

Workshop proposal, SLE 2023

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Expanding the boundaries of epistemicity: epistemic modality, evidentiality, and beyond.

Keywords: evidentiality, egophoricity, engagement, context, pragmatics

This proposal promotes the view that evidentials and other forms of epistemic marking, i.e. *epistemics*, are a species of deictics, which require an analytical focus on the context of use, as well as on the relation between propositions and the speech-act participants in terms of knowledge representation and knowledge attribution. Following from this, the challenge of determining what meaning is encoded by epistemics, and what is implied by their use, must be met by approaching their analysis from the point of view of interaction and discourse. An increasing number of empirical studies demonstrate that epistemic markers and expressions have inherently context-related, intersubjective meanings, which most current theorizing does not account for (cf. Michael 2008; Gipper 2011; Bergqvist 2016; Hintz & Hintz 2017; Fried 2018; Grzech 2016; 2021; Sandman & Grzech 2022, among others). This mismatch between data and theory has a negative effect on the field of epistemic research, and makes it more difficult to articulate and answer questions which could bring us closer to understanding the meaning and interactional basis of epistemics. This workshop aims to explore the use and meaning of epistemics, focusing on three main analytical challenges.

The first challenge is the context-sensitivity of epistemic forms. If the context of their use is disregarded, the semantics of individual forms is near impossible to define. The context-sensitivity of epistemics is highlighted by the fact that their use and meaning are affected both by linguistic categories they co-occur with, such as person and tense (e.g. Sun 2018), and by discourse-level phenomena like genre and modality (written/spoken language, cf. e.g. Nuckolls & Michael 2014; González Condom et al. 2017). This sensitivity stems from the fact that the semantic and pragmatic properties of epistemics concern the interactional dynamics of the speech situation and the respective stances of the speech-act participants. Variation according to these contextual parameters has often been noted in the literature, but at the same time, it has been downplayed in favor of decontextualized exemplifications that permit neat definitions and paradigms. However, to say that epistemics are sensitive to context is only a starting point, and in order to make progress in the study of epistemicity, it is necessary to determine what aspects of the context are relevant for their analysis.

A second challenge in the study of epistemicity concerns the comparability of forms and systems between languages, i.e. the cross-linguistic comparison of epistemics. As we gain access to a growing number of descriptions of epistemic marking systems from non-European, indigenous languages, it is becoming increasingly clear that the traditional conception of epistemicity as subsuming only

evidentiality and epistemic modality (cf. Boye 2012) must be amended to include a much more complex picture; one that emerges from these growing data sets. Comparatively new notions like *egophoricity* (cf. Floyd et al. 2018) and *engagement* (Evans et al. 2018a; 2018b) should also be possible to relate to the more established notions like epistemic modality and evidentiality. Do these distinct labels and the definitions that they house allow for a meaningful comparison of forms encountered in descriptive data, or are they disparate grammatical concepts? Again, it is by looking at the contextualized use of the investigated forms that such comparisons are made possible and relevant.

The third challenge is to relate data-driven analyses of epistemics that emphasize aspects of interaction and discourse to traditional analyses of similar forms. The established definitions of epistemic modals and evidentials are by and large couched in an analytical framework that emphasizes truth-relations and the justification of knowledge (cf. Willett 1988; Aikhenvald 2004). Such definitions have mainly focused on determining whether evidentials are modal or non-modal (cf. e.g. Faller 2002; Matthewson et al. 2007; Matthewson 2011; Peterson 2010) disregarding other aspects of their meaning. They also advocate a stand-alone analysis of forms that should be possible to retrieve void of any contextual cues. Recent proposals, on the other hand, argue for the necessity of contextual transparency in the analysis of epistemics and question the very possibility of analyzing these in an objective, de-contextualized sense. Are these seemingly distinct modes of analysis compatible, or are they at odds with respect to what they claim?

In the light of these three challenges for the study of epistemics, this workshop aims to explore the following questions:

- How can pragmatics, conversation analysis and interactional linguistics inform the analysis of evidentials and other epistemics?
- What aspects of interaction are relevant for the description and analysis of epistemics? Can they be modelled and theorized, and if so, how?
- What role do sociolinguistic factors play in the analysis of epistemics? Which of these factors are most relevant in accounting for how epistemics are used?
- What kind of data is important for the description and analysis of epistemics?

The objective of the workshop is to bring together researchers interested in the interactional aspects of epistemicity. Through the discussion of different epistemic categories such as evidentiality, egophoricity, mirativity, engagement, etc., in the context of their use in interaction, we hope to be able to formulate directions for future research on epistemicity as an interactional and/or deictic category. We also aim to contribute to the development of an empirically-grounded theory of epistemicity which would be able to account for the context-related characteristics of knowledge-related expressions, which

the currently available theory treats as negligible idiosyncrasies or ‘pragmatic extensions’ (cf. Aikhenvald 2004) of allegedly context-independent epistemic meanings.

We invite contributions approaching the above questions and issues from theoretical, methodological and descriptive perspectives. The contributions can deal with any language, and with any epistemic category, and they should focus on the analysis of epistemic systems in the context of natural or naturalistic, interactive language use.

Please send the provisional abstracts (max. 300 words) to karolina.grzech@ling.su.se or henrik.bergqvist@gu.se by **November 10th, 2022**.

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