

Rutgers-Siena Joint Workshop “Mind and Culture”
Certosa di Pontignano (Siena)
1-2 June 2009

EVIDENTIALS AS NOT-AT-ISSUE ASSERTION

Sarah E. Murray
Department of Linguistics
Rutgers, The State University of New Jersey
`semurray@rutgers.edu`

The evidential contribution of sentences containing evidentials is typically analyzed as belonging to a separate level of illocutionary meaning (e.g. a sincerity condition, [1]) or as a presupposition (e.g., [2], [3]). These analyses aim to capture certain semantic facts about evidentials, including that the propositional and evidential contributions need to be distinguished and that the evidential contribution is not challengeable. However, a presuppositional approach cannot account for the fact that evidentials, which occur on every sentence in some languages, contribute new information. On the other hand, a speech act modifier approach (e.g., [1]) locates an arguably truth-conditional contribution in the sincerity conditions. In addition, it posits a new kind of speech act to account for data with reportative evidentials. In this talk, I argue for a compositional alternative where the evidential contribution is asserted, but it is not part of the at-issue content of a sentence. The at-issue proposition, the ‘main point’ ([4], [5]), is the proposition in the scope of the evidential. In this proposal, the evidential contribution is new, not presupposed, and separated from the propositional contribution without appealing to a separate level of illocutionary meaning.

Selected References

- [1] FALLER, M. 2002. *Semantics and Pragmatics of Evidentials in Cuzco Quechua*. Ph.D. thesis, Stanford.
- [2] IZVORSKI, R. 1997. The present perfect as an epistemic modal. In A. Lawson (Ed.), *Proceedings from Semantics and Linguistic Theory VII*, pp. 222–239. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University.
- [3] MATTHEWSON, L., ET AL. 2008. Evidentials as Epistemic Modals: Evidence from St’át’imcets. In J.V. Craenenbroeck (Ed.), *Linguistic Variation Yearbook*, volume 7. John Benjamins Publishing Company.
- [4] PAPAFRAGOU, A. 2006. Epistemic modality and truth conditions. *Lingua*, 116:1688–1702.
- [5] SIMONS, M. 2007. Observations on embedding verbs, evidentiality and presupposition. *Lingua*, 117:1034–56.