

## Investigations of Category of Evidentiality in the English Language

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### Abstract

The article is devoted to the investigations of the category of evidentiality in the English language. It is argued for the approach to consider the English language as a language characterized by evidential strategy. Every language has some ways of referring to the information source, but a category of evidentiality does not exist in every language. Evidentiality is a category that relates to perceptivity and/or epistemological basis in the formulation of a statement. This category can be divided into direct and indirect evidentiality. It is important to specify whether the speaker is a witness of a particular situation. Also it should be mentioned how he makes conclusion: on the basis of facts or hears about it from others. It is proved that the source of evidentiality suggests different ways of obtaining information. The paper indicates that there is a zone of convergence between such concepts as evidentiality and epistemic modality. There were given points of view of Western Europe's linguists who traditionally examine the various combinations of options of these concepts.

**Keywords:** Language; Linguistics; Grammar; Sentence; Evidentiality.



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### 1. Introduction

In linguistics, the term evidentiality has been recognized since (Cornillie, 2009), but only recently it has come to the attention of a larger number of linguists, among them (Abdrakhmanova and Mubarakshina, 2017; Lutfullina, 2016; Plungian, 2001). In some languages every statement must contain a specification of the type of evidence on which it is based: for example, whether the speaker saw it, or heard it, or inferred it from indirect evidence, or learnt it from someone else. This grammatical reference to information source is called evidentiality, and is one of the least described grammatical categories. Evidentiality systems differ in how complex they are: some distinguish just two terms (eyewitness and non-eyewitness, or reported and everything else), while others have six or even more terms. Evidentiality is a category in its own right, and not a subcategory of epistemic or some other modality, nor of tense-aspect. Every language has some way of referring to the source of information, but not every language has grammatical evidentiality.

In the article Evidentiality and epistemic modality (Cornillie, 2009) writes the following the source of information can be attributed to different degrees of reliability of information, but this does not mean the transition to the sphere of mandatory epistemological modality. According to this view, these categories have as much in common as differences. Many statements carry both an essential, and modal coloring. The reasons for this combination may be different. Is there a functional match between the two categories or there is a constant mixing because of the lack of clarity in the division of these two categories? The author tries to demonstrate that the reason of mixing these two concepts – the reliability of information and epistemological meaning – is the terminological confusion.

Evidentiality is a functional category that relates to perceptivity and/or epistemological basis in the formulation of a statement. Traditionally, the evidentiality is divided into indirect and direct (=perceptivity). Direct evidentiality is realized when the speaker is the witness of the action, and indirect evidentiality is used when the speaker is not personally the witness of the action, but he makes conclusion on the basis of facts or hears about it from others. When we come to the conclusion, we are talking about the inference (an inferential way to obtain information on the basis of the observed consequences or facts that imply the possibility of what has happened or is going to happen). When the information about an event is transmitted from others, the markers mean heard-said, i.e. a reportative way of receiving information. Recently, definitions of evidentiality of various scope have become widespread.

### 2. Methodology

When writing this article we summarized the results of studies in the field of linguistics, we adhered to the typological studies in the field of evidentiality developed by Aikhenvald and Dixon (2003) and used the following set of methods: theoretical (study and analysis of the scientific literature on the issue of research, system analysis of

the phenomena under study); distributional, component, mental-logical analysis and descriptive method, presupposing compilation and classification of the analyzed material.

### 3. Results

Nuyts (2001a) and Cornillie (2009) distinguish between the following concepts of the source of evidentiality and inner subjectivity. The source of evidentiality suggests different ways of obtaining information. In his article about the different subtype of inferential method of access to information (Squartini, 2008) follows a clear distinction between the method of obtaining the information and source verification. Method of obtaining the information can be visual or sensory, or reportative. The source of information, therefore, can be either a speaker or another way of verification. The distinction between these two concepts allows describing the interaction of various evidential parameters, such as the interaction of the information access method with extended visual perceptivity or with the reportative.

Aikhenvald (2004) supports the consideration of evidentiality as a grammatical category. Indeed, the functional field of the category of evidentiality is represented in most languages and can therefore be recognized as a universal category. Evidentiality is important both for languages with obligatory grammatical system of evidential meanings and for languages with optional lexical realization of this category. The first category includes languages of native residents of America and languages of the continent of Eurasia, among which there is grammaticalization of evidential meanings, most often with the help of affixes. Romano-Germanic languages, in contrast to the above mentioned languages, belong to the second group, in which the evidential meanings are expressed by lexical elements, such as adverbs, for example, allegedly, presumably or more grammaticalized expressions, such as the evidential auxiliary verbs, for example, the English verb seem. She cites the following examples: The author is allegedly a member of s comedy troupe and presumably was trying to be witty. It seems to be a good movie.

Supporting this point of view, (Cornillie, 2009) in his article emphasizes that the reportative access to information, for example marked by the adverb allegedly, and the presumptive access marked by the verb seem + Infinitive, are the most common in languages without the obligatory grammatical category of evidentiality. On the contrary, languages with obligatory grammatical category of evidentiality often have grammatical expression of perceptivity (direct evidentiality).

According to Nuyts (2001a) view, the category of epistemological modality implies an assessment of the possibilities that the considered particular hypothetical state of affairs may occur, occurs or has occurred in the possible world. The results of the assessment range from absolute certainty that the situation is real to absolute certainty that the situation is unreal. In this range, between the two endpoints there is a continuum that includes probability and opportunity, such as May and may be.

The above given definition of epistemic modality is contrary to the traditional definitions of Aijmer (1980) and Palmer (1986). Aijmer (1980) writes that the epistemic quantifiers are expressions that indicate any information on verification by the speaker or the degree of his confidence. Palmer (1986) argues that the term epistemological should be applied not only to modal systems, which mainly operate in terms of possibility and necessity, but to any modal system, indicating the degree of confidence in the truth of the speaker of what he says. In particular, it is necessary to include evidential markers, such as the reportative or the evidential nature of the organs of perception. (Cornilli, 2007) in his article emphasizes that the evidentiality implies the process of reasoning leading to the assumption, and the epistemological modality estimates the extent to which this assumption corresponds to the truth.

### 4. Discussion

Linguists of Western Europe traditionally examine the various combination of options of evidentiality and epistemic modality. The first point of view indicates that there is a zone of convergence between the two concepts. In America, the representatives of structuralism unambiguously link the reference to the source of information (the definition of evidentiality in the narrow sense) with an indication of confidence in it (epistemological modality). A similar view is shared by Cornilli (2007). Since the late 1990s, public attention was attracted by the problem of identifying the distinctive features of the category of evidentiality. In previous definitions there is an explicit mix of the two categories, for example, the verb seem is considered both as epistemological semantics Aijmer (1980) and as an evidential (Nuyts, 2001b) (Cornilli, 2007). A similar interpretation is observed with respect to the verb must – it is classified as either modal or evidential (Nuyts, 2001b) (Cornilli, 2007). The ratio of the two categories is determined as the contiguity or as the involvement.

The second point of view indicates to the mutual inclusion of the two categories. Some scientists indicate that epistemic modality can be derived from the evidential indicator. In favor of his point of view, (Palmer, 1986) cites Tuyuca language, which is the language of communication in Columbia and Brazil. This language has a series of affixes that indicate visual, non-visual, probable, secondary, and intended access to information. According to the (Palmer, 1986), these five indicators can be distributed on the epistemological evaluation scale as the probability decreases. However, this point of view can be argued. For example, it is not always obvious that the assumption always implies a weak assessment of truth. Consequently, the above-mentioned evidential markers may express a certain type of assessment of the speaker, but this does not mean that they are intended to assess the actual status of the statement, as it can be expressed by other affixes (Nurgaliyeva et al., 2018).

According to another point of view expressed by Plungian (2001), the evidential meaning is inherent in the epistemological meaning: while the evidential component is present in the epistemological marker, the opposite is not always observed. Not all evidential markers are modal, so they do not always imply an epistemological modal

meaning. The second explanation seems more plausible. The third point of view to the adjacency of the two categories. [Plungian \(2001\)](#) associated mandatory need for the expression of epistemic modality with a specific type of evidential meaning. The zone of convergence of meanings of these categories exists. Their position is as follows. An inferential way of accessing information leads to an expression of epistemological modality: both categories deal with probability with other judgments. From this point of view, it is not surprising the fact that during the translation statements into English by inferential way of access to information the verb must observed with epistemic meaning. Thus, the inferential way of access to information is considered as a common zone between modality and evidentiality ([Aiyzhy et al., 2018](#)).

This statement explains only the case with the verb must, but all statements expressing a representative way of evidentiality are related to confidence. Thus, inferential method is considered as a monolithic concept, excluding any options. At the same time, there is no unambiguous relationship between the information method and the epistemological assessment. However, the estimated relationship between inference and reliability implies that other means of access to information, such as reportative, are automatically carried beyond the category of credibility. As a result, their correlation with weak modality forms, such as opportunity and probability, is assumed.

Inferential method of evidentiality is the boundary term that needs clarification. [Cornillie \(2009\)](#) draws a distinction between indirect (circumstantial), general (generic) and estimated types of inferential method ([Lutfullina, 2016](#)).

In the perceptual form of the inferential method (circumstantial inferential reading), the speaker indicates that there is a direct (visible) evidence for the expression of inference. If we consider the verb must in the following example: There is a wounded dog lying on the other side of the street. It must be in pain. In this example, the speaker believes that his own assessment of the state of affairs should be correct. You only need to decide that this confidence motivated by inferential way to access information or visible evidentiality – perceptivity. Inferential method based on perceptivity usually involves strong epistemological credibility of the speaker. The following example shows that the perceptivity range does not exclude weak confidence expressed through the verb may. There is a wounded dog lying on the other side of the street. It may be in pain. Thus, indirect inferential method involves different degrees of epistemological confidence. In this regard, it does not differ from the generic inferential reading based on generally accepted truths, which correlates with weak epistemological modality. [Squartini \(2008\)](#) claims, analyzing the Italian language, that inferential method may not always be the same combined with a weak or strong modality. Epistemological evaluation is expressed additionally, sometimes through the form of future tense by making guesses with various degrees of confidence. On the contrary, the presumptive method does not mark in any way its correlation with modal capability or modal confidence ([Malpica et al., 2016](#)).

## 5. Summary

Summing up the investigations of the category of evidentiality in the English language, following conclusions can be drawn:

- 1) Statements-guesses may have a different level of confidence;
- 2) The presumptive method in the future tense plan differs by modal neutrality and only indicates on the basis of what reasons this assumption is made.

Thus, it is impossible to talk about the correspondence between a certain method of access to information and a certain degree of confidence. These findings disagree with the opinion of ([Plungian, 2001](#)) that there is interplay between them. On the contrary, they confirm the idea of a complete delineation of the two categories. It is impossible to claim the presence of a specific adjacent zone, more accurate is the statement of the presence of small zones in which there is a contact between the two categories at a certain point ([Gizatova et al., 2017](#); [Sabirova et al., 2017](#)).

## 6. Conclusions

Although it is often said that markers of reportative method of access to information expresses fewer conditions than inferential method, the strong evidence of such statements still raises doubts. Languages with a grammatical system obviously present interesting examples of the relationship between evidential meanings and epidemiological conditions. For example, ([Gizatova et al., 2017](#)) examines examples from Holy Scripture of Lama, which is written on one of Tibet's languages. This is the biography of Buddha where the suffix of the indirect evidentiality occurs. This is not an indication that the author does not believe in its history, in any case, for Buddhists is description cannot be more true – similar examples are given by [Sabirova et al. \(2017\)](#) in Quechua. [Sabirova et al. \(2017\)](#) argue that there are languages in which the markers only indicate the source of the information or the opinion of the speaker regarding the reported information. In such languages, the choice of specific evidential meaning is not marked from a pragmatic point of view.

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