

# Interpersonal evidentiality: The Mandarin V-过 *guo* construction and other evidential systems beyond the ‘source of information’



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## Abstract

This study aims at establishing a new evidential category of interpersonal evidentiality (IE). IE grounds the illocutionary force of a statement in intersubjective knowledge shared by the speaker and other assumed members of society, regardless of whatever the source of information is. Drawing on Nuyts's (1992, 2001a,b) work on the evidential application of the notion of intersubjectivity (Traugott and Dasher, 2002; Traugott, 1999, 2003, 2010; Verhagen, 2005) this paper argues that the perfect V-过 *guo* evolved in Modern Mandarin into a new IE construction. I provided a qualitative survey on 862 occurrences from the LCMC (Lancaster Corpus of Mandarin Chinese) proving the specific interpersonal dimension of V-过 *guo* as an evidential marker. I demonstrate in this work that IE can be seen as a proper typological category characterized by specifically grammaticalized items in many languages of the world. The theoretical implications of the establishment of IE as a typologically attested domain must lead us to redefine the primary semantics of evidentiality. The secondary claim of this work is thus to reconsider evidentiality as a non-modal domain primarily marking different types of ‘acquired knowledge’ rather than a ‘particular source of information’. Evidential constructions encoding specific sources of evidence must then be considered as a sub-class of the broader semantic scope of ‘acquired knowledge’ (AK). In essence, AK is here regarded as the primary pragmatic and semantic connotation of any type of evidential construction or strategy.

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## 1. Introduction

It is widely accepted in the literature that evidentiality is the domain encoding the ‘source of information’ for a given statement (Boas, 1938; Jakobson, 1957; Chafe and Nichols, 1986; Anderson, 1986; Willett, 1988; Aikhenvald and Dixon, 2003; Aikhenvald, 2004). To explain, utterances such as *I saw a cat running* or *I have been told that there was a cat running* are considered evidential expressions in that they convey respectively a speaker's witnessed (the speaker saw the cat with his/her own eyes) and reported (someone else told the speaker) evidence for the statement. Many languages of the world (mostly located in Central and South America) are characterized by complex evidential systems encoding grammatically even more specific types of evidence. The semantic particularity of those evidential systems led many scholars to consider evidentiality as a pragmatic and grammatical domain marking the specific ‘source of evidence’ for a given proposition, whether the event was seen, directly heard, ‘touched’, told, repeatedly experienced, etc.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Alternative recent views on evidentiality are discussed separately in section 1.1.1.

Notably, this original definition induced many scholars to take for granted the dual nature of evidentiality, which opposes primarily the two subclasses of direct (the speaker witnessed *p*) and indirect (the speaker did not witness *p*) evidence. Nonetheless, this fundamental bipartition led to several semantic contradictions in the analysis of many other evidential systems merging direct and indirect evidential meanings into one single construction (as for the so-called A2 or Balkan-type systems, more generally the mediative systems, the Sinitic systems and others).

I will demonstrate in this work that there is a type of evidentiality which grounds the illocutionary force of a given statement in interpersonal knowledge, shared by the SP/W<sup>2</sup> and an assumed third party (3rdP) – being it singular or plural – in society. This category is here defined as interpersonal evidentiality (IE) and is based on a form of intersubjective knowledge regardless of whatever source of evidence. I argue here that although IE is fundamentally motivated by pragmatic reasons, nevertheless it has grammaticalized into schematic constructions in many languages of the world. Drawing on Nuyts's (1992, 2001a,b) work on the evidential application of the notion of intersubjectivity (Traugott and Dasher, 2002; Traugott, 1999, 2003, 2010; Verhagen, 2005), I show in the paper that the perfect V-*guo* evolved in Modern Mandarin into a new IE construction. The establishment of IE as a grammatical category poses new questions about the fundamental semantics of the evidential reasoning. It is here theoretically argued and empirically demonstrated that evidentiality is the domain marking different types of 'acquired knowledge' rather than the 'particular source of information' of a statement. Evidential constructions encoding specific sources of evidence must then be considered as a sub-class of the broader semantic scope of 'acquired knowledge'. AK is here regarded as the fundamental pragmatic and semantic connotation of any type of evidential construction or strategy.

In section 1.1, I provide a general outline of the traditional classification of evidentiality, whereas section 1.1.1 justifies the claim regarding to which evidentiality is a non-modal category merely encoding different forms of 'acquired knowledge'. Successively, in section 1.2 I deal more in detail with the incongruent dichotomy of direct and indirect evidentiality in mediative and Balkanic – elsewhere called A2<sup>3</sup> – systems. Section 2 introduces the conceptual notion of intersubjectivity, fundamental for the understanding of the here proposed category of interpersonal evidentiality (IE). A general introduction to the most influential definitions of intersubjectivity is given in section 2.1. In section 2.1.1, I then provide a theoretical distinction between 'immediate' and 'extended' intersubjectivity distinguishing an intersubjective awareness just limited to the here-and-now of the discourse (immediate) from a broader one, including other assumed members of society not present at the moment of speech (extended). In section 2.2 I define in detail interpersonal evidentiality (IE). Section 3 is specifically dedicated to a case study on the Mandarin V-*guo* here reclassified as a grammaticalized IE construction. In sections 3.1 and 3.1.1 is presented a recent evidential reclassification of *guo* proposed by Chappell (2001) in opposition to the traditional merely aspectual reading traditionally provided in the literature. In section 3.2 a semantic and pragmatic account of *guo* as an IE construction is given. Finally in section 3.3 I present a corpus based survey on all the 862 occurrences of V-*guo* in the LCMC (Lancaster Corpus of Mandarin Chinese) giving semantic and grammatical evidence for an IE reclassification of this construction.

### 1.1. The dual domain of evidentiality

Evidentiality is generally considered to be the discursive or grammatical indication of the source of evidence for a given statement. As early noted by Boas (1938) evidentiality in some languages can be an obligatory grammatical category:

while for us definiteness, number, and time are obligatory aspects, we find in another language location near the speaker or somewhere else, source of information – whether seen, heard, or inferred – as obligatory aspects.

(Boas, 1938:133)

Jakobson (1957:4) adopts the term evidential as a tentative label for a verbal category which indicates the source of the information on which the speaker's statement is based. More specifically, Aikhenvald (2004) considers evidentials as highly grammaticalized markers indicating the nature of the information for a statement:

stating the existence of a source of evidence for some information; this includes stating that there is some evidence, and also specifying what type of evidence there is.

(Aikhenvald, 2004:1)

Within the evidential domain, a grammatical division of labour has been drawn between functions encoding evidence of a first-hand rather than a second-hand source. Earlier studies on source of information (e.g. Givon, 1982; Bybee, 1985) established that the primary evidential parameter expressed in natural language would be that of **direct evidence** versus **indirect evidence**. Simply put, the attention was centred on whether the source of the SP/W's information would be of a

<sup>2</sup> Speaker/writer.

<sup>3</sup> This label is adopted following Aikhenvald (2004) typological classification of different systems of evidentiality.

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