EVIDENTIALS AS NOT-AT-ISSUE ASSERTION

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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