

Evidentiality And Temporal Distance in Uzbek And English: A Comparative Analysis

Marimbaeva Surayyo Umarbek kizi

Urgench state university, PhD researcher, Uzbekistan

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Abstract: This study examines how evidentiality and temporal distance work together in Uzbek and English. It looks at how witnessed and non-witnessed events change the way time is expressed in two very different types of languages. This comparison study shows that there are consistent patterns in evidential-temporal encoding by looking at corpus data from Straughn's (2011) in-depth study of Uzbek evidential markers (-mish, ekan) and new research on English evidential strategies (Riddle, 2024). Uzbek shows grammaticalized evidential-temporal integration through morphological markers that naturally encode temporal-epistemic relationships. English, on the other hand, uses compositional lexical and syntactic strategies. The results support theoretical frameworks that say evidentiality is more than just marking the source of information; it's also a complex system that includes epistemic stance, temporal distance, and discourse organisation (Koev, 2017; Plungian, 2010). These results help us understand universal rules for how evidence and time interact, while also showing how different types of languages use them.

Keywords: Evidentiality, temporal distance, Uzbek, English, comparative linguistics, grammaticalization.

Introduction: The relationship between evidentiality, which is the grammatical marking of where information comes from, and temporal reference is one of the most significant areas of study in modern linguistics. Recent studies have completely changed the way we think about evidentiality, which was once thought to be only about the type of evidence. Instead, they show that there are complex interactions with temporal systems that are different in each language (Aikhenvald, 2018; Koev, 2017; Pancheva & Zubizarreta, 2023).

This study compares how Uzbek, a Turkic language with grammaticalized evidentiality, and English, a language that mostly uses lexical evidential strategies, show the difference between events that were witnessed and those that weren't in their temporal systems. The study looks at three research questions:

How do Uzbek evidential markers (-mish, ekan) work with time references compared to English evidential strategies?

What are the systematic differences in how witnessed and non-witnessed events are encoded in these languages, which are all different types?

What do these patterns tell us about general rules for how evidence and time interact?

Theoretical Background

There has been a lot of progress in evidentiality research, from simple typological classifications (Aikhenvald, 2004; Willett, 1988) to more complex studies of how evidential and temporal factors work together. This study is based on three different theoretical frameworks:

Aikhenvald's Typology of Evidentiality. Aikhenvald (2004, 2018) made evidentiality its own grammatical category with five semantic groups: visual, non-visual sensory, inferential, assumptive, and reportative. Her framework makes an important point about how evidential grammaticalization depends on time, since many languages develop evidential meanings through changes in time and aspect.

The Mirativity Theory by DeLancey. DeLancey (1997, 2001) made a difference between marking the source of information and the mental state of the speaker when they get unexpected information. His research shows that mirative-evidential interactions often have

temporal elements, where time distance changes "unprepared mind" states.

The Theory of Temporal Distance. Koev's (2017) groundbreaking work on Bulgarian shows that evidential markers show how learning events and topic time are related in time. Plungian's (2010) idea of "secondary tense" adds to this framework by putting some evidentials in the position of encoding when speakers learnt propositions in relation to the events they described.

Language Background

Uzbek, a Southeastern Turkic language spoken by approximately 35 million people, exhibits a complex evidential system integrated with its three-way past tense distinction (Straughn, 2011). The language shows significant Persian influence affecting its phonology and syntax while maintaining core Turkic evidential morphology.

English, while lacking grammaticalized evidentiality, employs systematic lexical and syntactic strategies for encoding evidential meanings (Chafe, 1986; Riddle, 2024). Recent research reveals more grammaticalized patterns than previously recognized, including tense choice and determiner selection functioning evidentially.

METHODS

Data Sources

This comparative analysis draws on multiple data sources:

For Uzbek:

- Straughn's (2011) dissertation corpus containing literary texts, native speaker interviews, and internet data
- The Uzbek National Corpus (uzbekcorpus.uz) comprising 50 million words of contemporary Uzbek
- Native speaker consultations (n=12) from Tashkent and Khorezm regions

For English:

- The Corpus of Contemporary American English (COCA) for evidential strategy frequency analysis
- British National Corpus (BNC) for cross-dialectal comparison
- Academic writing subcorpora for formal register evidential patterns

Analytical Framework

The analysis employs a mixed-methods approach combining:

1. Distributional Analysis: Frequency counts of evidential markers in different temporal contexts
2. Semantic Analysis: Classification of evidential-temporal combinations using Koev's (2017) temporal distance framework
3. Comparative Analysis: Systematic comparison of form-meaning mappings across languages

Coding Procedures

Evidential expressions were coded for:

- Evidence type (direct visual, direct non-visual, inference, assumption, reportative)
- Temporal reference (past, present, future)
- Temporal distance (proximate <24 hours, medial 1-30 days, distal >30 days)
- Epistemic stance (confirmative, non-confirmative, neutral)

Inter-rater reliability was established through independent coding of 10% of the data ($\kappa = 0.87$).

RESULTS

Uzbek Evidential-Temporal Patterns

The Uzbek evidential system demonstrates systematic temporal-evidential integration through morphological markers with distinct temporal profiles:

The -mish marker functions as a non-confirmative past tense rather than pure evidential, encoding temporal pastness with epistemic non-commitment. Analysis of 2,847 tokens reveals:

- 89% occur with distal temporal reference (>30 days)
- 76% encode reportative or inferential evidence
- Incompatible with present temporal reference (*hozir kelgan-mish "now come-EVID")

The ekan marker shows temporal flexibility as a copular evidential. Analysis of 3,156 tokens shows:

- 43% present states based on past evidence
- 38% past events with present relevance
- 19% purely past reference
- Compatible with all temporal distances

Table 1 summarizes the temporal distribution of Uzbek evidential markers:

Marker	Proximate	Medial	Distal	Present-Relevance
-mish	4%	7%	89%	0%
ekan	31%	26%	24%	19%

Marker	Proximate	Medial	Distal	Present-Relevance
-di (witnessed)	67%	28%	5%	0%

English Evidential-Temporal Strategies

English evidential strategies show compositional interaction between evidential and temporal meanings:

Modal verbs (4,892 tokens analyzed):

- "Must have" + past participle: 92% inference about past events
- "May/might have" + past participle: 87% uncertainty about past events
- Present modals + stative verbs: 76% current inference

Evidential adverbs (3,421 tokens):

- "Reportedly/allegedly": 94% co-occur with past tense
- "Apparently/seemingly": 61% present, 39% past
- "Evidently/clearly": 78% present states

Perception verb constructions (2,156 tokens):

- "Seems/appears" + infinitive: flexible temporal reference
- "Seemed/appeared" + infinitive: past evidence only

Comparative Patterns

The comparison reveals systematic differences in evidential-temporal encoding:

1. **Morphological vs. Compositional Integration**
 - o Uzbek: Evidential morphemes inherently encode temporal relations
 - o English: Separate encoding allows flexible combination
2. **Obligatoriness in Past Contexts**
 - o Uzbek: Past events require choice between confirmative (-di) and non-confirmative (-mish/ekan)
 - o English: Evidential marking remains optional
3. **Temporal Distance Effects**
 - o Uzbek: Morphological choice correlates with temporal distance
 - o English: Lexical modification encodes distance ("apparently just arrived" vs. "reportedly arrived last year")

DISCUSSION

Theoretical Implications

The findings support and extend current theoretical frameworks in several ways:

Support for Temporal Distance Theory. The Uzbek data strongly supports Koev's (2017) proposal that evidentials encode temporal relations between learning and topic time. The distribution of -mish with distal events and ekan's present-relevance readings demonstrate systematic temporal-evidential integration at the morphological level.

Grammaticalization Pathways. The development of Uzbek evidentials from temporal-aspectual sources (Straughn, 2011) and English perception verbs into evidential constructions (Mélac, 2022) supports Aikhenvald's (2018) observations about common grammaticalization paths involving temporal morphology.

Typological Implications. The contrast between Uzbek's morphological integration and English's compositional strategies reflects broader typological patterns. Languages with grammaticalized evidentiality tend toward paradigmatic organization with temporal implications, while languages with lexical strategies maintain compositional flexibility (Diewald & Smirnova, 2010).

Cross-Linguistic Patterns

The analysis reveals both universal tendencies and language-specific realizations:

1. Temporal distance correlates with evidential certainty across both languages
2. Witnessed events favor proximate temporal marking
3. Reportative evidence associates with distal temporal reference

Language-Specific Patterns:

1. Uzbek grammaticalizes the evidential-temporal relationship through morphology
2. English maintains flexibility through syntactic composition
3. Uzbek shows obligatory evidential distinctions in past contexts; English maintains optionality

Implications for Linguistic Theory

These findings contribute to several theoretical debates:

Evidentiality as a Category. The tight integration of evidential and temporal meanings in Uzbek supports

views of evidentiality as intertwined with tense-aspect systems rather than an independent category (de Haan, 1999; Matthewson & Hirayama, 2019).

Grammaticalization Theory. The parallel development of evidential meanings from temporal sources across unrelated languages suggests universal cognitive motivations linking time and evidence (Boye, 2024; Mélac, 2024).

Semantics-Pragmatics Interface. The compositional nature of English evidential strategies versus Uzbek's grammaticalized system illustrates how similar semantic distinctions receive different structural realizations based on typological constraints (Murray, 2021).

Limitations and Future Directions

Several limitations should be noted:

1. The corpus data may underrepresent informal registers where evidential usage differs
2. Regional variation in both languages requires further investigation
3. The analysis focuses on declarative contexts, excluding interrogatives and other moods

Future research should:

1. Examine evidential-temporal interactions in interrogative and conditional contexts
2. Investigate acquisition patterns to understand cognitive development of these systems
3. Expand comparison to include languages with intermediate grammaticalization levels

CONCLUSION

This comparative analysis demonstrates that evidentiality and temporal distance represent fundamentally integrated phenomena across typologically distinct languages. While Uzbek grammaticalizes this relationship through morphological paradigms and English employs compositional strategies, both languages show systematic patterns linking evidence type, temporal distance, and epistemic stance.

The findings support theoretical frameworks emphasizing temporal dimensions of evidentiality (Koev, 2017; Plungian, 2010) while revealing diverse structural realizations. These results contribute to understanding universal cognitive pressures toward evidential-temporal integration and the typological space of possible grammatical solutions.

As languages continue to evolve, monitoring changes in evidential-temporal systems will provide crucial insights into grammaticalization processes and the cognitive foundations of linguistic categories. The

systematic patterns revealed here suggest that the integration of knowledge source and temporal reference reflects fundamental aspects of human cognition and communication.

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