

Marking intersubjectivity and epistemic authority via evidentials in Uralic languages

The aim of the paper is to discuss the role of evidential markers in the marking of intersubjective distribution of information and assigning epistemic authority in a couple of Uralic languages. Two Uralic languages will be discussed in detail, Udmurt (Uralic < Finno-Ugric < Permic) and Nganasan (Uralic < Samoyed), as well as a brief overview will be given about other Uralic languages in connection with these notions.

Intersubjectivity is a term used to mark the assessment of speech-act participants about their epistemic perspective and signaling the distribution of their attention or knowledge, whether the accessibility to some event or state of affairs is shared or exclusive to one of the speech-act participants (Bergqvist & Kittilä 2020, Evans et al. 2018).¹ The notion of intersubjectivity has functional and semantic overlap with other categories related to knowledge, such as evidentiality (linguistic marking of information source and type), mirativity (marking of non-assimilated knowledge) and egophoricity (marking of epistemic authority regarding to involvement in an event) (Bergqvist & Kittilä 2020: 2–5).

The morphosyntactic marking of evidentiality is present in most of the Uralic languages with the exception of Finnish, Hungarian and Erzya–Moksha Mordva (Skribnik & Kehayov 2018). However, evidential systems differ in their structural and semantic complexity – Udmurt has a single indirect evidential marker which is fused with the marking of the morphological past tense (Kubitsch 2022). At the same time, Nganasan has a more complex evidential system with three grammaticalized evidential markers (sensory, reportative and inferential) with different distributions considering their co-occurrence with tense markers (Wagner–Nagy 2019).

In our talk, we will primarily analyze second-person evidential markers – a category that is less accounted for in Uralic languages with grammatical evidential systems as well as in the typological literature of evidentials (cf. Aikhenvald 2015, Curnow 2002). Typologically, third-person evidential forms are considered the most frequent ones (Aikhenvald 2018: 27) although this claim has been challenged in more recent literature (Bergqvist & Grzech 2023: 14). A reason for the lack of discussion of second-person evidentials comes from the fact that for most languages narrative texts are used as material for examining evidentiality. Recent works on evidentiality propagates a more pragmatic, discourse-oriented approach towards

¹ Another term featuring this notion is engagement, however, it is primarily reserved to grammaticalized intersubjective systems.

evidentiality, taking into account its interaction with other epistemic categories mentioned above (Bergqvist & Grzech 2023). Therefore, the analysis of second-person evidential forms is not only a topical area of research in Uralic languages but also that of in the typological literature of evidentiality, intersubjectivity and epistemic authority. According to our data, considering intersubjective distributions and accessibility, indirect evidentials can signal access (more precisely, the lack of it) related to perception, as well as epistemic access (cf. Bergqvist & Knuchel 2019: 654, 657).

Furthermore, we investigate the interaction of the aforementioned categories in connection with sentence types – the use of evidential markers can have different functions in interrogative sentences than in declaratives (cf. San Roque et al. 2017), and in the case of second-person evidentials, this can lead to mark intersubjective relations and the epistemic authority of discourse participants.

The material for research is primarily taken from corpora. For Udmurt, the social media subcorpus of the online Udmurt corpora is used (Arkhangelskiy 2019) supplemented with interviews from journals found in the aforementioned corpora as well as observation of native consultations. For Nganasan, the Nganasan Spoken Language Corpus is used (Brykina et. al. 2018), which consists of multiple genres, including dialogues.

Our analysis on the one hand shows that the use of evidential markers in the discussed languages is more complex than applying them in accordance with the source of information but other considerations may motivate the speaker for the choice of a specific marker. On the other hand, we believe that our data contributes to a better understanding of the interaction of different epistemic categories.

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