

Beyond evidentiality: epistemic authority and other effects on the use of grammatical evidentials in Southern Finnic

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Abstract

The Southern Finnic languages (Standard & South) Estonian and Livonian have developed grammatical means for the expression of evidentiality based on verbal reports. The grammatical evidentials therein cover two meanings: reportative with the unknown/unspecified source, and quotative with the specified source (Aikhenvald 2004; Kehayov & Skribnik 2022). The additional epistemic meaning of uncertainty in the truth-value of the report is often ascribed to the Estonian grammatical evidential (Aikhenvald 2004: 193), while this additional meaning is less typical for Livonian (Kehayov et al. 2012). Besides the reporter's uncertainty, we also observe mirative overtones arising in contexts where the reported state-of-affairs was not expected by the reporter (1). Reports marked with the grammatical evidential usually contain information deriving from first-hand accounts of other speakers, otherwise inaccessible to the reporter (2).

(1) Estonian

<i>Suur</i>	<i>oli</i>	<i>minu</i>	<i>üllatus</i>	<i>kui</i>
big	be:PST.3SG	1SG.GEN	surprise	when
<i>kaal</i>	<i>näitas,</i>	<i>et</i>	<i>mina</i>	<i>kaaluvat</i>
weights	show:PST.3SG	COMP	1SG	weigh:REP.EVID
<i>kokku</i>	<i>72,4</i>	<i>kilo.</i>		
altogether	NUM	kilogram.PRT		

'I was surprised a lot when the weights showed that I weighed 72,4 kilos.'
(etTenTen21)

(2) Livonian

<i>ma</i>	<i>u'm</i>	<i>kūlõn</i>	<i>ku</i>	<i>oksāka'ļdi</i>
1SG	be.1SG	hear:APP.SG	COMP	stickleback:PL.PRT
<i>Rīgõs</i>	<i>sāl</i>	<i>Vēnas</i>	<i>ve'jjijid</i>	<i>ja</i>
Riga:INE	there	Daugava:INE	catch.fish:REP.EVID:PL	and
<i>Liepās</i>	<i>ma</i>	<i>u'm</i>	<i>ī'ž</i>	<i>nā'nd</i>
Liepaja:INE	1SG	be.1SG	self	see:APP.SG
<i>ku</i>	<i>kešīļdōks</i>	<i>āt</i>	<i>ve'jjōnd</i>	<i>oksāka'ļdi</i>
COMP	net:PL.INS	be.3PL	catch.fish:APP.PL	stickleback:PL.PRT

‘I’ve heard that three-spined sticklebacks have been caught in Riga, there in Daugava, and in Liepaja I’ve seen that three-spined sticklebacks have been caught with a landing net.’ (Suhonen 1975: 26)

This study aims at extending previous descriptions of the grammatical evidentials in the Finnic languages by scrutinizing additional connotations arising from grammatical expression of evidentiality based on corpus material. Furthermore, we investigate how the asymmetry in epistemic authority (Grzech 2020; Bergqvist & Grzech 2023, i.a.) between the current speech participants is reflected in the use of grammatical evidentials in these languages.

Our preliminary results for Estonian show an effect of this parameter on the distribution of grammatical evidentials relative to person. While the grammatical evidential is relatively frequently used in reports about the current speaker, who is also the (first person) reporter (accounting for ca. 1500 exx. in etTenTen21), it is rarely used in reports about the (second person) interlocutor (ca. 60 exx.). Furthermore, in the reports about the current speaker, the grammatical evidential acquires quotative interpretation more frequently than reportative. In such cases, the quotative reading often triggers additional epistemic and mirative effects (cf. First Person Effect in Aikhenvald 2004: 225), for which contextual cues and alternations with the epistemically neutral indicative mood are robust indexes. In contrast, reports about the interlocutor do not contain specification of the source. This can be viewed as a distancing strategy: to avoid potentially face-threatening situations the speaker keeps information sources vague. This is also found in reports about the current speaker boasting about their own qualities, e.g. *ma pidavat olema ilus* [1SG must:REP.EVID beautiful] ‘People say, I am beautiful’.

Considering the rarity of epistemic overtones in the use of the Livonian evidential (cf. Kehayov et al. 2012), we expect to find differences in the use of the grammatical evidentials with the same meaning between the closely related Estonian and Livonian, potentially stemming from different conventionalisation paths of the evidentials therein and their uses in the limited number of genres available for moribund Livonian.

References

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