

Workshop proposal, SLE 2024

Epistemicity and dialogue: how is knowing negotiated in conversation?

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The proposed workshop continues where last year's SLE-workshop, "Expanding the boundaries of epistemicity: epistemic modality, evidentiality, and beyond" left off (WS2, SLE 2023 in Athens). The starting point for the theme of the proposed workshop is (yet again) that evidentials and other forms of epistemic marking are deictic in nature and that their analysis therefore requires a focus on the context of use and the relation between propositions and the speech-act participants. If the representation and attribution of knowledge (i.e. epistemicity) is approached in this way, then primary data to support analyses of epistemic marking should ideally come from dialogical exchanges in everyday conversation (see Bergqvist & Grzech 2023, for a discussion).

An illustration of what a dialogically grounded analysis of epistemic marking can look like consists of a brief exchange featuring two Kogi speakers (Arwako, Colombia), who participate in the "Shape Classifier Task" (Seifart 2003; cf. Knuchel 2019). In Example (1), below, the speakers use "engagement" prefixes to negotiate the identification of an item in the task (Knuchel 2022; see also Evans et al. 2018b, for a discussion of engagement in Kogi):

(1)

D: *ezwa ama kēyakēyá-gatse naldatshak zumēya tū-gatse*
one uhm edged-seem be.but star look-seem
'One, uhm, with edges but it looks like a star.'

M: *kēyakēyá-gatse naldatshak zumēya tū-gatse*
edged-seem be.but star look-seem
'One with edges but it looks like a star.'
meilde sha-hangu-kú, zumēya tū-gatse?
which.one ADDR.ASYM-think-1SG star look-seem
'Which one may it be (lit: I think)? It looks like a star?'

D: *hai hē nzha ni-hangu-kú hai*
DEM DEM SPKR.SYM.be SPKR.SYM-think-1SG DEM
kēyakēyá-gatse hai
edged-seem DEM
'Here, it's this one, I think [gestures with lips]. Here, the one with the edges, here.'

(kog_170826_sct3-2; after Knuchel 2019)

In Example (1), the director (D) offers a description of an item that is represented in a photograph that the director has access to, but which the matcher (M) cannot see. In front of them both, all available items are laid out on a table. The matcher responds by repeating the

director's preceding utterance, almost word-by-word before going on to ponder which item on the table corresponds to the description (and the image in the photo). The phrase *shahangwakú* literally means 'I think', but the presence of the *sha*-prefix (in bold), signals that the speaker lacks knowledge and at the same time expects the addressee to know and act as epistemic authority (see Bergqvist 2016, for details).

In the director's next utterance, which contains the resonating phrase *nihangwakú* (also, 'I think'), the speaker assumes epistemic authority (*ni*-, in bold) when pointing out what they think is the right item. At the same time, the speaker signals that the addressee is prompted to agree with the speaker's assessment, given that the item on the table is (physically) accessible to them both.

The exchange in Example (1) shows how knowledge is negotiated in the dialogical exchange between director and matcher. The speech-act participants' respective perspectives are asserted even in the face of uncertainty, given that the director and the matcher are collaborating to identify the right item on the table. The resonating use of engagement prefixes and the propositional formulations of the exchange in Example (1) exemplify how stance-taking and the negotiation of knowledge includes reference to previous utterances. While the perceptual and cognitive prerequisites constitute a background for this exchange, they are arguably not part of the meaning of the forms. Nor is their level of commitment, which is implied by the assignment of epistemic authority.

The workshop aims to explore approaches to analyzing epistemicity in dialogic interaction. Our aim is to learn more about how this can be done, using data from different languages and different empirically-driven approaches to the analysis of linguistic data. Possible theoretical frameworks that may assist us in this exploration include, but are not limited to, "dialogical syntax" and stance (Du Bois 2014; Du Bois 2007), "epistemic status and stance" (Heritage 2012), "Territories of Information" (Kamio 1997), and more generally the pragmatics of evidentials (cf. e.g. Mushin 2013; Bergqvist & Grzech 2023). Broader approaches to the analysis of natural linguistic data such as Conversation Analysis (e.g. Schegloff 2007) or Interactional Linguistics (Couper-Kuhlen & Selting 2017) are also relevant to this endeavor.

The bottom line is, if dialogue is indeed indispensable for a more nuanced analysis of epistemic forms and constructs, our aim must be to support this argument by shifting our analytical focus towards working on data-sets consisting of dialogical, linguistic interaction.

We invite proposals from researchers who are working with first-hand data containing dialogical exchanges and with an interest in epistemicity in language. We are aiming for a workshop where we can meet to discuss data-sets and proposed analyses as a group with shared interests in epistemic marking, but with different experiences of working with our respective languages. Therefore, we envisage the workshop as a series of short data sessions, each one led by the person presenting their data, but open to contributions/suggestions from other participants. This means that proposals are not required to be finished talks in the sense of presenting a result based on an established hypothesis. However, as per SLE guidelines, the abstracts should state the research question(s), method of analysis, and the (expected) results.

We invite preliminary abstracts of **up to 300 words** to be submitted **by November 15th**. To submit your abstract, please send it to Henrik Bergqvist (henrik.bergqvist@gu.se).

References

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