirectly through the reception by a conscious recipient (similar to mediativity)
- ▶ *-dI* is unmarked, not direct

# Acquisition

- ▶ Longitudinal data:
  - ▶ 3 children, 21-30 months of age during testing
  - ▶ visited at regular intervals for a period of a few months
  - ▶ toys used to create comparative samples



# Acquisition

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  - ▶ 3 children, 21-30 months of age during testing
  - ▶ visited at regular intervals for a period of a few months
  - ▶ toys used to create comparative samples
- ▶ Children start using the direct past before the indirect past
- ▶ Emergence of different functions of the indirect form mirrors the grammaticalization process:  
current state → inference → hearsay

# Acquisition

Utterance (1) was used by a child to describe a situation when the researcher showed her a broken stick, but also when the researcher broke the stick in front of her.

- (1)      kır-ıl-mış  
         break-PFV-INDIR  
         ‘[It] got broken.’

# Acquisition

- ▶ Experimental data:
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# Acquisition

- ▶ Experimental data:
  - ▶ 60 children, aged 3 - 6.4
  - ▶ Production: describe sequences of events
  - ▶ Comprehension: match utterance with speaker
  - ▶ Mixed: track perspectives with dolls

# Acquisition

- ▶ All markers are used from age 3, but appropriate use in evidential contexts appears between 3.6 - 4.6
- ▶ Comprehension and metalinguistic awareness lag behind

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- ▶ All markers are used from age 3, but appropriate use in evidential contexts appears between 3.6 - 4.6
- ▶ Comprehension and metalinguistic awareness lag behind
- ▶ Confirmed in recent replication  
(Aksu-Koç, Ögel-Balaban & Alp 2009)

# Acquisition

- ▶ Development in Quechua parallels that of Turkish in order of emergence (**Fitneva 2018**)
- ▶ Acquisition in Korean occurs in a different order (**Ibid.**)

# Acquisition of evidentiality

- Comprehension and metalinguistic awareness seem to appear later across languages  
→ Theory of mind



# Acquisition of evidentiality

- ▶ Comprehension and metalinguistic awareness seem to appear later across languages  
→ Theory of mind
- ▶ Correlation with awareness of reliability is not proven (Fitneva 2018: 195)

# Memory

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- ▶ Most typologies call this direct or firsthand evidentiality
- ▶ Cross-linguistically the expression of evidentiality seems to favor the past tense (Forker 2018)

# Tense

- (2) náciya páe-áy=hõ  
boat go.upriver-DYNM=NONVIS  
'The boat is going upriver (I can hear it).'

(Epps 2008: 153)

Hup (Naduhup)

# Tense

- ▶ Evidentials usually do not fall under the scope of tense

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(3) *Übermäßiger Kartoffelgenuss sollte angeblich zu Schwindsucht, Rachitis Bauchgrimmen oder gar Syphilis führen.*

‘The consumption of too many potatoes was said to allegedly cause consumption, rachitis, stomach ache or even syphilis.’

From (Faller 2006), see (Murray 2017: 31–34)

# Tense

- ▶ Evidentiality in the nominal domain can determine a relationship between speaker and some referent, rather than speaker and event

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- ▶ Evidentiality in the nominal domain can determine a relationship between speaker and some referent, rather than speaker and event
- ▶ Determiners in Nivaêle indicate whether a referent is visible at utterance time
- ▶ AND whether the speaker has ever seen them in their lifetime



# Tense

- (4)      ja-yasinôy-esh      pa                      León  
         1SG-talk.to-COM DET:NO.BSE NAME  
         ‘I talked to León (only on the phone, but I never  
         met him.’

(Jacques 2018: 118)

Niva'le (Mataguayan)

# Tense

**Table 1:** Nivaçle determiners according to Jacques (2018: 119)

|                 | BSE at some point in lifetime |                       | no BSE |
|-----------------|-------------------------------|-----------------------|--------|
| BSE at UT       | na                            |                       | pa     |
| no BSE<br>at UT | ja                            | ca<br>ceased to exist |        |

# Memory

- ▶ Memories of past events are of variable quality
- ▶ Taku Tibetan differentiates immediate versus prolonged observation (Sun 2018: 51–54)

# Memory

(5)      ɛnã: <sup>n</sup>boʔ-wuʔ

rain fall:IPFV-IMMED

‘It is raining (the speaker takes a look out the window and notices the rain outside).’

(6)      ɛnã: <sup>n</sup>boʔ-ji:

rain fall:IPFV-DIR:PRS

‘It is raining (the speaker has been aware of the rain for some time).’

(Sun 2018)

Taku Tibetan

# Monitoring sources

“People’s mental experiences do not have labels indicating where they came from.”  
(Johnson 2006: 761)

# Source monitoring

- ▶ Memories are attributed to source based on their resemblance to a general type of memory

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- ▶ Memories are attributed to source based on their resemblance to a general type of memory
- ▶ People can think they saw something when actually they read a vivid description (Intraub & Hoffman 1992)
- ▶ Lines between real and imagined events can be blurred; details misremembered → see recent research on the reliability of eyewitness testimonies

# Source monitoring

- ▶ Do speakers of evidential languages have a cognitive advantage in this regard?



# Source monitoring

- ▶ Do speakers of evidential languages have a cognitive advantage in this regard?
- ▶ So far the answer seems to be NO
- ▶ Not a lot of research has been done so far, limited to languages with small evidential systems (overview in Ünal & Papafragou (2018))

# Knowledge

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event - source of information - information -  
utterance

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- ▶ Assumed simple correspondence:  
event - source of information - information -  
utterance
- ▶ But knowledge is often composed of fragments  
from different sources
- ▶ In which case speakers opt for a “preferred  
evidential” (Aikhenvald 2004: 305–309)

# Knowledge

- (7) Valteir ite tʃinu  
Valteir POSS+NCL:AN dog  
nihwã-ka di-na  
3SG.NF+bite-REC.PST.VIS 3SG.NF-OBJ  
'Valteir's dog bit him.' (VISUAL)

(Aikhenvald 2004: 306)

Tariana (Arawak)

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Tariana (Arawak)

The speaker heard and saw the event, yet uses *-ka* (VISUAL) rather than *-mahka* (NON-VISUAL).

# Knowledge

- ▶ Jacques (2018) mentions that blind speakers of Nivaçle use the visual evidential for tactile perception → “best sensory evidence”

# Knowledge

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(8) komandir-əm pušt-ən-ət ul-maš.  
commander-ACC kill-PST.3PL AUX-EVID  
‘[I see] the commander has been killed.’  
(Tatevosov 2003: 184) Mari (Uralic)



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- (8) can be used when the speaker checked the pulse of the commander, not when they simply saw the commander fall down in a fight

# Epistemic authority

- ▶ Evidentials can be used to assert the speaker's “epistemic authority”, indicating that they have privileged knowledge about the subject (Stivers, Mondada & Steensig 2011)
- ▶ Not to be confused with commitment, reliability judgments, etc.

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- ▶ Not to be confused with commitment, reliability judgments, etc.
- ▶ According to Grzech (2016), clitics in Tena Kichwa (formerly analyzed as evidential) mark epistemic authority instead

# Epistemic authority

“[epistemic authority is] the right of a speaker, for example, to talk about the internal states of others. Many languages do not allow a speaker to talk directly about the internal states of others. For example, in some languages one can use a direct evidential to say ‘I am afraid of the dog’ (endopathic sensation) but one cannot use a direct evidential marker to say ‘He is afraid of the dog’, because the emotion is not directly perceivable to the speaker. One can only use an inferential sensory marker based on the visible consequences of fear such as his body shaking and the look on his face.” (Tournadre & LaPolla 2014: 245)

# Manipulation

Indirect evidential markers are commonly used for pragmatic distancing

- (9)      seler   ki'ci   voğanda getu                      daxənbar  
            you.PL small when      head.covering wear.IMP  
            o      - **daxan ixua**  
            INT - wear      not.INDIR  
            'When you were young, did you cover your  
            heads?' - 'No, we didn't.'

(Dwyer 2000: 51)

Salar (Turkic)

# Manipulation

Distance can take on an ironic or sarcastic flavor

- (10) Her gün koş-uyor-muş.  
every day run-PRS-mİş  
'(It is said that) he jogs every day.'

(Slobin & Aksu-Koç 1986: 161)

Turkish (Turkic)

# Manipulation

Distance can take on an ironic or sarcastic flavor

- (11)      Paṙk-ac                      ē  
         lie\_down-INDIR be-3SG

‘She’s lying down.’

1. This is normal, e.g., she usually rests at this time of day, she’s pregnant, she’s ill, etc.
2. It’s shocking how lazy she is.

(Donabédian 2001: 426)

Western Armenian

# Manipulation

The reverse is arguably also possible, cf.

- (12)    ŋə           gepi:               ʃa    zɐ-wuʔ-\*lə  
          1SG:GEN husband:ERG meat eat-PROG-EGO  
          ‘My husband is eating meat.’

- (13)    ŋə           gepi:               ʃa    zɐ-lə  
          1SG:GEN husband:ERG meat eat-EGO  
          ‘My husband eats meat.’

(Sun 2018: 56)

Taku Tibetan (Tibetic)



# Manipulation

Taking into account the addressee: face-saving and face-threatening

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- (14)      wa   dila        r-ik:an      x:unul, cel,  
             hey 1SG.GEN F-beloved wife,    somehow  
             kuxnjali-b        dig    k:wɣʔbih-ub-ca-b.  
             kitchen-N[ESS] meat spoil-PRET-COP-N  
             ‘Hey, my dear wife, somehow the meat has  
             spoiled in the kitchen.’

(Fieldwork 2016)

Icari Dargwa (East Caucasian)

# Manipulation

Taking into account the addressee: face-saving and face-threatening

- (15)    na-n      pay-ka                  mopsi kophu-tanta  
         1SG-TOP stomach-NOM very    be.hungry-EVID  
         ‘[I’m afraid to tell you but] I am very hungry,  
         one could say.’

(Ahn & Yap 2015: 67)

Korean

# Manipulation

Taking into account the addressee: face-saving and face-threatening

- (16) Kan-mi pusha-ra-ngi, ri-ki!  
you-EVID bring.along-PST-2 look-IMP  
'You (are the one) who brought us (to this point), look!'

(Nuckolls 2018: 211)

Pastaza Quichua (Quechuan)

# Narratives

- ▶ Evidentials in narrative are subject to conventionalization
- ▶ Use of evidentials has more to do with narrative conventions than speaker's access to the information

# Narratives

► Over-use of a marker as a stylistic device

- (17)      ‘ihaedám **ba**,   huwa **ba**,   wi’   huwa ’i-wínu-di  
then:FOC EVID again EVID one again 3SG  
**ba**,                      dí-khaw-kaenu  
REFL-stand-SUB EVID                      3PL-sing-start  
“And then (*ba*) so, again so (*ba*), as one stood up  
again so (*ba*), they started to sing.’

(Aikhenvald 2004: 313)

Arizona Tewa (Tanoan)

# Narratives

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- ▶ Tonkawa (isolate) supposedly had a dedicated reportative marker for myths (**Hoijer 1933**)

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- ▶ Preferred forms for certain genres
- ▶ Tonkawa (isolate) supposedly had a dedicated reportative marker for myths (Hoijer 1933)
- ▶ In the Vaupés linguistic area: reportative for animal stories and folk tales, assumed (presumptive) for history and origin stories (Aikhenvald 2004: 311)



# Narratives

- ▶ Indirect form in Turkish is strongly associated with unrealistic events and fiction
- ▶ Historical accounts are cast in the direct form (Slobin & Aksu-Koç 1986: 160)

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- ▶ Indirect form in Turkish is strongly associated with unrealistic events and fiction
- ▶ Historical accounts are cast in the direct form (Slobin & Aksu-Koç 1986: 160)
- ▶ Similarly, historical and religious texts in Old Japanese are cast in a direct form (Shinzato 1991: 39–40)

# Narratives

- ▶ In Huamalíes Quechua, speakers typically tell myths about Achkay using indirect evidentials for the main line

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- ▶ In Huamalíes Quechua, speakers typically tell myths about Achkay using indirect evidentials for the main line
- ▶ One version recorded by Howard (2018) situated the myth in familiar surroundings, and used a personal perspective

# Narratives

- ▶ Switch to direct evidential in story-telling can add “vividness” to a story, similar to historical present in non-evidential languages
- ▶ Switch to direct can also be perceived as claiming truth, see [Friedman \(2003\)](#) on Macedonian

# Narratives

- ▶ Narratives are typically built on sequences of one particular verb form (Labov & Waletzky 1967)
- ▶ Verb forms in sequences are interpreted in a specific way → Narrative regime of interpretation (Padučeva 2010)

# Narratives

- (18) Fred arrived at 10. He **had got up** at 5; he **had taken** a long shower, **had got dressed** and **had eaten** a leisurely breakfast. He **had left** the house at 6:30.  
(Kamp & Reyle 1993: 594)

# Manipulation in narration

- ▶ Indirect forms can be used in the first 1 or 2 sentences to “frame” a story as not witnessed (see Siegl (2004) on Permic languages)



# Manipulation in narration

- ▶ Indirect forms can be used in the first 1 or 2 sentences to “frame” a story as not witnessed (see Siegl (2004) on Permic languages)
- ▶ Another function of alternating forms is to structure the text, for example by marking the beginning of a new episode within the text, cf. (Makarcev 2013) on Balkan texts
- ▶ Transition can also mark foregrounded or backgrounded information

# Manipulation in narration

- (19) Kulübün idarecilerine haber uçuruldu,  
club manager message carry  
**geldiler** ama... Mektubumuzu **almamışlar**.  
come but letter receive  
'The message was **carried**<sub>(DIR)</sub> in a hurry to the  
managers, they **came**<sub>(DIR)</sub>, but... (We  
understood that) they have not **received**<sub>(INDIR)</sub>  
our letter.'

(Csató 2000: 32)

Turkish (Turkic)

# Summary

- ▶ Evidential marking relies on people's ability to identify how they know something
- ▶ It forces the selection of a single value in case knowledge originates from various sources
- ▶ In other words, evidential marking is a subjective approximation

# Summary

- ▶ The use and interpretation of evidential markers in context may not be predictable from their perceived core meanings (e.g. reportative, visual evidence)
- ▶ Depends on narrative conventions and politeness strategies, among other things

## Fieldwork on evidentiality



# Abbreviations I

|       |                                     |
|-------|-------------------------------------|
| 1     | first person 25, 48–51              |
| 2     | second person 52                    |
| 3     | third person 36, 37, 39–41, 47, 54  |
| ACC   | accusative 39–41                    |
| AN    | animate 36, 37                      |
| AUX   | auxiliary 39–41                     |
| COM   | comitative 25                       |
| COP   | copula 49, 50                       |
| DET   | determiner 25                       |
| DIR   | direct evidential 28                |
| DYNM  | dynamic 20                          |
| EGO   | egophoric 48                        |
| ERG   | ergative 48                         |
| ESS   | essive 49, 50                       |
| EVID  | evidential 39–41, 51, 52, 54        |
| F     | feminine 49, 50                     |
| FOC   | focus 54                            |
| GEN   | genitive 48–50                      |
| IMMED | immediate 28                        |
| IMP   | imperative 45, 52                   |
| INDIR | indirect evidential past 10, 45, 47 |

# Abbreviations II

|        |                                |
|--------|--------------------------------|
| INT    | interrogative 45               |
| IPFV   | imperfective 28                |
| N      | neuter 49, 50                  |
| NCL    | noun class 36, 37              |
| NF     | non-feminine 36, 37            |
| NO.BSE | no best sensory evidence 25    |
| NOM    | nominative 51                  |
| NONVIS | nonvisual evidential 20        |
| OBJ    | object 36, 37                  |
| PFV    | perfective 10                  |
| PL     | plural 39–41, 45, 54           |
| POSS   | possessive 36, 37              |
| PRET   | preterite 49, 50               |
| PROG   | progressive 48                 |
| PRS    | present 28, 46                 |
| PST    | past 36, 37, 39–41, 52         |
| REC    | recent 36, 37                  |
| REFL   | reflexive 54                   |
| SG     | singular 25, 36, 37, 47–51, 54 |
| SUB    | subordinating 54               |
| TOP    | topic 51                       |
| VIS    | visual evidential 36, 37       |

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