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Visual and non-visual categories of evidentiality in written discourse

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Abstract: The following research provides information about the linguistic category of evidentiality and its two types as visual and non-visual in written discourse. It should be mentioned that both categories of evidentiality are focused both in empirical and theoretical way and has mostly been used as propositional evidentiality which might scope over other propositions during fictional communication. Both types of evidentialities have been subjected to comparative linguistic analysis in fiction texts of English as well as Uzbek languages. Furthermore, in the work, a cross-linguistic comparative study of visual and non-visual evidentiality are used with sensory verbs and are directed from firsthand to secondhand and other people. One can see cohesive parallels in how flavors of both propositional and non-propositional evidentiality which interact with verbal tense and aspect simultaneously.

Key words: *visual evidentiality, non-visual evidentiality, epistemic evidence, information source, sensory verbs, nominal tense, perfect aspect, epistemic modality, witness evidentiality.*

1. Introduction

The representation of knowledge in discourse involves more than the communication of events: it also concerns how information becomes available to the person presenting it. A statement may derive from direct observation, another sensory experience, an inference, or information supplied by someone else. These distinctions are central to evidentiality, which concerns the linguistic expression of information source. Aikhenvald (2004) distinguishes the general capacity of languages to express information sources from grammatical evidentiality, in which source distinctions are encoded through grammatical systems. This distinction is essential for cross-linguistic comparison because similar communicative functions need not be realized through equivalent linguistic forms.

The present study investigates visual and non-visual evidential meanings in English and Uzbek written discourse. It approaches visual evidence as information grounded in sight and non-visual sensory evidence as information grounded in hearing, smell, taste, or touch. Inference and report are treated as separate analytical categories rather than being automatically classified as non-visual sensory evidence. This framework allows the analysis to distinguish what a discourse participant perceives directly from what that participant concludes or learns through another source.

Written narrative provides a productive setting for examining these distinctions. A text may present an event through a narrator's description, a character's perception, quoted speech, or an interpretation of observable circumstances. Consequently, identifying an information source requires attention to both linguistic form and the perspective from which a proposition is presented. For the purposes of this study, the relevant question is not simply whether a sentence contains a perception verb, but whether the construction establishes an evidential basis for a particular claim.

English and Uzbek offer a useful comparison because their resources for expressing information source cannot be assumed to correspond directly. Research on English examines the relationship between lexical expressions and the grammaticalization of evidential meanings (Mélac, 2022). Research on Uzbek identifies resources such as *-ibdi*, *ekan*, and *emish*, alongside inferential expressions such as *chog'i*. These findings support a comparison based on contextual functions rather than the mechanical matching of individual words or morphemes.

A central analytical challenge is distinguishing expressions of perception from evidential uses of those expressions. Verbs such as *see*, *look*, *hear*, and *feel* may describe sensory activities without specifying the source of a proposition. Conversely, a construction may establish an information source without explicitly naming a sensory process. Similarly, sensory vocabulary within a narrative does not necessarily indicate hearsay, and a reference to smell or taste should not be classified as visual evidence. These distinctions are necessary to prevent lexical meaning, evidential function, and contextual interpretation from being conflated.

Accordingly, this study adopts a qualitative comparative approach to selected English and Uzbek textual examples. It addresses three questions:

1. How are visual and non-visual sensory sources represented in the selected texts?
2. How can sensory evidence be distinguished from inference and reported information?
3. How do clause structure, tense–aspect marking, and narrative perspective contribute to evidential interpretation?

The intended contribution is a context-sensitive comparison of evidential strategies in the selected material. Rather than claiming that Uzbek evidentiality has not previously been studied, the analysis brings established distinctions in evidential research to bear on English–Uzbek written discourse. It seeks to clarify where the two languages show functional similarities and where their linguistic resources require different interpretations.

2. Literature Review

2.1. Evidentiality and the expression of information source

A foundational issue in evidential research is the distinction between grammatical evidentials and other means of identifying information sources. Aikhenvald (2004) establishes that languages can communicate information source without necessarily possessing a grammatical evidential system. Her account also recognizes evidential strategies: forms whose principal functions lie elsewhere but which acquire secondary meanings associated with information source. This distinction provides a basis for examining lexical and constructional expressions without treating every source-related expression as a grammatical evidential.

For the present comparison, three levels of description are therefore maintained: grammatical marking, lexical expression, and contextual interpretation. A grammatical marker may conventionally contribute a source-related meaning; a lexical expression may explicitly describe how information was obtained; and a broader passage may enable a source interpretation through its narrative organization. Keeping these levels separate allows English and Uzbek examples to be compared without assuming structural equivalence.

2.2. Lexical and grammatical evidential expressions

Boye (2024) relates the distinction between lexical and grammatical indications of information source to discourse prominence. In his account, grammatical indications are conventionally secondary, whereas lexical indications can function as primary discourse content. He also identifies propositional scope as a condition relevant to evidential grammaticalization and proposes diagnostics involving focusability, addressability, and modifiability. benjamins.com

This approach helps explain why a list of perception verbs is insufficient as an evidential classification. In the present study, an expression is examined for the function it performs within its construction. A verb describing an act of looking is distinguished from a construction that presents observation as the basis for believing a proposition. The analysis therefore considers complements, surrounding clauses, and the informational contribution of the expression rather than assigning evidential status solely from its dictionary meaning.

Mélac's (2022) investigation of evidential grammaticalization in English provides a complementary perspective on the relationship between information-source meanings and linguistic structure. Its relevance to the present study lies in treating English evidential expression as a subject requiring construction-specific analysis rather than reducing it to an inventory of sensory verbs. [Cambridge Core](https://www.cambridge.org/core)

2.3. Evidentiality in Uzbek

Existing scholarship demonstrates that evidentiality in Uzbek is already an established research topic. Research on the inferential marker *chog'i* identifies several grammatical options for expressing information source, including *-ibdi*, *ekan*, and *emish*, and notes that evidential marking is not obligatory in every utterance. Related research examines the hearsay function of *e(r)mish* and its lexicalization in *mish-mish(lar)*. [AVESIS](https://avesis.org)

These studies make it necessary to interpret Uzbek forms within their constructions and contexts. The present analysis does not assign a single sensory source or temporal value to a marker in isolation. Instead, it examines the proposition being qualified, the surrounding tense–aspect configuration, and the discourse participant to whom the information is attributed. This avoids treating an indirect evidential expression as automatically equivalent to either hearsay or non-visual perception.

2.4. Evidential perspective and clause structure

Evidential interpretation also raises the question of whose information source is represented. Aikhenvald's (2004) discussion of evidentials and person explicitly addresses the relationship between source marking and the individual whose perception or evidence is relevant. [Oxford Academic](https://www.oxfordacademic.com)

Bhadra's (2018) research on Bangla further demonstrates that evidential constructions can be sensitive to syntax and perspective. Her analysis links perspective-sensitive finite clauses to speech-act structure, showing that evidential interpretation cannot always be accounted for through lexical semantics alone. Although these findings concern Bangla, they provide a reason to consider clause structure and perspective when designing a comparative analysis of other languages; they do not establish that English or Uzbek has the same structural properties. [Experts@Minnesota](#)

In the present study, perspective is treated as an analytical variable. Each example is examined to determine whether the evidence belongs to the narrator, a speaking character, or another represented participant. Quotation and reported speech are considered alongside perception constructions because they may redistribute responsibility for the information conveyed.

2.5. Analytical framework for the present study

The reviewed literature supports an analysis that separates information source from linguistic realization and narrative perspective. Accordingly, the selected examples are examined along three dimensions: the source represented, the form used to express it, and the participant whose access to information is relevant.

The source categories comprise visual perception, non-visual sensory perception, inference, and report. Linguistic realization is examined through lexical items, grammatical markers, and larger constructions. Narrative perspective is identified through the relationship between the narrator, characters, and attributed statements. Tense and aspect are considered where they contribute to the interpretation, without assuming that temporal marking alone determines evidential status.

This framework enables a more precise English–Uzbek comparison than a binary division in which all information not obtained through sight is grouped together. It also allows ambiguous examples to remain explicitly context-dependent. The study's contribution consequently lies in the consistency and explanatory value of its comparative analysis, rather than in an unsupported claim of discovering evidentiality in Uzbek for the first time.

3.Methods and results. There is much evidence confirming that evidentiality is a grammatical category that refers to the speaker's ability to convey information about a certain event to others, whether they saw it, heard it, or heard it from secondhand or thirdhand.

Evidentiality, discourse prominence, and grammaticalization interact when source-of-information markers shift along the lexicon-grammar continuum, moving from primary, focal discourse elements into backgrounded, conventionalized grammatical categories. This evolution changes how speakers signal direct, inferred, or reported knowledge in real-time communication [Boye 2024: 35].

Famous linguist Bednarek Anderson defines the evidential category as follows: "Evidentiality is considered to be one of the general theoretical concepts that has a dominant semantic function, and has fundamental and consistent properties in relation to lexical meaning and grammatical expression [Anderson 1986: 273].

Evidentiality is also an important component of the phenomenon based on tense and aspect. It refers to the general meaning basis that is subject to the systematic composition of grammatical signs. In addition, evidentiality is not only the determination of the source of information of a particular object, but also the quality of the evidence presented in it, their concept of being close to reality or not, and the connection with epistemic evidence [Johanson 2000: 132].

Epistemic evidence is understood as the transfer of information about a certain event to others through one's own thoughts. Since tense and modality interact with each other in evidential content, temporal means and modal relations play a special role. Evidentiality is often determined by the acceptance of the statement by a subject. Let us pay attention to the following examples:

As I said you are a gentleman [O'Henry: 47]. They say I was a dead man [R.Crais.Chasing darkness: 17].

The expressions *as I said*, *they say* in the examples given above indicate that evidentiality has produced epistemic evidence. In Uzbek, it is like

Ta'kidlashlaricha, xudoyam Odam Atoni to'kisroq yaratolmaganidan armonda ekan (M.M. Do'st. Lolazor; 66) - Islom dinida aytishlaricha qiyomat qoyim bo'lganda, jamiki odamzot tirilib to'nlanadigan qo'rqinchli dasht, qiyomat maydonida to'planarmish [O'TIL: 93].

Discussion. The expressions in both languages are used the same. However, they express both the past and future tenses, and the role of the verb is important in this. Because, such additions as *-ibdi*, *ekan*, *-mish* are included in the category of hearsay, that is non-visual evidentiality. In the examples, *-kan* is used to express the past tense, while *-mish* refers to the future tense. In the English example, *are*, *was* are used to express the present and past tense. As evidentiality is identified with perception through senses, also known as sensory evidence. Sensory evidentiality might be divided into the following two types: visual (sight) and non-visual (all senses other than sight, i.e. hearing, smell, taste, and touch).

While visual evidentiality expresses the information that a person sees with his own eyes, speech act evidentiality refers to information that is not yet generally seen. Aikhenvald in the process of comparing non-visual evidential phenomena in Tariana, a language spoken by the Amazonian people, the Brazilian people and the English people reveals that in Tariana this phenomenon has a special grammatical meaning. For example, the following sentences:

Ma-ka-kade-mhana means (in the Tariana language)

I have never seen a white deer (in the English language)

Men hech qachon oq bug'uni ko'rmaganman (in the Uzbek language)

The following expression *kade* means the action which have not been done.

Furthermore, pointing to a subject or object is also considered as visual evidence. As an example, the scientist gives the following:

<i>In Tariana</i>	<i>In English</i>	<i>In Uzbek</i>
<i>Yii maki nii-mi</i>	<i>It is my son</i>	<i>Bu mening o'g'lim</i>

While in Tariana the personal pronoun *mi* is an evidential demonstrative, in English the personal pronoun *it* performs an evidential function. Although the object of vision is not involved in the sentence, it is clear that the speaker is encouraging the listener to see the information [Aikhenvald 2003: 138].

Below is the table of the visual evidentiality in two languages

VISUAL EVIDENTIALITY

ENGLISH	UZBEK
see	ko'rmoq
look	qaramoq

observe	kuzatmoq
stare	termilmoq
gaze	tikilib qaramoq
notice	payqamoq
peep	mo'ralamoq

In English, visual evidentiality can be used to express the past or perfect tense with the help of perceptual verbs. For example, *In the last one hundred years, we have seen the rise of the car, the airplane, the television, the personal computer, the internet, the smartphone and Beyoncé* (J. Clear. *Atomic Habits*: 151).

In Uzbek visual evidentiality also appears in certain expressions, in addition to the use of sensory verbs in the past tense. For instance, *Men tut daraxtlari panasiga o'tganimdan keyin quyuq yanroqlar orasidan ko'z tashlagan edim, Shakarning hamon izimdan termilib turganini ko'rdim* (H.Nazir. *Ko'kterak shabadasi*: 9).

In the provided example, the analytical compounds "ko'z tashlamoq" (to look) and "termilib turmoq" (to stare) are included in the category of visual evidentiality, along with their content-specific evidential meaning. Visual evidentiality fully explains the concept of "observer", in which it is clearly emphasized who is doing what and how, i.e. *After the shouting, I went across the hall to ask my neighbours if they had seen or heard anything. None of them had, but everyone wanted to see the damage, so I let them* (R.Crais. *Chasing darkness*: 98).

In the sentence, the speaker emphasizes the action in which he or she is involved. In some languages, visual evidence is distinguished from evidence that is not related to hearing, smelling or feeling. For example, in Kashaya language auditory and hearsay evidence is studied separately from other evidentialities [Lloyd 1986: 11].

In all languages, visual evidentiality involves all senses except sight. For example, in English, "Someone is coming after us" conveys the meaning that someone is coming behind the speaker (He/she hears). "Someone has stepped on my dress and is holding it firmly" means the fact that the subject of the speech has touched his shirt and is still touching it (I feel) brings to the surface of semantics [Bhadra 2018: 38].

In English the sentence *There is a very strong smell of blood here* [learnenglish.com] there is a visual evidentiality meaning. Because it is not only expressed by visual sight senses but also encompasses content such as a person's complete understanding of a specific reality. In Uzbek this sentence is translated as "Men qonning hidini sezayapman". "The food is very salty" which in Uzbek "Ovqat sho'r ekan" sentences the subject's message about specific information that is relevant to reality" and is related to the fact that a certain subject testifies that he tried the taste of the food. This context might an example to witness evidentiality.

Tasty flavours and the feeding of a fresh mouth provided little bits of immediate reinforcement and made the product satisfying to use (J.Clear. *Atomic habits*;149). This example expresses the non-visual evidentiality as it encompasses the information provider meaning.

The expression "tasty flavours and the feeding of a fresh mouth provided little bits of immediate reinforcement" indicates the rumours. This types of sentence also exists in the Uzbek language and it appears in the speech as the following:

Hovli yuzida aylanib yurgan oqsoq mushuk to'kilgan jo'xorini iskab ko'rdi, ma'qul bo'lmadi shekilli, Turobjonga qarab shikoyatomuz "myaau" dedi (A.Qahhor. Anor;1).

The expressions as "*shekilli, dedi, iskab ko'rdi*" indicates the reportative, in other words non-visual evidentiality. In this context, the idea expresses the attitude of the second person to the first person's action, stating that the watermelon was tasted and that it was not approved by the first person, and that it was given to the animal. This information is an example of both inferential and reportative second-person, non-visual evidentiality which also expressed with the help of adverbs and introductory phrases outside the semantic meaning of the verb. Non-visual evidentiality includes such verbs as *feel, smell, taste, experience, touch* and others where eyes do not directly participate but other senses of human-being.

In **conclusion**, one can infer that the category of evidentiality exists in all languages. To date, the category of evidentiality has been studied in English, German, French, Tariana, and Tucano but since has not been studied in Uzbek, we have tried to cover it in the article. Evidentiality can be defined both by the impression that various features of linguistic units are combined into a single composition, in which the resulting diverse meaning are aimed at identifying phenomena that are similar in several respects. Evidentiality, in turn also encompass properties associated with reality as a specific status in cognitive and functional-semantic analysis. Some traditional evidential phenomena often consist of experienced, observed or heard information.

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