

Knowing in interaction: fieldwork on epistemicity and intersubjectivity

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Epistemicity in language concerns expressions of knowing, including belief, attention, perceptual accessibility, attitude, and rights to knowledge, as well as their distribution among the speech-act participants. The distribution of knowledge of events has been investigated in terms of ‘intersubjectivity’, and more recently under the term ‘engagement’ (Evans et al. 2018). While the term epistemicity has a very wide applicability in linguistics and philosophy, the proposed workshop will mainly be concerned with investigating grammatical expressions reflecting this notion in the form of inflections, clitics, auxiliaries and particles. Lexical resources and supra-segmental phenomena (e.g. intonation) will be left aside.

Epistemic marking, as an instance of epistemicity in language, reflects how knowledge is distributed in interaction, including how knowledge states are expressed and tracked by discourse participants. It encompasses multiple functional categories, such as evidentiality, epistemic authority (‘right to know or claim’, cf. Heritage & Raymond 2005; Stivers et al. 2011), stance (e.g. Du Bois 2007) and the newly-proposed category of ‘engagement’ (Evans et al. 2018), among others. Despite the growing number of described languages where complex epistemic marking systems are attested (e.g. Gipper 2011; Bergqvist 2012; Zariquiey 2015; Grzech 2016), no systematic methodology exists for studying the use of such expressions. Moreover, methodological tools used for studying evidentiality concentrate on the truth-conditionality of the markers and their morphosyntactic properties in terms of scope and embeddability (cf. e.g. Peterson 2010), and are as such not sufficient for adequate description of intersubjective epistemic marking systems (e.g. Bergqvist 2016).

Bergqvist (submitted, cf. Bergqvist 2017) discusses the categorical overlap between epistemic modality, evidentiality, egophoricity, and engagement in terms of how these distinct categories reflect the allocation of epistemic authority. He argues that the qualification of the speaker’s belief, perceptual access, and involvement constitutes ways of either claiming (direct, sensory access), or deferring epistemic authority by assigning it to someone else (e.g. reported speech), or by signalling reduced accessibility to the event in question (e.g. non-sensory access/uncertainty). Whether epistemic authority is indeed a central notion for the use of epistemic marking remains to be confirmed by empirical investigation into the use of such systems in discourse.

Semantic research based on fieldwork on lesser-spoken languages has been developing dynamically since Matthewson’s (2004) seminal methodological paper. However, Field semantics is still mostly

concerned with truth-conditional phenomena (cf. Bochnak & Matthewson 2015), and, despite some attention being afforded to pragmatics in field methods volumes such as Chelliah and de Reuse (2011), studying language-in-use has yet to receive systematic and detailed treatment in the literature for linguistic fieldworkers. Thus, the methodological advances in the field lag behind its technological development: with widespread access to affordable, good-quality video-recording devices and a rise in the number of digital archives, linguistic documentation can now provide accessible and transparent records of all kinds of communicative practices, from ceremonial speech to private conversations. One part of this field of research in which the mismatch between thriving theoretical interest and lack of methodological progress is particularly apparent is the study of epistemicity.

Moreover, the use of corpus data alone is not sufficient to investigate forms of epistemic marking. In order to test any hypothesis emerging from patterns attested in natural language use, we need elicitation materials/stimuli that target the relevant components of epistemic authoritativeness in terms of privileged access as relying on perception/experience, involvement, attitude, and expertise (see Kamio 1997 for a discussion of these components), as well as strategies related to epistemic stance construction (cf. e.g. Mushin 2001). Matcher-director tasks (e.g. the Map Task or the Diff-task, Enfield & De Ruiter 2003), collaborative problem solving using board games (e.g. Mastermind, Silva & AnderBois 2016), and the collective production of narratives (e.g. FPPT, San Roque et al. 2012), have all proved useful for eliciting epistemics, but more so for some forms of epistemic marking than others. One challenge that appears especially pertinent in the development of such methods and tools is how to consider the influence of social factors in the analysis of epistemic marking systems/strategies, since these may impact on rights to knowledge. When accounting for the distribution and meaning of epistemic marking, how can we situate socio-cognitive considerations against perceptual and spatio-temporally grounded accessibility?

This panel aims to bring together field workers and experimental linguists with an interest in describing epistemic marking systems, in order to discuss field methods and tools that can be used to document such systems. The main questions the panel will seek to answer are the following:

- (1) What kind of data is needed to ground our analysis and understanding of epistemic marking systems in their communicative function as seen in everyday language use?
- (2) What kinds of experimental stimuli should be developed to elicit epistemic paradigms in a fieldwork situation?
- (3) What methods can be used to test the socio-cognitive relevance of our analyses of epistemic systems?
- (4) How can we ensure that the methods we use in the field deliver results that can be used for comparative studies of epistemic marking systems?

In line with the questions listed above, we invite contributions centred around, but not limited to, the following topics:

- Experimental methods for eliciting forms of epistemic marking, such as epistemic modals and evidentials;
- Adaptation/use of existing tools and stimuli for work on epistemic marking systems;
- Methods for tracking knowledge states in experimental tasks and in natural discourse;
- Methods for establishing semantic distinctions within epistemic marking paradigms, in particular semantic components of intersubjectivity;

- Empirically testing the relationship between related functional categories, such as epistemic modality, evidentiality, egophoricity and engagement.

We believe that, in a field of research as complex as this one, it is important to learn from our errors, and therefore we would like to encourage contributors to talk not only about their successes, but also to discuss their failures and reflect on possible reasons behind them.

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