EVIDENTIALS IN KARITIANA: MODALS OR SPEECH ACT OPERATORS?

FOCUS: The main purposes of this work are (i) to analyze the semantics of evidentiality within the verbal system of Karitiana, a Tupi language spoken in Northwestern Amazonia, Brazil; and (ii) to contribute to the understanding of the cross-linguistic variation in the expression of evidentiality. More specifically, and based on data primarily collected in the field, it addresses the question of whether evidentials in Karitiana should be treated as epistemic modals or as illocutionary operators. As epistemic modals, evidentials belong to the meaning of the proposition expressed by an utterance, whereas, as illocutionary operators, they don’t.

BACKGROUND: Evidentiality can be broadly understood as the linguistic encoding of information source. It may be expressed by a variety of linguistic categories across languages, only some of which have specialized evidential morphology (Aikhenvald 2004, Peterson et al 2010). Evidentiality has been analyzed as a type of epistemic modality (Kratzer 1991, Izvorski 1997, among others), and, as such, as introducing quantification over possible worlds, and restricted to epistemic conversational backgrounds. Faller (2002), on the other hand, argues that evidentials in Cuzco Quechua are speech act operators, and modify the illocutionary force of an utterance. Finally, Matthewson et al. (2008) argue for the existence of these two types of evidentiality in natural languages.

DATA: Karitiana has three known evidentials: a direct visual evidential (ta’à), a reportative evidential (saryt), and an inferential evidential, which amounts to the use of the prefix taka, instead of the default 3rd person declarative mood prefix naka. Their use is illustrated in sentences (1-2) (Storto 2002, Mello 2007). In this paper, we deal only with ta’à and saryt, which clearly fit the definition of a (‘pure’) evidential since they encode evidential value as their primary meaning, and constitute a grammatical paradigm (Aikhenvald 2004).

(1) Taso naka’yt ta’â/ saryt opokakosypi
taso Ø-naka-’y-t ta’â-t/ saryt-Ø opok ako sypi
man 3-DECL-eat-NFT VIS.EV-NFT/REP.EV–NFT chicken.egg
‘The man ate the egg [speaker saw it/speaker heard it]’

(2) taso taka’yt opokakosypi
Taso Ø-taka-’y-t opok ako sypi
Man 3-INF.EVID-eat-NFT chicken.egg
‘The man ate the egg [speaker inferred it]’

Morphosyntax: Syntactically, evidentials in Karitiana belong to the verbal system. They have a fixed syntactic position in the sentence, always occurring above V and Asp(ect) (note that Karitiana is a head-final language), and are obligatorily marked for tense (see 1-2). Nevertheless, Karitiana evidentials are optional and may or may not be e used in declarative sentences.

Semantics: Faller 2002 proposes some tests to set apart epistemic modals from illocutionary operators. Three of them are presented in Table 1, together with the predictions they make and with the results obtained for ta’à and saryt. As can be inferred from the results, ta’à and saryt behave like epistemic modals in relation to these tests.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>modal</th>
<th>illocutionary operator</th>
<th>saryt</th>
<th>ta’à</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>(i) Felicity if embedded proposition is known to be false?</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(ii) Felicity if embedded proposition is known to be true?</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(iii) Can the evidential be questioned?</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 1

Test (i) is based on the fact that epistemic modals assert the necessity/possibility of the embedded proposition, whereas illocutionary operators only affect its force or conditions. Consequently, if the evidential is a modal, the utterance should result infelicitous; and if it is a speech act operator it should result felicitous.

Test (ii) applies only to reportatives. Again, epistemic modals result infelicitous because one is not expected to be sure of some reported fact. If one is sure of some fact, it does not make sense to use a modal, that is, to quantify over possible worlds. Illocutionary operators, on the other hand, should result felicitous since they only have to do with speaker’s relation to his information source, and not to his judgements about the truth or falsity of the embedded proposition.

Test (iii) is based on the fact that modals are part of the propositional content of an utterance and can therefore be questioned. Illocutionary force operators, on the other hand, cannot be questioned since they do not belong to the content of the embedded proposition.

**THESIS:** We thus conclude that *ta’at* and *saryt* are epistemic modals. They constitute a grammatical paradigm that expresses direct vs indirect sources of information (Willet 1988). The two markers can be classified straightforwardly as grammatical evidentials because: (i) they encode an evidential value as their primary meaning, and (ii) they are grammatical elements (Aikhenvald 2004).

The behavior of Karitiana evidentials thus supports the claim that – at least for some languages – evidentials are epistemic modals (Matthewson et al. 2007 and Faller to appear).

**Abreviations:** DECL: declarative; NFT: non-future; VIS.EV: visual evidential; REP.EV: reportative evidential; INF.EVID: inferential evidential.

**References**


