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DFG Projekt
Evidentialität, epistemische Modalität
und Sprecherhaltung im Ladakischen
Evidentiality, epistemic modality,
and speaker attitude in Ladakhi

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International workshop:

'Evidentiality' in Tibetic languages and beyond – a closer look

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Evidentiality is commonly described as the marking of the source of information (firsthand vs. non-firsthand) or also as the discrimination between direct knowledge through sense perception, on the one hand, and indirect knowledge, namely inference and hearsay, on the other.

The modern Tibetic languages are known to have developed a particular type of 'evidential' marking. One of the key features is the subjective involvement of the epistemic source or 'ego' (the speaker in statements and the addressee in questions) in the events reported.

Table 1 Crosslinguistic evidentiality and the Tibetic system

type	direct		indirect (± mirative connotations)	
crossling.	(own)	observed	inference	second hand
Tibetic	own responsibilities	observed	inference	second hand
		(± mirative connotations)		(−mirative)
	committed / involved / authoritative	non-committed / non-involved / non-authoritative		

Table 2 'Evidential' markers, standard distribution

verbal domain	authoritative	directly observed	
	'egophoric'	'visual'	'non-visual'
identifying	*yin*	—	—
future	*yin*, zero	—	—
attributive	*yin / yod*	*ḥdug / snaŋ*[NL]	*rag*[L]
past/ anterior	*pa.yin*	zero[LL,SL], *soŋ*[ST,KL], *byuŋ*[ST,(KL)]	—
existential	*yod*	*ḥdug / snaŋ*[NL]	*rag*[L]
simultaneous	*yod / yin*[L]	*ḥdug / snaŋ*[NL]	*rag*[L]
perfect/ resultative	*yod / yin*[L]	*ḥdug / snaŋ*[NL], *bžag*[ST]	*rag*[L]
prospective	*yod*[L] */ yin*[L]	*ḥdug*[L] */ snaŋ*[NL]	*rag*[L]

No marking = all varieties; ST = Standard Tibetan; L = Ladakhi, LL = Leh,

SL = Shamskat, KL = Kenhat, NL = Ldumra (aka Nubra)

verbal domain	'evaluative' markers		
	'factitive' ↔	'inferential'	epistemic …
identifying	*red* ST	*yin.ḥog* ^{LL}, *yin.sug* ^{SL}	…
future	*red* ST, *cen* ^{L}		…
attributive	*red* ST	*yin.ḥog* ^{LL}, *yin.sug* ^{SL}	…
past/ anterior	*pa.red* ^{LL}	*tog* ^{LL}, *sug* ^{SL}	…
existential	*yod.pa.red* ST	*yod.kyag* ^{LL}, *yod.sug* ^{SL}	…
simultaneous	*yod.pa.red* ST	*yod.kyag* ^{LL}, *yod.sug* ^{SL}	…
perfect/resultative	*yod.pa.red* ST	*yod/yin+kyag* ^{LL}, *-sug* ^{SL}	…
prospective		*yin.ḥog* ^{LL}, *yin.sug* ^{SL}	…

all verbal domains: second-hand, quotation: *-s(e)* ST, *lo* ^{L}

On the level of *la langue*, the system looks quite neat (and has thus also been mistaken for a somewhat awkward syntactic person system).

Many descriptions stop here. But I think it is high time to go beyond these standard descriptions.

We know already that the 'system' is very flexible, and the choice of the auxiliaries is often pragmatically conditioned, so that in the end almost all forms can be used with all persons, albeit with clearly different fre-quencies.

We do not only deal with the source of information (firsthand vs. second-hand/ hearsay) or the access channels (self-centred knowledge, perception, and inferences), but also or even predominantly with the subjective assessment of the situation and/or the socio-pragmatic situation, plus the knowledge states of the speaker's interlocutor.

In my work on Ladakhi I came across so many odd, freaky, 'non-standard' usages of the auxiliaries on the level of *la parole*, that I wondered whether this was only an idiosyncrasy of this language or whether we would not find similar 'freaks' also in the other Tibetic varieties.

Some of the questions I would have liked to discuss would have been:

Do we have evidential neutral zero-forms that function as garbage bin for "everything else"?

Are such neutral forms related to particular temporal (or aspectual) domains?

Could we say in such cases that the evidential system is not yet fully developed?

What kind of content remains unmarked for evidentiality in the strict sense, and is it then marked for something else?

With respect to the Ladakhi data, I would argue that evidentiality is only a subfunction of speaker attitude or Stance. But how well would such a shift of perspective account for other Tibetic languages?

Such questions were the main ideas behind my invitations for this workshop.

But other researches have other questions, which appear to be equally important, and so we will discuss various topics that will hopefully broaden our horizons and help to better understand the character of the 'evidential' 'system(s)' in the Tibetic languages.

A closer look into the genesis of these systems (Zemp, Widmer) and into the hierarchical structure of the markers (Tournadre) may help to explain at least some of the idiosyncrasies.

The subjective involvement of the epistemic source and the pragmatic restrictions in the speech situation may define the attitude or STANCE the speaker is willing or allowed, and the addressee in questions is expected, to take (Sandman, Simon, Oisel, Zeisler).

We will also look at languages at the periphery of the Tibeto-sphere, that is at languages that have been under the influence of Tibetic languages, namely Wu-tun, a Sinitic language in the Amdo Sprachbund (Sandman) and Bunan, a West Himalayish language spoken in Himachal Pradesh (Widmer).

The contrast with the closest 'evidential' neighbours in the region, the Iranian languages (Pezechki), with their mediative system, which is closer to the standard model of evidentiality, will help to improve our under-standing of the specificness of the Tibetic system.

Table 3 Mediativity and the Tibetic system

type	direct		mediative		
Iranian	neutral		inference, second hand		
Tibetic	own responsibilities	observed	inference	second hand
	committed / involved / authoritative	non-committed / non-involved / non-authoritative		

One may already discuss the terminology of 'commitment' and 'authority' chosen here.

In the discussion of epistemic modality a speaker is described as being *committed* to the truth values or reliability of his or her statement or to his or her *evaluation* of the situation. The speaker then choses a neutral or a marked expression accordingly. But when chosing a hedging expression, he or she is *not committed* with respect to the *content* of the proposition.

It is perhaps also not self-understanding when I describe the use of the experiential marker *ḥdug* as being less committed or also less authoritative than the use of the 'egophoric' markers *yin* or *yod*.

As I can judge from remarks by different reviewers on different publications and also discussions with Nicolas, it seems to be not very intuitive that mere sense perception should not lead to authoritative knowledge. Quite evidently, the claim that one has seen something with one's own eyes constitutes a claim of relatively high certainty, but certainty alone does not automatically yield the 'right' to make an authoritative assertion.

One aspect of the problem is, in fact, an epistemic one. A single sense perception or a restricted number of sense perceptions of a stranger's behaviour cannot lead to as strong a conviction as, say, a life-long observation of one's family members.

Compared to the latter, the conviction that arises from knowledge of one's own volitional actions is again much stronger. As Norcliffe (2018) stresses, knowledge of others (through observation) implies the identification of an individuum, and is thus potentially prone to misidentifications.

Selfknowledge, on the other hand, is not in need of identification; it is "immediate and immune to error through misidentification" (Norcliffe 2018).

Selfknowledge is furthermore so immediate that it lacks any connotation of possibile doubt or of the necessity of justification by reasoning or experiments (I draw this argument from Malcom (1991), who refers to Wittgenstein's essay On certainty).

The content of such 'knowing' (which is no longer knowing in a philosophical sense) is beyond doubt or simply not at issue (unhintergehbar), that is, it cannot be challenged by others in the sense of *you cannot know this*.

Some philosophers go even further, claiming that sense perception is generally not trust-worthy. At least, it can be quite misleading, as when we perceive the full moon as having the shape and size of a coin, whereas one can know for sure by inference and reasoning (including mathematical calculation) that it is a globe and of much greater size.

Indirect knowledge can thus lead to much more reliable knowledge than direct knowledge.

With that we are back in the field of epistemic modality and the question how far epistemic modality and evidentiality are only two sides of one coin or how far they constitute different conceptualisations of events or different ways of presenting events with some overlappings. Different scholars have given different answers to this question, but I think that epistemic modality, evidentiality, and speaker's attitude are three different ways of perspecitivising situations, but all three may be subsumed under modality in a wider sense.

The Tibetic evidential-*cum*-attitudinal systems can certainly enrich the crosslinguistic debate.

Literature:

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