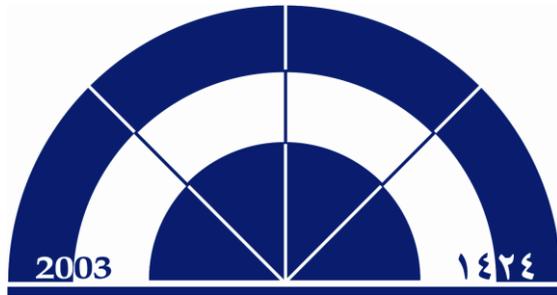# A Study of Evidentiality in Arabic and English

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Abstract

This paper focuses basically on some semantic frames and syntactic structures by which evidentiality is depicted and illustrated. Firstly, different definitions of evidentiality are introduced in order to provide a profound understanding of this linguistic category. Secondly, this paper deals with how evidentiality has been investigated in other languages, namely, English. Thirdly, evidentiality in Arabic and the main semantic frames and syntactic structures used to show it are deeply investigated by explaining the main evidential devices used in Arabic, such as, the lexical ones.

Keywords: Evidentiality, Semantic Frames, Syntactic Structures, Evidential Devices.

Introduction :

All languages have certain linguistic tools to specify the source of information mentioned in the utterance, in the sentence, or even in the text, whether spoken or written. These linguistic tools may partially or completely differ from one language to another; that is, some languages have certain affixes to determine the source of information in the text, whereas others have unique lexical elements to determine it. For example, Kashaya (of the Pomo family of northern California) has a very rich system

of verbal suffixes indicating evidentiality (Wierzbicka, 1996); whereas, for example, in English, evidential relations are sometimes conveyed with mental state and perception verbs (e.g. know, guess, see, look, hear, etc.). (Papagragou and Li, 2001).

Background and Literature Review:

Aikhenvald (2003) states that evidentiality is properly understood as expressing the existence of a source of evidence for some information found in the text; this includes both stating that there is some evidence and specifying what type of evidence is there (Aikhenvald, 2003). In addition, Gronemeyer (1997) indicates that there is a general agreement in the literature that evidentiality is a subsystem of epistemic modality due to the close relationship between evidentiality and epistemic possibility. He adds that evidentiality differs in that it characterizes the source and reliability of the proposition, rather than the speaker's judgment of the necessity/possibility of the truth of the proposition. He continues that despite the semantic similarity between epistemic modality and evidentiality, it is not straightforward to assimilate an analysis of the former to the latter. (Gronemeyer, 1997).

Dendale and Tasmowski (2001) indicate that the term evidentiality was introduced into linguistics about fifty

years ago in a posthumously published grammar of Kwakiutl compiled by Boas (1947), Dendale and Tasmowski (2001). On the other hand, Lazard (2001) states that the evidentiality may be said to be grammaticalized in a language when, in the grammatical system of this language, there are specific forms of which semantic-pragmatic content is basically a reference to the source of the information conveyed by the discourse. (Lazard, 2001).

However, there are many other researchers who have dealt with this linguistic phenomenon either in their languages or in other languages, addressing its different issues and aspects. For instance, Papafragou, et.al. (2007) indicate that source distinctions are encoded in language through a variety of evidentiality markers. In English, such evidential devices are mostly lexical. For instance, in (1a) and (1b) below, the speaker conveys that she had direct perceptual access to the event of John's singing, while in (1c) and (1d) the evidence is indirect (hearsay in (1c) or some unspecified source in (1d) (Papafragou, et.al. 2007).

(1)
    a. I saw John sing.
    b. I heard John sing.
    c. John was allegedly singing.
    d. John was apparently singing.

On the other hand, evidential markers are defined as grammatical categories which indicate how and to what extent speakers stand for the truth of the statements they make. Evidentials illustrate the type of justification for a claim that is available to the person making that claim. In Chafe and Nichols' (1986) terms, they represent a 'natural epistemology'. To be clear, videntials indicate both source and reliability of the information. They put in perspective or evaluate the truth value of a sentence both with respect to the source of the information contained in the sentence, and with respect to the degree to which this truth can be verified or justified. This justification can be expressed by markers referring to immediate evidence on the basis of visual observation, to inference on the basis of (non)observable facts, to deduction or inference, etc. (Rooryck, 2001).

Evidentiality in English

English has been investigated in terms of evidentiality. Chafe (1986) determines five markers of evidentiality in English, which are :

- Degree of reliability
- Belief
- Inference
- Hearsay
- General expectation

He states that each of these is typically associated with specific lexical and/or grammatical devices. He notes that just about any part of the grammatical system may be used to signal evidentiality.

Concerning the first marker, degree of reliability, he states that there are three kinds of this marker. Firstly, modal auxiliaries which go before the main verb in a sentence such as "She could / might / may come tomorrow" can be taken as evidence for evidentiality. Secondly, adverbs which are words that "modify" a verb or a whole sentence such as "She will possibly / probably / certainly / undoubtedly come tomorrow." can also be taken as evidence for evidentiality. Thirdly, hedges which are expressions which mark a proposition as "only approximately true" and which are divided into 1- non-prototypicality such as : "It's sort of / kind of raining" (it's not "really" raining) and 2- approximation such as : "It rained about / approximately three inches" can also be taken as evidence for evidentiality.

Concerning the second marker of evidentiality, belief, he states that it is encoded in the verb of cognition such as "I think / guess / suppose it's raining" (or "It's raining, I think/guess/suppose") and can be considered as evidence for evidentiality. Concerning the third marker, inference, which is employed by using the modal auxiliaries such as "You're all wet, it must / has to / 's gotta

be raining", by using adverbs such as "It's obviously / evidently / apparently raining"; "Maybe / perhaps it's raining" and by using adjectives: "It's obvious / evident / apparent that it's raining" can be taken as evidence for evidentiality.

Concerning sensory evidence, it can be direct by using perception verb (strong assertion): "I can hear / see / feel / smell it raining" or indirect perception verb (weak assertion): "It feels / looks / smells / sounds like it's raining". Concerning the fourth marker of evidentiality, hearsay evidence, it can be a direct quotation : "Joe said, 'it's raining'" or an indirect quotation : "Joe says it's raining", "They say it's raining" in which the speaker gives Joe responsibility for the truth of the statement, without repeating his words and verb of reporting: "I hear it's raining", "It's reported to be raining" in which the speaker ascribes responsibility to "unnamed sources". Concerning the last marker, expectations, the most important of these discourse markers are "of course / in fact / actually / oddly enough, it's raining". These markers suggest that the proposition is either in line with or opposed to what the speaker thinks the hearer expects to be the case. (Chafe, 1986).

Evidentiality in Arabic

Evidentiality in Arabic has not been unfortunately investigated in depth as compared with other languages especially Indo-European ones although the Arabic system abounds with evidential markers. However, there are few papers dealing with this linguistic category in Arabic such as Comrie's (1976) that outlines a reasonable account of Arabic explaining that evidentiality can mainly be introduced by the perfect form system. This finding is also determined by Isaksson (2000) who determines that if a finite verbal form is used to express inferential or reportive nuances, it is exclusively a perfect, never an imperfect . However, in this project, certain issues related to this semantic phenomenon in Arabic will be explained to show how the syntactic structures are also susceptible to be varied according to the semantic behavior of some verbs indicating evidentiality.

First of all, Arabic linguists classified Arabic verbs in general into different categories according to their semantic content. They stated that there are some verbs of which semantic content refers to the degree of evidentiality. These verbs are linguistically called "to suppose and its sisters" – ظن وأخواتها. Besides, some prudent Arabic linguists divided these verbs into two categories according also to their semantic content:

1- "the verbs of hearts- أفعال القلوب and 2- "the verbs of conversion- أفعال التحويل.

The verbs of hearts-أفعال القلوب - in turn, are also divided into two subcategories, based also on the semantic content: 1- "verbs indicating knowledge and complete truthfulness- أفعال الدالة على اليقين - and 2- verbs indicating potential truthfulness- أفعال الرجحان - Evidentiality is clearly apparent in such verbs. To begin with "verbs indicating knowledge and complete truthfulness- أفعال الدالة على اليقين - Table 1 shows the most common seven verbs indicating knowledge and complete truthfulness in Arabic, and, of course, indicating evidentially since the speaker does not use such verbs unless he/she is utterly sure of what he/she speaks. In general, these verbs share mutual semantic content depicted in the sense of "know" (Hasan, 1980).

No.	Semantic Content	Verb in Arabic	Example	Evident-iality Degree
1-	know	know يعلم	I knew that respect is the way to love people.	100%
2-	know	consider يرى	I considered that hope is a motive for work.	100%

3-	know	يجد find	I found that knowledge is power.	100%
4-	know	يدري know	I knew that respect is the way to love people.	100%
5-	know	يلفي experience	I experienced that obstacles is a test of souls.	100%
6-	know	يجعل make	I made that my home is my eternal love.	100%
7-	know	تعلم learn	He learned that success is the only way for life.	100%

Table 1 : the most common seven verbs indicating knowledge and complete truthfulness in Arabic

As shown in Table 1, all of these verbs have semantic content, indicating 100 % evidentiality. Besides, all of these verbs share the same syntactic behavior which is clearly depicted in the following formula :

subject - - - verb (of evidentiality) - - - nominal sentence
1   knew   that respect is the way to love people.

If the semantic content of these verbs differs from being 100% evidentiality since these verbs may have more than one sense, their syntactic behavior will also change. For example, if the semantic content of such verbs especially those referring to sense such as - يرى - indicates direct evidentiality, then these verbs assign only one object not two such as:

The elegant person saw his ex-wife near the park.

In this sentence, the main verb indicates direct evidentiality, not indirect evidentiality; and hence, it assigns only one object not two ones like those of indirect evidentiality mentioned in the table above.

Concerning another subtype of the verbs of hearts أفعال القلوب , i.e., verbs indicating potential truthfulness- أفعال الرجحان , Table 2 shows the most common six verbs indicating potential truthfulness in Arabic, and, of course, indicating evidentiality but with less degree than verbs indicating knowledge and complete truthfulness since the speaker here is somehow sure of what he/she speaks. In general, they share a mutual semantic content depicted in the sense of "suppose"(ibid)

No.	Semantic Content	Verb in Arabic	E x a m p l e	Evident-iality Degree
1	suppose	يظنsuppose	The pilot supposed that the river is	80%

			channel.	
2	suppose	يخالsuppose	The traveller supposed that the city is more profitable for him.	80%
3	suppose	يحسبexpect	I expected that staying off is tiring.	80%
4	suppose	يزعمclaim	He claimed that people are the strongest power.	80%
5	suppose	يعدsuppose	He supposed the believer is a brother.	80%
6	suppose	احجاsuppose	The tourist supposed that the minaret is a tower.	80%

Table 2 : the most common six verbs indicating potential truthfulness in Arabic.

As shown in Table 2, all of these verbs have semantic content, indicating 80% evidentiality. Besides, all of these verbs share the same syntactic behavior which is clearly depicted in the following formula :

- verb (of partial evidentiality) - - - nominal sentence
The pilot   supposed   that the river is

channel.

If the semantic content of these verbs differs from being 80% evidentiality since   these verbs may have more than one sense, their syntactic behavior will also change.

Concerning the second category, the verbs of conversionافعال التحويل ,   these verbs do not have semantic content of evidentiality but rather their semantic content indicates a sense of conversion from one state to another. Thus, these verbs do not fit this study.

Concerning the sensory evidence, Arabic has a similar system of such evidence to English. To be clear, Arabic speakers use perception verbs for strong assertion, which is considered direct evidence such as "hear يسمع/ see ينظر / feel يشعر/", etc. In addition, indirect perception verbs indicating weak assertion are also used to indicate evidentiality such as : "it is said that ...."يقال. However, there are many Arabic structures indicating evidentiality, but since we do not have enough room to cover them all, two of these structures with different degrees of evidentiality are illustrated below :

1- It is probable that it will rain : من المحتمل ان تمطر اليوم
2- It is emphatical that it will rain: من المؤكد ان تمطر اليوم

In the first sentence, the evidential marker is "it is probable", which refers to the potential incidence of the

event (50% evidentiality). On the other hand, in the second sentence the evidential marker is "it is emphatical", which refers to the potential incidence of the event (100% evidentiality).

Nevertheless, the past tense (perfect form) represents an effective linguistic tool to indicate evidentiality in Arabic. Also, some scholars have claimed that the past tense in Arabic is mainly used as a marker for evidentiality (Comrie, 1976). In fact, the perfect form is meant to show that the action happened and that the degree of speaker's evidentiality can reach up to 100%. Such usage is highly noticed in the Gluorious Koran, especially when talking about some event that really happened or even some events that have not yet happened.

To be clear, the Glorious Koran uses the perfect form to refer to the deeds carried out by Allah Almightly to indicate 100% of evidentiality. In addition, many verbs that are attributed to Allah Almighty are perfect in order to bring the clear-cut evidence to the fore even if these verbs deal with future aspects or deeds such as what will happen on Resurrection or Judgment Day:

1- "وجاء ربك والملك صفا صفا وجيء يومئذ بجهنم يومئذ يتذكر الانسان وأنى له الذكرى"(الفجر: ٢٢-٢٣)

And your Lord comes with the angels in rows; and Hell will be brought near that Day. On that Day will man remember, but how will that remembrance (then) avail him?

2- "اذا الشمس كورت واذا النجوم انكدرت" (التكوير: ١-٢)

When the sun Kuwwirat (wound round and lost its light and is overthrown), and when the stars shall fall*;*

Although the first holy verse talks about a future event, the perfect tense is used to indicate 100% evidentiality since as mentioned above this tense is used in Arabic to show that events did happen; what is future for us is a past for Allah Almighty; therefore, this finding conforms totally with the claim stated above by many researchers that the perfect form is used in Arabic as a marker for evidentiality. On the other hand, although the second holy verse talks also about a future issue related to the Resurrection Day, the perfect tense is also employed to show the same aspect, 100% evidentiality.

Conclusion

The focus of this study is meant to show certain aspects related to evidentiality in both Arabic and English, and how this linguistic phenomenon is depicted and framed in these two languages. The study claims that

Arabic provides many ways to present evidentiality. These ways are varied according to the degree of evidentiality involved. Besides, this study claims that the perfect tense is mainly used in Arabic to show evidentiality.

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