Extragrammatical expression of information source

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(Article begins on next page)
Chapter 4  
Extragrammatical expression of information source  
Mario Squartini

4.1 Evidentiality: a ‘grammar-only’ category?
The adjective featured in the title of this chapter (‘extragrammatical’) undoubtedly requires preliminary caveats and disclaimers. Using this term implies a neat distinction between grammar and ‘extra-grammar’, a point that cannot be taken for granted in all of the various streams of contemporary linguistics. Setting this debated boundary ultimately depends on the theoretical perspective one adheres to and no solution can be assumed as generally applicable. But even admitting that the boundary were clearly set, the real problem is whether evidentiality crosses this boundary or not, i.e. whether evidentiality only covers grammar or can be extended to lexical phenomena. As will be shown in Section 4.3, other grammatical categories might be affected by similar difficulties, which, however, are particularly apparent in dealing with evidentiality, a notion whose ‘discovery’ took place in a moment in the history of linguistics in which a rigid structural account of grammar used to be dominant. Apart from unsystematic recognition in previous studies on Turkish and Albanian (Friedman 2003: 189, 192–193, 213; 2010: 24), evidentiality was introduced by early American ‘ethno-structuralism’ (Boas 1911, 1938; Sapir 1921: 114–115; see also Chapter 1) in a landscape that was dominated by a major interest in grammatical properties, with a special focus on ethnical peculiarities of still undescribed languages. Inflectional markers of information source in local languages attracted the attention of American ethno-linguists, who were particularly interested in those structural peculiarities that might emphasize the differences with respect to what was traditionally known from well described Indo-European languages. This historical imprint has permanently marked evidentiality as an ‘exotic’ category, whose prototype was to be found in those very special systems.
But on the other hand, the revitalization of the studies on evidentiality set in motion by Chafe and Nichols (1986) paved the way for a more extensive perspective, in which evidentiality is not only restricted to what is ‘formally’ coded by the core of grammatical systems but is also intended as a more general ‘functional category’ expressed by different means, which include lexical elements sharing the same semantic content as the grammatical morphemes discovered in native American languages. Chafe (1986) makes explicit this functional approach by reviewing various lexical and (semi)grammatical elements that allow a non-exotic language like English to compensate the lack of a fully developed grammatical system of evidential markers. The comparative hints between Iroquoian and English proposed by Mithun (1986: 89–90) also prelude to a functional perspective made possible by the comparison of systems in which evidentiality is expressed by different exponents. The crucial consequence of positing a comprehensive functional perspective is that evidentiality can be extended outside the rigid domain of grammar and the very notion of ‘lexical evidentiality’, i.e. the lexical expression of information source, becomes possible, a claim that is explicitly challenged by those who advocate for a ‘grammar-only’ conception (Aikhenvald 2004, 2007).

Structuralists’ focus on grammar and Chafe’s (1986) functional approach coexist today in the current stream of studies on evidentiality, which, despite its always increasing scope, is still divided between a ‘grammar-only’ conception and the extensive idea of ‘all-purpose evidentiality’. The bifurcation between these perspectives is particularly apparent when it combines with different conceptions concerning what really belongs to grammar and where ‘extra-grammar’ starts from. This is clear if one compares Aikhenvald’s (2004, 2007) strict adherence to a ‘grammar only’ conception and the functional approach followed, among many others, in Pietrandrea’s (2007, 2008) analyses of Italian epistemic-evidential adverbs and adverbial constructions, whose ‘lexical paradigm’ is described in its structural similarities to an isomorphic ‘grammatical paradigm’ expressed by inflectional verb forms and modals. Similarly, Boye (2012: 87) considers German adverbs as belonging to a ‘morphosyntactic system’ based on common distributional properties,
which make German(ic) lexical expressions comparable to fully-fledged grammatical systems of evidential and epistemic forms. As is spelled out in Aikhenvald’s (2007: 227, fn. 6), these different approaches epitomize divergent visions of the boundaries of grammar, which cannot be reduced to a unitary account without violating their theoretical conceptions. Considered from a historiographical point of view, these divergences are particularly intriguing for they crosscut the distinction between functionalist and formalist accounts. Within a functionalist perspective Diewald and Smirnova (2010a) have most explicitly interpreted evidentiality as a ‘semantic-functional domain’, in which different linguistic means equally contribute to express evidential meanings. But even hard formalist perspectives (see Cinque’s (1999) syntactic ‘cartography’) include lexical adverbs as ‘functional heads’ with evidential meaning (inferences, reports, etc.), which, similarly to grammatical morphemes, are arranged in a hierarchical model that predicts constraints on their linear order. From this point of view, Cinque’s formalist program is very different from the perspective adopted by functionalist approaches followed by Van Valin and La Polla (1997), Ramat and Ricca (1998), Narrog (2009). But in fact, they share a conception of syntax as a multilayered domain in which verb morphology and lexical items jointly contribute to a comprehensive ‘functional’ arrangement of the clause. The result is that both formalist syntax and functionalist accounts extensively elaborate on ‘lexical evidentiality’ as an unproblematic notion.

4.2 Between grammar and lexicon: grammaticalization and evidentiality strategies

Obviously, also those who advocate for a neat separation between grammatical and extragrammatical evidentiality have to handle verbs indicating evidential sources and modes of knowing, like English say, see and assume or adverbs like German angeblich ‘apparently’ and adverbial constructions like Italian secondo Gianni ‘according to John’. Aikhenvald (2007) admits their relevance but only as ‘lexical expressions of information source’, which can most interestingly be studied from a cross-cultural perspective (Aikhenvald and Storch 2013). As they gradually grammaticalize, these lexical markers become part of (semi)closed classes of particles and modals,
which are ‘evidential in the making’ (Aikhenvald 2007: 220). Thus, a decategorialized form of a verb meaning ‘say’ used as a marker of reportativity (e. g., Latin American dizque, Chapter 32), albeit not belonging to grammar in a strict sense, is considered by Aikhenvald (2007: 218-220) as an ‘evidentiality strategy’. Consistently with her conception of evidentiality as independent from other categories (especially crucial is the boundary with epistemic modality, cf. Chapter 8), Aikhenvald (2003a: 18–20; 2004) prototypically applies the notion of evidentiality strategy to those grammatical phenomena that, even though belonging to modality, mood and other grammatical categories, do acquire additional evidential meanings. The usage of the Romance conditional mood as a reportative marker of second-hand knowledge, often combined with different degrees of epistemic distance, is a typical representative of an ‘evidentiality strategy’ (Aikhenvald 2004: 106-107).

The very idea of ‘evidentiality strategy’ suggests some form of secondary, possibly pragmatic, extensions that participate to the general evidential ‘make up’ of the utterance. In Aikhenvald’s perspective, evidentiality strategy is an umbrella covering what is, generally speaking, peripheral with respect to the core of evidential grammar, either because belonging to the grammar of other categories or because not fully grammaticalized. It is not surprising that in dealing with grammaticalization (see also Chapter 9) ‘grammar-only’ conceptions and ‘all-purpose evidentiality’ tend to reduce their distance. Albeit only in the secondary form of an evidentiality strategy, a grammaticalizing item that expresses reportivity and inferentiality is somehow admitted among ‘evidentials’ even in grammar-only conceptions, as is also most naturally the case in those ‘integrative’ accounts (Wiener 2007, 2010; Giacalone Ramat and Topadze 2007) in which the balance between grammar and lexicon is not predefined, thus typically admitting intermediate elements.

A step further along the cline between ‘grammar-only’ and ‘all-purpose’ evidentiality can be found in those ‘discourse grammars’ in which a rigid boundary between grammar and lexicon is totally blurred, by focusing on the interplay of evidential lexical items as discourse strategies that
complement the array of discourse markers (see also Chapters 11–12). Within this framework lexical items belonging to whatever part of speech all participate to modalizing the speaker’s interactional role (for a recent example of this perspective see González 2015). In some of these discourse-focused perspectives the relationship with the original grammatical notion is so loosened that the very term ‘evidentiality’ is dismissed in favor of the overarching notion of ‘stance’, which is “the linguistic mechanisms used by speakers and writers to convey their personal feelings and assessments” (Biber 2004: 109). Within these “linguistic mechanisms” Biber (2004) admits evidential (apparently) as well as epistemic adverbs (certainly) without distinguishing them from prototypical grammatical markers.

4.3 Comparing evidentiality to other categories

Biber’s conception of a ‘grammar of stance’ is totally incompatible with the original structuralistic tradition of keeping lexicon and grammar neatly separated. Being so diverse in their theoretical assumptions, any attempt at comparing these opposite perspectives, let alone their reconciliation, would be a sterile exercise. Nevertheless, we should also keep in mind that the point dealt with here on the boundary between lexicon and grammar is not, in principle, restricted to evidentiality, being instead a potential problem for all grammatical categories. Thus, it is not surprising that in the literature on evidentiality we do find attempts at settling this issue by comparing evidentiality to other linguistic categories with similar features. These are the so-called TAM categories and one of the most apparent signs of the increasingly flourishing interest towards evidentiality is indeed the revision of this acronym, which was recently extended as to include E(videntiality) as its fourth initial (TAME). This might suggest an amenable way-out from the sterile deadlock caused by the confrontation between a strict ‘grammar only’ and a more liberal ‘all-inclusive’ perspective. The argument that can be derived from the TAM(E) extension is rather obvious: assuming that evidentiality has equal status as the other categories of the acronym, why don’t we look at our
general understanding of the relationship between a grammar-only perspective and all-inclusive functionalism as is settled for the other categories?

As observed by Aikhenvald (2007: 221), nobody seems to doubt that *time* and *tense* are two different notions, the former being a conceptual category and the latter its grammatical counterpart. Consistently with this view, *yesterday* and *today* are *time* adverbs, whereas the grammatical opposition between the English verb forms *is going* and *was going* codifies *tense*. If applied to evidentiality, this terminological neatness very naturally leads to Aikhenvald’s ‘grammar only’ perspective, in which evidentiality is only made of uncontroversial grammatical morphemes, marginally including evidentiality strategies.

However, those who follow an all-inclusive functionalism might also provide similarly compelling arguments. The clear *time* / *tense* bifurcation only refers to the first initial of the TAM acronym. If we look at the other grammatical categories typically expressed in the verb, the distinction grammar vs lexicon becomes much fuzzier. This complication is particularly apparent in considering the final letter, M, whose meaning is much less clear than T(ense) and A(spect). Consistently with the assumption that the categories contained in the acronym should in principle refer to what is typically expressed by verb morphemes, M was originally intended as the initial for Mood (see e.g. Dahl 1985: 1). But more recently, has also been interpreted as M(odality) (Brisard and Patard 2011: 1). Obviously, the way of intending M makes a great difference in terms of a comparison with evidentiality. Mood is very different from evidentiality, which has a clear semantic reference (it denotes source of information / mode of knowing), whereas mood has strict correlations to syntax (‘subordinating moods’) and pragmatics (some moods have special illocutionary force, e.g. the imperative mood), but poor semantic stability (see the vexed grammatical question on the core semantics of the subjunctive mood). Being so morphosyntactically and pragmatically anchored, mood is, by definition, a grammatical category, which, in principle, should not exist extragrammatically (for a recent overview see Thieroff 2010). In this respect, the behavior of mood corroborates the assumption that TAM categories should be
restricted to notions with definite grammatical exponents. But the opposite applies when M is interpreted as the initial of modality, a category that, considering the debate on its correlations to evidentiality, should more naturally be seen as the direct area of interest in dealing with evidentiality. The intricacies of the relationship between modality and evidentiality have constantly made problematic the study of these two domains (Chapter 8), which, in some accounts, are considered as belonging to the same macrocategory (see, among many others, Palmer 2001 and Boye 2012). This debate also has consequences on the different conceptions of the boundaries between grammatical and extragrammatical phenomena. Modality is typically conceived as a ‘supercategory’ (Nuyts 2006: 2) acting at different layers in which grammatical and lexical elements are variedly involved. The adverb perhaps is currently defined as an ‘epistemic adverb’ and nobody seems to have objections to the assumption that it belongs to ‘modality’, which implies that modality can be expressed lexically.

The point now is whether we claim that evidentiality should be considered more similar to tense and mood or to modality. If we stress the similarity to tense and mood, lexical evidentiality should not exist. Its nature would be equally inconsistent as ‘lexical tense’ and ‘lexical mood’, whose incoherent nature seems to be tacitly assumed. On the contrary, for those who consider that evidentiality should find its direct counterpart in modality there is no contradiction in admitting lexical expressions of evidentiality. In this respect, it is probably not a chance that among the most strenuous defendants of the independence between evidentiality and modality we do find those who also criticize the very existence of something called ‘lexical evidentiality’. Aikhenvald (2004) is an explicit representative of the consistency between the two positions. On the other hand, this is not tantamount to saying that those who admit the very notion of lexical evidentiality, necessarily consider evidentiality and epistemic modality as two faces of the same category. Take, among others, Diewald and Smirnova (2010a: 1–2), who clearly combine the interpretation of evidentiality as a “semantic-functional domain” with the assumption that evidentiality “is not a sub-division of epistemic modality”.
As is apparent from the above discussion, no consensus can be derived by simply comparing evidentiality to the other TAM categories. The intricate relationship that especially involves modality does not provide conclusive results. But whatever scope of evidentiality one might have in mind, there are still significant empirical lessons that can be drawn from a comparison between what is expressed by the core of grammar and what is instead expressed by other linguistics means, which may be more or less external to grammar and variously intended as belonging to a general comprehensive notion. Therefore, the aim of the rest of this chapter is to investigate whether the study of ‘extragrammatical’ phenomena provides a different picture from what we already know from grammatical systems or, on the contrary, the same evidential notions applied to grammars also extend to lexical phenomena. This is, first of all, an empirical question that might enrich our understanding of evidentiality and, ironically, might be of more interest for those who posit a clear-cut boundary between grammar and extra-grammar. If the empirical study of lexical phenomena should highlight substantial differences between grammar and extra-grammar, the very idea of such a boundary would be corroborated.

But comparing lexical and grammatical expressions is not only a practical way out from the difficulties of the theoretical problem whether lexical evidentiality exists or not. It is also a general option inspired by another letter of the acronym TAME that I have not considered so far. The initial A is also object of a certain debate: it definitely stands for ‘Aspect’, which, however, can be intended as a grammatical category or as a more general functional category also expressed by lexical items. Aktionsart, types of actions, actionality as well as ‘lexical aspect’ (Smith 1991) are notions that have been intended as covering lexical areas or areas intermediate between lexicon and grammar. If ‘lexical aspect’ exists, the real challenging point is whether what is expressed lexically is semantically different from what is expressed by grammatical morphemes. This observation is the starting point for all the discussions on the difference between ‘durativity’ and ‘imperfectivity’ and between ‘telicity’ and ‘perfectivity’. In this perspective, it becomes clear that the discussion developed in the previous sections ceases to be a theoretical option based on different degrees of
adherence to ‘old structuralism’, eventually becoming a crucial issue affecting the balance between lexicon and grammar. This is a point discussed by Boye and Harder (2009) and elaborated in Squartini (2008) as well as in Michael’s (2014) study on the interactional pragmatics of Nanti quotative markers, among which a lexical verb of saying coexists with a grammaticalized evidential.

4.4 What do we learn from extragrammatical phenomena?

From time to time a fresh look at lexical material turns out to be extremely helpful in clarifying those thorny issues that affect ever-lasting debates on the boundaries between evidentiality and epistemicity. Take for instance the English adverbs *certainly, probably, probably not, certainly not*, which indisputably represent “an estimation of the likelihood” that a given state of affairs occurs (Nuyts 2001: 21) and can therefore be arranged along an epistemic scale (apart from Nuyts 2001, see also Hengeveld 1989: 138 and Boye 2012: 43–47). If one compares the different degrees of certainty expressed by these genuinely epistemic adverbs to the evidential meaning characterizing the English adverbs of indirect mode of knowing (e.g. *allegedly* and *reportedly*, cf. Ramat 1996), the distinction between epistemic degree of confidence and evidential source of knowledge appears particularly clear. But once we gradually move into grammar by considering intermediate items between lexical and grammar status (modals, particles), these neat distinctions tend to blur. What is particularly telling of the complexities triggered by (semi)grammatical elements is the varied array of analyses proposed for Germanic modals, which, despite their traditional interpretation as epistemic markers, have also been considered either as evidential (see Mortelmans’ 2000 account of German *müssen*) or as representatives of an overlapping area between epistemicity and evidentiality (van der Auwera and Plungian 1998), where epistemic markers develop evidential extensions (Boye 2012: 152). Within these discussions the consistent epistemic nature of English *must* has also been reappraised (de Haan 2005: 14; 2006: 58–59) by contrasting it to its Dutch cognate *moeten*, whose genuine evidentiality is considered uncontroversial due to the coexistence of inferentiality and
hearsay (indirect evidentiality) in one and the same modal. Apart from modals, comparable complexities also characterize ‘particles’ or ‘adverbs’ (Wiemer 2010: 90–91) that, albeit originally evidential, tend to develop epistemic overtones as they grammaticalize by showing signs of decategorialization. This is what happens to Latin-American *dizque* (see Section 4.2 and Chapter 32) and many other items such as those described in Lithuanian by Wiemer (2007). While *girdi*, a petrified form of the verb ‘hear’, is restricted to reports without any epistemic overtones, the ‘adverb’ *tariamai*, even though derived from a neutral verb of saying, can hardly occur without epistemic overtones with respect to the reported content, and in many other markers described by Wiemer evidential meaning and epistemic overtones coexist, making it difficult to draw the line between semantic content and pragmatic implicatures. But the analysis of these ‘evidentiality strategies’ might be biased by grammaticalization, which suggests that, if we want to explore the peculiarities of extragrammatical phenomena, we should look at the core of lexicon. In this perspective, direct perception verbs might be particularly interesting. They are undoubtedly lexical, but at the same time, being expressions of direct evidence, they are also prototypical in terms of evidentiality. The analysis of perception verbs in Section 4.4.1 will prepare the background for SEEM-verbs (Section 4.4.2), in which direct perception is filtered by the speaker’s subjective evaluation. The role of the speaker as a ‘mediating filter’ between epistemic estimation and source of evidence will also be discussed with respect to verbs of belief (Section 4.4.3), whose varied interpretations are another manifestation of the evidential / epistemic diatribe. By underscoring the role of the speaker as primary source of direct evidence but also as a ‘subjective filter’ of perceptual data, I will concentrate on those lexical expressions that involve the speaker’s senses (*I see, I hear*) as well as impressions (*It seems to me*) and beliefs (*I think*), thus neglecting the important lexical area covered by *verba dicendi*. Their role is undoubtedly significant as lexical exponents of indirect reports; yet, they have been more interestingly studied either as (semi)grammatical evidentiality strategies (e.g. Latin-American *dizque* etymologically contains a verb of saying) or in terms of
textual construal of indirect speech (Güldemann and von Roncador 2002) rather than from the point of view of their lexical semantics as markers of information source.

4.4.1 Perception verbs: direct and indirect evidence

In his comparative analysis of English and German Whitt (2010a, 2010b) shows how a verb that typically expresses physical perception (English see) can be extended towards inferential meanings (1) and “metaphorical denotations of knowledge and understanding” (2):

(1) I see you are dying with curiosity to know what has excited my anger, which I consider both inquisitive and impertinent. (Whitt 2010b: 265)

(2) When I was with him I was always puzzled and uneasy, and always wondering why on earth he had ever married Dottie or rather how Dottie had ever arranged it, but I could see why he liked the family publishing business. It was a sort of ivory tower for him […] (Whitt 2010b: 268)

The semantic extension from physical and concrete to mental and abstract can easily be arranged within traugottian subjectification, which, in this case, is independent from grammaticalization. However, what is more relevant in the present perspective is the sheer fact that (1) and (2), despite their ‘indirect’ and subjective meaning, contain the same lexical entry that elsewhere occurs as a verb of objective direct perception (see). This is patently at odds with the assumption that the most fundamental distinction within evidentiality opposes direct perception vs indirect knowledge, the speaker’s assumptions typically belonging to the domain of indirect knowledge (see Aikhenvald’s 2003b: 139 ‘generic inferences’). As suggested by Grossmann and Tutin (2010: 287–288, 304, fn. 10) in their study of French voir ‘see’ in scientific writing, a neat distinction between perceptual stimuli and cognitive dimension might be difficult to disentangle especially with lexical perception verbs, in which ‘recognition and deduction’ are strictly intertwined (on voit bien dans ce schéma que ‘this diagram clearly shows that (lit. in this diagram one sees well that’). Rather radically,
Grossmann and Tutin (2010: 283–284) suggest that it is precisely this combination of indirect understanding and direct perception that should be considered as the genuine ‘evidential’ meaning of perception verbs, in which the speaker is also intellectually involved as a source and not as a mere ‘perceiver’ of external data.

Now, the empirical question that might be derived from these observations is whether the coexistence of direct and indirect evidence is only possible due to the lexical nature of the verb see or is a phenomenon that also extends to grammatical systems, thus unexpectedly blurring the direct / indirect opposition. Per se, it comes as no surprise that this boundary can be crossed, if one considers that indirect evidence (especially in inferential reasoning) are prototypically based on external data directly perceived by the speaker (‘circumstantial inferences’ Anderson 1986: 274: *The light is on; he must be at home*). The same also applies to auditory evidence, expressed e.g. by the English lexical verb hear (Whitt 2009), which not only covers direct evidence but also second-hand knowledge acquired through ‘hearsay’. Thus, the point is not whether the coexistence of indirect and direct evidence is semantically possible, but how it impacts on grammatical systems and on our understanding of them. A look at Willett’s (1988: 57), Aikhenvald’s (2004: ch. 2) and (Boye 2012) typologies, which all invoke the fundamental distinction direct / indirect opposition, seems to confirm the general tendency of grammars to keep this distinction clearly divided. As the A2 type in Aikhenvald’s (2004: 65) classification reminds us, there are, in fact, grammatical markers that cut across the fundamental distinction direct vs indirect, but in these cases only non-visual markers of direct evidence pattern together with inferentials, thus confirming a fundamental distinction between what is visually perceived and what, being perceived through other senses, can be categorized as more indirect. But apart from non-visual markers, there is another a point in which Aikhenvald’s (2004: ch. 5) careful survey of the semantics of grammatical systems might provide us something comparable to the behavior of the English verb see in (1–2). In her data Aikhevald (2004: 186–193) highlights cases in which ‘direct’ evidentials not only express firsthand sensory perceptions but also cover the speaker’s ‘internal experience’, including ‘thoughts and
knowledge’. This is what happens, among other languages, in Quechua (Floyd 1999: 63–64, Aikhenvald 2004: 160), which leads Aikhenvald (2004: 186–193) to recognize the speaker’s internal thoughts as a possible additional meaning of ‘firsthand’, ‘visual’ and ‘direct’ markers. Also Boye’s (2012: 138) semantic map admits neutralization between direct and indirect evidence, but this typically correlates with an epistemic bias towards reliability. Lega (Botne 1997) and Supyire (Carlson 1994) have markers covering direct perception as well as indirect inferences. However, this combination is only made possible when the speaker also asserts full reliability, thus recognizing to the speaker “a kind of proto-evidential capacity to code higher certainty” (Carlson 1994: 365), irrespective of the mode of knowing.

These forms of encroaching of the speaker’s internal interpretation and / or epistemic persuasions on direct perception might support other classificatory systems of evidentiality (see the discussion in Squartini 2001) in which the primary division is not direct vs indirect but the speaker’s SELF vs OTHER (Frawley 1992: 412–413), which Plungian (2010: 29) dubs personal vs non-personal.

On the other hand, it is the syntactic distribution of English perception verbs, which, by forming a special ‘morphosyntactic system’ (Boye 2012), confirm the tendency to develop a special syntactic grammar for direct perception, ultimately keeping it distinct from indirect interpretation of sensory data. As concluded in Whitt’s (2010b) corpus analysis, the construction in which the verb of perception is complemented by a non-finite dependent clause (I saw her pass through the room) “almost solely is marker of visual evidentiality”. A parallel development characterizes other verbs of perception (most typically, hear) with a similar tendency to specialize the non-finite construction for direct perception (“I heard John cross the street implies that I did hear John stamping his feet”, Aikhenvald 2007: 213), while the indirect interpretation of verbal report is triggered by the complementation with a finite clause (I heard that John crossed the street). Thus, grammar (here intended as morphosyntactic restrictions) seems to be particularly sensitive to the boundary direct vs indirect (for other examples in various languages see Aikhenvald 2004: 120–123 and for a
general interpretation of syntactic complementation in evidential terms see Boye 2012: ch.4). What instead remains to be better understood is the relationship between speaker’s perceptions and speaker’s thoughts, which is a prominent feature of lexical semantics in visual verbs. Yet, its impact on grammatical systems might have been underestimated.

4.4.2 External appearance and subjective interpretation: SEEM-verbs

The interplay between external sensory data and speaker’s subjective interpretation highlighted above comes even more prominently to the foreground when one moves from perception verbs to verbs of ‘external appearance’ such as English appear, seem, look (you look tired). What ‘appears’ from direct perception is not necessarily claimed to be true and the balance between appearance and reality is exactly the cognitive mold on which the semantics of single verbs of this classvariedly elaborate showing different degrees of subjective interpretation (Dixon 2005: 204; Usonienè 2000).

The semantic connection between objective external appearance and subjective uncertainty can easily be demonstrated by looking at diachronic data. The Old Italian (second half of the 14th century) example in (3) shows that the verb pare, nowadays occurring as indirect evidential (pare che ... ‘it seems that ...’) as well as a marker of personal opinions (a me pare ‘it seems to me’), used to occur in a much more objective sense as anaphoric referential link to a point of a written text, where the referred fact appears, i.e. is documented, mentioned:

(3) le quali chase si conperarono da Iacopo di Lapo Ghavaciani, come pare in questo libro a dietro a car(te) 2. (Libro di ricordanze dei Corsini 1362–1402, ed. by A. Petrucci, Rome, 1965, p. 16)

‘these houses were bought by I. di L. G., as recorded (lit. it appears) in this book above on page 2’

This usage as internal text-reference provides a possible connection to indirect evidentiality: pare refers here to the source of information (what is recorded elsewhere in the same book), which can
be twisted towards modern uses of the same verb as hearsay and inferential (‘indirective’ in general). The connection to evidentiality is confirmed by the English verb of appearance *seem*, which occurs as a copular verb (*John seems happy*) signalling personal opinions or impressions, with respect to which the speaker “is not fully certain whether the adjectival description is appropriate” (Dixon 2005: 204). Moreover, *seem* expresses hearsay (*It seems that Sam’s in the hospital*, Mithun 1986: 90) and inferences (*John seems to be here now*, Anderson 1986: 279), with a semantic dynamics similar to adverbs and adverbials derived from verbs of appearance (Eng. *apparently*, Fr. *apparemment*, It. *a quanto pare*, cf. Ramat 1996, Squartini 2008).

These data involving different constructions of a copular verb also demonstrate that in dealing with SEEM-verbs we are again moving into an intermediate domain between lexicon and grammar, in which the boundary between the two might be difficult to assess (Cornillie 2007b). Diewald and Smirnova (2010b: 178, 187) consider the copular occurrences of German *scheinen* ‘seem’ as ‘lexical uses’ (4), with respect to which inferential constructions (*scheinen* ‘seem’ + infinitive) are ‘more grammaticalized’ (5):

4) Sie *scheint* traurig
   ‘She seems sad’

5) Gaigern *scheint* hier draußen Stammgast zu sein, jedermann grüßt und kennt ihn
   ‘Gaigern seems to be a regular guest here, everyone greets and knows him’

Once more, it is morphosyntax that turns out to be sensitive to different evidential interpretations, as confirmed in analyses of SEEM-verbs in various languages (cf. Dendale and van Bogaert 2007 for the French pair *paraître* and *sembler*; de Haan 2007 on the relationship between grammaticalization and the special syntax of ‘raising verbs’ such as Eng. *It seems that John is ill / John seems to be ill*). In this perspective of syntax-semantics interface, Cornillie’s (2007a) diachronic and synchronic corpus-based accounts of the Spanish constructions with the verb *parecer* ‘seem’ have shown that the infinitival construction *parece* ‘seem’ + infinitive is restricted to one evidential mode of
knowing (inferences) as opposed to other syntactic structures (parece + complement clause, parece + datival expression of the conceptualizer, parenthetical uses), which cover a wider array of subjective (belief) and intersubjective (hearsay) meanings.

From a semantic point of view these tendencies involving SEEM-verbs confirm the strict functional correlation between inferentiality and hearsay/reports within the general domain of indirectivity, a point that is well known from typological studies on grammatical evidentiality since Willett (1988), with significant confirmation by Johanson and Utas (2000) and Aikhenvald (2004). In this sense, the study of lexical material does not add anything new to what is well assessed from research on grammatical systems. What, instead, might more fruitfully be derived from the semantics of SEEM-verbs in a general ‘evidential’ perspective is again a contribution to the discussion on the role of the speaker as a ‘conceptualizer’, who balances between direct and indirect knowledge and in this function can also express his/her own opinions, ‘beliefs’ and impressions (It seems to me). Thus, what is expressed by SEEM-verbs is not only how the speaker knows something but what the speaker thinks on the basis of external input, which, as demonstrated by the Old Italian example, may originally have a very objective and ‘sensory’ basis. Is this direct or indirect evidence? And what is the role of the speaker as evidential ‘filter’ between external data and internal conceptualizations? When Mary says to John You seem tired/sad, she is interpreting external (indirect) data on the basis of her own conceptualizations and similarity to a prototypical ‘categorization’ (Kratschmer 2013). This should be an indisputable case of indirect evidentiality, but in fact if we look at how these notions are expressed in grammatical systems of evidential-prominent languages, what we find is not conclusive. “[W]hen talking about the internal experience (emotions, thoughts, and the like) of someone other than the speaker” (Aikhenvald 2004: 161), as in You seem tired/sad, Quechua can use a grammatical marker of indirect inferentiality (something corresponding to English You must be tired expressed in Quechua by the inferential marker -chr, see Floyd 1999: 68–68), but the evidential marker of direct evidence –mi can also occur in contexts in which the speaker stresses personal certainty.
As opposed to the strong certainty conveyed by the selection of a marker of direct
evidentiality in Quechua, the strategy adopted when using English *seem* underlines the epistemic
uncertainty of the speaker, who signals potential discrepancy between the subjective interpretation
of what externally appears and what is in fact true. As demonstrated by the analysis of data from a
parallel corpus (Aijmer 2009), English *seem* may express different degrees of commitment to the
factuality of the situation, including the creation of a fictitious interpretation that explicitly runs
counter normal facts in the actual world (*The door shook and the banging became so wild and
erratic it seemed as if the wind and thunder wanted to be let in*, from Aijmer 2009: 78).
This comparison between Quechua grammatical markers and English *seem* clearly permits us to
grasp the difference between ‘evidential- vs epistemic-prominent’ languages (van der Auwera and
Amman 2005: 307, Boye 2012) and the various correlations between evidentiality and epistemicity
that they imply. In evidential-prominent languages (Quechua) thoughts can be expressed by the
evidential marker of direct perception, provided that the semantic interpretation also includes strong
certainty. On the contrary, the marker used in an epistemic-prominent language (English *seem*)
always conveys an ‘epistemic flavor’, which allows the speaker to ‘modalize’ his / her subjective
commitment on the factuality of the situation. But if we take these data as a whole, English and
Quechua demonstrate that the speaker thoughts are not *per se* ‘epistemic’ for they do not
necessarily correlate with a lower degree of certainty. In English they do, but in Quechua they
don’t, which obviously raises the problem whether what the speaker thinks should be considered
epistemic or evidential.

4.4.3 Verbs of belief: epistemic or evidential?
Being ‘phenomenon-based’ (Viberg 2005), the verbs of appearance discussed above have clearly
shown the interplay between the external phenomenon, which is directly perceived, and the
speaker’s internal interpretation. Now, the role of the speaker as an internal conceptualizer becomes
really crucial with ‘verbs of cognitive attitude’ (Cappelli 2007) such as *I think, I guess, I suppose,*
which can express subjective opinions and beliefs (Aijmer 1997), thus posing the problem whether
the speaker should be interpreted as an evidential source or as an epistemic evaluator of states of
affairs, who focuses on their reliability. Since the first studies on the relative syntactic freedom of
these ‘parenthetical’ verbs (Urmson 1952), the epistemic interpretation connected to the truth
commitment has been taken for granted. Nevertheless, these intrinsically ‘subjective’ elements
(Nuyts 2005: 14) lack the scalar nature associated with genuine epistemic markers, which
‘prototypically’ can be arranged along a continuum of different degrees of certainty (possibly,
probably, certainly). At the same time, their evidential nature highlighted by Chafe’s (1986) notion
of ‘belief’ is problematic due to the fact that ‘belief’ is the only ‘mode of knowing’ that lacks a
‘source of evidence’, which implies that in this very special case the source should be identified
with the ‘issuer of the evaluation’ (Nuyts 2005: 14). The interpretative duplicity of these verbs is
also mirrored in Boye’s (2012) comprehensive reappraisal of the relationship between modal-
epistemic and evidential systems. Due to their common distributional features, Boye (2012: 113)
lists Danish mene ‘think’ among the other verbs (sige ‘say’, se ‘see’, synes ‘seem’) that form an
‘evidential system’. Nonetheless, when defining the notion of ‘epistemic support’, he follows
Caton’s (1969) classification, in which think lends its initial to the ‘T-group’ of epistemic qualifiers
that express ‘partial epistemic support’, thus occupying an intermediate position along the epistemic
scale (Boye 2012: 23).

The controversial status of these verbs is also reflected in discourse analyses, where I think
can be conflated with epistemic adverbs and modals, for it shares with them “the effect of damping
down the force of what is said” (Coates 2003: 331). On the other hand, Kärkkäinen’s (2003: 53)
conversational analysis distinguishes between markers of reliability (I don’t know, may be,
probably, might, may, of course) and belief (I think, I guess, I figure, I’m sure). Interestingly, this
duplicity is also reflected in pragmatic interpretations, where the verbs of belief are variedly
described as strategies to avoid (epistemic) commitment (Jucker 1986: 149) but also as signals used
by politicians to assert their ‘authoritative’ stance (Simon-Vandenbergen 2000), thus imposing themselves as trustable sources.

Obviously the question whether I think should be an ‘evidential verb’, as Aijmer (2009: 72) dubs it, or is instead the prototypical expression of epistemic stance (Cappelli 2007) cannot be solved without further descriptive research. A comparison to other lexical entries expressing ‘cognitive attitude’ might be extremely helpful in detecting different combinations of epistemic and evidential features in different verbs, thus contrasting the evidential support that characterizes English assume or French trouver ‘find’ with the lack of specific evidential sources in English think, French croire ‘believe, think’ and penser ‘think’ (see Cappelli 2007 for English verbs and Dendale and Van Bogaert 2007 for French). But as suggested in Sections 4.4.1–2, our analysis of extragrammatical lexemes should also be consistently matched with what we know from grammatical systems, where, in fact, one of the most controversial issues has to do with of conjectures (assumptions, generic inferences), variedly interpreted either as prototypical epistemic evaluations or as evidential modes of knowing (Palmer 2001: 29–30, Plungian 2010: 46, Squartini 2016: 63–64).

4.5 Conclusion

The interpretative complexities of the relationship between lexicon and grammar required long introductory preliminaries (Sections 4.1–3) in which I surveyed the varied set of theoretical solutions adopted to settle the discussion on the relationship between evidentiality and information source. Nonetheless, the lines of research summarized in Section 4.4 should have demonstrated that, irrespective of one’s theoretical persuasion, lexical expressions of information source can fruitfully be compared to the core of evidential grammar, eventually providing a richer understanding of both lexicon and grammar.

References


