

### EVIDENTIALITY AND EPISTEMIC AUTHORITY IN SPOKEN TAJIK

In the months of May and June of 2016, I conducted interviews in Dushanbe, Tajikistan, with mostly university students. Most of the interviews were in the form of group conversations, but some of them were done individually. The purpose of these interviews was to see to what extent the Non-Witnessed forms are used in the retelling of past events where the speaker was not a witness. I would ask questions like: “How was it in Tajikistan during Soviet times?” and “What happened during the civil war?” Since the students were not born at these times, it is safe to say that they were not a witness to them.

As a counterweight to these questions I would also ask questions regarding contemporary musicians in order to see how the Tajik speakers express themselves as regards suppositions and rumours. All in all, I recorded six sessions. Most of them with university students in the age range of 19-23. In these sessions, the number of the participants would range from 3-5 persons and be both male and female.

### Evidentiality in Tajik

According to Perry (2005), the non-witnessed forms are mainly used in three different instances a) second-hand information b) logical inference and c) mirativity (sudden realization). These closely mirror the uses of the non-witnessed forms in the neighbouring Turkic languages, and also in a broader sense the languages of South-Eastern Europe and Western Asia. Lazard (1999) has therefore argued that these forms could all be subsumed under the term “mediative” since there is not always a clear-cut delineation between these three categories. This is something DeLancey (1997) discusses, stating that the three uses of the non-witnessed form, as seen in Tajik and Turkish “is not an idiosyncratic peculiarity of one language, but a pattern motivated by cross-linguistically relevant considerations”.

In my talk, however, I will use the model of *territory of information* (Kamio 1985) and Akatsuka’s model of information incorporation, a model that was originally devised to explain conditionals. According to this model, new information first enters the mind in the realm of Irrealis, a domain which information is still uncertain and has not become true knowledge. Only after information processing can the piece of information move to the realm of Realis, and be seen as “knowledge”. (Akatsuka 1985). Similar to this theory, is that of the “unprepared mind” as proposed by Slobin and Aksu Koç (1982).

### The use of the “witnessed” form for unwitnessed events

The most striking characteristic of these interview was the strong tendency to use the direct forms of the past tense, even when retelling events of the past that the speaker did not witness, and this begs us to re-evaluate the meaning and usage of the Non-Witnessed forms.

**Example:** Retelling what happened during the civil war.

banditho	meomad,	zuri	mekard
bandits	come:3SG.IMF <sup>1</sup>	violence	do:3SG.IMF

“Bandits came, they forced (people).” (20160525)

Based on numerous examples from my recordings, I will in my presentation propose that these forms are not merely evidential in the sense of indicating the *source of information*, but that another factor informs the choice of TAM-form in the narration, namely *epistemic authority* or *territory of information*.

Using a model which takes epistemic authority / territory of information into account can explain the somewhat “unconventional” uses of the direct and indirect verb forms. Generally, the direct forms are described as being used for events that have been witnessed, but this is not always the case. In my data, I have youths retelling Soviet times and incidents during the war - things they clearly did not witness.

Akatsuka’s model of information processing and the concept of epistemic authority may serve us in explaining this. First of all, even if they did not witness these events themselves, the fact that everyone around them talks about them as “real” has moved this piece of information from the Irrealis realm that of the Realis. Second, since I am an outsider, maybe they feel that they have the epistemic authority to speak about these matters in an assertive way. What would

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<sup>1</sup> Note here that the verb is in the singular although the subject is plural.

happen if someone who actually was involved in the civil war asked them what they knew? Would they still use the direct form or would they feel compelled to use the indirect because they no longer have the epistemic authority.

I also asked about rumors about famous pop singers and I did not get verbs in the indirect form, as would be expected. However, I did get the direct grammatical form, but with a lot of lexical evidentials signaling doubt and supposition.

In only one instance do I have a story told in the indirect form, and it is a joke. This closely mirrors the use of *-miş* in Turkish, which is also used as the default form when the story is of a certain character, like Nasrettin Hoca stories, typically humorous. This is also the case with Ecuadorian Siona (Bruil 2015 : 408) and the use of this “non-witnessed” form in traditional stories has been attested in other languages around the world, being a token of certain speech genres (Aikhenvald 2004 : 137).

Also, the so called reported form, just like in Turkish, is used for miratives and hearsay. This would further corroborate Akatsuko’s theory of the two-stage model of information processing - sudden realizations, jokes, and hearsay occupy a specific space in the mind of the speaker- all of them being in some sense “untethered” and they therefore share the same form. My own findings are therefore very similar to the findings of Martine Bruil (2015) on Ecuadorian Sinoa.

Even though Ecuadorian Siona has a marker for reportative utterances, thereby clearly distinguishing witnessed and non-witnessed information, Bruil gives us examples where the assertive (or so called witnessed) form of the verb is used, even in cases where the plot of the story or other factors clearly negate the fact they had witnessed the information. Bruil here argues that the use of the assertive verb form signals the speaker can vouch for the truth of the information, even if access to the information is only inferential. This is also, I would assert, the case for Tajik, even though Perry, as noted above, does not mention it as one of the functions of the “non-witnessed” forms. This phenomenon has, however, been witnessed in spoken Persian (Jahani 2000).

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