

A Study of Lexical Evidentials in Modern Persian: Does Genre Matter?

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ABSTRACT

The present study intended to test whether or not the number of lexical evidential markers employed in different genres caused statistically significant differences. To this end, a total of 7,375 words were chosen from three initial, middle and final sections of four different texts and scanned for lexical evidential markers. The texts were related to psychology, statistics, political sciences and linguistics. The results of statistical analyses showed that different genres employ different number of lexical evidential markers and that the differences among the genres were statistically significant and meaningful.

KEYWORDS:Source of Information, Quotatives, Revelatives, Memory Evidence, Deixis, Grammaticalization

1-INTRODUCTION

Evidentiality is concerned with the source of information. Where does our knowledge of statements we make come from? If someone states that blood is red, what makes others believe the statement? Is it because of the fact that others have been told that blood is red, or is it because of a common knowledge about redness of blood? Or is it because they have seen blood? Restated in a rather technical language, the issue takes the following shape [1]:

a. Evidentiality as source of information: this refers to the sources from which speakers come to know something they want to express in language. Jakobson [2] describes Evidential as the source from which the alleged information about the narrated event is obtained. The speaker reports an event on the basis of mutative, reflective, presumptive or memory evidence.

b. Evidentiality as attitudes towards knowledge: there are some things people are sure of. This certainty is “either because they have reliable evidence for them, or—probably more often—because they have unquestioning faith that they are true.” [3]. Languages possess and use a variety of devices in order to convey various attitudes toward knowledge. These devices include eye witnessing an event, using an adverb to show something about the trustworthiness and reliability of the event (e.g., ‘probably’), making inferences using a modal auxiliary (e.g., ‘must’), using a separate verb (e.g., ‘sound like’) using formulaic expressions (e.g., ‘sort of’) or using an adverb to suggest that some knowledge is different from what might have been expected (e.g., ‘actually’) [3].

c. Evidentiality and deixis: evidentiality can be identified and illustrated as a deictic category, as well. The deictic category “functions to index information to some point of origin.” Devices that are utilized to this end include “spatio-temporal coordinates e.g., demonstratives and temporal adverbs”, and indexing of information to the participants in the speaking event “e.g., first and second person pronouns”. [1].

What is basic in the meaning of evidentiality is the coding of the source of information, which can be done through direct evidence accompanied by observation, evidence together with inference, inference alone, reasoned expectation from logic and other facts. In addition, it may rely on different sensory and perceptual sources such as auditory, visual or other perceptions [4].

2. Evidential markers

“Evidential markers encode the speaker’s source for the information being reported in the utterance.” [5]. They also serve to encode the speaker’s stance towards knowledge. Some languages such as English employ lexical markers to express evidentiality while Turkish and Azerbaijani grammaticalize evidentiality through specialized markers. It is interesting to know that Persian utilizes both lexical and grammaticalization (verbal affixes) devices.

Typological research has demonstrated that a great number of languages have evidential markers which often form complex evidential systems of high degrees of grammaticalization that enjoy different kinds of periphrasis [6, 7]. These languages distinguish different kinds of evidential values such as direct, conjectural, reported, sense and hearsay by means of epistemic modals, evidential adverbs, evidential adjectives, syntactic constructions with perception verbs, syntactic constructions with cognitive verbs and deixis.

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3. Evidentiality in Persian

One of the related statements is found in Windfuhr's the concise grammatical description of "Persian" [8]. He remarks that "the complex forms *mi-raft-e ast*, which combines imperfective *mi-* with the perfect *-e*, and *raft-e bud-e ast*, a double perfect, express remote past in the literary register" but in the colloquial language "what they express is the category of inference, i.e., mainly second-hand knowledge, conclusion and reminiscence." He further expresses that "In this they are joined by the perfect form *raft-e ast* which also functions as the inferential aorist."

Apart from syntactic evidentials, Persian uses lexical evidentials in the form of modals such as '*momken ast* (maybe)', phrases such as '*az in didgah* (from this viewpoint)', adverbs such as '*ehtemalan* (perhaps)' and sentences such as '*shavahed be roshani neshan midahand ke ...* (The evidences clearly indicate that ...)'.

4. Genre

The term 'genre' has been with us for a long time. Different perspectives, "including literary studies, popular culture, linguistics, pedagogy and more recently, English / literacy education" have helped it to become formulated" [9]. "The conventional conception considers genre a classification system of texts based on shared formal characteristics." [10]. The importance of classification in genre is detectable since the time of Aristotle. "The rhetorical division of discourse into epideictic, judicial, and deliberative can be seen as a similar classification system, one still in use by some rhetoricians today." [10]. Other text types such as literature and nonliterature; narrative and nonnarrative; narrative, exposition, argument, description; the lyric, the sonnet; the Shakespearean sonnet, etc. have been suggested. Studying genre means studying how individuals and people in general make use of language to make their way in the world.

5. Null hypothesis

The different number of lexical evidential markers used in different genres in Persian is not statistically significant.

6. METHODOLOGY

Data for this study were obtained from four modern Persian texts. The objective was to find whether or not the frequency of the lexical evidentials was statistically significant with regard to the genre of the texts utilized. For this purpose, four books were chosen. They were of different genres: psychology, statistics, political sciences and linguistics. The samples were chosen based on a modified version of the model by Dash [11]. He asserts: "We can use two pages after every ten pages from a book. This makes a corpus best representative of data For instance, if a book has several chapters, each chapter containing different subject matters written by different writers, then the text samples collected in this process from all chapters are properly represented."

In order to have a good sample from all over the selected books, two pages from the beginning, two from the middle and two pages from the end were chosen. Periods, semicolons, exclamation marks, question marks and letters or numbers dividing complete ideas were taken as sentence boundaries. Pages including footnotes, long quotations from other authors, pictures, diagrams, tables, etc. were excluded. Numbers were not taken as data and units such as proper names and compound nouns were considered one word. Descriptive information regarding the data is presented in Table 1.

Table 1: descriptive information regarding the data

Book Title	Page Numbers	No. of Sentences	No. of Words
Social Psychology: Theories, Concepts and Applications	11-12	46	853
	201-202	33	851
	373-374	34	865
Total	6	113	2569
Statistical inference in behavioral research	11-12	22	530
	257-258	21	623
	504-505	23	550
Total	6	66	1703
Discourse for all seasons	11-12	19	487
	149-150	23	407
	271-272	14	477
Total	6	56	1371
Linguistic theory: the emergence and development of Generative Grammar (Second Edition)	13-14	14	600
	339-340	18	613
	645-646	21	519
Total	6	53	1732

7. FINDINGS

Since the number of words and sentences in different books was different, the data were first normalized. We extracted the lexical evidentials in each sample and exposed them to statistical analyses like crosstabulation and Chi-Square test to see whether the differences in the number of lexical evidentials used in each genre were statistically significant and meaningful or not.

The results of Chi-Square Tests are shown in Table 2.

Table 2: The results of Chi-Square Tests

	Value	df	Asymp. Sig. (2-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	25.177 ^a	3	.000
Pearson Chi-Square	26.039	3	.000
Linear-by-Linear Association	24.176	1	.000
N of Valid Cases	7455		

a. 0 cells (.0%) have expected count less than 5. The minimum expected count is 30.05.

The Chi-Square value for the association between the number of evidential markers and different genres was obtained as 25.177 with 3 degrees of freedom and a significance probability less than .001, which is a highly significant result. On the evidence of this data, there would appear to be no doubt that there is an association between presence of varying number of lexical evidential markers and different genres.

8. DISCUSSION

As the results of Chi-Square test indicate, the differences between the number of lexical evidential markers and the text type (genre) in Persian are statistically significant and meaningful. This further explicates that different kinds of texts in Persian utilizing different types of genres use different number of lexical evidential markers. Evidentiality, therefore, is genre sensitive and the use of evidentiality reveals different genre features. In other words, evidentials are functionally adjusted to particular situated practices and goals.

The major functional objective of evidentials is the marking of the source of information. The results of analysis revealed that the employment of lexical evidentials in Persian depends on the type of genre and on the concrete discourse situation. Generally, speakers and writers use evidentials when they do not want to take any responsibility for their statements.

As Aikhenvald [6] puts it “the use of evidentials depends on a variety of conventions.” Whenever there are several sources of information available to the speakers or writers, visual sources of evidential markers are preferred. This is because of the fact that what one sees is more valuable than other sources. The genre of a text, however, may determine the choice of an evidential.

Preference for special lexical evidentials may indicate the speakers’ choices for different classes of words. For instance, the non-visual evidential markers are preferred largely when people talk about what they feel or know. When they wish to talk about what other individuals feel or know, a different set of evidential markers may be employed. In written mode, writers can manipulate evidentials as a stylistic device. For instance, when a writer switches from reported to direct or visual evidential markers, they create an effect which is indicative of the speaker’s participation and confidence. When the writer switches to a non-firsthand evidential marker, it is implied that they use a backgrounded distant position. The use of various evidential markers in different genres is the reason why texts are different and polyphonic.

The existence of the highest number of non-direct and second-hand evidential markers in the texts of social psychology book in the present research indicates the degree of uncertainty in genres that deal with abstract subjects. Since the subjects being studied in these texts relate to indirectly observable mental and emotional matters, the writers can barely speak confidently. This uncertainty in writing style is reflected in high number of non-direct evidentials where the foci of discussion are volatile and unstable.

The results of this study reveal that evidentials seem to be interrelated with the lexicon in several ways. What the choice and the meaning of an evidential depend on is the lexical class of a verb. “Fixed expressions can allow restricted evidentiality choices” [6].

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