

## Not just “source of information”:

Re-defining evidentiality on the basis of data from natural interaction

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Evidentiality is most often defined as a linguistic category indicating the ‘source of information’ for what is being said (cf. Aikhenvald 2004). The example from Cuzco Quechua (Quechuan, Peru, Faller 2002: 122) demonstrates how it can work in a language where this category is expressed by dedicated morphemes:

*Parashanmi* ‘It is raining’ [the speaker sees the rain]

*Parashanchá* ‘It is raining’ [the speakers conjectures it without observing the rain]

*Parashansi* ‘It is raining’ [the speaker was told by another person]

As these examples suggest, the use of evidentials does not change the propositional content of the utterance. Rather, it adds an additional layer of meaning (cf. Faller 2002; Boye 2012), the precise nature of which varies between languages and remains an object of study and debate. In line with the established definition of evidentiality, this additional layer is widely assumed to indicate ‘how the speaker knows.’ However, a growing body of descriptive research shows that evidentials do more than that, or that their function is different altogether.

This mismatch is particularly evident when we analyse language-in-use, rather than isolated sentences. An increasing body of descriptive research based on interactional data shows that, in languages from around the world, expressions analysed as evidentials signal not so much the source of evidence, as the basis on which the proposition should be integrated with what is already known. Source of evidence is relevant, but not key for how they are used and interpreted. They help interlocutors structure knowledge, and provide interpretative cues which make communication more effective; Their overarching function could be characterised as management of epistemic Common Ground (cg. Grzech 2020).

This talk discusses the above hypothesis, drawing support from descriptive accounts of a variety of languages, and from my own fieldwork. The lecture’s main objective is to problematise the theory-data mismatch persistent in evidential scholarship, and to propose ways in which the field could move forward in a more empirically-grounded manner.

## References:

- Aikhenvald, Alexandra Y. 2004. *Evidentiality*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
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- Grzech, Karolina. 2020. Managing Common Ground with epistemic marking: ‘Evidential’ markers in Upper Napo Kichwa and their functions in interaction. *Journal of Pragmatics* 168. 81–97. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.pragma.2020.05.013>