Speaker discourse roles and the discourse profile of reportative evidentials[*]

Roumyana Pancheva and Deniz Rudin

University of Southern California
{pancheva,drudin}@usc.edu

Abstract

Reportative evidentials introduce an asymmetry between what their utterance makes at issue and what their utterance commits the speaker to. We propose that this is due to reportative evidentials enforcing a contextual requirement of nonidentity between the speaker and the agent whose commitment is being described. A general mechanism for assertive update that is sensitive to this distinction delivers the exceptionality of reportative updates while preserving a uniform characterization of assertion. We then discuss ramifications for the typology of evidentials, and sketch an extension to the use of reportative evidentials in questions.

1 Introduction

A speaker who utters a declarative sentence with an evidential marker, EVID-p, expresses commitment to the prejacent proposition p in case the evidential is direct, (1a), or inferential (1b), but not when the evidential is reportative (1c).

(1) Cuzco Quechua (Quechua), Faller (2002): ex. (2))

    a. *Para-sha-n-**mi***
       rain-PRG-3-DIRECT

       'It is raining (I see).'

    b. *Para-sha-n-**chá***
       rain-PRG-3-INFERENTIAL

       'It is raining (I infer).'

    c. *Para-sha-n-**si***
       rain-PRG-3-REPORTATIVE

       'It is raining (I was told).'

The emerging consensus among dynamic accounts of reportative evidentials (Murray 2014, AnderBois 2014, 2019a, Faller 2019) is that they introduce an asymmetry between what their utterance makes at issue (the prejacent p) and what their utterance commits the speaker to (the existence of a report with content p). These theories allow evidentials to rewrite basic update operations like speaker commitment. A worry is that this undercuts recent advances in our understanding of the relationship between clause type and context update (e.g. Gunlogson 2001, Farkas & Roelofsen 2017), which pursue an explanatory link between the semantic type and illocutionary potential of declarative sentences. This paper explores a way to connect the discourse profile of reportative evidentials to the morphosemantics of reportative evidentials, while maintaining the explanatory power of a general account of the context update carried out by assertive utterances of declarative sentences.

Building on the insight that reportative evidentials involve perspective-shifting (AnderBois 2014) that relies on a fine-grained decomposition of discourse roles (Faller 2019), we propose that reportative evidentials introduce a presupposition that enforces distinctions between the referents of discourse roles in context. We formalize a basic update operation for assertive uses of declarative sentences that delivers standard assertive updates for non-reportative sentences,

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but updates similar to those proposed on the dynamic accounts above for reportative sentences, via sensitivity to the discourse roles involved in the presupposition of reportative evidentials. The resulting account links the discourse behavior of reportative assertions to the meaning of reportative evidentials without taking reportative evidentials to be special update operators, resulting in a more constrained, predictive account of the space of possible assertive updates.

2   The morphosemantics of reportative evidentials

Pronouns introduce presuppositions about discourse participants, evaluated relative to the context parameter.[1] For example, first person pronouns presuppose that their referent is the speaker of the context. But 'speaker' is a cover term for distinct discourse roles which are often coextensional (Goffman 1979, Sells 1987, a.o.), e.g. the animator (a, the person who is actually talking) and the principal (pr, the person whose commitment is being described, or, in Goffman's terms, 'the party to whose position the words attest').[2] We propose that these two roles are represented independently in the context parameter, though coextensional by default (in addition to the addressee ad; see 2).

(2)   Example context (preliminary): $[a = \text{MARY}, pr = \text{MARY}, ad = \text{BETH}]^c$

These presuppositions are associated with person features—i.e., a pronoun bearing the feature [+ADDRESSEE] (or, rather, the combination of features [–SPEAKER, +PARTICIPANT]—q.v. Halle 1997, Nevins 2007 or alternative person feature representations as in Harley & Ritter 2002) presupposes that the context maps the variable it introduces to the addressee. We assume, with Pancheva & Zubizarreta (2019), that evidentiality is partially encoded with person features, and that different types of evidentiality (e.g. direct, inferential, reportative) can be captured with different combinations of person features.

We propose here that reportative evidentials are associated with particular values of the person features representing the discourse roles of *animator* and *principal*, thus decomposing [+SPEAKER] so it is no longer a unitary person feature. Specifically, we propose that reportative evidentials are associated with the person features [+ANIMATOR, –PRINCIPAL], serving to introduce a presupposition that the context contains an entity that is equivalent to a and not equivalent to pr (3).

(3)   PRELIMINARY SEMANTICS[3]
    a. $[\![\text{REP}]\!]^c$ is defined iff $a_c \neq pr_c$ b. If defined, $[\![\text{REP}]\!]^c$ is an identity function

A reportative simply presupposes that the animator is not describing their own commitment with the prejacent. Note that, on our proposal, this is the entire contribution of the reportative evidential. The distinctive illocutionary profile of reportative assertions is not directly encoded

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[1]We follow convention is describing this aspect of the meaning of pronouns as presuppositional. What matters for our purposes is only that pronouns enforce such requirements on the context one way or another. Throughout, what we describe as presuppositions could just as easily be implemented as some other contextual requirement.

[2]Note that though we borrow terminology from Goffman, his work is focused on sociologically complex contexts, such as speeches given by proxy. We redeploy these terms to describe simpler cases in which a speaker is attributing a commitment to another agent. We suspect that a significant amount of pretense is involved in the more convoluted cases, and we do not intend our proposal to extend to them. In particular, we do not make the prediction that a reportative evidential would be used in the special contexts that Goffman considers. This will become even clearer when we update the presupposition of the reportative evidential in §6 to not directly invoke the animator role.

[3]We will revise this semantics in §6 in a way that is irrelevant to its predictions for declarative sentences.

in the meaning of the reportative evidential, but rather falls out of how the contextual requirement enforced by the evidential interacts with a general mechanism for assertive context update, which we turn to now.

3   The theory of assertion

3.1   A general mechanism for assertion

We assume a central role for discourse commitments (DC) in context update (Hamblin 1971, Gunlogson 2001). We assume that all agents x are associated with a set of public discourse commitments DC_x, the set of all propositions that x has made a public discourse commitment to. Following Faller (2019) but diverging in the implementational details, we propose that when a utters a declarative sentence (modulo intonation; Pierrehumbert & Hirschberg 1990, Bartels 1999, Gunlogson 2001, Westera 2017, Rudin 2018 a.o.), she commits to the proposition that the principal is (discourse-)committed to the prejacent p (a proposition we notate $\mathrm{COMM}(pr,p)$), and pushes p onto the Table stack, making it at issue (Farkas & Bruce 2010). An assertion by a of a sentence denoting p is a function from an input context k_i to an output context k_o:

(4) $\mathrm{ASSERT}(a,p,k_i) \to k_o$ such that
    a. $DC_{a,o} = DC_{a,i} + \mathrm{COMM}(pr,p)$
    b. $\mathrm{TABLE}_o = \mathrm{TABLE}_i +_{push} p$
    c.   In all other respects, $k_o = k_i$

This account predicts an asymmetry in the assertive profile of reportative and non-reportative sentences. In the default case, in which $a = pr$, this simply entails that a is committed to p itself ($\mathrm{COMM}(a,\mathrm{COMM}(a,p)) \leftrightarrow \mathrm{COMM}(a,p)$, q.v. Condoravdi & Lauer 2017 ex. 20), as in standard accounts of assertion. However, in the case of reportative assertions, $a \neq pr$ via accommodation of the presupposition of the reportative, so the speaker's commitment to $\mathrm{COMM}(pr,p)$ does not entail a commitment to p itself, unlike in standard assertions.

(5)   Output context following a reportative assertion of p:

DC_a	Table	DC_{ad}
$\mathrm{COMM}(pr,p)$	$\{p\}$	

$pr \neq a$

The speaker makes no indication of who pr is, other than that it's not them. In some contexts, it is clear who pr is, as when the reportative assertion is prefaced by *I was talking to Susie on the phone, and...*, or when the speaker adds *Susie told me so* after the reportative assertion, a pattern Aikhenvald (2004) calls 'lexical reinforcement'. But out of the blue, the identity of pr remains vague. If the context suggests that a trusts pr, we can conclude that a is suggesting that the issue they've raised should be resolved by making p Common Ground. If the context suggests otherwise, no such suggestion will be inferred. It may also be that appeal is sometimes made to a generic pr (see §5).

3.2   Three Clarifications

3.2.1   The nature of discourse commitments

What an agent is discourse-committed to and what an agent is taken to believe are not the same thing (a distinction made quite clearly by Grice 1975 and Stalnaker 1978). We highlight two

differences. First, a discourse commitment is incurred only by a conversational move, whereas we can by many non-conversational means infer what an agent believes. This means that if somebody is committed to p, it must be that they made an utterance. Second, we can watch somebody lie in defiance of manifest evidence to the contrary, and they have committed to the lie in spite of our firm evidence that it contravenes their own beliefs. So somebody being committed to p does not mean that they are taken to actually believe it.

3.2.2 Committing to the existence of a commitment

We do not claim that a reportative assertion adds anything to any commitment set other than the animator's. We assume that no agent can add propositions to any commitment set other than their own. In the case of a reportative assertion, the speaker commits to the proposition that the principal is committed to p; if the principal is not in fact committed to p, then the animator has simply spoken falsely, not added anything to the principal's commitments.

3.2.3 Commitments outside of the current conversation

We assume that agents keep track of representations of the discourse commitments of other agents outside of the scope of individual conversations. This is common-sensical: we keep track of what somebody said to us yesterday, and are surprised if they contradict it today; likewise, we notice when a description of a situation by one agent differs from how a different agent described it in a different conversation. So if an agent hears an assertion that p from a party they are not currently engaged in conversation with—say, in a radio interview they are listening to—they nonetheless add p to their representation of the commitment state of the speaker.

If an agent's commitment to some principal being committed to p is sincere, that means that in their current representation of the principal's commitments, the principal is committed to p. As of the last time they had reason to update their record of the principal's commitments, p was a member of that set—i.e., last they heard the principal speak (or heard a credible report of what they'd said), the principal was committed to p—and they have no particular reason to believe that the principal has rescinded that commitment since.

4 Predictions

4.1 The existence of a prior communicative event

In making a reportative assertion, a makes a discourse commitment to COMM(pr, p). As discourse commitments can only be incurred by communicative acts (§3.2.1), if $pr \neq a$, it can only be true that pr is committed to p if there is a prior communicative event, u_0, whose animator a_0 was pr. Thus, it is predicted that reportative assertions REP-p are felicituously used only if there is a prior communicative event whose speaker made a discourse commitment to p.

4.2 The principal is not the addressee

Interpretations of reportatives in which $ad = pr$ are not available, but our account permits them in principle. We suggest that such interpretations are indeed compatible with the semantics of reportative evidentials, but are ruled out by the same pragmatic pressures that rule out interpretations of attitude reports like 'I hear that p' where p is a discourse commitment of the addressee. Under normal circumstances, it is uncooperative to make utterances that simply communicate what the addressee is committed to, as this information is redundant.

4.3 Speaker bias toward p

In making a reportative assertion, a places p on the Table while committing to $\textsc{comm}(pr, p)$. This may or may not suggest her epistemic bias toward p, depending on the context. If the report is taken to be credible, then positive bias toward p is predicted. If the report is not taken to be credible, then negative bias is predicted. We assume, contra Faller (2019), that Walker's (1996) Collaborative Principle, which obligates interlocutors to voice disagreement with others' commitments immediately if they do not share them, only applies to commitments made by the current interlocutors. We predict that neither a nor ad is automatically taken to share pr's commitment to p following the utterance of a reportative sentence.

5 Typology of reportative evidentials

Evidential systems with a single, general reportative evidential are well represented in existing studies of evidentiality. Our proposal concerns the meaning of such general reportative markers. Beyond the claim that the (current) animator is not the principal, nothing more is said about the identity of the principal (and original animator): it could be a particular individual or it could be generic. Suitable paraphrases of this distinction are 'he/she says', 'I am told' vs. 'one says', 'it is said'. An example of a general reportative evidential, explicitly acknowledging the vagueness with respect to the source of the report, is given in (6).

(6) Tagalog (Austronesian) AnderBois (2017): ex. (5)

Scenario: We are discussing our opinions about a local politician.

*Matapat **daw**   siya.*
honest **REPORTATIVE** DIR.3SG

'He's honest, I heard.' or 'He's honest, they say.'

Less commonly, some languages have more than one reportative evidential. Several subtypes of reportatives have been proposed in the typological literature, aiming to capture the more specialized meanings: *second-hand*, *third-hand*, and *folklore* (Willett 1988, Aikhenvald 2004).[4] Unfortunately, there is much terminological confusion, with *second-hand* sometimes used as a synonym for a general reportative. But when meaning distinctions are made, *second-hand* is used for reports 'from someone who said it', while *third-hand* is used for reports 'from someone else who in their turn acquired the information through another [...] report' (Aikhenvald 2004: 395). This is the same distinction that direct evidentials and reportatives make with respect to the described event, see (1a) vs. (1c), but here the distinction is applied to the communicative event itself: the speaker of an utterance REP-p has directly witnessed an utterance with the content of p (second-hand) vs. the content of REP-p (third-hand). Tsafiki (Barbacoan) is said to distinguish third-hand from second-hand reportative evidence through the repetition of the reportative marker (Aikhenvald 2004: 54, 179). *Folklore* evidentials are used in the genre of culturally-shared narratives (e.g., folk tales, myths) (Aikhenvald 2004).

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[4] *Quotative* markers used for direct quotation are sometimes grouped with reportative evidentials. Putting aside cases where the term *quotative* is simply used as an alternative for *reported* (also called *hearsay*) or *second-hand* (see Aikhenvald 2004 for examples and discussion of both the use of terminology and the need to differentiate among the terms), quotative markers proper have different properties from reportative evidentials (see AnderBois 2019a,b for a theoretically-based comparison of reportative and quotative markers in Yucatec Maya and several other Mayan languages).

Clearly, more research is needed to establish the robustness of the reportative sub-categories cross-linguistically.[5] Nevertheless, of relevance here is the fact that our account is sensitive to these distinctions. A communicative event u_n, in which an animator a_n utters REP-p, commits a_n to the proposition that $\text{COMM}(pr, p)$, and thus to the existence of a prior communicative event, u_0, whose animator a_0 was pr, i.e., $\text{COMM}(a_0, p)$. a_n (the reportative evidence holder for p in u_n) may have directly witnessed u_0, as an addressee (i.e., a participant in u_0), or just a recipient (i.e., an observing bystander), in which case the reportative evidence is *second-hand*. Alternatively, a_n may have been a participant/recipient in a different communicative event, u_i, whose animator a_i used a reportative evidential herself, i.e., she committed to $\text{COMM}(pr, p)$ but not to $\text{COMM}(a_i, p)$. In this case a_n's reportative evidence is *third-hand*. This distinction concerns the potential distinctness of *animator* and *principal*, not only in the current communicative event u_n but also in the reported one, and thus could be naturally specified in the presuppositions of individual reportative evidentials. In the case of *folklore* evidentials, an appeal could be made to a generic principal.

In addition to the various subtypes of reportatives, a very common typological pattern is underspecification of evidential morphemes, such that indirect evidentials can give rise to both inferential and reportative meanings. Because we do not make specific reference to reportativity in our semantics for reportative evidentials, our proposal allows for this kind of underspecification to be modeled without resorting to simply listing evidence types in the lexical semantics of evidentials.

6 Extension to questions

6.1 Interrogative flip

In languages where evidentials may appear in questions, the perspectival orientation typically undergoes *'interrogative flip'*: the evidence holder switches from speaker to addressee and the evidence concerns the expected answer to the question (see 10a). The phenomenon of interrogative flip suggests that the presupposition of the reportative evidential should be formulated more broadly than we did in §2, and it should be *evidence holder* (*eh*) ≠ *principal*, rather than the more specific *animator* ≠ *principal*, given that the animator role only concerns the speaker.

(7) Example context (final): $[a = \text{MARY}, pr = \text{MARY}, eh = \text{MARY}, ad = \text{BETH}]^c$

(8) REVISED SEMANTICS
    a. $[\![\text{REP}]\!]^c$ is defined iff $eh_c \neq pr_c$ b. If defined, $[\![\text{REP}]\!]^c$ is an identity function

The discussion in §2 and §3 is not affected because in matrix declaratives *evidence holder* = *animator* by default, and so it follows that *animator* ≠ *principal*.[6] We assume, however, that utterances of interrogatives shift the value of *eh* to the addressee.

(9) Output context following a reportative polar question $\{p, \neg p\}$:

DC_a	Table $\{p, \neg p\}$	DC_{ad}
	$pr \neq eh$; $eh = ad$	

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[5]In particular, there seem to be no clear examples of *second-hand* and *third-hand* reportatives marked with different morphemes within one and the same language (Aikhenvald 2004: 59).

[6]The more general formulation of the presupposition of reportative evidentials, *evidence holder* ≠ *principal*, is also needed for evidentials in attitude reports, for the cases where the evidence holder shifts from the speaker to the attitude holder (the matrix subject of the attitude verb).

An utterance of a reportative question shifts the value of *eh* to the addressee, while raising the issue of whether *p* is true; an affirmative or a negative reply will commit *ad* to *p* or ¬*p*, respectively, being the commitment of a *pr* other than themselves, by virtue of the presupposition of the reportative evidential.[7] The interpretative patterns of reportative evidentials in questions conform to our proposal that *a* makes a discourse commitment to COMM(pr, p) when making a reportative assertion—in this case, it is the addressee of the question who will be the animator of the assertive response. This commitment will only be cooperative if the addressee, rather than the animator of the question, has access to reportative evidence.

Note that the principal enters the picture only via commitment. A reportative interrogative under its interrogative flip interpretation, on our view, achieves its reportativity by imposing restrictions on the context that ensure that an answer will be a reportative assertion.

6.2   Beyond interrogative flip

While in some languages (e.g., Cheyenne, Murray 2017) interrogative flip is the only inter- pretation available to reportative evidentials in questions, in other languages the speaker may remain the evidence holder. Particularly relevant here is the interpretation *'interrogative by proxy'*, where the speaker reports a question, see (10b). In addition to Cuzco Quechua the interrogative-by-proxy pattern has also been reported for Kham (Sino-Tibetan) (Aikhenvald 2004), and Tagalog (Austronesian) (AnderBois 2019a).[8]

(10)   Cuzco Quechua (Quechua), Faller (2002): ex. (189b)

    *Pi-ta-**s**   Inés-qa   watuku-sqa?*
    who-acc-**REPORTATIVE** Inés-TOP visit-PST

    'Who did Inés visit?'

    a. ✓ Flip: speaker expects addressee to have reportative evidence for their answer
       evidence holder = addressee

    b. ✓ By-proxy: speaker indicates that somebody else is asking the question
       evidence holder = speaker

In this case, the speaker remains the evidence holder. Because, on our account, interrogative flip follows from question-asking shifting the value of *eh* to the addressee, we predict optionality or lack of interrogative flip in languages in which this shift is optional or unavailable. The by- proxy pattern could be accounted for in terms of a third Goffmanian role, the *author*, or the one who scripted the words being said. Reportative evidentials could vary both within and across languages in requiring that the animator is not the principal, or is not the author, or both. If the animator is not the author, there must be some other author that the animator is aware of, explaining why they remain the evidence holder. We leave further investigation of by-proxy readings and exploration of the feasibility of this extension to future work.[9]

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[7]We present a polar question here for the purposes of simplicity; the same applies *mutatis mutandis* to *wh*-questions with reportative evidentials.

[8]There is another pattern that has been observed in polar questions with reportative evidentials. The evidence holder remains the speaker and the evidence concerns the sentence radical of the question. We do not have space to illustrate it here (see Bhadra 2018), but we note that the roles of animator and principal are split here as well, just as in declaratives.

[9]By-proxy interpretations are also attested for reportative-marked imperatives; see AnderBois (2017).

7 Significance

The decomposition of speaker roles within grammatically-accessible representations of discourse participants is motivated independently, as these roles can pull apart in logophora (Sells 1987, Culy 1997, Sundaresan 2012) and free indirect discourse (Doron 1991, Schlenker 2004, Sharvit 2008, Eckardt 2014). The proposal fits reportative evidentials into this broader typology of perspectival constructions.

The update account builds on previous dynamic proposals without sacrificing a uniform conception of declarative updates. We show that asymmetric behavior of reportative and non-reportative sentences can be derived from such a uniform conception, resulting in a more constrained, explanatory theory of the space of possible discourse moves.

Because the proposal does not hard-code the illocution of reportative assertions into the meaning of the reportative evidential, it opens up avenues to explain the behavior of reportative evidentials in questions in terms of the same decoupling of participant roles that is at play in evidential assertions. The account of reportative assertions extends straightforwardly to interrogative flip interpretations of reportative questions.

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