

# Studying evidentiality in language

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Project and research seminar

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

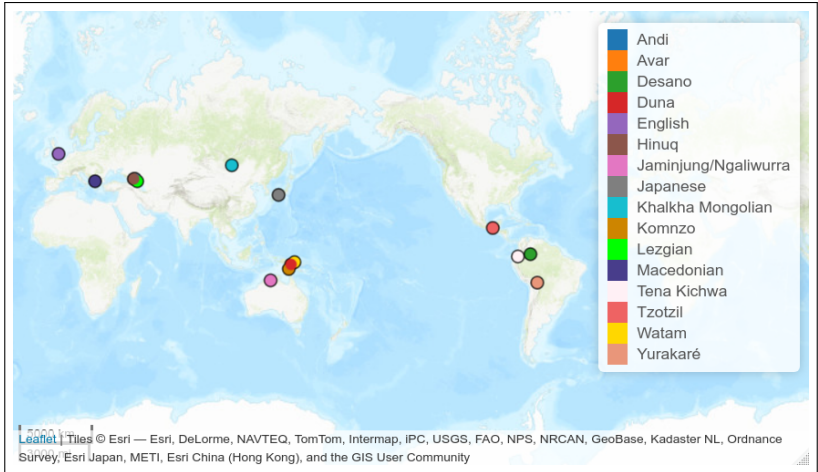
# Outline

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

# Fieldwork



# Fieldwork



# Types of data

- ▶ Corpora of natural speech
- ▶ Elicitation tasks
- ▶ Staged communicative events

# Communicative events

According to (Himmelman 1998: 185–186)

1. Natural communicative events - as a rule not accessible to the researcher (Observer's Paradox)
2. Observed communicative events - speech production with the presence of a researcher and / or recorder
3. Staged communicative events - elicit natural speech using stimuli or prompt, serves no real communicative purpose

# Communicative events

- 4 Elicitation - asking a speaker directly to produce a linguistic utterance and comment on it → often a new kind of task for speakers

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- 4 Elicitation - asking a speaker directly to produce a linguistic utterance and comment on it → often a new kind of task for speakers
  - ▶ **contextualizing elicitation:** speakers provide comments and context for a specific construction
  - ▶ **translation:** speakers translate a sentence from a lingua franca
  - ▶ **judgement:** speakers evaluate acceptability



# Types of data

- 2 Observed communicative events (**Production**)
- 3 Staged communicative events (**Production**)
- 4 Elicitation (**Production, comprehension (= interpretation), meta-linguistic awareness**)

# Corpora

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- ▶ Observed communicative events (possibly including results of staged events)
- ▶ Specific markers may be rare in corpus data (Kittilä, Jalava & Sandman 2018: 292–294)
- ▶ Evidentials are sensitive to discursive context (narrative vs. dialogue) and genre (history, fiction, religion, mythology, etc.)
- ▶ The study of evidentiality requires a large, diverse corpus covering all possible discourse genres in sufficient quantities

# Corpora

- ▶ Evidentiality seems to be most common and most elaborate in relatively small communities (Bernárdez 2017)
- ▶ Data is often not readily available
- ▶ Creating a corpus is very costly and time-consuming

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- ▶ Creating a corpus is very costly and time-consuming
- ▶ Context of non-staged communication is often “too rich”, motivation for using a marker cannot be retraced (Silva & AnderBois 2016: 59)

# Corpus and speaker assessment

- ▶ Brosig (2018) created a corpus from ~10 hours of unscripted television in Khalkha Mongolian
- ▶ Subsequently he used these data for elicitation with 42 different speakers, asking them to interpret and judge the acceptability of modifications

# Corpus and speaker assessment

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- ▶ Subsequently he used these data for elicitation with 42 different speakers, asking them to interpret and judge the acceptability of modifications
- ▶ The paper offers a generalized description of the system, with occasional direct references to speaker judgements

# Elicitation

“One should concentrate on gathering and analysing texts in the language, starting near the beginning of any linguistic fieldwork. The evidential patterns found in texts of various genres should then be confirmed and systematically studied through participant observation and, to a lesser extent, carefully directed elicitation in the language itself. Observing how evidentials are used in various circumstances in day-to-day life is crucial to the understanding of the system. Gossip, casual remarks, or overheard conversations often provide many more enlightening clues than narrated stories. (Aikhenvald 2004: 385)



# Elicitation

[...] Trying to elicit an evidential system using a lingua franca (be it English, Spanish, Portuguese, Russian, or Mandarin Chinese) is not a sensible or profitable source of action.” (Ibid.)

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→ There are, however, a number of insightful studies based mostly on elicitation; a good example is *Maisak & Tatevosov (2007)* on Tsakhur (East Caucasian).

# Elicitation

“The evidential markers are so well integrated into the grammar that their use is largely **unconscious**. If one tries to elicit them with English prompts such as ‘I heard that...’ or ‘It is a known fact that...’ or ‘Apparently...’ speakers provide translations with full verbs, adverbials, or clauses.” Mithun (2001) on Central Pomo

# Elicitation

“[...] the study of evidentiality differs from other phenomena in linguistics because of their **non-at-issue** semantics. In other words, evidentials do not concern the contents itself, but they express how the speaker knows what s/he knows, and how other peoples' information affects their use.” (Kittilä, Jalava & Sandman 2018: 301)

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Not-at-issue → Subjective (Korotkova 2016)

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Not-at-issue → Subjective (Korotkova 2016)

→ Multiple complementary methods are necessary

# Elicitation with questionnaires

- ▶ The Perfect Questionnaire (Dahl 2000: 800–809)
- ▶ Originates from TAM questionnaire (Dahl 1985)
- ▶ 88 sentences, additional questions

58. [A comes from the kitchen very agitated and tells B what he has just seen happen:]

A: The dog EAT our cake!

59. [A comes from the kitchen where he has just seen the sad remains of the cake. He tells B what he assumes to have happened:]

A: The dog EAT our cake!

# Elicitation with questionnaires

|           | Avar    | Avar   | Rikvani Andi | Zilo Andi |
|-----------|---------|--------|--------------|-----------|
| 58. Dir   | aorist  | aorist | aorist       | perfect   |
| 59. Indir | perfect | 'find' | perfect      | perfect   |



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- ▶ Avar 1 and Rikvani Andi conformed to expectations
- ▶ 'find' used as an auxiliary marks “the moment of discovery” (Danièl' & Majsak 2018), similar (but not identical) to inference

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- ▶ Is Zilo Andi different, or is the speaker different?

## Acceptability judgment

- (1) kic'-i č̣i tort t'ü-na!  
dog-ERG our cake eat-AOR  
'The dog has/must have eaten our cake!'
- (2) kic'-i č̣i tort t'ü-nwa!  
dog-ERG our cake eat-PF  
'The dog has/must have eaten our cake!'
- (Greed 2017) Lezgian (East Caucasian)

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(Greed 2017)

Lezgian (East Caucasian)

→ Both are possible in both cases, for different reasons, according to 1 speaker.

# Interpretation

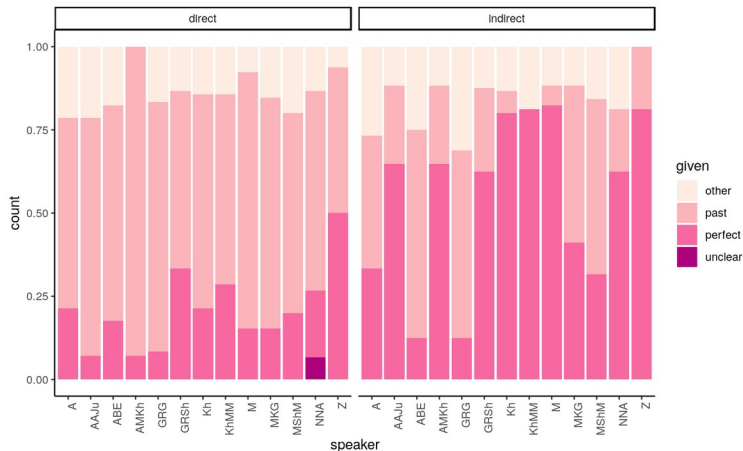
I WALK in the forest. Suddenly I STEP on a snake. It BITE me in the leg. I TAKE a stone and THROW (it) at the snake. It DIE.

- ▶ Same narrative, different contexts (temporal, evidential)
- ▶ Zilo Andi speakers also used perfect for the main line in unwitnessed contexts → “when you tell a story”

# Eliciting narratives

Replication of the narrative question with 5 Rikvani speakers, 6 Zilo speakers, speakers of 2 other dialects

Figure: Proportion of given forms per speaker by context



# Interpretation

- ▶ Minimal pairs can make contrasts more salient and prompt “evidential” interpretations when the meaning is not at all grammaticalized
- ▶ Conversely, evidentiality can be difficult to recognize or explain even when it is grammaticalized

# Possible pitfalls

## Accounting for divergent answers

- ▶ Linguistic reasons
- ▶ Non-linguistic reasons
  - ▶ Questionnaire set-up
  - ▶ Speaker concentration
  - ▶ Presence of the researcher



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  - ▶ Questionnaire set-up
  - ▶ Speaker concentration
  - ▶ Presence of the researcher

→ Linguistic reasons can be checked with additional work, non-linguistic reasons are difficult to measure and control

# Selecting consultants

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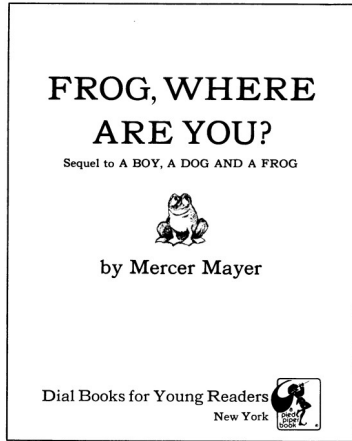
- ▶ Have language skills
- ▶ Provide extended responses
- ▶ Provide useful explanations
- ▶ Enthusiastic about the fieldwork
- ▶ Able to repeat forms
- ▶ Translate accurately
- ▶ Trainable

(Chelliah & De Reuse 2010: 174–176)

# Elicitation with stimuli

- ▶ Frog story (Berman & Slobin 1994)
- ▶ Pear story (Chafe 1980)
- ▶ Retelling narratives (Mushin 2001)
- ▶ Family Problems Picture Task (San Roque et al. 2012)
- ▶ Mastermind (Silva & AnderBois 2016)

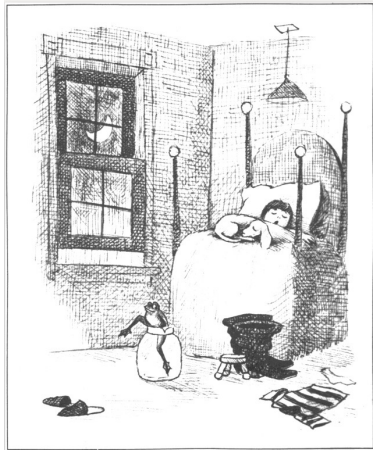
# Frog story



Corpus

Staged communication

# Frog story



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- ▶ Initially aimed at acquisition and spatial configuration (verb vs. satellite framing languages)

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- ▶ Initially aimed at acquisition and spatial configuration (verb vs. satellite framing languages)
- ▶ Narration style may differ from regular narratives: Watam (Foley 2003)
- ▶ Can elicit targeted evidential morphemes
- ▶ Though evidentials known to exist may not appear: Tzotzil (Leon 2009)
- ▶ Describing picture-by-picture vs. narrative mode



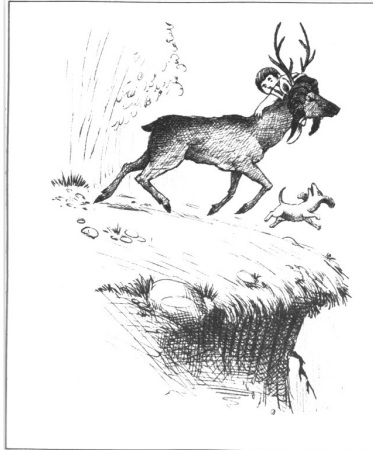
# Frog story

- (3) hoʔor-ʔa ho<w>k'o-j moč'i  
floor-SUP sit\_down<M>-PF child  
'A child *is sitting* on the floor.'
- (4) rahal-ʔa-k:u hiʃ'u r-ik'o-j ihur  
precipice-SUP-EL under INAN2-be-PF pond  
'Under the precipice *was* a pond'.

(Fieldwork 2019)

Zilo Andi (East Caucasian)

# Frog story



# Frog story

- (5) [hadbe b-ot'-iš goła] maqo-r  
they HPL-lay-RES be.PTCP outside-LAT  
b-ułi-n łoči  
III-go.out-UWPST frog(III)  
'When they slept, the frog *went* outside.'

(Forker 2013: 254)

Hinuq (East Caucasian)

# Frog story



# Frog story

- (6)      galo-nñu-shi-ø                      a-sibbë  
         canister-DIM-UV-3SG.SBJV 3SG.POSS-house  
         ‘Its house looks like a small canister.’

(Gipper 2018)

Yurakaré

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Yurakaré

→ similitive → uncertain visual → inferential

# Frog story

- (7) digirrij=jung ga-rdba-ny=**mind**i  
die=RESTR 3SG-fall-PST=EGO+TU  
'(The owl frightened the boy), and he fell down  
as if dead (or so it appears – you have access to  
the same evidence as me, so correct me if I am  
wrong)'  
  
(Schultze-Berndt 2017: 179) Jaminjung/Ngaliwurru

# Pear story

**Film** with sound but no words.



(Still from the **Garifuna** version.)



# Pear story

- ▶ Method used for a variety of purposes:
- ▶ Comparing processing, narrative construction and cultural influence across languages  
([pearstories.org](http://pearstories.org))
- ▶ Study how psychotic patients construct narratives in comparison to other people (Chaika & Alexander 1986)

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- ▶ Study how psychotic patients construct narratives in comparison to other people (Chaika & Alexander 1986)
- ▶ Good for eliciting narrative strategies (cf. Forker (2013: 208, 209, 224) on Hinuq (East Caucasian): present and unwitnessed past (similar to frog stories)

# Pear story

Can also elicit epistemic markers

- (8)      chi   rumi-ra    payna=**mi** chura-sha,  
         DEM stone-ACC 3PL=**MI**    put-IPFV  
         chapa-nu-shka chi-bi...  
         wait-3PL-ANT    DEM-LOC  
         ‘They have put this stone...they’ve waited  
         [having put it there]’

(Grzech 2016: 406)

Tena Kichwa (Quechua)

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=*mi* marks a sudden conjecture

# Retelling narratives

- ▶ Retelling narratives experiment (Mushin 2001)
- ▶ Corpus of personal experience stories
- ▶ Retold by participants (from person or recording) to another speaker
- ▶ Targets reportative
- ▶ Participants told it was a memory task
- ▶ Speakers of English, Japanese (students in the US) and Macedonian (longtime residents of Australia)

# Retelling narratives

## Two Participants



## Three Participants



## Four Participants



(Mushin 2001: 93)

# Retelling narratives

- ▶ Macedonian — different strategies: narrative framing and indirect past, indirect past without framing, direct speech
- ▶ Japanese — reportative particle and direct speech
- ▶ English — framing, but no direct speech, an adverb on occasion

# Retelling narratives

- ▶ One Macedonian speaker used direct forms → **Mushin (2001: 110–112)** hypothesizes that this is because she knew the original speaker



# Retelling narratives

- ▶ One Macedonian speaker used direct forms → **Mushin (2001: 110–112)** hypothesizes that this is because she knew the original speaker
- ▶ Much seems to depend on the speaker's strategy as to how they want to represent the narrative and their own relationship to it

# Family Problems Picture Task



Social Cognition Parallax Interview Corpus (SCOPIC)

# Family Problems Picture Task

- ▶ Picture cards with dramatic, emotional situations
- ▶ Construct a story through cooperation and discussion between speakers
- ▶ Recorded on video
- ▶ Some videos available online (e.g. for **Komnzo**), most is restricted

# Family Problems Picture Task

1. Individual card descriptions
2. Arranging into an order
3. Tell the story to an (if possible, naive) audience
4. Retell from a first person perspective

# Family Problems Picture Task

## Alternative set-up for Duna:

“Set-up 2 uses a reduced set of five pictures (5, 7, 9, 12, and 15). [...] Participants A and B sat back-to-back, with A holding the pictures in such a way that B could not see them. Participant A described what was happening in the five pictures, and B, based entirely on A’s description, directed A in the order the pictures should be laid out, from first to fifth. After this, B was able to look at the pictures, and the pair together retold the story as a whole.” (San Roque et al. 2012: 146)

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- ▶ High density of epistemic marking
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# Family Problems Picture Task

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- ▶ Interesting results in terms of how participants analyze situations and relationships between characters across languages and cultures
- ▶ High density of epistemic marking
- ▶ Perhaps due to the interactive aspect (cf. frog and pear stories)
- ▶ Might not work for all cultures: speaking of topics like family crises and alcoholism may be taboo



# Mastermind

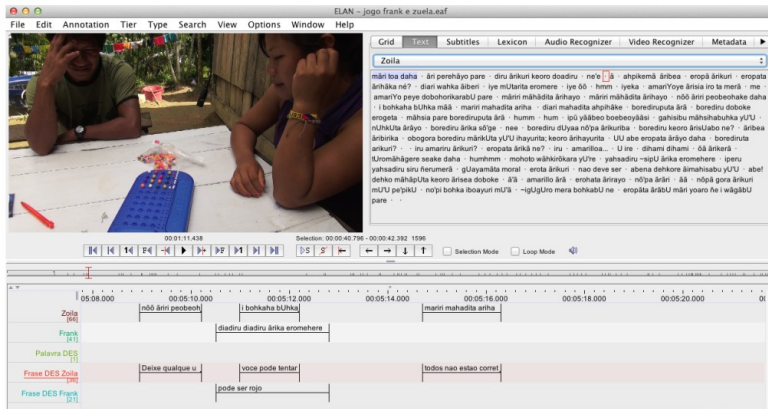


Figure 3. Mastermind dialogue video annotation on ELAN

(Silva & AnderBois 2016: 70)

# Mastermind

- ▶ Logical game where one player has to guess the “code” created by another player with colored pins
- ▶ Experiment set-up: one codemaker, two code-breakers

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- ▶ Logical game where one player has to guess the “code” created by another player with colored pins
- ▶ Experiment set-up: one codemaker, two code-breakers
- ▶ Targeted inferential form in Desano (Tucanoan)

# Mastermind

- ▶ Elicited a relatively large quantity of the target morpheme
- ▶ + revealed formerly undescribed mirative forms
- ▶ + revealed that utterances can be unmarked for evidentiality in Desano

# Mastermind

- (9) pee-~ra bida-~ra-ka  
two-PL.AN play-PL.AN-INFER  
'We (may be) both playing (The speaker infers).'

- (10) ɰba ~igu api-a-  
DUB 3SG.M allow-ASSER-3SG.M=as.you.see  
~bi=bu daa  
again  
'But I don't know, he's determining (who will  
play) again.'  
(Silva & AnderBois 2016: 71) Desano (Tucanoan)

# Abbreviations I

|       |                                |
|-------|--------------------------------|
| 3     | third person 45–47, 51, 52, 69 |
| ACC   | accusative 51, 52              |
| AN    | animate 69                     |
| ANT   | anterior 51, 52                |
| AOR   | aorist 27, 28                  |
| ASSER | assertive 69                   |
| DEM   | demonstrative 51, 52           |
| DIM   | diminutive 45, 46              |
| DUB   | dubitative 69                  |
| EGO   | egophoric 47                   |
| EL    | elative 41                     |
| ERG   | ergative 27, 28                |
| HPL   | human plural 43                |
| III   | III noun class 43              |
| INAN2 | inanimate 2 41                 |
| INFER | inferential 69                 |
| IPFV  | imperfective 51, 52            |
| LAT   | lative 43                      |
| LOC   | locative 51, 52                |
| M     | masculine 41, 69               |
| PF    | perfect 27, 28, 41             |

# Abbreviations II

|       |                  |            |
|-------|------------------|------------|
| PL    | plural           | 51, 52, 69 |
| POSS  | possessive       | 45, 46     |
| PST   | past             | 47         |
| PTCP  | participle       | 43         |
| RES   | resultative      | 43         |
| RESTR | restrictive      | 47         |
| SBJV  | subjunctive      | 45, 46     |
| SG    | singular         | 45–47, 69  |
| SUP   | super            | 41         |
| TU    | TU?              | 47         |
| UV    | uncertain visual | 45, 46     |
| UWPST | unwitnessed past | 43         |

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