



Reportative evidentiality, attribution and epistemic modality: A corpus-based diachronic study of Latin *secundum* NP (‘according to NP’)



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ABSTRACT

Based on data drawn from the *Latin Library* corpus, this paper discusses some previously under-researched meanings of the *secundum* NP construction and traces their evolution across a period of over 800 years. The discussion focuses on the meanings of reportative evidentiality and a new conceptual category called “attribution”, whose function consists in ascribing a proposition to someone’s mental content (opinion, thought or belief). Two sub-categories of attribution are identified: other-attribution and self-attribution. Whereas the former is modal epistemic in nature, the latter is not. The data analysed in this paper suggest that the attribution and reportative meanings are distinct senses, as evidenced by their different semantic/pragmatic functions, development paths and preferences for different sets of arguments. Particular attention is paid to the spread of Christianity as a relevant socio-cultural context for the emergence of reportative constructions. From a pragmatic/interactional point of view, the notion of interpersonal evidentiality plays a central role in the emergence of the reportative evidential sense. Abstracting away from the case of the Latin *secundum* NP (‘according to’ NP) construction, this paper argues that both reportative evidentiality and attribution presuppose extended intersubjectivity and are deictic categories, even if they convey different meanings.

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1. Introduction

1.1. Background

Using a narrow definition of evidentiality as a grammatical category (Jakobson [1957]1963/2002; Anderson, 1986; Willett, 1988; Guentchéva, 1996; Aikhenvald, 2003a, 2003b, 2004, 2007; Guentchéva and Landaburu, 2007), Latin can be considered a language without evidentiality. However, based on a notional understanding of this category, defined on semantic/pragmatic grounds (e.g. Givón, 1982; Mithun, 1986; Jacobsen, 1986; Ramat, 1996; Ramat and Ricca, 1998; Wiemer, 2005, 2006; Pietrandrea, 2007; Squartini, 2007; Pietrandrea and Stathi, 2010; Disney, 2012), I claim that Latin does express reportative evidentiality (see also Magni, 2009; Greco, 2013).

This article discusses the rise of the reportative evidential meaning of the *secundum* (‘according to’) NP construction, a PP which has been so far under-explored in Latin studies on prepositions (Pinkster, 1972: 145 ff., 1990: 65–72, Baldi, 1979, 1999:

Abbreviations: 1P, first person; 3P, third person; ABL, ablative; ACC, accusative; COMPTV, comparative; F, feminine; FUT, future; GEN, genitive; GER, gerund; INF, infinitive; IND, indicative; M, masculine; N, neuter; NOM, nominative; PL, plural; PASS, passive; PLUPERF, pluperfect; POSS, possessive; PRF, perfect; PRS, present; REL, relative pronoun; SBJV, subjunctive; SG, singular.

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358–360; Lehmann, 1983; Luraghi, 1989; Joseph, 1991; Baños Baños, 1994; Vincent, 1999; Bubenik, 2006; Martín Puente and Conde Salazar, 2006, 2012, 2014, 2015; Luraghi, 2010; Brucale and Mocciaro, 2011; Short, 2013; Trabelsi, 2014, 2015), the only exceptions being the rather sketchy observations in Matos Rocha (1998), Vieira Ferrari (1998) and Heine and Kuteva (2002: 139).

In this paper, reportative constructions, expressing the source of information the speaker has for uttering a proposition, are contrasted with attribution expressions. Within the function of attribution, two sub-domains are identified: by using other-attribution constructions, the speaker assigns a proposition to someone other than him/herself, whereas by using self-attribution constructions, the speaker ascribes a proposition to him/herself. Under a definition of epistemic modality as a subjective performative category, self-attribution expressions are modal epistemic in nature, whereas other-attribution ones are not. The functional similarities shared between self-attribution and other-attribution expressions allow us to account for the fact that in some languages one and the same construction can express both (e.g. Italian *secondo* ‘according to’ NP).

1.2. Theoretical preliminaries: evidentiality and attribution

As mentioned in Section 1.1 above, I share a view of evidentiality as a conceptual category instead of a grammatical one. The core function of evidentiality is to present a proposition to the addressee, signalling how the speaker has acquired it (see Tantucci, 2013 for a similar view). Reportative evidentiality is a sub-category indicating that the source of information a speaker has for uttering a proposition is something communicated by someone else (in speech or writing). The English *according to* NP expressions in sentences (1) and (2) below qualify a statement made by the writer, who indicates his/her source of information. Therefore, *according to [the] police* in (1) and *according to our correspondent* in (2) are reportative evidential constructions.

- (1) Man arrested after he beheaded his ‘nagging’ mother, **according to police**. (Levi Winchester, *Express*, 2nd January 2015)¹
- (2) Security sources say the situation has never been so grim, said BBC home affairs correspondent Margaret Gilmore. [...] Each cell has a leader, a quartermaster dealing with weapons, and volunteers. **According to our correspondent**, each cell works on separate, different plots, with masterminds controlling several different cells. (Author unknown, “UK ‘number one al-Qaeda target’”, *BBC News*, 19th October 2006)²

Attribution, on the other hand, is a semantic category expressing that the speaker explicitly assigns a certain proposition to a person who may or may not be directly involved in the speech situation (speaker, hearer, third party). Crucially, this ascribed proposition, understood as someone’s mental content (thought, opinion, belief etc.), need not be overtly communicated to the speaker, who may simply infer, guess or even invent it. *In his eyes* in (3) and *for him/for her* in (4) qualify the modified statements as the opinions held by someone other than the writer.

- (3) Butler had shown a keen personal interest in the preparation of the White Paper which underwent at least four drafts before it reached the finished version. **In his eyes** it came to rank on a par with his Education White Paper of 1943. (BNC 44 EEC)
- (4) **For him**, Ireland was best served by deep cultural transformation; **for her**, the first requirement was for bombs and bullets. (BNC 9 AK4)

The conceptual category of attribution can be split into two sub-domains: other-attribution and self-attribution. In the case of other-attribution, a proposition is assigned by the speaker to someone else, be it a third party as in (1) and (2) above, or the hearer as in (5), below.

- (5) The language of desire is rich and complex. It excludes you. **For you**, desire is a mobile flung in all directions and getting nowhere. (BNC 36 C9S)

Self-attribution can be seen as a particular case of other-attribution, when the speaker construes him/herself as “split” or “divided” in two (Lakoff, 1996; Talmy, 2000) and assigns a proposition to the rational part of him/herself (conceived of as a separate individual).

- (6) This comment was, **in my opinion**, justified. (BNC 97 FD2)
- (7) **To my mind**, age does not matter; love is what matters. (BNC 6G1A)
- (8) **In my eyes** it’s the hardest hole on the course. (BNC ASA W_misc)
- (9) **For me** Ilona is one of the world’s great artists. (BNC 14 AHA)

Evidential expressions can be paraphrased as *I have come to know that p [based on < source of information >]* whereas attribution expressions can be paraphrased *someone thinks that p* (other-attribution), *I think that p* (self-attribution).

¹ Available at <http://www.express.co.uk/news/world/549820/Man-beheaded-nagging-mother>. (accessed 1.10.15).

² Available at <http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/uk/6065460.stm>. (accessed 1.10.15).

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