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**EVIDENTIALITY AND EPISTEMIC MODALITY IN THE TEXT**  
**OF MASS MEDIA REPORTAGE**

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**Abstract**

The language of mass media reporting serves as a tool for appealing to a wide readership. It inevitably reveals the author's viewpoint regarding the arguments and statements given in the current reportage. The aim of this article is a full review of implementation of the categories of evidentiality and epistemic modality in the context of mass media reportage. At the same time, a set of tasks is given in this respect: to define the notions of evidentiality and epistemic modality proposed by the linguists, to determine the pragmatic meaning of introductive predicates. Particular attention is given to the relationship between the reliability of the information presented in the reportage and the meaning of the introductive predicates and accompanying lexical markers. Summarizing the achieved results, it is worth noting that the category of evidentiality is based on linguistic coding of information source. In the context of mass media reportage, the relevant information is included by means of introductive predicates. Herewith being evidential markers, these predicates reflect direct or indirect source of information and the author's relevant opinion about the reported situation. Consequently, the category of evidentiality is deeply interconnected with epistemic modality, since mainly the verbs denoting mental activity act as predicates introducing relevant messages. Considering the meaning of introductive predicates and accompanying lexical markers, it is quite possible to determine the degree of reliability of the given information.

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## 1. Introduction

Modern media linguistics and media discourse studies is increasingly turning to the study of the anthropocentric interpretation of mass media language peculiarities.

Mechanisms for creating social reality with the help of words are the mechanisms of discourse, since the discourse as a social practice provides scenarios for interpretation of facts and phenomena, the possibility of realizing one's goals and fighting for one's interests. (Labutina & Topchii, 2019, p. 221)

The categories of evidentiality and epistemic modality are vivid examples in applying the approach with anthropocentric focus. On the mental and language level these categories will be realized through the construction and transmission of certain, specially sophisticated concepts (Antropova & Bondarevskaya, 2019). Evidentiality is a special linguistic category by means of which the speaker determines his role in the description of the event, taking on the role either of a direct witness or of a transmitter of other people's information.

## 2. Problem Statement

The category of evidentiality has a relatively short history of study and is increasingly becoming the subject of comprehensive analysis in linguistics. It is related to important conditions of communication and is associated with the language coding of the source of information and the nature of its indication. Evidentiality allows speakers to state the information source of what they are talking about and frame knowledge patterns (Aikhenvald, 2018).

Traditionally, evidentiality is considered as a category that encodes only the source of information and the means of obtaining it. According to this approach, evidentiality exists independently parallel to the category of epistemic modality. In many works of this research area there is an obvious connection and interaction between these categories. This view towards the multimodal analysis of communication and discourse seems to be reasonable (Kozhemyakin, 2019).

However, there is another interpretation of the phenomenon under discussion that includes evidentiality in the parameters of the category of epistemic (subjective) modality. This means that evidential meanings also express the reliability of the statement, i.e. an assessment of the truth of the proposition, which means the speaker's attitude to current events and allows their different interpretation and shades of appraisal (Nuyts, 2001). This approach was implemented in the works of linguists such as Frank R. Palmer, J. Nuyts, Th. Willett and others. Thus, the question of the relation between evidentiality and epistemic modality remains disputable.

## 3. Research Questions

Researchers emphasize the universal nature of evidentiality, since it exists in all languages. This is due to the natural need of a person to transmit information in the process of communication, while pointing to the source of information. Thus the main research questions appear to be the following:

### **3.1. To define the notion of evidentiality proposed by the scholars of language**

Definitions suggested for evidentiality centres on broad understanding and narrow understanding. W. Chafe was the first to suggest the broad one, according to which evidentiality indicates both the information source and a speaker's viewpoint on the proposition. A narrow understanding of the category of evidentiality is suggested by M. Faller. The researcher considers evidentiality to be a category independent of modality, which refers to "the speaker's coding of the reasons for creating a speech act".

### **3.2. The next issue is to review the types of epistemic modality in linguistic writings**

Speaking about the types of epistemic modality, some foreign linguists distinguish between objective and subjective epistemic modalities. J. Lyons was apparently the first to introduce this classification. The researcher believes that objective epistemic modality denotes an objectively measurable possibility of reliability (or unreliability) of the described state of things, and subjective denotes purely subjective assumption of a speaker about the reliability of a proposition.

A separate type of modality expressing the relation of the content of the statement to reality in terms of its reliability/unreliability is called subjective epistemic modality. In the newspaper report this relation is established by the reporter. Subjective epistemic modality is a highly controversial notion in modern linguistics. Moreover, it is quite significant to differentiate between the meanings of introductive predicates in the context of mass media reportage.

## **4. Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this study is to identify the degree of reliability of information presented in the context of mass media reportage. The media language is modelled accurately as it addresses some quantitatively, but especially qualitatively diversified crowds (Mircică, 2017). The relevant information is most commonly included by the reporter by means of special introductive predicates. Each of these predicates realizes certain pragmatic meaning. This meaning makes possible to determine the degree of reliability of the given information. Thus, the actualization of evidential and epistemic meanings is accomplished.

The main concern here is to underline the importance of conceptual splitting and differentiations between explicit and implicit meanings of introductive predicates within the aspects of pragmatic research. (Tănase, 2017). Being evidential markers, these predicates reflect direct or indirect source of information and the author's relevant opinion about the reported situation. A gripping definition is given by Biber et al. (1998) understanding by the epistemic modality the speaker's comments in regard to the status of information in a proposition.

## **5. Research Methods**

When identifying the author's relevant opinion and the degree of reliability of the given information within the framework of the reportage the method of text analysis is used, as well as continuous sampling method, the method of component and semantic analysis. All these are important for interpreting the

conscious and unconscious efforts made by the media to sensationalize stories that they wish to promote, and to dissimulate factors which question the legitimacy of their reporting practices (Muhamed, 2017).

It can be noted as well that one of the promising methods in the study of the category of evidentiality is the study of its national-cultural potential, the realization of which is possible, first of all, in the framework of contrastive linguistics.

## 6. Findings

The relationship between evidentiality and epistemic modality in mass media report is clearly manifested when the verbs denoting mental activity act as predicates introducing relevant messages. Predicates of this type are used by reporters in a variety of ways in order to actualize the evidential meaning. In particular, we distinguish 7 introductive predicates of mental activity, or predicates denoting retrospective cognitive processes in the mind of the author of the report, to be exact.

Introductive predicates of this type and personal pronoun 1<sup>st</sup> person (in the singular or plural) form constructions such as *I believe... / I do not believe..., I think... / I do not think..., I consider... / I do not consider..., I suppose... / I do not suppose..., I find... / I do not find..., I guess... / I do not guess..., I understand... / I do not understand*. Constructions of this kind should be understood as explicit expressions indicating the author's position about some information.

Table 01 presents the quantitative distribution of introductive predicates in the text of mass media reports and their actual meaning.

**Table 1.** Introductive predicates. Pragmatic meaning in reportage texts

№	Introductive predicate	Pragmatic meaning (based on semantics, the categories of evidentiality and epistemic modality)	Frequency	Percentage frequency
1.	think	weak epistemic meaning (i.e. meaning expressing the author's opinion, supposition or assumption)	199	61,8%
2.	believe	strong epistemic meaning (i.e. meaning expressing the author's belief and strong conviction in the accuracy of what is being said in a reportage)	58	18%
3.	consider	weak epistemic meaning (i.e. meaning expressing the author's philosophical reflection, speculative or hypothetical evaluation)	26	8,1%
4.	suppose	weak epistemic meaning (i.e. meaning expressing the author's opinion, supposition or assumption)	14	4,3%
5.	find	weak epistemic meaning (i.e. meaning expressing the author's assumption made unexpectedly or by chance)	11	3,4%
6.	guess	weak epistemic meaning (i.e. meaning expressing the author's supposition, guessing or creating baseless assumptions)	8	2,5%
7.	understand	weak epistemic meaning (i.e. meaning expressing the author's particular view or interpretation of what is being said in a reportage)	6	1.9%
Total			322	100

It should be noted that above mentioned pragmatic meanings of introductive predicates carry the generalized meaning. At the same time, under the influence of the surrounding contexts they may acquire additional meanings or modify their epistemic meaning into opposite one. Thus, the introductive predicate *think* in some cases can acquire a strong epistemic meaning that is not typical for it. And vice versa, the introductive predicate *believe* can express weak epistemic meanings instead of strong one under the influence of the context and attendant words-intensifiers. The recognition and understanding of the meaning is possible only due to the adequate interpretation of the sentences uttered in concrete situations of communication (Tănase, 2017).

The introductive predicate *think* is the most frequently used introductive predicate. It has the most ramified semantic structure and in various reportage contexts expresses the epistemic meanings. In the examples below, the pragmatic goal of introductive predicate *think* used in the epistemic meaning in reporting is most likely to highlight the key points of the report, rather than avoid expressing one's own opinion regarding the issue being discussed.

(1) *The official, who was familiar with an internal Central Intelligence Agency report that discussed a potential global power shift, also warned of unrest that could ensue in countries around the world. **I think probably that**, combined with internal predictions that the pandemic could extend beyond 2020, gives China and Russia further leverage to elevate their positions on the world stage.* (O'Connor & Naveed, 2020).

The key role is played by the word that accompanies the introductive predicate *think* and affects its meaning. In example (1) the meaning of the introductive predicate *think* is emphasized by the meaning of the concomitant adverb *probably*, which means uncertainty itself.

In example (2) the reporter makes arguments casting doubt on the lack of the past practice of resolving the crisis. The report deals with the problems of free market economics and crisis. The doubt expressed is based on expert opinion in finance, the workplace, property, food and the environment.

(2) *The figure **we must think at is** what initially started as a public health crisis has now turned into an economic crisis, with jobless claims already surging to a record 3.28 million in one of the first weeks of this crisis alone.* (Collinson, 2020).

Example (2) serves as proof that the author's comment is often necessary to draw a conclusion about the degree of reliability of the initial assumption.

The epistemic meaning of the verb *to believe* is strong, i.e. the meanings expressing belief and strong conviction in the accuracy of what is being said in the report. And only in rare cases the epistemic meaning of the verb *believe* can be compared with the meaning of the verb *think*.

When considering examples (3), (4) and (5), in which the phrases *I believe* and *I do not believe* are used, at first glance it may seem that these phrases carry the meaning of the highest degree of uncertainty. Nevertheless, the use of the modal verb *could* and emphatic adverb *immensely* in example (4) gives this phrase the meaning of conviction rather than speculation.

In addition, in example (3), the journalist expresses his opinion in the first part of the sentence, unlike in example (6). From the point of view of information structure, the initial or previously known information is reported at the beginning of the sentence, as a rule. Firstly, this indicates that the reporter thus refers to the previously mentioned information in the previous context and therefore expresses his

opinion again and builds the rest of the utterance based on the assumption that the reader is aware of the information provided in the article.

(3) *But I believe the turmoil has at least helped American consumers. They are facing an unprecedented economic crisis thanks to the coronavirus pandemic* (Brennan, 2020).

(4) *Meanwhile, I believe that the production increase has left firms lacking the space to actually store the product being extracted. According to industry analyst IHS Markit, the first half of 2020 will see an increase of 1.8 billion in global oil inventories, though there is only storage space for some 1.6 billion. This could immensely force production cuts by June* (Brennan, 2020).

(5) *I don't believe this is the first time the RAC has been accused of failing to comply with the rules. In April last year, the FCA told the RAC to contact 1 million customers after finding the firm had failed to display the previous year's premium in renewal letters* (Collinson, 2020).

(6) *It was not just hardline militias that expressed frustration at the U.S. approach in Iraq, I believe.* (O'Connor, 2020).

The pragmatic meaning of the introductive predicate *consider* is reflected in the realization of the epistemic meaning that tends to be a neutral one, neither strong nor weak in this particular example. In the context of newspaper reports this predicate expresses the meaning of the author's reflection, evaluation, which gives the information a speculative, partly philosophical and cognitive connotation as in the example (7).

(7) *I consider that the problems we face on the climate crisis are systemic and that fundamental societal change is needed. Through rampant overfishing, pollution and coastal destruction, humanity has inflicted severe damage on the oceans and its inhabitants for centuries.* (Collinson, 2020).

The pragmatic meaning of the introductive predicate *suppose* expresses the meaning of opinion, supposition and assumption. Thus, the expressed epistemic meaning is weak and in the context of a newspaper report the reliability of presented information may be viewed as low.

(8) *We should not suppose it surprising then, only 27 per cent of the average employee's time is dedicated to the job they were hired to do, while the remaining 13 per cent is focused on strategic planning and forward-looking analysis* (Everett, 2020).

The weak epistemic meaning of the introductive predicate *guess* is explained by its pragmatic meaning of making suppositions, guessing and creating baseless assumptions. The message undertaking also has as objectives the conspiracy of the sources and targets by creating ambiguity concerning them and by multiplying the potential targets and sources (Vlăduțescu & Voinea, 2016).

(9) *The caps were designed to boost oil prices, which had fallen due to the global economic slowdown, I guess, particularly in Asia* (O'Connor, 2020).

It should be emphasized that the introductive predicate *find* bears the epistemic meaning expressing the author's assumption made unexpectedly or by chance. This predicate comes with special supplementary means and emphatic elements particularly frequently. They are used to draw the reader's attention to the idea expressed in the report. So, in example (10) the construction *I find* expresses the dislike of the author about the idea of working conditions presented in the article. The use of the formal adjective *negative* emphasizes the author's position even more.

(10) This unintended focus on mundane tasks has a number of knock-on effects, none of which are positive. First, **I find** the effect on staff productivity **negative** (Everett, 2020).

In a large number of cases the epistemic meaning of the introductive predicate *understand* expresses the author's particular view or interpretation of what is being said in the report. At the same time, the construction is used to indicate the author's upcoming and expected sequence of reasoning.

(11) **I understand** there is now the knowledge to create an ocean renaissance for wildlife by 2050 and with it bolster the services that the world's people rely on, from food to coastal protection to climate stability (Collinson, 2020).

## 7. Conclusion

In modern mass media reportages, the most common means of expressing evidentiality and epistemic modality are introductive predicates. In particular, predicates denoting retrospective cognitive processes in the mind of the author of the reportage. For instance, the undertaken reportage texts analysis shows that the introductive predicate *think* is characterized by the weak epistemic meaning. Although its epistemic meaning is weak according to the scale of reliability, this predicate is the most frequently used one. The predicate *believes*, on the contrary, is characterized by a strong epistemic meaning, occupying thus the highest position on the scale of reliability. At the same time, under the influence of the surrounding contexts the above mentioned predicates may acquire additional meanings or modify their epistemic meaning into opposite one. Possible obscuring of the informational benchmarks occurs by suppressing the information that could create an authentic reference system, which would enable the critical sense expression (Negrea & Dumitru, 2016). Thus, the degree of reliability of the given information is closely linked with the pragmatic meaning of the introduced predicate.

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