

THE DIVISION OF LABOUR IN THE INTERPRETATION OF ROMANIAN EVIDENTIALS

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Abstract: *The study is a corpus analysis of the Romanian evidential adverb ‘cică’, with a view to determining its semantic and pragmatic properties. It puts forward a unitary analysis of the semantics of the evidential, accounting for the various nuances it may acquire as the result of its interaction with other epistemic markers and inferences contributed by the context. The first section reviews previous semantic analyses of evidential adverbs in the literature proposing a polysemantic approach. The second and the third section investigate the semantic and pragmatic properties, respectively, that the evidential adverb evinces in examples extracted from the CoRoLa corpus as an attempt to tease apart the contribution of the different epistemic markers, evidentials and the wider context of conversation.*

Keywords: *evidential markers, hearsay, paranthetics, epistemic markers, pragmatic inferences*

1. Evidentiality and/or epistemic modality?

The Routledge Dictionary of Language and Linguistics defines evidentiality as a “structural dimension of grammar that codifies the source of information transmitted by a speaker with the aid of various types of constructions.” The sources of information included in the definition are personal observation as the primary source of information, hearsay (quotative), but also the deductive skills of the speaker (inferential). This definition reflects a debate that has been around for many decades regarding the relation between the linguistic categories of evidentiality and modality, namely whether evidentiality is to be analysed as a type of modality or certain types of modality can be treated as sub-types of evidentiality.

The intermingling of evidentiality and epistemic modality goes back to Jakobson, who is credited with coining the term *evidential* in a 1957 study, reprinted in 1971.

“a tentative label for the verbal category which takes into account three events – a narrated event, a speech event and a narrated speech event, namely the alleged source of information about the narrated event. The speaker reports an event on the basis of someone else’s report (quotative,

i.e. hearsay evidence), of a dream (revelative evidence), of a guess (presumptive evidence) or of his own previous experience (memory evidence). (Jakobson 1971: 135)

Jakobson includes in the categories of evidence presumptive evidence, which is indicated by epistemic modality markers.

Another early study conflating evidentiality and epistemic modality is Mithun 1986, quoted in Chafe and Nichols (1986), include, in the range of evidential phenomena, precision, probability and expectations, all of which are subcategories of epistemic modality, based on the fact that some markers may have several of these functions as well as the fact that, diachronically, they exhibit a shift in functions.

Chafe and Nichols (1986) themselves, in the introduction to the collective volume, consider that evidentiality codes both the source of information and the speakers' judgements on the reliability of the information.

“There are some things people are sure of, either because they have reliable evidence for them, or—probably more often—because they have unquestioning faith that they are true. There are other things people are less sure of, and some things they think are only within the realm of possibility. Languages typically provide a repertoire of devices for conveying these various attitudes toward knowledge. ... languages express these and other attitudes toward knowledge in sometimes similar, sometimes quite different ways. ... The data and analyses ... show us much about what we might regard as 'natural epistemology', the ways in which ordinary people ... naturally regard the source and reliability of their knowledge.... The term EVIDENTIAL has come to be used for such a device (Chafe and Nichols 1986: vii)

The authors analyse some English modals, particularly *must*, as serving both the function of epistemic markers and that of evidentiality markers, an analysis that has been carried over in the literature. McCready and Ogata (2007) argue, for Japanese, that some expressions indicating source of evidence are part of propositional content and are best analysed as a special kind of epistemic modal. Similarly, the French construction *devoir* + infinitive has been argued to serve as marker of the source of evidence, in addition to its epistemic function, in some contexts.

- (1) a. Le ciel se découvre. Le temps doit être en train de s'améliorer.
'The sky is clearing. The weather must be getting better.'

- b. Le ciel se découvre. *Le temps doit s'améliorer.
'The sky is clearing. The weather must be getting better.'
- c. D'après les prévisions météo, le temps doit s'améliorer demain.
'According to forecasts, the weather will get better tomorrow.'
- (Kronning, 2001 quoted in Squartini, 2004:875)

According to Squartini (2004), Kronning's tests can be interpreted as *prima facie* evidence that *devoir*+infinitive has both inferential and reportive functions, which mutually exclude each other. According to the author, a similar behaviour is exhibited by the French conditional.

Squartini (2004), however, does not argue for an overlap of the two categories, evidentiality and modality. While conceding that, "due to the cluster of different functions the interpretation as epistemic or evidential turns out to be an arbitrary choice, ultimately depending on a priori assumptions" (Squartini 2004: 874), he argues that "a distinction between marking the evidential source of the information and signalling the epistemic degree of certainty seems to be conceptually self-evident" (Squartini 2004: 873). The term 'inferential' is to be used, according to the linguist, for cases where the speaker draws conclusions based on some type of evidence.¹

An even firmer stance is taken by Aikenwald (2003), (2004), (2018), who argues for a much more restrictive use of the terms 'evidentiality' and 'evidential':

"There are, in every language, means for saying how one knows what one is talking about, and what one thinks about what one knows or has learnt. Every language has some means of phrasing inferences and assumptions, evaluating probability and possibility, and expressing belief or disbelief. The source of knowledge can be expressed in a variety of ways.

In quite a few languages one has to specify the information source on which a statement is based—whether the speaker saw the event

¹ The distinction between indicating and interpreting the source of evidence is rather blurred in Nuckolls (2018)'s rejection of the direct-indirect evidence dichotomy: "The assumed contrast between direct and indirect experience is an imperfect heuristic for the study of evidential systems because it carries a *tabula rasa* assumption within it, namely, the assumption that learning mainly takes place through sensory experience, and that the mind is primarily a processing mechanism for sensations. This is problematic because it ignores the cultural and psychological scaffolding that is essential for human learning, and which seems to have been alluded to in Boas' description of evidentials for Kwakiutl (1911b: 443) where he described them as marking 'source of subjective knowledge'. (Nuckolls, 2018: 202)

happen, didn't see it but heard it (or smelt it), made an inference about it based on visual traces or reasoning or general knowledge, or was told about it. This is the essence of evidentiality, or *grammatical marking of information source...*” (Aikhenvald 2018: 1)

The linguist restricts the label *evidential* (marker) to grammaticalized items whose sole or primary function is to indicate the source of evidence, their use being obligatory, similarly to aspect or mood markers in European languages.

“A number of grammatical categories, such as conditional mood or perfective aspect, can each acquire a secondary evidential-like meaning without directly relating to source of information. Such extensions of grammatical categories to evidential-like meanings will be referred to as ‘evidential strategies’ (Aikhenvald 2013: 2)

Aikenwald's strong position is, however, weakened by the fact that, according to McCready and Ogata (2007: 152), “although it is true that many languages that have evidentials strongly prefer their use, such use is almost never—and possibly simply never—obligatory.” While rejecting Aikenwald's restrictive use of the term *evidential*, the authors do propose a clear delimitation of the categories of evidentiality and modality, taking de Haan (1999)'s position:

“The hypothesis ... is that evidentials are in fact a priori unmarked with respect to a commitment to the truth of the speech utterance on the part of the speaker. Evidentials merely assert that there is evidence to back up the speaker's utterance. Any connection between the two ... is secondary in nature. They encode different things (source of information vs. attitude toward that information). Although they are closely enough related to cause overlap in some languages, this overlap is not universal.” (de Haan, 1999 quoted in McCready and Ogata, 2007:151)

The position adopted in this study is similar to that proposed by de Haan (1999), in that a distinction between the categories of evidentiality and epistemic modality is assumed, the aim being to determine whether certain markers of evidentiality in Romanian have as their sole or main function the indication of the source of evidence, thus resembling Aikenwald's definition of evidentials. At the same time, an extension of the category of evidentiality to languages which do not obligatorily require its marking in all contexts is implicit in the analysis, along the lines of the studies mentioned above.

2. The semantics of *cică* as evidentiality marker in Romanian

Romanian does not require the obligatory marking of the source of evidence, but, similarly to many other languages in addition to those mentioned before in this article, it may employ a range of linguistic devices (lexical items, such as report verbs and the adverbs mentioned below, constructions such as *in one's opinion*, mood markers) to indicate the source of evidence, classified by Zafiu (2002) into lexicalized and grammaticalized markers. The former, which are of interest for our research, are taken to include mood forms indicating inferential evidence (the presumptive and the conditional mood) and, reportative (hearsay) evidentiality markers, a category featuring the adverbs *cică*, *pasămite*, *chipurile* (En. *they say*, *presumably*, *allegedly*), as grammaticalized markers of indirect evidentiality.

- (2) Vă mărturisesc că au fost destul de evazive câteva mesaje care au ajuns la mine **cum că ar fi** bine să renunț, că nu e bine... (CoRoLa)
'I confess that some of the messages that I received were fairly elusive, that, presumably, I had better give up, that it's not good...'
- (3) ... nu **o fi** ea mai bună ca altele, dar nici mai rea, pentru că sufletul încă nu i s-a întinat ... (CoRoLa)
'... she may not be better than others, but she's not evil either, because her soul was not tainted ...'
- (4) Tocmai atunci, un scârțâit s-a auzit din depărtare, / Căci **pasămite**, niște care treceau pe drum. (CoRoLa)
'Just then they heard a grinding noise in the distance, since, apparently, some carts were passing by.'

The indirect evidentiality-marking function of the conditional marker *ar* in (2) and the presumptive mood marker *o* in (3), parallel to their function as markers of epistemic modality has been described in a number of studies, among which Zafiu (2002), GALR 2008, Irimia (2010), (2017), Mihoc (2012). GALR 2008 subsumes the function of hearsay evidentiality marking of the conditional mood to its function of epistemic modality marker, arguing that the conditional mood is a marker of possibility, signalling the weakening of the speaker's commitment to the truth of the reported facts. Zafiu (2002) takes that the same stance to all hearsay evidentiality markers. According to the linguist, evidential adverbs are included in the larger class of inferential evidentiality markers, alongside epistemic adverbs (*probabil* (En. *probably*)), epistemic verbs (*a presupune* (En. *suppose*)), epistemic modal verbs (*trebuie* (En. *must*)) and mood markers, (indirect) evidentiality being considered a subclass of epistemic modality.

The epistemic non-commitment interpretation of evidentiality markers varies, however, across the class of evidential adverbs, a fact

acknowledged by Dindelegan (2020). Unlike *pasămite* and *chipurile*, which clearly mark the speaker's non-commitment and imply non-factuality, the epistemic distancing interpretation of *cică* is weaker and context-dependent. The authors interpret *cică* as primarily a hearsay evidentiality marker, its use as marker of epistemic distancing being secondary to that of source of evidence marker. This difference in the epistemic interpretation of the adverbs may be due, in some cases, to their diachronic evolution. As shown by Remberger (2015: 33-34), the adverb *cică* originates from the construction (*se*) *zice că* (En. *they say that*) containing the report verb *say* with an impersonal value, while *pasămite* has grammaticalized from the construction *mi se pare* (En. *it seems to me*).

In order to determine the semantic contribution of *cică* and its interaction with other evidentiality markers a corpus analysis on the Reference Corpus of Contemporary Romanian (CoRoLa) was performed.

3. The results of the analysis

The aim of the corpus analysis was to determine whether the adverb *cică* can be analysed as a dedicated evidentiality marker, or whether, similarly to other members of this class, it simultaneously serves the function of epistemic marker. The starting assumption was that, as proposed by Speas (2018:311), “the speaker's level of certainty depends crucially on the reliability of evidence, but neither level of certainty nor reliability is encoded directly as a core part of an evidential meaning”.

The CoRoLa search returned 1553 matches, most of which were extracted from blogs, a fact which confirms the status of *cică* as a marker specific to the informal register.

The semantic interpretation of the contexts revealed that, in most cases, no inferences regarding the speaker's commitment to the truth of the reported proposition, as shown in the examples below, where *cică* simply presents the information as originating from a source other than the speaker.

- (5) A comisie care nu s-a întrunit niciodată, din care **cică** făcea el parte împreună cu alte persoane importante, ... a falsificat un raport de expertiză.
'A committee which never met, of which people say he was a member, together with other important people ... falsified an expert opinion.'
- (6) Un preot ... nu vă va îndruma spre odină. ... Se pare că și sufletul tău va avea parte de odihna veșnică din rai în care, **cică**, nu se muncește. Dar pe pământ trebuie să muncim ...

‘A priest ... will never urge you to rest. ... It seems that your soul will also enjoy eternal rest in heaven, where, apparently, one doesn’t work. But here, on Earth, we must work ...’

An epistemic interpretation is present in most of the contexts where the adverb co-occurs with the subjunctive mood marker *ar* (120 sentences), as the following example indicates:

- (7) ... Că ăștia **cică ar** fi cavalerii lui Mărțișor. Așa mi-a spus unul. Dar eu nu i-am văzut. (CoRoLa)
‘Allegedly, they are Martisor’s best men. Someone told me this. But I didn’t see them.’

While the presence of the subjunctive is, in most cases, associated with a pragmatic effect of distancing, this inference is not present in all the examples.

- (8) Trei luni **cică ar** fi stat el în spital după care a ieșit cu foaie de tratament sever la domiciliu. (CoRoLa)
‘They say he spent three months in hospital before being released with home treatment for a severe condition.’

In the example above, both the adverb and the subjunctive marker have the function of indicating hearsay evidence, no degree of certainty being indicated.

The lack of an epistemic function of *cică* makes it possible for the adverb to co-occur with other evidentiality adverbs.

- (9) **Chipurile**, acu’ de sărbători, **cică** a plecat la colindat. -Auzi, auzi! Ce le dă prin cap nenorociților! (CoRoLa)
‘Presumably, now, for the holidays, they say that we went carolling. – Can you believe what the bastards cooked up?’

The non-factuality interpretation obtained in such examples is the contribution of the adverb *chipurile*.

In other cases, the non-commitment is contributed by the context of discourse, where *cică* merely indicates the lack of direct evidence. The rejection of the truth of the proposition is inferred from the following context.

- (10) Partid complet rupt de lumea și realitatea profundă, adâncă a săracilor, a necăjiților dar **cică** îi reprezintă! Cât cinism!?

‘A party completely out of touch with the world and the true condition of the poor, the wretched, they claim to represent. What cynicism!’

Thus, the investigation supports an analysis of the adverb as a dedicated grammaticalized marker of evidentiality, its non-obligatory presence not perverting its analysis, I propose, as a true evidential marker.

4. Some remarks on the pragmatics of *cică*

The syntactic analysis put forward in Sava (2021) tentatively proposed the treatment of *cică* as a member of the class of parentheticals, i.e. “expressions which can be appended parenthetically to an anchor clause” (Huddleston and Pullum 2002:895), based on the syntactic mobility and scope properties of the adverb. This status is also supported by the pragmatic behaviour of the inferences contributed by *cică* to the proposition under its scope.

According to Potts (2005:13), supplemental adverbs contribute speaker-oriented entailments which cannot be cancelled.

- (11) Mi s-a cerut să platesc o factura de 520 lei, restantă **cică**. (CoRoLa)
#De fapt știu sigur că e restantă
‘I was asked to pay an invoice of 520 lei, presumably outstanding. In fact, I know for sure that it is outstanding.’

In example (11) the pragmatic contribution of *cică*, namely that the source of information for invoice being outstanding is not the speaker, i.e. that the speaker does not have direct evidence for it, cannot be cancelled by a continuation asserting the speaker’s full commitment to the truth of the proposition.

Korotkova (2020) identifies as pragmatic properties of parentheticals the fact that they escape negation.

- (12) Nu mi s-a cerut să platesc o factura de 520 lei, restantă **cică**.
‘I wasn’t asked to pay an invoice of 520 lei, presumably outstanding.’

The inference contributed by *cică*, namely that speaker doesn’t have direct evidence for the information is not cancelled by the negation of the sentence. According to the linguist, the pragmatic contribution of parentheticals is not at-issue information, and thus it will not be affected by negation, which targets the anchor clause contradicting only the proposition that the speaker was asked to pay the invoice.

Conclusions

The paper has investigated the semantic contribution of the evidential *cică* in the context of the evidentiality – epistemicity debate. The first section has briefly reviewed some of the proposals in the literature on evidentiality regarding the relation between the category of evidentiality and that of modality. The second section has presented the semantic analyses available for evidential markers in Romanian, with a focus on the evidential adverb *cică*. The third section has presented the results of the corpus analysis performed on CoRoLa in order to determine the semantic contribution of *cică*. The investigation has provided support to an analysis of the adverb as a purely evidential marker, the non-commitment epistemic inferences being shown to be pragmatic contributions of the context of discourse or mood markers. The results allow for treatment of *cică* as a grammaticalized marker of evidentiality. The final section has presented some pragmatic properties of *cică* supporting the previously proposed syntactic analysis.

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Corpus

CoRoLa - Corpusul de referință pentru limba română contemporană