

Further dimensions of evidential variation: Evidence from Nl̓eʔkepmxcín

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Matthewson et al. (2007), investigating the evidential system of the Salishan language St'át'imcets, establish a degree of cross-linguistic variation regarding which evidential meanings are specified and which are left to context: whereas English epistemic modals specify quantificational force but not evidence type, St'át'imcets evidentials specify evidence type but not quantificational force.

A close examination of the evidential system of Nl̓eʔkepmxcín (Thompson River Salish), a language closely related to St'át'imcets, suggests that evidentials may vary even further regarding what they specify and what they leave to context. Two of the Nl̓eʔkepmxcín evidentials, *ek^w* (REPORTATIVE) and *nke* (INFERENTIAL), act in ways parallel to their St'át'imcets counterparts, but the third evidential, *nuk^w*, exhibits unexpected semantic and pragmatic behavior. *nuk^w* is traditionally described as the “non-visual” evidential, frequently appearing when the speaker’s assertion is based on hearing, smell, taste, or touch (Thompson and Thompson, 1992).

(1) *Context: The speaker has just taken a bite of fish.*

cm-s-t-es nuk^w e sqeytn
burn-CAUSE-TR-3SUB SENSE DET fish
'He burned the fish.'

In many ways *nuk^w* patterns with the other Nl̓eʔkepmxcín evidentials. Syntactically, it occupies the same slot in the second-position enclitic sequence, and is in complementary distribution with the other evidentials. Semantically, its evidential meaning likewise projects through negation, resists direct (“That’s not true!”) denial, and is *not-at-issue*: the evidential meaning cannot itself constitute an answer to a question under discussion (Faller, 2002; Murray, 2010; Matthewson, 2010).

Its full range of use, however, is much wider than “non-visual evidence” narrowly construed – it is used just as frequently to express emotional states (2), pain, surprise (3), regret, premonitions, hunches (4), and even negative regard.

(2) q^wnoḡ^w nuk^w k n=sx^wox^w
sad SENSE IRR IPOSS=heart
'I'm sad.'

(3) *Context: The speaker accidentally knocks over her cane.*

k^wi-s-t-ene nuk^w
fall-CAUSE-TRANS-1SUB SENSE
'Oops, I dropped it.'

(4) *Context: The speaker is at the dentist, and has a feeling that something just isn't right about their business.*

te nuk^w teʔ čiy k s=ỵe=s
NEG SENSE NEG be.like IRR NOM=good=3POSS
'It just doesn't seem right.'

In these uses, there is no clear restriction to a particular mode of knowing – exclamations of dismay or realization such as (3), for example, could be supported by visual evidence, by a sudden memory, or inference from results.

On the other hand, *nuk^w* exhibits strict restrictions on other aspects of evidential meaning: it is used only in response to first-person feelings and sensations, and only when these are present at the time of utterance. Unlike the other Nl̥eʔkepmxcín evidentials, and evidentials in many other languages, the “judge” or “origo” of *nuk^w* cannot be shifted to another person in a question, or under a verb of saying; nor can it be used when the relevant evidential experience was in the past. For example, unlike the reportative evidential *ek^{wu}*, which can be used to request an answer based on reportative evidence available to the addressee (5), *nuk^w* cannot request an answer based on the addressee’s sensory experience (6).

(5) keʔ ek^{wu} k s=çelt=s e q^{wo}?
 whether REPORT IRR NOM=cold=3POSS DET water
 ‘Is the water cold [according to what you’ve heard]?’

(6) *keʔ nuk^w xeʔ k s=çlox^w=s
 whether SENSE DEM IRR NOM=hot=3POSS
 ‘Is it [the tea] hot [according to your sensory experience]?’

We propose that, rather than encoding a restriction on evidence source, as do the other evidentials, *nuk^w* instead has a primarily *expressive* meaning (Kaplan, 1999; Potts, 2005; Schlenker, 2007, in the sense of): that the speaker is at the moment of utterance having a notable feeling or sensory experience.

Despite an expressive rather than modal implementation, we argue that *nuk^w* is nonetheless part of the Nl̥eʔkepmxcín evidential system – it is still used to express the source of evidence for a speaker’s claims. The difference between *nuk^w* and more familiar evidentials is, instead, one of what is expressed: *nuk^w* specifies *when* and *by whom* the evidential experience was had, but leaves the exact type of evidence to contextual inference. *nuk^w* thus offers us an additional option regarding evidential restrictions, with implications for evidential typologies and further research on the cross-linguistic expression of evidentiality.

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