Scary monsters should not exist…or should they?

Narrow scope grammatical evidentiality in Basque and the question of nominal TAM

1. The problem

In a quarter of the world’s languages (e.g., Quechua, Tibetan) speakers must disclose information source (Chafe & Nichols 1986, Willet 1988). For example, if I say “my cat was in the toolshed”, how do I know this? (i.e., first/second hand information, weak/strong inference, general knowledge…). Generative and typological studies agree that grammatical evidentials have propositional objects: they always take sentential scope (Cinque 1999, Speas 2006, Aikhenvald 2004, Higginbotham to appear). While there are languages with nominal tense (see Nordlinger & Sadler 2004 in *Language* and Tonhauser’s reply focusing on Guarani 2007, 2008), and in fact nominal tense may be expected on theoretical grounds (e.g., Enç 1986), evidence for modals and evidentials in nouns is anecdotal. For Lowe (1999) Nambiquara has nominal evidentiality, yet Kroeker (2001) analyzes these morphemes as nominal tense. Nominal evidentiality is patent in Jarawara only (Alexandra Aikhenvald, p.c.; see Dixon 2004: 306). Parallel to evidentiality, a similar consensus holds of the scope of modals: it must be sentential. Only Iate (Lapenda 1968) and Aguaraná (Jivaroan, Peru) seem capable of narrow scope (Simon Overall, p.c.).

2. Meet a scary monster: EDO

Basque, an isolate spoken in Spain and France, has grammatical evidential markers (*author* 2008). For example, EDO is an inferential equivalent to *epistemic must* (e.g., “my keys must be here” with Azkue 1925: 470, §689) or *probably* if it modifies a constituent (with Azkue 1925: 252, §409). The evidential has sentential scope if placed at the end of the sentence (1). However, if *edo* occurs at the right edge of a phrase (2), its scope is limited to that phrase. Is it possible that EDO retains sentential scope and somehow attaches to focused constituents, as in Tariana (Aikhenvald 2003: 288)? Two arguments against this possibility are that (i) EDO is quite happy without verbs (3) and (ii) that its “translation” (though not its core meaning) changes depending on scope (“must”, “possible”; 4: “about” for time & distance).

Basque evidential markers have been treated as modal-like particles in the grammatical tradition (e.g., Zubiri & Zubiri 2000; see also Jendraschek 2003, a recent monograph building on this tradition). A reassessment of Basque evidentiality is long overdue (*author* 2008). That said, regardless of whether these markers are modal or evidential in nature, (1-4) make Basque obligatory research material for the study of scope in evidentiality and/or modality, because narrow scope is presumed not to be possible.

3. Further questions on evidential scope: parentheticals in a Spanish-to-Basque Parallel Corpus

Despite the accounts of the Basque grammatical tradition, some scholars have agreed that Basque has at least a grammatical hearsay evidential (Jacobsen 1986: 7; Aikhenvald 2004: 284): OMEN. Here is an example from a bilingual database of magazine articles written in Spanish and then translated to Basque (5: *Consumer Eroski Parallel Corpus*). In (5), OMEN is interpreted with sentential scope for the two verbs. The possibility to inspect the same sentences expressing hearsay evidence in Spanish and Basque provides empirical evidence that OMEN must take sentential scope. If the Spanish lexical strategy has narrow scope, then Basque also uses various lexical strategies (6: supposedly > *ustez* ‘supposedly’). Contrary to expectations, if sentential scope is expressed by means of a parenthetical in Spanish, then Basque translators deploy a parenthetical, rather than OMEN (Table 1). The distinction Basque draws is unexpected, inviting thoughts on Higginbotham’s insightful treatment of parentheticals and evidentials as binary structures (if they resist embedding as if-clause antecedents; OMEN is rare in this environment).

4. Concluding remarks

In light of EDO & OMEN, Basque calls for further discussion on the scope of evidentials. In the interest of space, we omitted OHI ‘habitual/general knowledge’ that modifies nouns too: *lehendakari OHTa* ‘former president’; elizkoi [church+OHI] ‘devout’). Nordlinger & Sadler (2004) argue that nominal tense is less frequent because nouns are more time stable. However, a frequency argument would be self-contradictory for evidentiality (e.g., *aparentemente* ‘apparently’ modifies adjectives 25 times and verbs only twice in the corpus). The data suggests that narrow scope is rather more frequent than sentential scope. In familiar languages it is clear that lexical strategies can be deployed to qualify structures smaller than a sentence: “The bill will be revoked *presumably* Tuesday or sometime next week.” Why does this scope grammaticalize less often? Are then some of these evidentials *scary monsters* or *logically expected facts*?
Examples:

(1) Maria etor(r)-i da edo. (2) Maria edo etor(r)-i da. (2’) Maria etor(r)-i edo da. Maria must have come.’ ‘Probably Maria has come.’ ‘Maria has come or something.’

(3) a. Bai, edo b. Atzo edo (3’) etorri edo (!?) [← also in imperatives]

‘Yes, I guess’ ‘Yesterday or so’ ‘Why don’t you come?’ [← imperative use]

(4) a. Bi metro edo dauka b. Bost-etan edo nahiago duzu?

two meters EVID has five-at EVID prefer AUX

‘It has about two meters.’ ‘Do you prefer to meet around 5?’

(5) aúin esta lejos la que parece la opción definitiva: ...

‘what seems to be the best solution is yet to come: …’

Azkeneko aukera omen den ... urruti omen dugu oraino

‘…if we find a dead fish or a supposedly poisoned bait, it is very important to apply…’

…oso garrantzitsua da animalia baten gorpua edo amu ustez pozoitu bat aurkitzen badugu...

(7) Table 1. Interplay between lexical and grammatical evidentiality in Basque hearsay evidence.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>TYPE OF SCOPE</th>
<th>SPANISH ORIGINAL</th>
<th>BASQUE TRANSLATION</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Sentential</td>
<td>verb, adverb or PP</td>
<td>omen</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sentential</td>
<td>parenthetical</td>
<td>parenthetical</td>
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<td>Narrow</td>
<td>adverb or PP</td>
<td>adverb or PP</td>
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References


