

Evidentiality and Me: The Interaction of Evidentials and First Person

TIMOTHY JOWAN CURNOW

RCLT, La Trobe University

T.Curnow@latrobe.edu.au, tjcurnow@ozemail.com.au

1. Introduction

During the past two decades or so, there has been an increasing interest in the phenomenon of evidentiality (see for example the papers in Chafe & Nichols 1986, Guentchéva 1996 and Johanson & Utas 2000 among many others).¹ However in the vast majority of both descriptive and theoretical works on evidentiality, the focus is on sentences which contain only third person referents. In this paper the focus is instead on the use of evidentials in sentences in which the speaker is involved.

This paper will show that there are certain types of evidentials which have a highly skewed frequency of occurrence in sentences which contain first person referents, and others which have a different interpretation in such sentences compared with their interpretation in sentences containing only third person referents.

2. Evidentials

A variety of different definitions of evidentials and evidentiality have been used in the literature. Here the discussion will be restricted to grammatical markers which, when used in sentences with third person only referents, indicate something about a speaker's source of information. Precisely what is indicated depends on the language and system of evidentiality; both non-specific and specific evidentials will be discussed here. In some languages, such as Turkish or the Indo-Aryan language Khowar, there are evidentials which simply show that a speaker had an external source of information, without specifying that source — these non-specific evidentials include those referred to as indirect evidentials and non-firsthand markers. In other languages, such as the Amazonian language Tuyuca or the Tibeto-Burman language Qiang, evidentials may explicitly refer to a particular source of information — these specific evidentials include visual evidentials and reported evidentials.

Some discussions of evidentials use a much broader definition of evidential, and consequently include items not considered here. For example, the definition here is restricted to grammatical markers, and thus lexical items such as *reportedly* are excluded, as are similar phrasal and clausal items. Equally, the focus is on those elements which, in sentences containing only third person referents, have as their primary use the indication of source of information, thus, for example, excluding epistemic markers, although these often convey evidential-like notions (see, for example, Chafe 1986).

The use of any evidential in a statement is speaker-oriented, in that the evidential encodes the speaker's source of information. However the focus here is on those sentences which indicate that a speaker was involved in the action or state discussed. There are various ways in which a speaker can be 'involved': syntactically, a sentence may contain a first person subject, object or oblique argument (either overtly, with a pronoun, or covertly, through cross-referencing or argument elision); and semantically the first person referent can range from a volitional agent, a non-volitional actor, a patient, to simply being

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(1) The frequency of certain evidentials varies greatly depending on person. For example, reported evidentials are uncommon with first person (see section 4.1), because normally when a speaker was involved in an action, they do not need to be told that it occurred.

(2) The interpretation of some evidentials in some languages changes depending on the person values in the sentence. For example, with a first person subject, non-witnessed evidentials often encode that an action was non-volitional (see section 4.2), rather than indicating that the speaker did not witness the event, their more common interpretation.

(3) Particular evidentials and person values cannot co-occur in particular languages. For example, in some languages an inferred evidential cannot be used in first person contexts (see section 4.3).

(4) Certain evidentials can be used with utterances which involve any person, but with restrictions on particular combinations of person and evidential with particular predicate types. For example, a predicate indicating something about an internal state may be used with a non-visual evidential, showing a speaker's knowledge is based on feeling (see section 4.4) — but only if the internal state relates to the speaker, since otherwise the speaker cannot know about the state through having felt it.

These four types of interaction are not fully independent — for example, it is precisely when a particular combination of person and evidential is infrequent that the evidential is likely to develop a distinct interpretation. However they are a useful schema for examining and classifying types of interaction.

4. Evidentials and First Person Interactions

The following is a cross-linguistic survey of the interaction of evidentials and first person, concentrating primarily on the first three types of interaction described in the previous section, as the level of semantic analysis of predicates required to examine the final type of interaction is lacking for the majority of languages with evidentials. For ease of discussion, the evidentials are grouped into general types; it must be recognized that the precise use of, say, a non-visual evidential varies slightly between languages, and in particular may depend on contrasts with other evidentials. For the discussion here, however, it is generally not necessary to consider the entire system in examining the interaction of specific evidential types and first person. Consequently the broader system of evidentials for any language is considered only where it is relevant to the point under discussion, namely in the discussion of visual evidentials in section 4.5.

4.1 Reported Evidentials and First Person

Many languages throughout the world have a reported evidential, which is used in third person only sentences to indicate that a speaker knows about the proposition because someone told them about it.⁴ These evidentials are infrequent with first person, which is not surprising — it is unusual for a speaker only to know about their own action because someone tells them about it. However in certain unusual contexts this is possible, and it appears that reported evidentials can be used in first person sentences in all languages with such evidentials with the same interpretation that they have in third person sentences. This can be illustrated with examples from Wintu and Tucano:

⁴ Note that in this section, only those evidentials which have a strictly reported use with third person are discussed. Other evidentials, such as non-witnessed evidentials, may be used in cases where a speaker was told about or inferred the event, but these evidentials are discussed separately (section 4.2). See also footnote 5.

- (4) *čoyi'la-ke' ni* (Wintu)
 drunk-HEARSAY I
 'I am drunk (I hear), they tell me I'm drunk' (Schlichter 1986:49)
- (5) *yamî deko yi'i bahuá-pa'ro* (Tucano)
 night middle I born-FARPAST.NON3.REPORT
 '(They say that) I was born at midnight' (Ramirez 1997:142; my translation)

There is one description in the literature which suggests that a reported evidential may have a different interpretation in a first person context. The Quotative particle in Wichita is used with first person to indicate that an action was unintentional. Thus if a speaker accidentally left some meat too close to the fire, they could say 'I was cooking it' with the Quotative particle indicating that the action was unintended (Rood 1976:93). However despite the label Quotative, the description (Rood 1976:92) implies a broader range of meaning than simply reported information even with third person, and it is perhaps better analyzed as a non-witnessed evidential (see section 4.2), since the description implies that this form can be used with third person whenever a speaker did not directly witness an event, whether the knowledge was obtained from a report, through inference, or by other means.

4.2 Non-Witnessed, Non-Firsthand Evidentials and First Person

There are many languages, particularly in Eurasia but also elsewhere, with a binary system of evidential marking. The evidentials in these systems are given many different labels — for example, non-witnessed versus witnessed, indirect versus direct, non-firsthand versus firsthand. In fact, the system of each language is often different in detail; the important feature is that the non-witnessed or non-firsthand term is always used in third person only sentences if a speaker did not directly witness an event. This includes: situations where someone reported the information to the speaker (which distinguishes this type of evidential from the inferred discussed in section 4.3, which cannot be used for this); situations where the speaker inferred the information (which distinguishes it from the reported in section 4.1); and in many languages even that the information came as a surprise to the speaker.

Under normal circumstances, a speaker cannot combine the non-witnessed/non-firsthand evidential form with first person, since if a speaker participated in an action, they will normally have witnessed the event. Indeed descriptions of some languages imply that this combination is disallowed. For example, in Dobrushina and Tatevosov's (1996) description of Godoberi, the only sentence containing a non-witnessed evidential and a first person pronoun is starred as unacceptable:

- (6) **den q'urʔen b=al-ú-da* (Godoberi)
 I.ERG Koran N=read.PST-CONV-COP
 '*I have read the Koran' (Dobrushina & Tatevosov 1996:94)

In other languages, however, non-witnessed or non-firsthand forms can be used in sentences with first person referents and have one of their usual interpretations, such as indicating that the information was heard from another. Of course, if this information is about the speaker, there may be further pragmatic interpretations, such as that the information is not true:

- (7) *para-m čok-muš!* (Turkish)
 money-my much-MEDIATIVE
 'They say I've got loads of money! [it's not true]' (Guentchéva, Donabédian, Meydan & Camus 1994:144; my translation)

While this combination thus occurs in at least some languages with the usual interpretation of the evidential, in many languages the combination of a non-witnessed or non-firsthand evidential with a first person subject gives rise to a distinct interpretation — that the event was performed unintentionally (compare with the Quotative of Wichita, discussed in section 4.1):

- (8) *tai Tayp atra' as'ta thay'-o DuD'-ila him* (Kalasha)
 you(OBL) tape recorder there also put(CP)-o sleep(PST-I)-1S
 'I must have put your tape recorder there and gone to sleep (without realizing it).'
 (Bashir 1988:54)
- (9) *met čohojo jonyža:-l'el-d'e* (Yukaghir)
 I knife forget-INFR-INTR:1SG
 'I have forgotten my knife' (Maslova 2001)
- (10) *oho' tonje'iru biret'-am* (Khowar)
 oh ruin(PST-I)-1S
 'Oh, I have ruined it (unintentionally, and I just realized this after observing the bad result)' (Bashir 1988:55)

This interpretation of non-volitionality appears to arise only when a non-witnessed or non-firsthand evidential occurs in a sentence with a first person subject argument. No examples have been found of these evidentials combining with a first person non-subject argument in languages where the non-volitional interpretation arises with first person subjects, and so the interpretations which may arise then are unknown.

4.3 Inferred and Assumed Evidentials and First Person

Another evidential, or 'cluster' of semantically related evidentials, commonly found in languages are evidentials which, with third person, indicate that a speaker has inferred the information in the sentence, either on the basis of some physical evidence (inferred) or on the basis of their knowledge of people's habits or the way the world is (assumed).⁵ These evidentials are rarely used with first person, which is once again unsurprising, since if a speaker participated in an activity they do not normally need to infer that the event took place.

There are languages for which it has been reported that evidentials of this type cannot be used at all with first person. Thus Schlichter (1986:51-53) reports that the Wintu Inferential and Assumed evidentials cannot occur with first person.⁶

In other languages, however, the combination of inferred evidential and first person does occur. In those rare cases where this has been reported, the evidential has the usual interpretation — the speaker inferred something about their own action or state:

- (11) *"ta, qa řile ep řuə-ka," ikə jə-kui* (Qiang)
 INT 1SG 2PL father COP-INFR.1SG thus say-NAR
 'He said, "Then, I am your father" [based on inference from what they had just said]' (LaPolla 2001)

⁵ Only evidentials with a strictly inferential use with third person are discussed in this section. Evidentials such as non-witnessed evidentials may be used to indicate that a speaker inferred an event, but these are discussed in section 4.2, because of their additional use to cover reported information. The issue is complicated by the use of the label Inferred or Inferential in some descriptions for an evidential which is treated here as non-witnessed or non-firsthand. See also footnote 4.

⁶ Of course, when a combination is reported to not occur, it is not always clear if this is an absolute restriction in the language, or simply means that the combination did not occur in the analyst's data.

Depending on the situation this can of course lead to a pragmatic inference of non-volitionality, as in (12); but this pragmatic inference depends entirely on the context, as can be seen in the clearly volitional (13).

- (12) *kõãhã-yu* (Tuyuca)
 throw.away-PAST.NON3.APPARENT
 ‘(Apparently) I threw it away’ (Barnes 1984:260; gloss added)
- (13) *xóč-inay ha kóq-ane* (Eastern Pomo)
 two-times 1.AGT shoot(+hit)-INF
 ‘I hit the deer twice [I didn’t see, but I shot twice and it had two cuts]’ (McLendon 2001)

4.4 Non-Visual Evidentials and First Person

Some languages have a category of evidential which indicates, at least with third person, that a speaker knows about the event or state through a sense other than vision — they heard it, smelled it, felt it or tasted it. These evidentials are common in first person contexts as well, normally indicating an internal or external feeling as the source of knowledge:

- (14) *wíabe boo-gá* (Tuyuca)
 cassava bread want-PRES.NON3.NONVISUAL
 ‘I want some cassava bread’ (Barnes 1984:260; gloss added)
- (15) *mãsíri-ga* (Tuyuca)
 not.know-PRES.NON3.NONVISUAL
 ‘I don’t know’ (Barnes 1984:260; gloss added)
- (16) *céce-nké* (Eastern Pomo)
 stick-NONVISUAL
 ‘Something is sticking me’ (McLendon 1996:536; gloss added)
- (17) *yí’î-re wi’ma-gí yĩa-ásĩ* (Tucano)
 I-REF boy burn.with.firebrand-RECPAST.3NONFSG.NONVIS
 ‘The boy burnt me.’ (Ramirez 1997:131; my translation)
- (18) *yí’î-re upíka pĩrĩ-sa’* (Tucano)
 I-REF tooth hurt-PRES.NON3.NONVIS
 ‘My tooth hurts.’ (Ramirez 1997:135; my translation)

Indeed with these types of predicates, non-visual evidentials are primarily used in first person contexts, since it is not normally the case that a speaker knows about another’s internal state through feeling, hearing, smelling or tasting.

With other predicates, non-visual evidentials can be used in non-first person contexts, for example in saying something like ‘A car is coming (non-visual)’. In these cases, the usual interpretation is that the speaker heard the event or state, although other non-visual sentences such as feeling or smelling may have been involved instead or as well as hearing.

The non-visual evidential may also be used, however, when an action with a first person agent could have been seen, at least in the Amazonian languages Tariana and Tucano. In this case the interpretation is different; the non-visual evidential indicates that the action was unintentional:

- (19) *bapá bope-ási* (Tucano)
 plate break-RECPAST.NON3.NONVIS
 ‘I broke the plate accidentally (I didn’t see it on the table)’ (Ramirez 1997:133; my translation)
- (20) *pũû-gi-pi birî diha-a’-asi* (Tucano)
 net-FOC fall descend-RECPAST.NON3.NONVIS
 ‘I fell from the net accidentally’ (Ramirez 1997:133; my translation)
- (21) *mi’î-re doó-gi’, koô-re wa’î o’o-ási* (Tucano)
 you-REF think.wrongly-IMPL.MS she-REF fish give-RECPAST.NON3.NONVIS
 ‘Thinking she was you, I gave her the fish’ (Ramirez 1997:134; my translation)
- (22) *nu-kapi nu-pisa-mahka* (Tariana)
 1SG-hand 1SG-cut-REC.P.NONVIS
 ‘I cut my finger’ (Aikhenvald, forthcoming)

As can be seen, then, non-visual evidentials are common with first person arguments, and when used with predicates referring to an internal or external feeling, have the same interpretation as when used in sentences with third person arguments. However in at least some languages they may be used in other contexts to indicate that a speaker performed an action unintentionally.

4.5 Visual Evidentials and First Person

Many languages have a visual evidential or similar, primarily used to indicate that a speaker saw an event or state. These evidentials fall into two groups. In one set of languages, sentences containing this evidential contrast with sentences which are formally unmarked for evidentiality or contain a semantically unmarked ‘default’ evidential; in another set of languages, evidentiality is obligatory and there is no default evidential. As the interpretation of the evidential in first person contexts is distinct in the two types of system, they will be treated separately.

4.5.1 Visual Evidentials Versus Unmarked

In some languages of the first type, where a visual evidential contrasts with unmarked sentences or a default evidential, the use or not of a visual evidential in a first person utterance appears to have no semantic effect. Thus in Maricopa, a first person sentence unmarked for evidentiality (but marked for aspect) can be contrasted with one containing a visual evidential:

- (23) *’-iima-k* (Maricopa)
 1-dance-ASP
 ‘I danced, I am dancing’ (Gordon 1986:76)
- (24) *’-iima-k’yuu* (Maricopa)
 1-dance-*k*=SEE=EV⁷
 ‘I danced’ (Gordon 1986:77)

The difference in the tense interpretation in these examples arises because the evidential system of Maricopa is only used if a sentence refers to a past event; in terms of other semantic properties, the sentences are essentially identical, although Gordon (1986:77) notes that the sentence with the evidential is more ‘definite’.

⁷ Note that *k*=SEE=EV is one morpheme, the (first person form of the) visual evidential. The initial *k* is not the aspectual marker *k* of sentence (23).

In other languages, the use of an optional visual evidential in a first person context gives a reading that the event was unintended. Thus in Qiang, the statement ‘I bumped my head’ may occur with the Visual evidential to indicate non-volitionality (LaPolla 2001). A similar interpretation arises in the use of the Direct evidential in Amdo Tibetan; in third person contexts this evidential indicates that the speaker directly witnessed (normally saw) the event, but the Direct evidential can only be used instead of the Default evidential in first person contexts if the event was non-volitional:

- (25) *ɣə tɕʰo ^hnədlæm=ɛ ^hni=tʰæ* (Amdo Tibetan)
 I(ERG) you(SG.ABS) dream=DAT dream=DIR.EV
 ‘I dreamed about you’ (Sun 1993:961)

Thus in languages with unmarked sentences or a default evidential, the visual evidential may have no obvious semantic import in first person sentences, or may indicate that an action was non-volitional.

4.5.2 Visual Evidentials With No Unmarked

Other languages have a visual evidential which does not contrast with an unmarked or default evidential. In these languages the visual evidential is used freely in first person sentences:

- (26) *atí-wi* (Tuyuca)
 come-PAST.NON3.VISUAL
 ‘I came’ (Barnes 1984:259; gloss added)
- (27) *ãyâ yi’î-re kũ’ri-ámi* (Tucano)
 jararaca I-REF bite-RECPAST.3NONFSG.VIS
 ‘A jararaca bit me’ (Ramirez 1997:127; my translation)

As was noted in section 4.4, in some languages a non-visual evidential indicates that a first person action was unintentional. In these languages, a first person sentence with a visual evidential is interpreted as being volitional. Thus replacing the non-visual evidential in (19) with a visual evidential leads to an interpretation of volitionality:

- (28) *bapá bope-ápi* (Tucano)
 plate break-RECPAST.NON3.VIS
 ‘I broke the plate (of my own will, e.g. because I was angry)’ (Ramirez 1997:133; my translation)

In summary, visual evidentials are very frequent with first person arguments if a language has no unmarked sentences or default evidential. If there is a contrast with a non-visual evidential marking a lack of intent in first person sentences, then sentences containing a visual evidential are interpreted as being volitional.

5. Conclusion

It can be seen, then, that there are common cross-linguistic interactions between evidentials and first person referents. While a variety of effects have been seen in this paper, two are particularly common. Certain types of evidentials are infrequently used in first person contexts — this has been exemplified for reported, non-witnessed/non-firsthand and inferential/assumed evidentials. Equally, certain evidentials have been shown to indicate a lack of volition when used in first person contexts — non-witnessed/non-firsthand, visual

(opposed to unmarked) and non-visual evidentials have been shown to be used in this way across a variety of languages.⁸

It is clear that more work remains to be carried out on this topic. A more precise examination of the effect of different systems of evidentiality on these interactions is required; and descriptions of the evidential systems of languages often give no indication even of whether particular evidentials are used in first person contexts, let alone their interpretation. But it is hoped that this paper will encourage analysts to examine these interactions, and will give a typological framework for their description.

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⁸ The apparently contradictory use of either a visual or a non-visual evidential to encode the same concept of non-volitionality can be explained; see Curnow (forthcoming-a) for details.

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