



Symposium on evidentiality, egophoricity, and engagement: descriptive and typological perspectives

17-18 March, 2016 at Stockholm University

It has become increasingly clear over the last 20 years that epistemicity in language houses a number of distinct notions and categories that are only partly related to a well explored notion like modality, which by some has been equated with the very notion of epistemicity found in different parts of grammar. The aim of the symposium is therefore to contribute to the ongoing exploration of epistemic marking systems in lesser-documented languages from the Americas, Papua New Guinea, and Central Asia from the perspective of description and cross-linguistic comparison.

As the title of the symposium suggests, part of this exploration consists of comparing already established categories such as evidentiality to the diversity of systems found in individual languages. Issues in the description of epistemic marking, in this broadened sense, include: meaning in forms as encoded or implied; the (semantic) scope properties of forms with respect to other categories and the proposition itself; and the development of forms with respect to ontogeny and phylogeny. Other issues pertain to the grammatical status of forms, their use (and related interactional aspects), as well as establishing criteria for cross-linguistic comparison. In relation to this, we briefly describe the categories that serve as a theme for the symposium:

Evidentiality is a category whose core function is to specify how information about an event was acquired, i.e. if it was directly perceived, inferred, or if the speaker in question was told about an event by a third party. Evidentiality, as a grammatical category, has been the subject of a substantial amount of research over the last 30 years and the number of descriptions of diverse evidential systems has grown along with an increasing number of documented and described languages from all parts of the world.

Egophoricity is a less well-known, and typologically unusual grammatical category that indicates whether one of the speech-participants was involved in a talked-about event. Egophoric markers are prototypically restricted to occur in utterances with agentive first, or second person subjects, but the pragmatically conditioned meaning inherent to these forms makes this prototypical distribution subject to change in different languages, where they can occur with third person and non-agentive subjects.

Engagement, finally, is a quite recently proposed category that focuses on the distribution of knowledge and attention between the speech-participants in terms of (intersubjective) (a)symmetries where the speaker makes assumptions about the addressee's knowledge/attention of an event as either shared with the speaker or non-shared, a contrast that entails the potentially diverging epistemic perspectives of both speech-participants. Languages, on which the proposed category of engagement is based, are spoken in South America, the Himalayas, and Papua New Guinea.

The symposium brings together researchers working with first and second-hand data relevant to the notion of epistemicity, as sketched above, in order to explore new avenues of research and methods for comparing analyses of different, but purportedly related systems. Participants come mainly from Stockholm University and Helsinki University as part of a newly instated collaboration program, but the organizers invite proposals from outside researchers working on epistemicity in language, using first hand data, or typological approaches. The symposium will, however, not be able to cover travel and accommodation costs outside of already invited speakers.

Professor Nicholas Evans (ANU, Canberra) and Professor Alan Rumsey (ANU, Canberra) are invited plenary speakers at the symposium. Both have worked and published extensively on epistemicity, intersubjectivity, and social cognition from a descriptive and typological perspective for over 30 years.

Proposals for presentations can be submitted to Henrik and Seppo as an e-mail attachment before November 30th 2015. Abstracts should be no more than 500 words (excluding references and examples) in pdf or ms-word format. If you have any questions about the symposium, don't hesitate to contact the organizers.

Organizers:

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