

Reported Speech as an Evidentiality Strategy in American Sign Language

Barbara Shaffer University of New Mexico

bshaffer@unm.edu



Introduction

Speakers infuse their discourse with their personal opinion. As people speak, they convey information and simultaneously impart their perspective, opinions, and beliefs. Some utterances convey more speaker perspective than others, and warrant special consideration. When using an evidential the speaker makes an utterance and simultaneously asserts that there is evidence for what he is saying (de Haan 1999).

In some instances an evidential asserts that the speaker has evidence to support making the proposition, but does not necessarily commit to the truth of that proposition.

These may be bound morphemes or periphrastics

Types:

Inferential Evidentials

Reported Speech Evidential

Inferential Evidentials

Based on the evidence, a deduction or conclusion is reached.

The evidence may be perceived via olfactory, visual, tactile, auditory senses, or a combination.

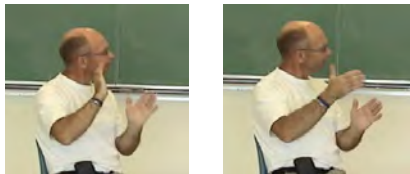
English: 'It looks like it's going to rain today.'

Uttered while looking at the clouds.

'It must be raining.'

Uttered when someone walks in with a wet jacket on or you hear rain hitting the roof.

SEEM as an Inferential Evidential



[LIBRARY HAVE DEAF LIFE MAGAZINE]-topic [SEEM]-head nod/brow furrow'

It seems the library has Deaf Life magazine.'

[TIM, JENNIFER DIVORCE]- topic [SEEM]- head nod/brow furrow'

It seems that Tim and Jennifer are getting a divorce.'

Reported Speech Evidentials

Spanish dizque: 'he/s says that' also encodes speaker doubt regarding the source and/or truth of the information expressed (Travis 2006)

English: 'I heard the lines at Highland High School were around the block.'

Uttered when discussing high voter turnout.

The speaker has not seen the lines, but uses 'heard' as evidence for his claim of high voter turnout.

ASL Reported Speech Evidentials

The coding often results in a complex temporal blend (Dudis 2004).

Signer pauses mid-stream in the discourse.

Assumes vantage point of self as participant in another discourse setting.

Relates relevant part of the discourse.

Constructed discourse expresses signer's reaction.

Signer resumes discourse using that blended frame, including the constructed discourse as evidence for a claim.



YES YES AND PRO.1 HEARD (gaze right) 3SIGN.TO1 (leans forward #WHAT** (gaze center) V-R-S (nod) START CUT (left hand) CUT (right hand) CUT (left hand) [HAPPEN SEE NAME]-top [KNOW WHO]-top CUT REFUSE ANSWER [WHY]-top SOMETIMES SIT NAKED BODY SECOND BAD SWEARING [TRUE]-y/n

'Yes, and I heard, well, I was told, and was shocked to hear, that the VRS (companies) are starting to disconnect calls. If they see a name that they know they don't answer, because sometimes people have answered naked, or used profanity. Is that true?'



The signer breaks eye gaze with addressee, and turns her gaze to the right. She creates a past discourse space mental space where she relates that she learned something she found surprising.

She uses a well known, and in this case metaphorical "I heard" to begin then a passivized "It was signed to me"

Followed by constructed discourse "what?"

Functions to provide evidence, and indicate her (at least initial) disbelief in the claim.

She checks in with her interlocutor to verify the claim.



(eye gaze right) SOMEONE SAY PRO.1 OH.I.SEE GOOD IDEA (eye gaze to addressee) SUPPOSE PRO.1 N.C. CALL VRS index left CHARLOTTE GO.TO OTHER STATE LESS CONFLICT INTEREST KNOW EACH.OTHER LESS CONFLICT INTEREST (eye gaze right) PRO.1 OH.I.SEE

'Someone told me something interesting. I thought it was a good idea. If I'm in North Carolina and call the video relay service I won't get the one in Charlotte, I'll get one in another state. There's less conflict of interest that way, because we don't know each other. So there's less conflict of interest. Interesting.'



'Someone told me something interesting. I thought it was a good idea.'

Summary

Inferential evidentials include words such as SEEM and OBVIOUS and appear to also express speaker commitment.

Reported Speech evidentials in ASL use past space blends and body partitioning to indicate source and sometimes to comment on the veracity of claims.

References

- de Haan, Ferdinand (1999). Evidentiality and epistemic modality: Setting boundaries. *Southwest Journal of Linguistics* 18.1, 83-101.
- Dudis, Paul, G. (2004). Body partitioning and real-space blends. *Cognitive Linguistics* 15:2, 223- 238.
- Shaffer, Barbara. (2004). Information ordering and speaker subjectivity: Modality in ASL. *Cognitive Linguistics*, 15:2, 175-195.
- Travis, Catherine E. (2006). Dizque: A Colombian evidentiality strategy. *Linguistics*. 44:6, 1269-1290.