

# On the exceptional status of reportative evidentials

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**I. Introduction:** Aikhenvald (2004) defines evidentiality as “a linguistic category whose primary meaning is source of information”, such as DIRECT: visual, auditory, etc.; REPORTATIVE: what others have said; RESULTS: abductive inference based on a result state; and REASONING: inference based on general knowledge. While this basic description makes evidentials seem uniform as a class, Faller (2002) and many subsequent studies of their semantics/pragmatics have shown a large amount of heterogeneity both across languages and across evidentials within a given language.

**In this paper,** we examine one such case of variation first analyzed in detail by Faller (2002) for Cuzco Quechua: the potential to *deny* REPORTATIVE claims, a pattern we dub Reportative Exceptionality (RE). Whereas Faller and others give *semantic* accounts of RE, we propose an alternative: RE is due to pragmatic perspective shift of the sort discussed by Harris & Potts (2009) for non-speaker-oriented appositives and expressives in English. REPORTATIVES better facilitate this shift by making a non-speaker perspective salient in the shared discourse context: the reporter.

**II. Reportative exceptionality:** Utterances of the form EVID(*p*) are commonly taken to do two things: (i) assert *p* (or some modalized version thereof), and (ii) convey in some way that the speaker has EVID-type evidence for *p*. Given (i), we expect it to be infelicitous/contradictory for a single speaker to go on to deny *p*. Indeed, such infelicity is found consistently for DIRECT evidentials as well as ‘weaker’ evidentials such as RESULTS and REASONING. For REPORTATIVES, however, we show – drawing primarily on published data from more than fifteen unrelated languages – that the possibility for such denials like (1) in Cuzco Quechua is quite consistent cross-linguistically.

- (1) a. Pay-kuna-S ñoqa-ma-qa qulqi-ta muntu-ntin-pi saqiy-wa-n  
(s)he-PL-REP I-ILLA-TOP money-ACC lot-INCL-LOC leave-1O-3  
*p* = ‘They leave me a lot of money...’ EVID = Speaker was told that *p*
- b. mana-má riki riku-sqa-yki ni un sol-ta centavo-ta-pis saqi-sha-wa-n-chu  
not-IMPR right see-PP-2 not one Sol-ACC cent-ACC-ADD leave-PROG-1O-3-NEG  
*q* = ‘(but) that’s not true, as you have seen, they don’t leave me one sol, not one cent.’  
EVID = Speaker has direct evidence that *q*. (Faller, 2002, p. 191)

Previous authors (e.g. Faller (2002), Faller (2007), Murray (2010)) give accounts where RE is part of the semantics of the REPORTATIVE. For example, Faller (2002) claims that the conventional contribution of the REPORTATIVE *-si* (unlike other evidentials) is to modify the speech act performed by (1a) from an assertion to a ‘presentation’. Such an approach, however, fails to *explain* why REPORTATIVES consistently allow for such denials whereas other evidentials do not. Furthermore, since RE is robust within languages whose evidentials differ in many other ways (e.g. syntactic and scopal properties), it seems likely that no single semantic solution would be possible.

**III. Reportative exceptionality as perspective shift:** Whereas most content embedded under attitude verbs like *think* and *believe* is attributed to the verb’s subject, Potts (2005) argues that appositive relative clauses and expressives are invariably speaker-oriented. More recent work has shown, though, that non-speaker-orientation is possible in a sufficiently rich context like (2). Harris & Potts (2009) argue, however, that such non-speaker-orientation is not due to compositional semantics, but rather is a pragmatically induced perspective-shift made possible by a ‘perspectively-rich’ environment. Being the subject of an attitude verb is one factor which helps establish the disconnect between Joan’s perspective and the speaker’s, but it is neither necessary nor sufficient.

- (2) Joan is crazy. She’s hallucinating that some geniuses in Silicon Valley have invented a new brain chip that’s been installed in her left temporal lobe ... Joan believes that her chip, which she had installed last month, has a twelve year guarantee.

**Claim:** RE like (1) is an instance of perspective shift of the same sort as (2). This sort of perspective shift is readily possible with REPORTATIVE evidentials because the semantics of reportatives makes salient another perspectival agent – the reporter – whereas DIRECT, INFERENCE, and REASONING evidentials are explicitly *indexical*, invoking the speaker’s own perception or inference. Beyond explaining why REPORTATIVES are exceptional in this way, this account helps explain further features of the denials. First, as in (1b), attested denials invariably use a DIRECT evidential rather than another REPORTATIVE or weaker evidential. Second, (1b) is typical of such denials in that it possesses a variety of other ‘evaluative’ elements which serve to further clarify the speaker’s distinct perspective: words glossed as ‘true’ or ‘really’, first person attitude verbs, and negative polarity items. In at least some languages, prosody plays a similar role (e.g. Shipibo-Konibo *ronki* Valenzuela (2003), Tagalog *daw* Schwager (2010)). In sum, the REPORTATIVE introduces a second perspective which together with context and evaluatively charged denial sentences serves to establish a ‘perspectively-rich environment’, facilitating felicitous sequences like (1)<sup>1</sup>.

**IV. Evidence from indirect evidentials:** Further support for the pragmatic hypothesis comes from Bulgarian and Turkish, where a single evidential has both reportative and non-reportative uses. As predicted, denials like (1) are possible only when context provides a reportative evidential source (Smirnova (2013) for Bulgarian, Şener (2011) for Turkish), as the glosses of Turkish (3) suggest:

- (3) Sinan bisiklet-ten düş-müş ama gerçekte öyle birşey yok  
 Sinan bike-ABL fall-INDIR but actually like nothing exists  
 ‘Sinan fell off the bike, {reportedly/#I infer}, but in fact nothing like that happened.’

**V. Conclusions:** Much research on evidentials has focused on characterizing variation between different evidentials within and across languages. Since we give a pragmatic account of reportative exceptionality, our account therefore allows for a *semantics* where reportatives are indeed parallel to DIRECT and RESULTS) evidentials, differing only in the evidence type. Building on Gunlogson (2001), Farkas & Bruce (2010), and other recent work, we assume discourse contexts with a Stalnakerian Common Ground (CG) and a set of public Discourse Commitments (DC) for each discourse participant (NB. as stressed by Stalnaker (2002), the CG may diverge from speaker beliefs, even public ones). An evidential-marked declarative, then, makes two discourse contributions:

- (4) **Discourse components:**  $\langle X, CG_X, \{DC_x \mid x \in X\} \rangle$   
 (5) An **evidential assertion** by *a* with content *p* and evidential source EVID:  
 a. Adds EVID(*p*) to DC<sub>*a*</sub>.  
 b. Proposes to add *p* to CG<sub>{*a*,*b*}</sub> on the basis of (5a), subject to acceptance or denial by *b*.

**Selected References:** Faller, M. (2002) *Semantics and pragmatics of evidentials in Cuzco Quechua*, Ph.D. Stanford; Harris, J. and Potts, C. (2009) Perspective-shifting with appositives and expressives, *Linguistics & Philosophy* 32(6): 523-552; Matthewson, L. and Davis, H. and Rullman, H. (2007) Evidentials as epistemic modals: evidence from St’át’imcets, *Linguistic Variation Yearbook* 7: 202-254; Murray, S. (2010) *Evidentiality and the structure of speech acts*, Ph.D. Rutgers; Şener, N. (2011) *Semantics and pragmatics of evidentials in Turkish*, Ph.D. UConn; Smirnova, A. (2013) Evidentiality in Bulgarian: Temporality, Epistemic Modality, and Information Source, *Journal of Semantics* 30(4): 479-532.

<sup>1</sup>Previous literature has regarded RE as a point of cross-linguistic variation with St’át’imcets (Matthewson et al. (2007)) and Gitksan (Peterson (2010)) not patterning with the languages discussed here. However, while we do not present an in depth analysis of the St’át’imcets data, perspective shift of a different sort – verbal irony – has been claimed to be impossible in the language (Lyon (2009)), so this exception can plausibly be explained in our account. For Gitksan, the relevant denial example in fact involves a lexical verb glossed as ‘hear’ with no reportative evidential =*kat*, and therefore does not bear on the generalization here. Finally, for both languages, utterances of the form REP(*p*) are claimed to be infelicitous in contexts where the speaker has *private* knowledge that *p* false. Such data are consistent with the account we propose here, since neither the context nor the sentence itself make the speaker’s differing perspective on *p* clear to the addressee.