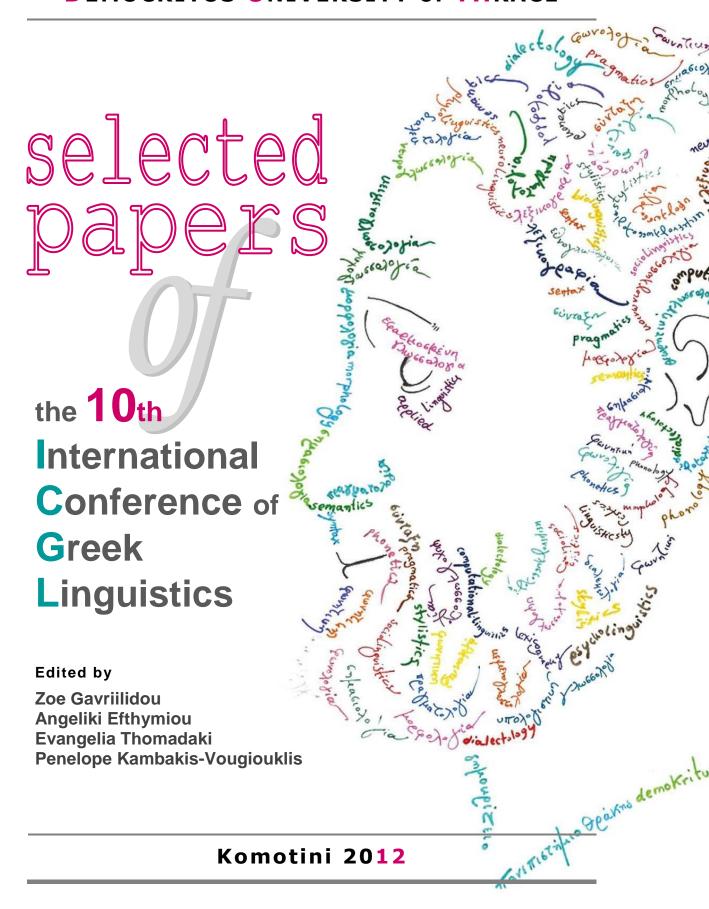
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SOME INSIGHTS INTO EVIDENTIALITY AND EVIDENTIAL MARKERS IN FRENCH¹

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ABSTRACT

A common approach to evidentiality distinguishes three main subcategories of phenomena: evidentiality by inference, by hearsay and by perception. If elementary cases look quite obvious, the problems arise as soon as we intent to give more accurate definitions. This work is an attempt to answer the following questions, on the bases of examples mainly taken from French.: a) What are the grounds that allow an inference by the speaker? Is it really a logical process that is at work, or rather some commonplace knowledge that thus would approximate inferential reasoning to some kind of hearsay mechanism; b) How does the speaker/utterer get involved in the hearsay process? What are the different positions he can occupy with regard to the source of a hearsay? c) Are there linguistic characteristics which reflects the intervening of a perception?

Keywords: Evidentiality, evidential markers, hearsay, inference, perception, semantics.

0. Introduction

Despite the fact that languages obviously consider that human awareness of truth is fairly relative, it is not until recently that studies have been devoted to the different devices used by languages to express the origin of the information carried by a sentence and/or the various attitudes of a speaker towards this knowledge. If languages are used to provide a wide repertoire of devices for expressing these characteristics, their nature usually varies from one language to another one: verbal, nominal, adverbial, etc. The study of such devices has been termed *evidentiality*², each device being an *evidential marker*, and the way in which different languages provide evidential marking is a general question still to be explored. Since it sometimes deals with the speaker's attitude towards the situation s/he refers to in her/his utterance, as we will see later on, evidentiality is obviously part of modality, more precisely **epistemic modality**³.

A commonly accepted claim - based on the wide amount of data investigated until today - is that languages tend to differentiate three general kinds of evidentiality, which can be classified into **direct evidence** and **indirect evidence**. **Direct evidence**, also labeled **attested** or **perceptual evidence**, involves any knowledge acquired through auditory, gustative, olfactory, tactile and visual senses, i.e. by a sensory mode. The indirect type of evidence is the well-known **reported evidence**, better known as **hearsay evidence**, and the **inferred evidence**. From now on, I will, in short, speak of the **perception** type, of the **hearsay** type, and of the **inference** type. Needless to say, these three types can be divided into subsubclasses, a point which will not be considered here. The three types can be exemplified in:

- (1) John must be in his office, his car is in the parking (inference type).
- (2) I was told that John is in his office (hearsay type).

¹ This work is part of the Research Project FFI2009-08714 « Dictionnaire d'opérateurs sémantico-pragmatiques en français contemporain », supported by the *Ministerio de Ciencia e Innovación Español*.

² The notion of *evidentiality* as a linguistic information is commonly attributed to Franz Boas in his *Handbook of American Indian Languages* (1911). The term *evidential* was first used by Roman Jakobson in 1957 as a verbal category to be distinguished from grammatical mood.

³ Some scholars like Chafe: 1986, include *belief* among evidentials, as part of the epistemic system, while others like Bybee: 1985 or Willett: 1988, are more reluctant. The crux of the problem lies in whether evidentiality only deals with the marking of the source of the knowledge, or also includes the speaker's attitude towards this knowledge.

- (3) I can hear John speaking with Mary in his office (perception type). Such cases may look quite obvious as for their interpretation, but the problems arise as soon as we intend to give to each of these categories a more accurate definition. This work is an attempt to answer the following questions, among others, in the case of explicit evidential markers:
- a) What are the grounds that allow an inference by the speaker, as in (1))? Is it really a logical process that is at work, or rather some commonplace knowledge that thus would approximate inferential reasoning to some kind of hearsay mechanism.
- b) How does the speaker/utterer get involved in the hearsay process? What are the different positions he can occupy with regard to the source of a hearsay?
- c) In the case of French, on which linguistic grounds can we determine the nature of the evidence, especially in the case of the perception type?

1. The hearsay type

We will start with the hearsay type, which is – or at least seems to be – the more obvious or visible type in Western languages. The base of hearsay is language itself, since we know an important part of the things we know because we have been told about them by some other people. Languages such as English, French or Spanish have a wide variety of devices to qualify a given knowledge as having been acquired through language communication. Some markers refer to a specific source as à mon avis/in my opinion/a mi parecer; others refer to some indeterminate linguistic community: on dit que, comme on dit; they say, as they say, people say, etc.; dicen, como dicen, cuentan en la prensa, etc. Here are a few real examples:

- (4) "...**Les sondages, qui affirment** que Hilary gagnerait haut la main contre Mc Cain, n'ont pas convaincu le gagnant des primaires démocrates..." (*L'Express*, 28 juillet 2008, p. 32). [The polls, that claim...].
 - (5) "...Il est imprudent de mettre, **comme on dit**, tous ses oeufs dans le même panier..." (Gide, *Robert ou l'intérêt général*, III,) [As the saying goes...].
- (6) "...**Dicen que** antes de morir comentó el croata se debe plantar un árbol, escribir un libro y tener un hijo..." (A. Pérez-Reverte, *El pintor de batallas*, Alfaguara, Madrid, 2006, p. 215) [They say that...].
 - (7) "...Del que te manda, hay que cuidarse siempre. Del amo y del mulo, cuanto más lejos más seguro, como dicen en mi pueblo añadió Robles..." (L. Silva, La reina sin espejo, p. 169) [...as they say in my village...].
 - (8) "...It did no good to think back. The mill cannot grind with the water that is past, **as the old people in the mountain used to say**..." (G. Richards, *Red Kill*, 1980, XIV).
 - (9) "...**They do say** that a trouble shared is a trouble halved..." (F.Cradock, *Thunder over Castle Rising*, 1980, i).

From now on, I will refer to an indeterminate source of a hearsay as a G-speaker, and will concentrate on the study of such G-speakers in Modern French. I will mainly examine two points: a) How can we claim we are dealing with a G-speaker; b) What is the relation between the G-speaker (the source) and the speaker of the utterance.

We will examine the following French evidential markers: *on dit que* ('they say that'), *comme on dit* ('as they say'), and *dit-on* ('..., it is said,...'/'somepeople say'). They show the following characteristics:

- a) They use the French verb *dire* 'to say', as a verb of saying, which can be seen by the possibility of substitution of *dire* by other verbs of saying:
 - (10) On (dit + affirme (state) + prétend (claim)+ raconte (tell) +...) que...
 - (11) Comme on $(dit + pr\acute{e}tend + l'affirme + le raconte + ...), ...$
 - (12) p, $(dit\text{-}on + pr\acute{e}tend\text{-}on + affirme\text{-}t\text{-}on + raconte\text{-}t\text{-}on + ...)$.
- b) French *on* can refer to a community of people, but it is not the only possibility, so that we must <u>find</u> out the linguistic properties supporting the claim that a G-speaker is at work in such expressions. Among other properties, the *on* referring to a G-speaker:
- (i) Can be combined with adverbials such as *généralement* ('generally'), *communément* ('commonly'), *couramment* ('currently'), *habituellement* ('usually'), etc. :
 - (13) Comme on dit **communément**, tout est bien qui finit bien (= 'As they commonly say, all is well that ends well').
 - (14) Une crise se prépare, dit-on **généralement** (= 'A crisis is in the wind, it is generally said').

- On dit **généralement** que les fameux OVNIS ne sont que de banals phénomènes atmosphériques (= 'They generally say that the well-known UFOS are just mere atmospherical phenomena').
- .(ii) Can be combined with aspectual adverbials such as *toujours* ('always'), *souvent* ('often'), *parfois* ('sometimes'), which are compatibles with an interpretation in terms of indefinite plurality:
 - On dit **toujours** qu'il vaut mieux se préparer au pire ('They use to say that the worst is yet to come').
 - (17) Les fameux OVNIS ne sont que de banals phénomènes atmosphériques, dit-on **parfois** ('It is sometimes said').
 - (18) Comme on dit **souvent**, un bon tiens vaut mieux que deux tu l'auras ('As they often say, better a bird in the hand than two in the bush').
- (iii) Can be combined with a **collective noun**⁴, that is a nominal that refers to a set of several unspecified entities of the same category, and cannot be given a definition in extension. Very common examples of collective nouns would be items like *les milieux autorisés* 'the responsible quarters', and *les milieux bien informés* 'the well informed people', *la presse* 'the newspapers. We should also mention expressions like *chez les scientifiques* 'among the scientists'. Below some examples:
 - (19) On dit dans les milieux autorisés qu'une crise se prépare ('in the responsible quarters').
 - (20) Comme on dit **chez les scientifiques**, les fameux OVNIS ne sont que de banals phénomènes atmosphériques.
 - (21) Le premier ministre serait sur le point de démissionner, dit-on dans l'entourage du président ('among the familiars of the president')

We will now aim to determine how does the speaker locates him/herself with respect to the G-speaker, being a G-speaker in a linguistic community, that is a set of real or virtual speakers. The results of our investigation show the following configurations:

- a) The speaker S of *on dit que* can be part of the G-speaker involved, but not necessarily. In this respect, *on dit que* is opposed to *on sait que*⁵, which necessarily includes the speaker S, as exemplified in:
 - (22) (On dit + on sait) qu'il y a un changement climatique en cours, et c'est indiscutable (= 'there is no question about it').
- (23) (**On dit** + *on sait) qu'il y a un changement climatique en cours, mais je suis loin d'être de cet avis (= 'I am far from being of the same opinion').
- b) The speaker S of *comme on dit*, p belongs to the community attached to the G-speaker involved, as can be seen in:
 - On dit que ce n'est pas la mer à boire, (et je suis bien de cet avis + mais je ne suis pas de cet avis).
- (25) **Comme on dit**, ce n'est pas la mer à boire, (**et** je suis bien de cet avis + ***mais** je ne suis de cet avis).
- c) The speaker of *dit-on* does not belong to the community attached to the G-speaker involved, as can be seen in the following contrasts:
- (26) **On dit** qu'il y a un réchauffement climatique, (et selon moi, on a raison + mais selon moi, on a tort) (= 'In my view, (they are right + they are wrong')).
- (27) Il y a un réchauffement climatique, **dit-on**, (*et selon moi, on a raison + mais selon moi, on a tort).

Moreover, *dit-on* cannot combine with an utterance that asserts some truth shared by the speaker. Hence the following contrasts:

- (28) On dit que je sais que Max est à Paris ('They say that I know that Max is in Paris').
- ??Je sais que Max est à Paris, **dit-on**⁶ ('I know that Max is in Paris, some people say').
- (30) Je **saurais** que Max est à Paris, **dit-on** ('I am supposed to know that Max is in Paris, some people say').

Since its pragmasemantic value is not predictable on the base of the usual value of the subject-verb inversion in parentheticals, the evidential marker *dit-on* then appears to be a grammaticalized or even

⁴ See Lecolle: 1998.

⁵ On dit means 'they say', but on sait does not mean 'they know', but rather 'we know, it is a well known fact'.

⁶ Is possible only if *je sais* is some kind of reported speech, in which case *je* does not refer to the speaker as such.

pragmaticalized sequence. It shows a clear contrast with similar markers like *dis-je*, *dis-tu* and *dit-il* which are usually intended to recall a former utterance⁷.

A quite intriguing case is the combination of *dit-on* with gnomic utterances, especially proverbs or sayings, as in:

- (31) Les apparences sont trompeuses, dit-on ('Appearances can be deceiving, it is said').
- (32) L'avenir appartient à celui qui se lève tôt, dit-on ('The early bird catches the worm, it is said').

A fact that seems to contradict our characterization of *dit-on*, since sayings are normally shared by the whole community of speakers. In fact, utterances like (31) and (32) are meant – at least in French – to advise somebody. They can be interpreted as meaning 'I don't want to interfere, but some people would apply the following principle...".

A first conclusion is that in addition to the origin of the information, evidential markers currently tell us something about the position of the speaker as regards this information and its origin. In this aspect, evidential markers show similarities with modalities seen as the speaker's attitude toward what is said.

2. The inference type

As with the hearsay type, the inference type is part of indirect evidence. A first point is the definition itself of the word **inference**. We will from now on call **inference** any sequence of operations starting from a set of premises and ending with a set of conclusions. According to the nature of the mechanism ensuring the inference, three types have been usually distinguished⁸: a) the **deductive** one; b) the **inductive** one; c) the **abductive** one. The first type comes under logic, the last two under reasoning. The most obvious case of inference is of course the logical one: from a given state of affairs, one can deduce some specific consequences in virtue of a logical law. As an example, let's examine Pierce's example:

- (33) 1. All the beans from this bag are white
 - 2. These beans are from this bag.
 - 3. (Then) These beans are white.

Being the mechanism the well-known *modus ponens*: if $p \to q$ and if p, then q. The inductive reasoning draws generalizations from specific cases, as in Pierce's example:

- (34) 1. These beans are from this bag.
 - 2. These beans are white.
 - 3. (Then) All the beans from this bag are white.

As for the abductive reasoning, it is based on the following schema:

- (35) 1. All the beans from this bag are white.
 - 2. These beans are white.
 - 3. (Then) These beans are from this bag.

That is: if $p \rightarrow q$ and q, then p^9 .

In fact, deductive reasoning should be divided into two subcategories, namely **logical deduction** as in (33), and **plausible deduction**, which is based on arguments, as in:

- (36) 1. When somebody works hard, he is (usually) tired.
 - 2. I have been working hard lately.
 - 3. (Hence) I am (likely to be) tired.

The point is now to find out on which grounds the inference is made. To clarify the type of problems bound to the notion of evidential inference, I will take an example from Guentcheva: 1986, namely:

(37) John [must have] left, his luggage is no longer in his room.

The central factual claim is obviously *John's luggage is no longer in his room*, being *John left* the plausible conclusion drawn by inference from the factual claim. The inference itself is a kind of circumstantial inference based upon a rule like [When the luggage of a person is no longer in his room, the person has left the room], which can be considered as an abduction from the gnomic R = [When a]

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⁷ For analogous facts in English, compare the (somewhat unusual) parenthetical say I, said he, etc. and the colloquial expression Says you!

⁸ Pierce: 1965.

⁹ Guentcheva: 1994, gives several examples of abductive inference in everyday language, such as *We have been broken into!*

person leaves his room, he takes his own luggage away]. (37) is then to be classified as a plausible deduction, being the problem the linguistic status of R. There are two possibilities: the first one consists in seeing R as an abstract pattern, the second considers R as some sort of virtual utterance belonging to a common knowledge. In this second case, R is not an explicit but rather an underlying causal principle, but can very often be made explicit, as in:

John [must have] left, his luggage is no longer in his room, and usually, [When a person leaves his room, he takes his own luggage away].

Let's now see a case of induction, as in:

(39) If you are going to Spain, mind Spanish flies, one bit me last year.

Once again, the inference rests upon a rule, namely [Spanish flies bite], which again is not an explicit but an underlying principle and is called up by the factual claim *one bit me last year*. And once again the problem arises of the status of the rule. Last but not least, there is a very well-known category of such gnomic rules that are clearly related to a virtual speaker, namely the proverbs and other sayings. We tend to use sayings as inferential mechanisms, as exemplified in:

(40) "...Show him the stuff. Let him make his own mind up. – Okay. May be you're right at that. Seeing is believing, I guess..." (A. Price, *Our man in Camelot*, 1975).

The speaker of (40) is the speaker of the saying, but in no way the origin of it, which is something like some collective wisdom that is depicted as a virtual voice - as they say, it is said, etc.

A consequence then of the second possibility is that it approximates the inference type to some kind of hearsay type, since the inferential mechanism is then considered to be due to a virtual speaker that can be made explicit for instance in cases like sayings. A problem of choosing the first possibility is that it makes it difficult to represent the way the inference works in reality. In the case of (38) for instance, the inference should go this way:

- (41) 1. [When a person leaves his room, he takes his own luggage away].
 - 2. John's luggage is no longer in his room.
 - 3. (Then) John left his room (by abduction).
- 2. is a factual claim and then an utterance and 3. the utterance that is drawn by inference from 1. and 2. But this is possible only and only if 1. is also an utterance. In the first option, it is not so and 1. is an abstract principle, that is a meta-linguistic proposition. (40) then will work only if 1 is said in a way or another to be equivalent to a real utterance.

To conclude the above, we can see the boundaries between the hearsay type and the inference type are not clearly established. As we have seen before, sayings and proverbs belong to the hearsay type but are used in inferential processes. On the other hand, inferential processes usually rest upon common grounds that might be interpreted as having a hearsay nature.

3. The perception type

As said before, the perception type is part of direct evidence, and involves any sensory mode, auditory, gustative, olfactory, tactile and visual senses as well. As quoted by Anderson: 1986. We usually tend to take our perceptions for granted, and see any perception verb as giving rise to an evidential. Unfortunately, things are not that simple, and in most cases the use of a perception verb is ambiguous between a mere predication and an evidential, as exemplified in:

(42) It looks like gold ('it has the same aspect as gold' + 'it is gold according to my visual perception').

On the other hand, the perception type is primarily a perception type, and its sensory nature is not due to some pragmatic inference. In the following example:

(43) The door is open.

I know that the door is open because I hear (43) or read it, but it means in no way that we have acquired such knowledge through a perception: (43) *implies* a perception, but does not *mean it*. Perception verbs have not given rise to many studies: from a syntactical point of view, see Willems (1981, 2000) for French; and from a semantic point of view, the *Perceptual Reports* have been analyzed as sentences within the intensional framework of *Situation Semantics* (Barwise: 1981, Perry and Barwise: 1981), and as indefinite descriptions of an event within the extensional framework of (Higginbotham: 1984). As in many other languages, French has perception verbs, about thirty, the more frequent being *apercevoir* (*perceive*), *contempler* (*contemplate*), *écouter* (*listen*), *entendre* (*hear*),

goûter (taste), observer (observe), regarder (watch), sentir (smell), voir (see), etc. The problem in both French and in English is that a perceptual report (naked infinitive) like:

(44) Jean a vu Marie pleurer ('John saw Mary weep').

Is totally ambiguous between a mere predication 'What John saw was Mary weep', where *John saw* is the main predication, and an evidential 'Mary wept, John saw it'), where this time *Mary wept* is the main predication. The distinction between true evidential and non-evidential interpretation of a perceptual report is not easy to make, and as far as I know, very few studies have been devoted to find out specific properties related to the evidential interpretation. I will now turn precisely to an indirect way of showing up the presence of a perceptual evidence.

In French, the verb *trouver* 'to find', is very commonly used to express a judgment or an opinion through the construction *je trouve que* 'I find that':

(45) Je trouve que cette pièce de théâtre est excellente ('I find that this play is excellent').

Such a verb also exists in English, Portuguese and Catalan, but in Spanish for instance, its use is restricted to noun phrases: La obra de teatro, la encuentro excelente/? Encuentro excelente la obra de teatro /*Encuentro que la obra de teatro es excelente. The verb trouver has two interesting characteristics:

- a) First, it shares with perception verbs like *voir* 'see' the possibility of a double construction, namely noun phrase and finite clause:
- (46) Je vois Marie impatiente/Je vois que Marie est impatiente ('I see Mary impatient/I see that Mary is impatient')
- Je trouve Marie impatiente/Je trouve que Marie est impatiente ('I find Mary impatient/I find that Mary is impatient').
- b) An utterance of *Je trouve que* SN + V is possible only if the speaker has had a **direct experience** of SN^{10} . Hence the following examples:
 - (48) Je n'ai pas vu cette pièce, mais (je crois + *je trouve) qu'elle est excellente. (Thave not seen this play, but (I think + I find) that it is excellent')
 - (49) Je n'ai pas goûté ce vin, mais (je pense + *je trouve) qu'il est excellent. ('I have not tasted that wine, but (I think + I find) that it is excellent')
 - (50) Je n'ai pas senti ce parfum, mais (j'ai l'impression + *je trouve) qu'il est très frais. ('I have not smelled that perfume, but (I think + I find) that it is very fresh')
 - Je n'ai pas encore écouté ce disque, mais (je suis sûr + *je trouve) que l'interprétation est remarquable.
 ('I have not played that record, but (I am certain + I find) that the interpretation is remarkable')
 - (52) Sans avoir touché le tissu, (je parie + *je trouve) qu'il est très doux. Without touching the fabric, (I bet + I find) that it is smooth

As opposed to:

- (53) J'ai vu cette pièce, et je trouve qu'elle est excellente. ('I saw this play, and I find it is excellent')
- (54) J'ai goûté ce vin, et je trouve qu'il est excellent.
 ('I tasted this wine, and I find that it is excellent')
- (55) J'ai senti ce parfum, et je trouve qu'il est très frais. ('I smelled this perfume, and I find that it is very fresh')
- (56) J'ai écouté ce disque, et je trouve que l'interprétation est remarquable. ('I played this record, and I find that the interpretation is remarkable')
- (57) J'ai touché le tissu, et je trouve qu'il est très doux.('I touched the fabric, and I find that it is very smooth').

Hence, the French verb *trouver* provides us a criterion to determine a subclass of perceptual evidentials. Not the whole class, since *trouver* implies that a judgment be possible.

What has been said above has an important consequence on the notion of direct evidence. Consider the following examples (Anscombre: 2010b):

- (58) Je trouve que la mort de César a été horrible.
 - ('I found Caesar's death horrible ').
- (59) Je trouve horrible de mourir à vingt ans. ('I find it horrible to die being twenty years old').

¹⁰ Ducrot: 1975.

It is fairly obvious that the speaker cannot have a 'direct experience' of Caesar's death, neither can he have a direct experience of 'dying being twenty years old'. In fact, some common knowledge is considered as taken for granted, and hence is considered as direct experiences. It can be historical knowledge as in (58), or else common places as in (59), which relies upon something like 'One dies when one is old'. Direct evidence appears then to refer to things that are considered as unquestionable facts, based on perceptual facts and on historical facts or commonplaces as well. Further investigations should then examine the linguistic relationship between *hear-say* phenomena and perceptual reports.

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