

Evidentiality and epistemic modality in Chechen (oral or poster)

The differences between ‘unexpected’, ‘new’, ‘assimilated’, ‘definite’, ‘old’ knowledge have been studied by DeLancey (1997), Lazard (1999), Aikhenvald & Dixon (2003), Aikhenvald (2004), Bickel (2007), however, the encoding of these features is not very well studied in the languages of the world. This paper explores in detail the evidential system in Chechen (Nakh-Daghestanian), focusing on patterns relevant to the typological study of evidentiality and epistemic modality. Chechen has a very elaborate evidential system, requiring speakers to explicitly mark the source of information, unexpected, and also well-known knowledge. The evidentiality of Chechen is fused with the tense and aspect system, and marks two distinctions (direct and indirect evidence (ex. 1-2)), which refer in statements to the speaker and in questions to the addressee. Many languages with evidentiality use overt marking only in statements (Aikhenvald 2004), in Chechen, on the contrary, evidentiality can be used in questions, subordinate clauses, and in imperative constructions as well. It is typologically unusual for evidentiality to be distinguished in subordinate clauses (Aikhenvald 2004), and also in imperative constructions. The evidential imperative constructions have a causative meaning ‘let somebody do it in the absence of the speaker’, i.e. the command has not to be carried out by the addressee, but by someone else in the speaker’s absence.

Chechen also makes a distinction between well-known and unexpected information. The unexpected information is marked by the mirative suffix *-q*, whereas well-known information is marked by dative pronouns. The mirative refers to the speaker’s knowledge, and is used to express unexpected information (ex. 3). The epistemic use dative pronouns is restricted to the second person singular and plural, and first person inclusive addressees. These are reduced forms of the ordinary dative pronouns, e.g. *hwuuna* is reduced to *hwuun*, or changed to *hwan* in some highland dialects (ex. 4). These forms can occur only postverbally, whereas the ordinary pronouns are placed into the argument positions in the clause. These markers are used if the speaker knows that the addressee should have some information on the situation and the speaker wants to confirm the addressee’s knowledge. The information is not new for the addressee and the speaker’s knowledge of the situation is not relevant, the epistemic marker acknowledges the addressee’s knowledge. This situation is in contrast to Turkish, where the mirative refers to the speaker; or to Tibetan, where the information is relevant for the speaker in statements and in questions for the addressee (Bickel 2007). In Chechen, the well-known information is relevant only for the addressee.

Chechen evidentiality is completely independent from other knowledge related categories (epistemic modality, mirativity). Mithun (1986) treated all these categories as a single system, whereas Aikhenvald (2004) argued that evidentiality can either be a part of these other categories, or it can be a separate category. Chechen codes evidentiality, mirativity and epistemic modality by completely different means, and as separate categories. Analysing them as separate categories allows for a clear view of the semantics of evidentiality, epistemic modality, and mirativity.

References:

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Examples:

1. *Zaara-s* *suuna* *kuoch* ***iici-ra***
Zara-ERG 1SG.DAT dress.NOM take-WPST
'Zara bought a dress for me (I saw that).'
2. *Zaara-s* *suuna* *kuoch* ***ec-na*** ***xilla.***
Zara-ERG 1SG.DAT dress.NOM take-CVBant be.PRF
'Zara bought a dress for me (I didn't see that).'
3. *Zaara-s* *suuna* *kuoch* ***ec-na*** ***xilla-q.***
Zara-ERG 1SG.DAT dress.NOM take-CVBant be.PRF-MIR
'Zara bought a dress for me!' (Unexpected information for the speaker)
4. *as* *hwuuna koch* ***ec-na*** ***hwuun***
1SG.ERG 2SG.DAT dress.NOM buy-PRF 2SG.DAT.ADDRESSEE
'I bought a dress for you.' (You already knew that I was going to buy something for you,
and I know you are interested in this information.)