

Evidentiality in Ainu: language-specific description and cross-linguistic comparison

Since Chafe and Nichols's (1986) seminal work, the past three decades have seen an increase in the number of studies on evidentiality. Many of these studies have touched upon two pivotal aspects of evidentiality. One of these aspects is the grammaticality of evidentiality as constituting a language category with a paradigm of forms that must be used for an utterance to be judged correct (e.g. Aikhenvald, 2004). The other aspect is the distinction between evidentiality and epistemic modality within the larger domain of modality (e.g. de Haan, 1999) as two separate categories that, however, may overlap being expressed simultaneously (as argued for by Faller 2002, among others).

Following from Aikhenvald's (2004, 2007) influential work on evidentiality, many languages possessing a set of formal devices primarily reserved to encode source of information have started to be reported and discussed within the typological prototypes outlined by Aikhenvald. However, we can see how many other languages that do possess what essentially are evidential forms cannot be said to have an evidential category in Aikhenvald's terms. This is usually because the use of evidential forms is not obligatory, or because the formal devices employed as evidentials in that language do not have source of information as their primary meaning and belong to different grammatical or syntactic categories, thus being scattered across the language's grammar. Furthermore, cross-linguistically it is most common for evidential forms to entail epistemic modality overtones. This obscures the divide between the epistemic modality and evidentiality and by consequence makes the definition of this latter troublesome.

Assuming such strict criteria for the definition of evidentiality hinders cross-linguistic comparison, as those languages where evidentials are not (fully) grammaticalized may be described as not having evidentiality at all. This issue has direct repercussions also on grammar writing, since it raises the question as to where to place a section on evidentiality, provided that such a section is deemed at all necessary.

Ainu (isolate, Japan), in its varieties of Hokkaidō and Sakhalin, presents an interesting case with respect to how evidentiality can be said to constitute a language category and to how it interacts with epistemic modality. Ainu has three types of evidentiality: personal knowledge/direct evidentiality, inferentiality, and reportative evidentiality. Evidential forms in Ainu are not obligatory and evidentiality is encoded in the language via a number of morphosyntactic devices with different origins and synchronically at varied stages of grammaticalization (Dal Corso 2018). Therefore, evidentiality in Ainu cannot be said to be a grammatical category in Aikhenvald's (2004) terms. In addition, though there is evidence to treat evidentiality and epistemic modality separately in the language, for some types of evidentiality these two categories interact simultaneously to define the evidentials' formal encoding.

With reference to Bickel's (2010) *Multivariate Analysis* and Haspelmath's (2010) *categorial particularism*, in this talk I argue for an approach to Ainu evidentiality that aims at capturing the nuances and peculiarities of this category through a description that rests on general comparative concepts and that does not expect a certain number of fixed (or universal) features to be met. Evidentiality is taken as a case study to also argue how an essentially comparative approach through general concepts can be beneficial to grammar writing, in that it simplifies structuring of a grammar and comparison among different publications. Moreover, this ultimately makes a grammar more easily accessible to the reader.

References

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