

'Clear remembrance' as an evidential category

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The functional domain of evidentiality can be classified into different categories according to several semantic properties. One widely cited classification is the Plungian's (2010) model based on binary parameters of direct/indirect and personal/non-personal access to knowledge. However, the classification faces challenges when new categories are proposed to the domain – a change accompanied both by increased data on understudied languages as well as extended view on 'evidentials' as more than just highly grammaticalized linguistic elements.

No surprise, most of the new categories belong to the group of cognitive information sources due to the almost boundless amount of human mental processes used in knowledge acquisition. One noteworthy new member that occurs along the traditional cognitive categories of 'inference' and 'assumption' is the category of 'memory' introduced by Nuyts (2023). In my presentation I will join this progress by discussing another lesser-known cognitive evidential category of 'clear remembrance' attested in Uralic languages Meadow Mari and Hill Mari. Earlier sporadically identified in some other languages of the so-called "great Eurasian evidentiality belt" (e.g. in Khalkha Mongolian by Brosig 2018: 54–58), the analysis on Mari contributes to a more theoretical and typological view on the functions and development of this category.

In Mari, the function of 'clear remembrance' has its roots in analytic past tense constructions. These constructions are based on expressions with present value followed by elements *ǎl'e* and *ǎl'ǎ* in Meadow Mari and Hill Mari, respectively. Representing grammaticalized 3rd person singular past tense forms of the verb 'to be', the function of these 'was'-elements is to shift the temporal interpretation of the present expression into past from the utterance time. This is illustrated in example (1) below:

(1) Meadow Mari

<i>šarn-et</i>	<i>ćaj,</i>	<i>kuze</i>	<i>tušto</i>	<i>jüštǎl-ǎna</i>	<i>ǎl'e?</i>
remember-2SG	maybe	how	there	swim-1PL	ǎl'e

'You remember maybe, how we used to swim there?' (Spets, forthcoming)
Literally: [we swim there] + [so it **was**]

As the example shows, the analytic past tense constructions are often chosen over morphological past tenses in complement clauses of cognitive verbs with the meaning ‘to remember’. This can be explained by morphosemantics of the construction: the present expression equals a synchronic memory that the speaker re-lives in their mind, while the past-marked $\hat{\alpha}l'e/\hat{\alpha}l'ä$ element explicates that the event is not actually present but located in the past.

My central claim is that when a speaker frames a piece of information as ‘clearly remembered’, they overtly mark that it originates from their subjective mental processes and is thus not to be exposed to judgement about its objective truth value. Rather, the Mari expressions are used to mark an imaginative epistemological stance (c.f. Mushin 2001: 76–79) which means that the claim is a description of a speaker-exclusive imagination world and not necessarily of the actual one. Indeed, the ‘clear remembrance’ construction in Mari shares form with counterfactual expressions and is typically used for marking states of affairs that the speaker cannot have a factual access to.

Crucially, the Plungianian classification is semantically not capable of distinguishing ‘clear remembrance’ or ‘memory’ from categories like ‘inference’ or even ‘sensoriness’. Thus, I propose two new parameters for clarifying the internal borders within the domain of evidentiality: internal/external division for the type of acquisition channel as well as active/passive division for the speaker’s type of participation in the knowledge formation. In this approach, ‘clear remembrance’ is characterized by internal acquisition of the knowledge as well as the speaker’s active participation in forming of the information.

References

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