

Evidentials in Balkan Slavic and Albanian as a text-structuring device

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In my report I am going to demonstrate how the semiotic category of distance influences the use of evidentials in a certain type of folklore texts in Balkan languages.

Evidentiality is grammaticalised in Bulgarian, Macedonian and Albanian: in Bulgarian and Macedonian unwitnessed evidentials are expressed through so-called *l*-forms (dating back to Common Slavic *l*-perfect), witnessed evidentials use old synthetic aorist and imperfect forms (forms in *-x/-š/-ø-* in Bulgarian, *-v/-š/-j/-ø-* in Macedonian). In Albanian unwitnessed evidentials are shaped on the basis of perfect with its elements inverted and the participle lost its ending, compare perfect *kam pas-ur* 'I have got' (Have + Have.Participle-Ending) and unwitnessed evidential *pas-kam* 'I have, indeed!' or (more rare and depending on the dialect) '[They say,] I have' (Have.Participle + Have). There are no witnessed evidentials in Albanian.

Though the literature on Balkan evidentials is abundant (see Friedman 2003 for the introduction into the main problematics and literature on the issue) and very intricate techniques to describe and predict occurrences of evidentials are mastered (compare the study of Balkan Slavic *l*-forms as a marker of narrative perspective, in other words, their use to show foreground/background opposition in Fielder 1997), the very specific use of evidentials in folklore songs still remains without a proper interpretation. Technically, as the songs are transmitted between people and generations, one should expect in them exclusive use of unwitnessed evidentials (as is known, they are common forms in folklore in many languages with evidential marking – Aikhenvald 2004: 310 et pass.), and that is what we observe in Balkan Slavic narrative folklore (e.g. tales and legends). As for the songs, however, an unexpected choice of forms is registered. On the first encounter it looks like a 'mixture' of witnessed and unwitnessed evidentials, the term 'mixture' (Bulg. *smesvane*) being referred to it in Bulgarian Academic grammar.

In the report I will use the data from Balkan Slavic and Albanian (mainly Northern Gheg) mythological ballads with the same plot ("The Dead Brother Song"), to demonstrate this very specific interplay of witnessed and unwitnessed evidentials.

The specific techniques attested in the texts under analysis are the following:

- switches between witnessed/unwitnessed/neutral forms occur at the junctures of the plot and mark its tensest moments;
- unwitnessed evidentials are used in formulaic beginnings and endings of the ballad (cf. Bulg. "Imala majka, imala devet sina i edna dāšterja... Živi se pregārnali, mārvtvi se razgārnali" 'The mother has got nine sons and one daughter... They embraced alive and dead were they apart');
- unwitnessed and witnessed evidentials mark certain lexical groups of verbs: unwitnessed evidentials mark motion verbs (the dead brother *goes* to take the daughter; they *pass* through a forest and hear the birds sing; the dead brother leaves the sister and *goes back* to the graveyard etc, all the forms in italic being unwitnessed evidentials in the respective texts), witnessed evidentials mark the verbs of speech.

The switches between witnessed/unwitnessed/neutral forms at the junctures of the plot can be explained if we take unwitnessed evidentials as a frame for the text, which isolates it from everyday profane speech (consider the use of unwitnessed evidentials in the beginning and the ending). The use of witnessed evidentials instead of unwitnessed 'shorten' the distance between the listener and the text space (cf. historical present effects of 'vividness'). The evidentials' interplay at the junctures thus is the means to guide the listener's attention.

The motion verbs are marked because of the specific role the motion plays in the Ballad. The semiotic analysis of the text (Civjan 1973) shows that every change of location of the characters is a transition between the poles of the basic oppositions (friend/foe; inside/outside; near/far

etc.), in other words, the most important turns in the plot happen due to the change of location. These changes of location make up the structure of the Ballad.

The use of witnessed evidentials to mark *verba dicendi* introducing direct speech I explain by the influence of the direct speech, which irradiates over its borders.

All the techniques described above are deeply connected with distance as a semiotic category: by means of switching between two types of evidentials the narrator shows either *shortening/enlarging the distance* between the text space and the listener, or *transition* between different poles of the basic semiotic categories.

These techniques were not previously attested in the typological literature, though they deserve to be included into the 'evidential' agenda: somehow similar appears to be the function of the so-called "reportative concord" in Plains Cree, which can be used to structure long utterances (Déchaine 2012).

References

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