

The role of indirect evidentials to mark epistemic primacy, epistemic authority and intersubjective distribution in Udmurt

Abstract

The presentation discusses the role of indirect evidentiality in signaling epistemic primacy (Stivers et al. 2011), epistemic authority (Bergqvist – Grzech 2023) and intersubjective distribution of information (Evans et al. 2018, Bergqvist – Kittilä 2020) in Udmurt. Evidentials can be used to make assumptions about the epistemic perspective of the addressee (Bergqvist 2017), and the speaker’s choice of evidential is not only governed by the source of information but rather it depends on the speech-act participants’ interpersonal dynamics and the respective position relative to the event in question (Bergqvist – Grzech 2023: 24).

The presentation focuses on morphological markers of evidentiality (i.e. forms of the so-called second past tense, cf. Skribnik – Kehayov 2018: 541) and primarily, but not exclusively, analyzes second-person forms. Data is collected from the online Udmurt corpora (Arkhangelskiy 2019), supplemented with material collected from native speakers as well as from press and Vkontakte entries not implemented in the corpora.

In earlier works it has already been established in that the indirect evidential form is multifunctional, its interpretation is highly context-sensitive and its application goes beyond the mere marking of indirect information source. Beside the marking of the information source, indirect evidentials forms can express non-assimilated knowledge, a lower degree of involvement in the events, a lower degree of responsibility for the truth of the information and less reliable knowledge (Kubitsch 2023). However, there are such uses which cannot be fully explained within the sphere of evidentiality and the above-mentioned notions.

In the context of example 1, speaker A comments about Udmurt traditional clothing. After that, speaker B reminds speaker A, using the indirect evidential, that they have already shared this piece of information earlier. Taking into epistemic primacy and authority into consideration, we can see that the use of the indirect evidential form attenuates the assertion by acknowledging they do not have the right to claim authority of knowledge about the actions of the other discourse participant.

(1) *Vasil'ij, vera-l'am-dy val ini.*

PN say-EV.PST-2PL be.PST already

‘Vasily, you have already said this.’

Considering the intersubjective distribution of information, indirect evidential forms signal knowledge asymmetry between the discourse participants. One case of knowledge asymmetry is when the speaker has access to the information and they assume that the addressee does not have (cf. Bergqvist – Knuchel 2019: 654). This use of the indirect evidential has been only observed so far in connection with highly informative pieces of information (cf. mirativity). In these terms, the indirect evidential can signal that the information is not highly informative from the speaker’s point of view but it is assumed to be a novelty to the addressee. In example 2, the speaker explains that they needed to wear a hat in Helsinki but in Budapest they were bare-headed, and then mentioned a Hungarian word in connection with this, which means ‘bare-headed’. Then adds that if the addressee (the reader of the article, in this specific case) can also learn such words in an institute specialized in

teaching Hungarian to foreigners. The third person indirect evidential form (*vylem*) is added after the predicate (*todod* ‘you will know’). The information cannot be highly informative to the speaker since they present the word, hence they are already familiar with it. In this case, the form *vylem* marks that according to the speaker’s evaluation, the information is highly informative to the other discourse participants.

- (2) *Tače kyl-ez no tod-o-d vyl-em [...]*
 this word-ACC too know-FUT-2SG be-EV.PST[3SG]
 ‘You will know this word too [...]’

Results show that indirect evidential forms are used to mark the speaker’s lack of epistemic primacy, disclaim their epistemic authority as well as signal knowledge asymmetry (non-shared access) between the discourse participants. Taking these notions into consideration, we have a better understanding about the use of indirect evidentials in discourse and we can see that its application does not only concern the speaker’s point of view (be that the information source, involvement, certainty, informativity) but it is sensitive to the epistemic status of the discourse participants. This is significant because analyses have rarely attempted to understand Udmurt evidentiality in interaction.

Finally, the results confirm that in Udmurt the use of indirect evidential form is not primarily guided by grammatical factors, but discourse-interactive factors also play a role. It might be worthwhile to contemplate the connection between evidentiality and epistemic primacy/authority and intersubjectivity in all evidential systems, in which it is the speaker’s choice to use an evidential form in a given situation.

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