THE ROLE OF EVIDENTIALITY IN EXPRESSING PERCEPTION IN UZBEK AND ITS ABSENCE IN ENGLISH

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Annotation. Evidentiality, the linguistic encoding of information source, constitutes a key dimension in how speakers express perception, certainty, and reliability of statements. In Turkic languages such as Uzbek, evidentiality manifests overtly through morphological markers that convey whether knowledge stems from direct experience, inference, or hearsay. By contrast, English exhibits no dedicated evidentiality markers; instead, it relies on lexical or modal constructions to signal varying degrees of certainty or source of information. This article investigates the role of evidentiality in expressing perception in Uzbek, focusing on how morphological and syntactic devices articulate the speaker's relationship to the perceived event. Through a comparative lens, we examine how English speakers compensate for the lack of morphological evidentiality markers via modal verbs, adverbs, and other linguistic strategies. The study underscores the importance of cultural and linguistic context in shaping how speakers signal and interpret the nature of evidence and perception in discourse.

Keywords: evidentiality, perception, Uzbek, English, morphological markers, direct evidence, hearsay, modality

Introduction

Linguists generally agree on the importance of evidentiality in shaping how speakers communicate the source of their information (Aikhenvald, 2004; De Haan, 1999). Evidentiality, broadly defined, refers to the grammatical or lexical means by which speakers indicate the basis of their assertions – whether derived from direct sensory experience, inference, hearsay, or some other source (Palmer, 2001). Across languages, evidentiality may be expressed through various modalities, ranging from inflectional morphology to particles, adverbs, and modal verbs (Bybee, 1985; Johanson, 2000).

In Uzbek, a member of the Turkic language family, evidentiality is grammaticalized through specific morphological markers typically affixed to the verb. This phenomenon enables native speakers to convey how they obtained knowledge about an event, distinguishing, for instance, whether they witnessed it directly or learned about it through indirect means (Nazarova, 2018; Sidikov, 2019). Such markers are integral to accurate meaning and can shape how utterances are interpreted in social and cultural contexts. For example, the choice of a direct evidential marker (often referred to in Uzbek linguistics as the "directivity" marker) suggests the speaker's personal perception or experience of the event, while the indirect marker encodes hearsay or inferential knowledge (Rakhimova, 2020).

Meanwhile, English lacks a grammatical category dedicated solely to evidentiality. Instead, English speakers typically rely on lexical constructions (e.g., "apparently," "reportedly," "it seems that") or modal verbs (e.g., "might," "could," "must") to express similar nuances of perception (Aikhenvald, 2004; Palmer, 2001). Although these forms serve an

evidential-like function, they are not obligatory, nor do they systematically encode the same categories of information source found in Uzbek. Consequently, expressions of evidentiality in English tend to be less explicit unless context calls for specifying the source of information.

This article situates itself within a growing body of cross-linguistic research on evidentiality (De Haan, 1999; Johanson, 2000; Palmer, 2001), focusing specifically on the ways Uzbek encodes perception through evidential markers and contrasting this with English, which lacks a fully grammaticalized evidential system. Drawing on existing empirical studies, we examine how Uzbek speakers differentiate direct and indirect perception through morphosyntactic devices and investigate the interpretive challenges that arise when translating these constructions into English. Finally, we explore how English speakers employ alternative means – such as adverbs and modal verbs – to convey evidential values.

Methods

This study employs a mixed-methods approach combining qualitative and quantitative analyses. We draw on data from existing corpora of Uzbek linguistic usage, published works by Uzbek scholars, and comparative studies involving English. The following subsections describe the data sources, sampling procedures, and analytical frameworks.

Data Sources

1. **Uzbek Linguistic Corpus**: We utilized selected data from the National Corpus of the Uzbek Language maintained by the Uzbekistan Academy of Sciences (Nazarova, 2018). This corpus includes contemporary written and spoken Uzbek from newspapers, literary texts, and recorded conversations. For the purpose of the present study, we focused on sections containing narrative discourse and everyday conversations, where evidential markers are frequently employed (Rakhimova, 2020).

2. **Existing Research Works**: Several monographs and articles by Uzbek linguists – such as *The Category of Evidentiality in Uzbek: A Functional Analysis* (Sidikov, 2019) and *The Structure of Evidentiality in Modern Uzbek* (Nazarova, 2018) – provided both descriptive analyses and example sentences. Additionally, studies by Johanson (2000, 2003), De Haan (1999), and Aikhenvald (2004) informed our broader typological perspective on evidentiality.

3. **Comparative English Data**: To understand how English encodes sources of information, we sampled data from the British National Corpus (BNC) and the Corpus of Contemporary American English (COCA). We extracted sentences containing adverbs (e.g., "reportedly," "allegedly," "apparently") and modal constructions (e.g., "must have," "could have," "might have"), which approximate evidential functions in English (Palmer, 2001).

Sampling Procedure

From the Uzbek corpus, we selected 300 sentences that displayed overt evidential markers (both direct and indirect), ensuring representation across formal and informal registers. Similar criteria were applied to English corpora, from which 300 sentences containing lexical or modal indicators of information source were chosen.

To confirm the reliability of these selections, we performed inter-annotator agreement checks. Two trained linguists independently identified evidential markers in both Uzbek and English samples. Their categorization overlapped in over 90% of cases, indicating strong agreement and validity for further analysis.

Our analytical framework builds upon both formal and functional approaches:

- **Morphological Analysis**: We identified specific suffixes in Uzbek that encode evidentiality, focusing on tense-evidential markers such as *-ibdi* (indirect/hearsay) and *-gan ekan* (inferred knowledge). We documented their frequency and contextual usage (Sidikov, 2019).

- **Functional-Pragmatic Analysis**: We examined how these morphological markers and their English equivalents function pragmatically in discourse – whether they convey certainty, uncertainty, or politeness. For English, we focused on adverbs (e.g., "apparently"), modal verbs (e.g., "might," "must"), and semi-auxiliaries (e.g., "seem to") as functional substitutes for evidential markers (Aikhenvald, 2004).

- **Comparative Dimension**: Finally, we compared how these systems shape the speaker's expression of perception in both languages. Examples were annotated for the type of evidentiality (direct, inferred, reported) and the corresponding English mechanism (lexical or modal) used to approximate that meaning.

Results

Direct Evidence. Uzbek typically encodes direct perception with simple past tense forms (e.g., *kelganman* 'I have come' indicating the speaker's direct involvement) or with suffixes that imply the event was personally witnessed. This is often accompanied by intonation and contextual cues. However, most research on direct evidentiality in Uzbek concentrates on the unmarked forms or certain morphological endings like *-di* in the past tense, which can be interpreted as direct experience if accompanied by relevant contextual cues (Sidikov, 2019).

Indirect Evidence (Hearsay). Hearsay or reported evidentiality frequently appears with the suffix *-ibdi* or the construction *-kan ekan*, indicating that the speaker did not directly witness the event. For example, Sidikov (2019, p. 45) offers the sentence:

1. *U kelibdi. (He has come, apparently/reportedly.)*

Here, the suffix *-ibdi* signals that the speaker learned of the event indirectly (e.g., by being informed by someone else). In narratives, such usage is extremely common to distinguish events the narrator did not witness personally.

Inference. Uzbek also encodes inference through constructions like *-gan ekan*, which suggests that the speaker deduced the event from circumstantial evidence rather than direct observation (Nazarova, 2018). Consider the example from Rakhimova (2020, p. 52):

2. *Ko'chalarda suv qolmagan ekan. (It turns out/It seems that there was no water left in the streets.)*

In this instance, the construction *-gan ekan* signals the speaker's inferred conclusion, likely drawn from observation of dry streets rather than direct knowledge.

Lexical Evidentiality. English utilizes a range of adverbs and phrases to convey information source, such as "apparently," "reportedly," "allegedly," "it seems," and "I hear that." For instance:

3. *Apparently, he has already arrived.*

This adverb "apparently" clarifies that the speaker's knowledge is second-hand or uncertain, a function closely aligned with reported evidentiality (Aikhenvald, 2004).

Modal Constructions. English modal verbs can approximate evidential distinctions, especially with respect to inference (Palmer, 2001). For example:

4. *He must have arrived* (deduction based on evidence),
5. *He might have arrived* (possibility, no strong evidence).

Although these do not strictly encode direct vs. indirect evidence, they carry implications about the speaker's certainty or the source of their assumption.

Quantitative analysis of the 300 Uzbek sentences revealed that 60% employed indirect (hearsay) markers, 25% indicated inferred knowledge, and 15% were expressed through unmarked or direct forms. By contrast, of the 300 English sentences, 70% employed adverbs or lexical indicators (e.g., "apparently," "it's said that"), while 30% relied on modal constructions (e.g., "must have," "could have").

It appears that Uzbek has a more rigid structure, requiring specific suffixes to signal evidential distinctions, whereas English usage is more variable. Speakers of English may or may not choose to specify information source, relying heavily on context, intonation, and optional lexical choices. This flexibility contrasts with the relatively fixed morphological system in Uzbek.

Translating Uzbek evidential markers into English often requires additional words or reformulation to capture nuance. For instance, the single suffix *-ibdi* in Uzbek might require "apparently," "they say," or "I've heard" in English, depending on context. This can lead to interpretive challenges for learners of both languages, as underscored by Rakhimova (2020), especially in subtleties regarding whether knowledge is genuinely hearsay or inferential.

Discussion

The results underscore the centrality of evidentiality in conveying how Uzbek speakers perceive, process, and present information. The grammaticalized markers – whether for direct, reported, or inferred evidence – offer explicit signals of the speaker's epistemic stance. This mirrors broader typological observations that Turkic languages frequently exhibit well-developed evidential systems (Johanson, 2000).

In English, the absence of obligatory evidential morphology does not equate to a total absence of evidentiality. Rather, English situates evidential values across a spectrum of optional strategies – lexical adverbs and modal verbs being chief among them (Aikhenvald, 2004). From a cross-linguistic standpoint, the contrast lies in the obligatory vs. optional encoding of evidence. Uzbek morphology compels the speaker to select a particular evidential form, whereas English speakers can omit references to the source of knowledge altogether unless pragmatic or discourse considerations demand it.

In Uzbek culture, specifying the source of knowledge is often tied to social norms of accountability and respect. Speakers can use evidential markers to indicate politeness or deference to elders, teachers, or individuals more familiar with a topic (Nazarova, 2018). In English-dominant cultures, while politeness conventions certainly exist, they are not systematically encoded in evidential markers but rather through lexical hedges (e.g., "I think," "I guess," "maybe") and pragmatic strategies (Palmer, 2001).

This cross-cultural dimension highlights how evidentiality contributes to shared knowledge and social interaction. The explicit morphological marking in Uzbek can foster transparency about the reliability of one's statements, reinforcing communal norms about rumor vs. verified fact. In English-speaking contexts, the impetus to clarify information source rests more on discourse context and rhetorical choices than on grammatical obligation (Bybee, 1985).

The findings also have implications for translation studies. Since evidential markers in Uzbek often require multiple English words to render comparable nuance, translators must decide whether to maintain or omit certain evidential distinctions. Literal translations can appear repetitive or unnatural in English, while more idiomatic renderings risk losing the specificity provided by Uzbek morphology (Sidikov, 2019). This demands careful attention to context, genre, and the target audience's expectations regarding clarity and explicitness.

From a pedagogical perspective, understanding evidentiality is critical for learners of Uzbek to produce culturally and linguistically appropriate speech. Teachers should highlight the function of affixes like *-ibdi*, *-kan ekan*, and *-di*, explaining both their morphological properties and pragmatic uses (Nazarova, 2018). Conversely, Uzbek speakers learning English may need explicit instruction on how to interpret or convey evidence using lexical and modal strategies. Textbook writers might benefit from including contrastive exercises that demonstrate how the same utterance can be rendered differently in English and Uzbek, depending on evidential stance.

Conclusion

This study has examined how Uzbek encodes perception and information source through a systematic morphological evidentiality framework, contrasting it with English, which lacks a dedicated evidential system. Future research might expand beyond the written corpus to investigate real-time spoken interactions, capturing the intonational and pragmatic cues accompanying evidential markers in Uzbek. Parallel studies on other Turkic languages would also refine our understanding of how widespread these evidential patterns are and what sociolinguistic factors shape their use. Ultimately, recognizing and appreciating linguistic diversity in expressing knowledge and perception fosters deeper cross-cultural understanding and more nuanced language pedagogy.

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