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## Evidentiality in language and cognition

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## Editorial

### Evidentiality in language and cognition\*

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Evidentiality in linguistics concerns how the source of information is expressed in linguistic communication, whether grammatically coded, lexically coded or merely inferred. It established itself as a research topic during the latter part of the last century. The starting point of the upsurge in interest in this topic in linguistics was Chafe's and Nichol's (1986) edited volume *Evidentiality: The linguistic coding of epistemology*. After that publication a wealth of research on evidentiality was carried out from a wide range of different perspectives in the linguistic community. Current research on evidentiality covers typological studies as well as single language treatments, the ontological nature of the category of evidentiality and its relationship with modality, i.e. the relationship between speakers' indications of knowledge source and speakers' assessment of the degree of certainty and reliability of that knowledge.

The idea of this special issue on evidentiality was conceived by the participants at a workshop held at Lund University in 2005 and sponsored by generous grants from Einar Hansen Allhem Foundation and the Wenner-Gren foundation. The selected papers in this volume cover matters of language as well as of cognition and they nicely reflect the title of the workshop *Evidentiality: theoretical and applied*. The first two papers deal with aspects of categorization, and the two last papers are empirical applications: a corpus investigation and an experimental investigation.

Using evidence from a wide range of languages, **Kasper Boye** and **Peter Harder** address two closely connected theoretical issues that they deem to have been inadequately treated in the previous literature. These issues are related to categorization and to discourse status. More precisely, they concern the ontological nature of the category of evidentiality on the one hand, and aspects of distinctions between pragmatic, semantic and grammatical status on the other. Boye & Harder criticize previous treatments of evidentiality for mixing up category status with grammatical versus lexical status and argue that the distinctions have to be reconsidered in order to untangle this knotty theoretical problem so as to provide an

adequate model of description. In accordance with both functional typology and cognitive linguistic assumptions about the nature of meaning, their claim is that evidentiality should be understood as a functional-conceptual substance domain. When evidentiality is put to use in language, it may be coded as either primary or secondary information. Lexical meaning equals coding as primary information whereas coding as secondary information has grammatical status. By separating functional-conceptual pre-meaning from particular uses in communication, Boye & Harder free meanings from set form-meaning pairings, whether grammatical or lexical, and present a dynamic and discourse-sensitive model of meaning categories in general and of evidentiality in particular.

In his paper, **Bert Cornillie** also grapples with the problem of categorization, namely the relationship between evidentiality and epistemic modality. Cornillie defines evidentiality and epistemic modality as two functionally and conceptually different categories. Evidentiality refers to the perceptual and epistemological basis of a proposition, while epistemic modality concerns the judgement of the likelihood that the proposition is true. In contrast to many researchers in the field, Cornillie argues in favour of a clear distinction between the two categories rather than inclusion or overlap. Using data from Italian, Spanish, English and Dutch, he presents three case studies all of which corroborate the idea of keeping the categories apart rather than conflating them. Cornillie demonstrates that epistemic evaluation does not necessarily correlate with a specific mode of knowing as has been proposed in the literature, and he suggests that the reason why the two categories are often combined in linguistics literature is explainable in terms of the level of reliability of the evidence rather than epistemic evaluation of truth, which is a totally different phenomenon.

**Karin Aijmer's** contribution to this volume is a corpus-based study, which centres on seven different constructions with the English verb *seem* and their various functions and uses in fictional and non-fictional texts. She uses translation methodology in order to identify differences and similarities across the uses of the *seem* constructions. Her main source of data comes from the English-Swedish Parallel Corpus, but she also uses French and German translations to support her claims. Aijmer argues that although evidentiality and epistemic modality are related and often interact, they should be kept apart as two conceptually different notions (cf. Cornillie above). She provides a description of the distribution and the interpretations of the seven *seem* constructions in the light of their various evidential and epistemic properties. Her proposal is that the multi-functionality of *seem* is due to the fact that *seem* constructions involve different degrees of grammaticalization with *seem to* as the most grammaticalized form and *seem* 'appear' at the more lexical end of that cline.

Finally, Elly Ifantidou investigates children's use and understanding of evidential expressions in early childhood and how their linguistic abilities correlate with their metarepresentational abilities. Two comprehension experiments were carried out on Greek-speaking children between 3;6 and 5;10 years of age in order to identify the links between their linguistic abilities and their cognitive development. Using evidential lexical markers, the first experiment obtains information about the children's inferential abilities to identify the knowledge states of puppet-characters. The second experiment examines the children's ability to assess the evidential reasoning of fairy-tale characters in story telling. The outcome of the experiments shows that early use and understanding of evidentials in language are dependent on children's cognitive capacity to reason successfully about sources of knowledge. A reliable reasoning ability to interpret the characters' state of mind is a prerequisite for children's linguistic ability to use and understand evidentials in early childhood. Ifantidou shows that it is more likely for age to have an effect on children's linguistic mastery of evidentials than on their cognitive capacity in early childhood. Linguistic development correlates with growing metarepresentational sophistication and linguistic development is explainable in terms of a three-stage metarepresentational developmental path.

In sum, the recurrent theme of the contributions of this volume concerns the nature of evidentiality and the relation of evidentiality to epistemic modality, the mappings of linguistic expressions of evidentiality to meaning, communicative function and reasoning. In spite of the fact that each contribution approaches evidentiality in a different way, all of the contributions reflect the efforts made by the authors to bridge the gaps between language, concepts and cognitive processes using typological, translational and experimental evidence.

## Note

\* We owe many thanks to the Editor of *Functions of Language*, Geoff Thompson, for making this Special Issue possible and for his help and support in the preparation of this volume.

## Reference

Chafe, Wallace L. & Johanna Nichols (eds.). 1986. *Evidentiality: The linguistic coding of epistemicity* (Advances in discourse processes 20). Norwood: Ablex.

