

Highlights

We offer a novel experimental paradigm to the cross-linguistic investigation of speaker commitment in modals and evidentials.

We demonstrate the utility of the paradigm on a comparison of German and English.

We test which devices (a bare main clause, epistemic modals, discourse particles) speakers use to communicate a proposition under varying evidential circumstances.

In a series of three studies, we test the strength of the resulting listener belief in a proposition, the strength of the inferred speaker commitment to that proposition, and the strength of the inferred evidence for the proposition, upon observing different evidentially marked utterances about that proposition.

The paradigm provides a starting point for approaching theoretical debates on the nature of evidential expressions empirically.