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## INTRODUCTION

# Evidentials and evidential strategies in interactional and socio-cultural context

Janis Nuckolls and Lev Michael

Although the grammar of evidentials<sup>1</sup> has received significant descriptive, typological, and theoretical attention since the 1980s (see surveys in Aikhenvald 2004 and Speas 2008), attention to this grammatical and functional category from scholars interested in the social, cultural, and interactional aspects of language has been more sporadic and less systematizing in nature (see e.g., Agha 2002, Atkinson 1999, Chafe 1986, Clift 2006, Fox 2001, Hill and Irvine 1993, Ifantidou 2001, Mushin 2001, Kärkkäinen 2003, Sakita 2002). As a result, important questions remain regarding the interactional and cultural dimensions of evidentials and evidential strategies, their role in shaping interaction and larger scale social processes, and the relationship between the socio-functional properties of evidentials and evidential strategies and their grammatical properties. The purpose of this special issue of *Pragmatics and Society* is to bring together complementary perspectives on the social and interactional life of evidentials and evidential strategies to focus attention on these issues.

The communicative functions of evidentials in interaction are still poorly understood, a lacuna with significant ramifications that we spell out below. Moreover, it is clear that the intuitions of speakers of languages that lack evidentials (including most linguists) are unreliable guides to identifying these functions. In fact, we can probably attribute the conflation of evidentiality and epistemic modality that was characteristic of early work on evidentiality to the fact that speakers of languages that lacked grammaticalized evidentials found it difficult to understand evidentials as anything other than a proxy for epistemic modality, which was a familiar category to them. Palmer (1986: 54) represents this early approach to evidentiality clearly when he remarks (see also Willett 1988: 53):

... their whole purpose is to provide an indication of the degree of commitment of the speaker: he offers a piece of information, but qualifies its validity for him in

terms of the type of evidence he has ... they indicate the status of the proposition in terms of the speaker's commitment to it.

It has since become clear that evidentiality is notionally distinct from epistemic modality (although pragmatic and grammaticalization relationships link the two categories), and that evidentials needn't have epistemic modal implicatures — all of which only deepened the mystery of their functions. In a chapter of her magisterial survey, entitled *What are evidentials good for?*, Aikhenvald (2004) grapples with this functional question, suggesting that “[w]hat evidentials do is provide grammatical backing for the efficient realization of various maxims within Grice's ‘cooperative principle’” (ibid: 361), especially those of Manner and Quantity. Gipper's (2011) study of the interactional uses of Yurakaré evidentials finds, in contrast, that evidentials play a major role in expressing the nature of participants' intersubjective relationships with respect to the topic of conversation, suggesting that these evidentials are important in managing the social entailments of access to information. Michael (2008), on the other hand, finds that a major function of evidentials and evidential strategies in Nanti society is to subtly disclaim responsibility for mishaps and unfortunate events. Whatever the ultimate general validity of individual hypotheses like these, they all point to the importance of studying evidentiality in interaction in order to gain insight into the functional properties of evidentials.

It is important to note, however, that functional accounts of evidentials that appeal to universal mechanisms such as the cooperative principle stand in tension with the fact that evidentials are unevenly distributed across languages and geographical regions (Aikhenvald 2004). Moreover, while there are no doubt multiple factors at play in the emergence of evidentials, including extrinsic ones such as language contact (Aikhenvald 2004:288–296, Aikhenvald and Dixon 1998, Epps 2005), case studies indicate that evidentials are often closely tied to local linguistic and cultural ideologies, such as in the Apache (De Reuse 2003), Japanese (Aoki, 1986; Ide, 1989; Kamio, 1994; Trent, 1997), Jaqi (Hardman 1986), Tsafiki (Dickinson 2000), and Quechua (Weber 1989) cases. These facts suggest, first, that the functional accounts of evidentials must extend beyond appeals to universal principles of interaction, and second, that social and cultural factors play an important role in their emergence as grammatical categories.

These conclusions are congruent with recent work on the role of culture and social activity in grammaticalization, which attributes a major role to social factors in the development of grammatical categories (Evans 2004, Evans and Levinson 2009, Simpson 2002). Given that grammaticalization is driven by token frequency (Hopper and Traugott 2003), and that the social and interactional functions of evidential strategies are key to determining their occurrence and frequency in

discourse, we expect that the grammaticalization of evidentials on the basis of evidential strategies — or the lack of such grammaticalization — would depend significantly on the socio-interactional functions of those strategies in particular societies. In this respect, the study of evidential strategies and currently grammaticalizing evidentials is a particularly promising area, as the social factors leading to high discourse frequency are likely to still be operative in the particular society in question. On the basis of such work, it will be possible to evaluate proposed social explanations for the presence of evidentials in individual languages. Such proposed explanations include, first, the nature of interpersonal relations in small-scale societies, and in particular, the imperative to avoid direct confrontations in contexts of intense mutual interdependence (Fortescue 2003), and second, the salience of particular cultural practices — especially witchcraft accusations (Aikhenvald 2004: 358) — in the assignment of moral responsibility of misfortune. Such hypotheses need to be examined in light of close studies of the actual social instrumentality of evidentials in interaction, within a framework that links social action and language use to the emergence of grammatical categories.

The functional properties of evidentials also relate to two unresolved issues regarding the delimitation of evidentiality as a grammatical category. First, disagreements remain regarding whether evidentiality as a cross-linguistic grammatical category should be defined narrowly as denoting 'source of information' or whether it should be defined more broadly as denoting 'attitudes towards knowledge' that also include epistemic modality and possibly other kinds of stances and perspectives on propositions and states of affairs. Proponents of the view that evidentials and epistemic modality should be distinguished have been quite successful in arguing that the two categories are notionally distinct (see discussions in e.g. Aikhenvald 2004, De Haan 1999, Speas 2008), but the ultimate success of this position depends on the empirical facts regarding the relationship between mode of access and epistemic modal meanings in numerous specific languages. And although claims regarding the independence of these two kinds of meanings are compelling in many cases, it is relatively unusual to find sophisticated studies that carefully distinguish semantic and pragmatic relationships between evidential and epistemic modal meanings, and that also provide detailed empirical support for claims that a given morpheme exhibits, say, evidential and not epistemic modal semantics. Faller's (2002) study of Cuzco Quechua evidentials and Gipper's (2011) study of Yurakaré evidentials exemplify different approaches to this problem area, where further study is much needed, given recurrent claims that evidentiality and epistemic modality should not be distinguished either in specific languages or more generally (Floyd 1999, Stenzel 204, Blain and DeChaine 2007, Matthewson et al. 2007). All of this points to the importance of moving beyond traditional grammatical description so as to ultimately settle this debate.

Second, debate continues regarding the importance of grammaticalization as a criterion for distinguishing evidentials ‘proper’ from related lexical expressions of source of information meanings (Boye and Harder 2009, Weimer and Stathi 2010). As Michael (this issue) explains, this debate turns in part on theoretical issues in typology (specifically, the role of form and semantics in delimiting cross-linguistic grammatical categories), but it also depends on an empirical issue: whether grammaticalized evidentials and lexical counterparts, such as complement-taking verbs of perception, exhibit systematic functional differences. To the degree that functional differentiation between grammaticalized evidentials and evidential strategies obtain, it may prove possible to settle the question of the role of grammaticalization in delimiting evidentials on empirical grounds. The success of such an endeavor, however, depends on careful studies of the functional properties of both grammaticalized evidentials and evidential strategies, including their role in social interaction.

Thus far we have focused on the ways in which attention to the interactional and social dimensions of evidentiality can advance the linguistics of evidentiality. An equally important line of research, however, uses evidentiality as a window onto the social consequentiality of language, and a way to explore the question of how specific components of grammatical form can be instrumental in social action, both shaping small-scale personal interactions (Gipper 2011, Hill and Irvine 1993, Sidnell 2005), and forming a component of larger scale cultural patterns of behavior. Because of their deictic characteristics and their ties to expressions of individual and collective knowledge, evidentials appear instrumental in achieving a variety of social and interactional effects, making them an especially propitious domain in which to examine the role of grammatical form in mediating social action.

Each of the papers in the current issue addresses some aspect of the social functions of evidentiality and evidential strategies. Our data come from naturally occurring conversations (Friedman, Michael, Mushin), electronic news reports (Friedman), narratives of personal experience (Nuckolls), and a myth (Howard). The papers by Friedman, Nuckolls, and Howard analyze languages with established evidential paradigms; all three papers also concern the ways in which evidential categories are used to express various voicing effects. Friedman’s “Enhancing National Solidarity through Deployment of Verbal Categories: How the Albanian Admirative Participates in the Construction of a Reliable Self and an Unreliable Other” is based on years of observing complex political and social movements that culminated in the establishment of an independent Kosovo Republic. Using data from electronic news reports as well as field work covering periods from 1994 until the present, Friedman traces the deployment of the Albanian admirative, a grammaticalized nonconfirmative, and lexical non-confirmative markers, as a strategy that was used successfully to construct opponents as unreliable and delegitimized,

while simultaneously creating solidarity among those trying to bring about an independent Kosovo. By analyzing its use and also, its nonuse in situations where it would be expected, Friedman builds a powerful case for the strategic importance of the admirative subsystem for political change.

Janis Nuckolls' paper "From quotative other to quotative self in Pastaza Quichua evidential usage" examines dozens of personal experience narratives from an Amazonian dialect of Ecuadorian Quichua. She argues that analyses of Quichua's evidential system have been dominated by a discourse of empiricism, as demonstrated by the use of categories such as 'direct' and 'eyewitnessed' to describe the evidential system, something which has obscured the ways in which speaker subjectivity and deixis figure in usage. By observing the depiction of dramatic and often life-changing events through representations of quoted conversations in narrative discourse, she demonstrates that speaker perspectives shift between a speaking self of a speech event, a speaking self of a narrative event, and an other. Discursive moments featuring shifts between various speaking selves and others reveal that the evidential system is governed by a perspectival logic that is particularly apparent in narrative representations of conversations.

Rosaleen Howard's paper "Shifting voices, shifting worlds: evidentiality, epistemic modality and speaker perspective in Quechua oral narratives (central Peru)" examines the evidential system of Huamalíes Quechua, a member of the Quechua I group of Peruvian languages. Suggestively integrating anthropological work on perspectivism, with perspective as a grammatical distinction, she identifies speaker perspective rather than information source as the notional basis of the evidential system in this language. Her analysis uses speaker perspective to explain the shifting uses of evidential and epistemic enclitics in quoted dialogues within a mythic narrative involving a man's transformation into a spirit being. The man's gradual evolution from a human to a nonhuman identity is marked through progressive shifts in voicing, and marked by first and second order speech event participants and 'others'.

The next set of papers by Mushin, Sidnell and Michael all examine languages with evidential strategies and recently grammaticalized evidentiality. Ilana Mushin's paper "'Watching for Witness': Evidential strategies and epistemic authority in Garrwa conversation", analyzes the use and non-use of evidential strategies in a small-scale, Australian Aboriginal society of Garrwa speakers. Mushin's work analyzes naturally occurring conversations within situations where claims to knowledge are at stake, but are not deeply contested or emotionally charged. Garrwa use of a sensory evidence clitic reveals that in ordinary disputes, people do reveal their concern for epistemic authority and that there is a preference for claiming authority based on what is witnessed. However, there is a marked disinclination to index source of information, perhaps because so much of social life

takes place in public view. More significantly, a particular person's right to reveal knowledge is at least as important as having it, and there are strict rules governing who is allowed to reveal what they know.

Jack Sidnell's paper "Who knows best?: Evidentiality and epistemic asymmetry in conversation" adds an interactional dimension to our understandings of the social life of epistemic strategizing through fine-grained analysis of English language conversations. When speakers express their certainty about claims, they can be seen as simultaneously expressing the social asymmetry entailed by another's lack of knowledge. Differences in epistemic access to knowledge must be balanced with considerations of differences in rights or obligations to know: even though a speaker's access may be ranked as first-hand, second-hand, or mediated, that person's right to make an assessment must also be established. And finally, epistemic negotiations, variously achieved through turn-taking, sequential organization, and use of epistemic particles or verbs, are embedded within other conversational practices such as recounting, complaining, or sympathizing.

Lev Michael's paper "Nanti Self-Quotation: Implications for the pragmatics of reported speech and evidentiality" is based on naturally occurring conversations between speakers of Nanti (Arawakan) residing in southeastern Peru, and analyzes a system which functionally contrasts lexical quotatives with grammaticalized evidential quotatives, focusing on a form of self-quotation that has received little attention thus far, namely concurrent quotative framing (CQF), in which a speaker quotes him- or herself as a way of individuating commitment to a position that contrasts with that of another speaker. Michael's finding that lexical and grammaticalized quotatives are interactionally distinguished (in that one among them is used for utterances with stronger social consequences), reveals a linguistic division of labor between the grammatical and the lexical. More generally, by explaining how quotatives can produce both distancing as well as commitment-enhancing effects, Michael provides evidence for distinguishing epistemic modality from evidentiality.

## Note

1. In this introduction we employ the term 'evidential' in its narrow sense to denote grammaticalized elements that indicate 'source of information' or more precisely 'modes of access' (Michael 2008: 135–140), upon which an utterance is based, and 'evidential strategy' to denote their (relatively) un-grammaticalized counterparts, largely following Aikhenvald (2004). Note that we do not impose the more restrictive requirements, expressed or implicit in Aikhenvald's approach, that evidentials constitute paradigmatically tidy sets of morphemes in any given language (see Michael 2008: 62–82, for a discussion). Our choice here, however, is not intended to

preempt debate on the definition of 'evidentiality', and the reader will note that the individual contributors to this issue vary in how they employ the term.

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