

Book Reviews

Aikhenvald, Alexandra (2004) *Evidentiality* (Oxford Linguistics). Oxford: Oxford University Press. Pp. xxvii, 452.

Reviewed by Heiko Narrog

1. Introduction

Evidentiality is a grammatical category arguably absent from English and many other European languages. In fact, according to the author of the volume reviewed here, although every language disposes of lexical and other means to convey the source of information, as a grammatical category it probably exists only in about a quarter of the languages of the world. In linguistics evidentiality has been recognized since Boas, but only recently it has come to the attention of a larger number of linguists. This can be attributed mostly to the collected volumes on the topic by Chafe and Nichols (1986), Johanson and Utas (2000) and Aikhenvald and Dixon (2003), as well as a special issue of the *Journal of Pragmatics* in 2001, and also a handful of frequently cited papers like the ones by Malone (1988) and Willett (1988). However, there can be little doubt that the present monograph by Aikhenvald marks a major advance in the study of evidentiality, both in terms of general recognition for the category, and in terms of knowledge and discussion about it. Of course, this is the first high profile monograph on the topic at all, but the scope and systematicity of Aikhenvald's approach would benefit any topic, even well-studied ones. Aikhenvald works typologically and examined over 500 languages for grammatical evidentiality. She does so under a wide range of viewpoints, including semantic extension, interaction with other categories, grammaticalization, and use in discourse. In general, her results are convincing, but the information on evidentiality in individual languages appears not to be always equally accurate. Section 2 is devoted to a broad overview of her work. In section 3, I give an evaluation and point out some potential problems.

2. Summary of contents

The book consists of 12 chapters. 10 contents chapters are framed by an introduction and a summary. A definition of the category is given right in the beginning. “Evidentiality is a linguistic category whose primary meaning is source of information [...] To be considered as an evidential, a morpheme has to have ‘source of information’ as its core meaning; that is, the unmarked, or default interpretation” (p.3). Aikhenvald is particularly intent on establishing evidentiality as a grammatical category in its own right, and preventing it from being included in other categories, especially modality, as has been done frequently before. For Aikhenvald, “marking data source and concomitant categories is ‘not a function of truth or falsity’. The truth value of an utterance is not affected by an evidential” (p. 4). Her approach to the investigation is rigorously inductive and empirical, in the spirit of Bloomfield (“The only useful generalisations about language are inductive generalisations”; p. 4), and based on Dixon’s Basic Linguistic Theory.

Chapter 2 gives an overview over evidentials worldwide. Aikhenvald proposes to distinguish systems with two, three, four, and five or more choices of evidential marking. Those with only two choices are referred to as “small” systems. They are divided into five types, namely (1) firsthand and non-firsthand, (2) non-firsthand versus ‘everything else’, (3) reported (or ‘hearsay’) versus ‘everything else’, (4) sensory evidence and reported (or ‘hearsay’), and (5) auditory (acquired through hearing) versus ‘everything else’ (p. 25). The semantic domain covered by each of the two terms complement each other. According to Aikhenvald, types (1) to (3) are quite common worldwide while (4) and (5) are rather rare. In fact, (5) has been found only in a single language so far (Euchee). These small systems are particularly characteristic of evidential systems in Eurasia (e.g. Finno-Ugric or Caucasian languages). A map of distributions of evidential systems worldwide on p. 303 shows that Eurasia (including part of South Asia) and large chunks of the Americas are the only regions in the world with large contiguous areas of languages with evidential systems (isolated instances can be found in other regions such as Australia and New Guinea). Similarly to the two-term systems, systems with three or four choices are divided into types as well. When it comes to systems with five or more choices (e.g. Tuyuca and Central Pomo), each attested system seems to be unique. Aikhenvald makes a valid effort here to discover patterns and bring order into complex facts. For the reader, the borderline between different

systems often appears to be vague. Particularly, the less terms there are in a system, the broader and more difficult it becomes to delimit the terms. The author is aware of this problem and addresses it in a subsection devoted to “analytic difficulties” (2.1.2.).

Chapter 3 deals with the encoding of evidentiality. Evidentials may be typically expressed inflectionally, with clitics, or with particles, but, as the author states, there are hardly any morphological limitations on their expression. Aikhenvald seems to demand, however, that in a single language the evidentials form a coherent morphosyntactic category in order to acknowledge the existence of an evidential “system” in a language. Some languages have evidentials which are “scattered” among various morphosyntactic classes (e.g. Japanese, West Greenlandic). Systems in these languages are seen by the author “somewhat problematic and thus only marginally relevant for the present study” (p. 81). A large part of the chapter deals with markedness in evidential systems, and, as a special problem, with evidentially neutral forms and omissions of evidentials.

In chapter 4, evidential extensions of non-evidential categories are discussed. Quite often, a language does not have grammaticalized evidentiality, but one or more of its other grammatical categories may have evidential connotations. Thus, in many Caucasian languages, including Georgian, the perfect, entailing a meaning component of resultativity, has evidential connotations. Cross-linguistically, evidential extensions can be found also with passives, nominalizations, and complementations, among others. Also, all languages have some tools to convey reported speech, and the borderlines between reported speech and reported evidentiality may not always be clear. Chapter 5, discussing the meaning of evidentials, including also their extensions into other categories, approaches from the opposite direction, and chapter 6 follows up with extension into mirativity. Mirativity as a category of “speaker’s ‘unprepared mind’, unexpected new information, and concomitant surprise” (p. 195), is a category saliently related to evidentiality. Aikhenvald argues that despite the fact that in many languages mirativity exists only as an extension of evidential meaning, these are separate categories. The justification comes from languages which express mirativity as the extension of another category (e.g. Semelai; p. 210), or have independent expression of mirativity (e.g. Kham, p. 211).

Chapter 7 brings up the topic of evidential and person. In brief, for many evidentials what matters is the distinction between first person and non-first person. Non-firsthand, non-visual, inferential, and reported evidentials often presuppose use with non-first person participants. The

choice of an evidential that goes counter to this rule may trigger so-called ‘first-person effects’, including the implication of irony, surprise, or lack of intentionality or controllability. In some languages, like Eastern Pomo, evidentials may be a means of implicit person marking, since they presuppose the involvement of a certain person. (p. 235). Chapter 8 deals with the interaction of evidentiality with categories other than person. These include clause type, negation, modality, and tense and aspect. Most conspicuous are the interactions with clause type and tense. Usually, if a language has different evidential choices depending on clause type, it is declarative main clauses where the most choices are available, while in dependent clauses or imperatives the options are generally restricted. One may talk here of different subsystems of evidentiality, depending on clause type (e.g. p. 255). With respect to tense, many languages have more evidential choices available in the past than in other tenses, or, they may even have evidential marking only in the past.

Chapter 9 discusses the origin of evidentials. Like most other grammatical categories, the most common source of evidentials is the grammaticalization of lexical categories, first and foremost verbs. Typical examples are verbs of speech which grammaticalize into reported or quotative markers. This often goes hand in hand with a reanalysis of the complement clause of such a verb as a main clause (p. 272). Evidentials can also be grammaticalized from deictic and locative markers or evidentiality strategies (chapter 4), among others.

Chapter 10 is one of the most impressive chapters of the book, dealing with evidentiality in discourse and in the lexicon. The passages on how evidentials are linked to certain types of discourse, or speech registers, and can be manipulated by speakers for their rhetoric purposes are fascinating to read. With respect to the lexicon, there is salient interaction between evidentials and certain verb classes. One case that is mentioned throughout the book is that of verbs of internal states, including emotions, desires, physical states etc.. In many languages, one needs to use an “indirect” evidential, for instance an inferred evidential, when referring to the internal states of someone else than the speaker. The chapter ends with a flow chart that shows how “correct” evidentials are chosen, depending on a variety of factors including discourse and verb class (p. 331). Chapter 11, the last contents chapter, expands into further issues, many of which already emerged in the relationship between evidentials and discourse, namely the relationships between evidentials, cognition and culture. In the first place, this chapter brings home the point of how important evidentials are in

languages which have them as full-fledged systems, and how much speakers are aware of their importance. If speakers of a language with evidentials communicate in a language that doesn't have them, they often try to make up for them with lexical means, which leads to awkward results. For them, lack of evidentials may mean lack of precision or even lack of truthfulness (p. 333-338).

Chapter 12 provides a concise summary of the book. It is followed by a "fieldworker's guide" with a catalogue of questions, which should be very welcome by any field linguists working on a language with evidentiality. In fact, as Aikhenvald states, "most languages with large evidentiality systems are spoken by small groups of indigenous peoples" (p. 334), and given the ongoing catastrophic decline of languages spoken by small communities world-wide, high-quality documentation of languages, including evidentiality systems, and by means of a solid descriptive framework like Dixon and Aikhenvald's, is an urgent task.

3. Critical evaluation

As was already stated in the introduction, this is a highly important book which takes the field a step forward. Not only is this the first systematic monographic account of evidentiality as a category, the description is accomplished in admirable systematicity and comprehensiveness. From meaning range to formal expression to grammaticalization, one gets the feeling that the book provides the (preliminary) answer to every question that naturally emerges when dealing with this category.

When it comes to accuracy in detail, however, this book may be somewhat controversial. I will mention here just a few points that I noticed and that I think may point to issues where closer investigation is desirable. A thread running throughout the book is that Aikhenvald's data are most convincing, and her account is most compelling, when she draws on the data from languages of which she has first-hand knowledge. These are most importantly Tariana (see Aikhenvald 2003) and Estonian. There are also a number of other languages with which the author either appears to be well acquainted (e.g. Tucano, Quechua, varieties of Portuguese and Spanish in South America), or for which she can rely on data that she obtained directly from specialists on the language (e.g. Jarawara/Dixon or Qiang/LaPolla). In the case of many other languages, the data of which are taken from grammars or papers, the description seems to stand on more shaky feet. This is a methodological problem for language typology in

general, and one with which anyone who has experience of working typologically can only sympathize. Perhaps one ought to simply admire the number of languages Aikhenvald manages to cover with first-hand or near first-hand data.

On the other hand, I should say that I found the treatment of those languages I happen to have some first-hand knowledge of myself a little problematic, and this inevitably made me wonder about the reliability of data from all the other languages that do not belong to the author's main sources. The first case in point is German. If it makes sense at all to claim that German has grammaticalized evidentiality (Aikhenvald believes that it doesn't), the prime evidence would certainly be the evidential ('reported' or 'quotative') constructions of the modal verbs *sollen* and *wollen*. *Sollen* is brought up with the following example on p. 150:

- (1) *Er soll sich das Bein gebrochen haben*
 'Apparently he has broken his leg'

The translation here is misguided. Instead of *apparently*, *sollen* should have been rendered with *allegedly* in English. *Sollen* + perfect is a construction that unambiguously marks the reported, or, as the common term in the literature goes, "quotative" (cf. Diewald 1999, Letnes 1997). Consider, in contrast, the explanation that is given by Aikhenvald (p. 150): "In German, the modal verb *sollen* 'must' may indicate that the speaker is reporting the information from someone else or that they inferred it or assumed it [...] The English *must* may have similar meaning." As stated above, the meaning in this construction is clearly reported and not inferred or assumed. English *must*, at least in the standard varieties, has no comparable use. In fact, if anything, the inferential use of English *must* corresponds to the inferential use of German *müssen* (cf. Mortelmans 2001), rather than *sollen*.

Apart from the problematic interpretation of these data from a specific language, the question arises here where grammaticalized evidentiality begins. For Aikhenvald, the criterion is whether a "morpheme" has evidentiality as its primary meaning. In the case of German, the evidential meaning of *wollen* and *sollen* is certainly not primary for the morphemes. However, there are two constructions, namely *sollen* and *wollen* in present tense form and with perfect main verbs that are specialized on evidentiality. Taking into account that there is a growing recognition of the importance of constructions (versus morphemes "in isolation") in linguistics, I think

that the existence of these specialized grammatical constructions is a good ground for claiming that German has grammaticalized evidentiality. On the other hand, it would certainly be an overstatement to assert that German has an evidential “system.”

Few would doubt that Japanese has grammaticalized evidentiality. However, in the system presented in this book, it is one of the languages with “scattered” means of encoding modality. Therefore, in the author’s view, Japanese does not have evidentiality as a unitary grammatical category, and systems like that of Japanese are viewed as “only marginally relevant for [this] study of evidentiality.” Accordingly, the Japanese evidentials are labeled as mere “so-called” evidentials (Aikhenvald 2004: 81). Again, as Japanese is a fairly well-documented language like German, I feel that a closer investigation of the facts should have been possible (the author appears to base herself exclusively on Aoki 1986). This, then, might have led to a quite different, and arguably more accurate, interpretation. Japanese has four morphemes in the verbal complex which are widely recognized as being evidential. These are the nominal-adjectival suffix –*soo* for apparent imminence, the adjectival particle *rasii* for reported and inference, the particle *soo* for reported, and the (almost) synonymous noun *yoo* and nominal-adjectival particle *mitai* for inference based on appearance. Superficially, they are diverse indeed. But in terms of morphosyntactic combination, four of them, namely *rasii*, *soo*, *yoo* and *mitai* basically occupy the same structural slot in the verbal complex. Morphemes in the verbal complex, can, on the basis of their distribution, be classified into three classes, namely A inflections, B derivational suffixes, and C particles. These are combined according to the formula Verb+B_r+A+(C_r+B_r+A)_r. (“r” signals recursivity). Everything except one inflection (A) is optional. Despite their different morphological makeup *rasii*, *soo*, *yoo* and *mitai* basically participate in slot C, and –*soo* in slot B. The combinations of morphemes are only partially restricted morphologically, but most simply by what makes sense. The particle *soo* can indeed appear further outside in recursive combination than other C morphemes, but not as the result of any morphological restrictions, or because it would occupy a different slot in a template, but simply to the extent that it makes sense. While all other evidentials in Japanese combine some kind of evidence with inference, *soo* is purely reported without any inferential connotations. It is understandable if evidentials which combine evidence with inference are labeled as “so-called” evidentials, although Aikhenvald recognizes inferentials as regular members of evidentials

systems. I find it highly debatable from any perspective, however, if even a pure reported suffix is demoted to the status of a “so-called” evidential. From a broader point of view, the case of Japanese seems to raise the question of whether it is justified to exclude systems with markers that have divergent morphological properties as marginal. As shown here, they may appear to be mixed only from a specific theoretical viewpoint, or in a specific description. Also, no clear borderline is given between so-called “scattered” evidentiality (p. 80-82) on the one hand, and evidentiality subsystems (p. 82-87). In the viewpoint of the present book, it is apparently only the latter which merit closer investigation.

Another point in which the author is perhaps not entirely successful is the discussion of the relationship between evidentiality and modality. Aikhenvald quite vigorously maintains that these are different categories, but I feel that the arguments presented in the book will not be sufficient to really lay this issue to rest. Apparently, the central argument is that “marking information source as a grammatical category does not imply any reference to validity or reliability of knowledge or information” (p. 5). If this turns out to be true, I find this a strong argument indeed, but as it stands now, it is simply a claim, and perhaps a book chapter of its own or a stand-alone paper would be necessary in order to back up this claim in more detail. Other arguments appear to be less convincing, or of purely rhetorical nature. Thus, for instance, it doesn’t really matter that evidentials have been grouped with epistemics from the point of view of European scholars who are not familiar with evidentiality from their own languages (p. 7). The only thing that counts is if this view is actually correct or not. The fact that evidentials may be compatible with irrealis or other mood and modality marking (e.g. p. 68) tells little as well. In many if not most languages, markers of different modalities are compatible with each other. Even in many Germanic languages deontic and epistemic modals may occur in the same clause (usually the epistemic modal takes the deontic one in its scope), and even epistemic markers in different slots may co-occur with each other. Subjunctive marking and modals may also co-occur frequently. Therefore, nothing emerges from this that would speak against regarding evidentiality as one type of modality on a par with epistemic modality, irrealis, or deontic modality. On the other hand, as the author remarks herself, in other languages, evidentiality and mood/modality are mutually exclusive or occupy the same slot in the morphological template (e.g. p. 13, 68). As I mentioned above, it may be questioned whether the author does not place too much weight on morphosyntactic criteria when

identifying grammatical evidentiality in languages. If morphosyntactic criteria are applied it should be done consistently, which might then, questionably, lead to the exclusion of markers which are in a paradigmatic relationship with epistemic or other modal markers. The typologically more profitable way, however, I suggest, is to view the category rigorously semantically, taking into account that morphosyntax is always the product of historical vagaries, and hardly ever consistent across languages, or even within one language. This would lead to a broader view of evidentiality in language. It deserves mentioning in this connection that recently a fruitful line of research of evidentiality in languages such as English, Dutch, German and Spanish has developed in functional and cognitive linguistics. The author apparently disapproves of the use of the term “evidentiality” in these languages, but with a few exceptions she cautiously avoids to comment on and (potentially) confront this type of research in any detail.

Other theoretical issues that would have benefited from more discussion are the question of obligatoriness of the category, which is far from trivial if unmarked forms are also regarded as part of the system, and the distinction of “scattered” evidentiality and evidentiality sub-system, mentioned above. In general, it would be good to have a coherent picture about what is understood by “sub-system.”

The book is generously equipped with indexes (language index, author index, subject index). One, however, is sorely missing, namely a list of those 500 languages which the author based her study on, and, most importantly, her (preliminary) judgment of which of these languages do have grammatical evidentiality, and if so, which system (chapter 2) they adhere to. The book would gain considerably in transparency if such a list were provided. Aikhenvald’s hypotheses would become more testable, and I sincerely hope that a second edition or a paperback edition will come with it.

The prose of the volume is very dense and repetitious. Therefore it is suitable as a reference work rather than as a book to be read from the beginning to the end. In fact, the repetitions should be quite helpful if the book is used as a reference because the reader can be sure that an issue is mentioned at every point where it is relevant. The book is carefully edited and comes in a high-quality printing and binding.

Overall, I can only repeat from the introduction that this is a book that represents a considerable advance in research on evidentiality. There is little doubt that it will become a reference on the topic for years to come. The author, on the other hand, has firmly established herself with this

publication as the number one expert on evidentiality. Claims about particular languages or particular theoretical claims may turn out to be disputable, or may even be shown to be mistaken. In this respect, the book is reminiscent of genealogical-typological work of Greenberg. Painted in bold strokes, specific claims have been contested, often vigorously, and sometimes justifiedly, by specialists on particular languages or language areas. This doesn't lessen the overall significance of the work. Aikhenvald has opened the floor for discussion, and everyone with an interest in this area can only appreciate this.

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