Evidentiality as a Link between Speakers, Times, and Events

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Bulgarian is a language that has a bi-partite distinction between direct and indirect (reportative or inferential) evidentiality, morphologically marked by verbal suffixes (1a, 2a). A similar pattern is found in typologically unrelated languages like Turkish and Norwegian (Izvorski 1997). The goal of my presentation is to account for the semantics of the direct and the reportative uses of the indirect evidential (abbreviated as DIR and REP, respectively).

For starters, I will discuss a few crucial empirical properties of Bulgarian evidentials, namely: (i) DIR and REP cannot occur with the same proposition in their scope (REP(p)&DIR(p) is infelicitous); (ii) REP cannot be used with two contradictory propositions (REP(p)&REP(~p) is not good); (iii) evidential markers are always speaker-oriented; (iv) the evidential import cannot be directly challenged; (v) the evidentials always take scope/project through propositional operators like negation, tense, or modals; (vi) both evidentials commit the speaker to the truth of the embedded proposition. Given these facts, I conclude that DIR and REP have some kind of projective and contradictory meanings with no modality involved.

Faller (2004) distinguishes between event-level and sentence-level evidentiality. I apply her (simple-event) account on DIR and REP, assuming that event-level evidentials express a relation between the speaker and the verbal event. After showing that this account makes the wrong predications for negated sentences, I develop a double-event account, which is grounded in the following core assumptions: (i) every sentence of Bulgarian contains two events – a verbal event e (introduced by the main verb) and a learning event e' (introduced by the evidential morpheme); (ii) e' expresses a relation between the speaker and the main proposition; (iii) the difference between DIR and REP is a difference between overlap/non-overlap of e' and reference time. The particular semantics I apply is based on Hamblin (1973) and Murray (2008), with two extra definitions specifically targeting the evidential import and the main proposition (1b, 2b).

In the literature, two types of evidential systems have been distinguished, depending on whether an indirect evidential does or does not commit the speaker to the main assertion. As fallout of the discussion, I speculate that the empirical distinction between committing and non-committing evidentials corresponds to the theoretical distinction between event-level and sentence-level evidentiality.

(1)a. Ivan pobedi-∅.　⤳　b.　$\lambda p[\underbrace{p = \lambda w[\exists e(\text{win}_w(e, \text{ivan}) \wedge \tau(e) \subseteq \text{RT})]}_{\text{identity condition}}$

　　　Ivan won-**DIR**

　　　'Ivan won (I saw it).'　　　　　$\wedge \underbrace{\exists e'(\text{LEARN}_{v_0}(e', \text{SP}, p) \wedge \tau(e') \subseteq \text{RT})}_{\text{evidential import}}$

　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　$\wedge \underbrace{p(v_0) \leq p(v_1)}_{\text{illocutionary relation}}]$

(2) a. Ivan pobedi-**l**. $\leadsto$ b. $\lambda p[\underbrace{p = \lambda w[\exists e(\mathrm{win}_w(e, \mathrm{ivan}) \wedge \tau(e) \subseteq \mathrm{RT})]}_{\text{identity condition}}$

  Ivan won-**REP**

  'Ivan won (I was told so).' $\wedge \underbrace{\exists e'(\mathrm{LEARN}_{v_0}(e', \mathrm{SP}, p) \wedge \tau(e') \nsubseteq \mathrm{RT})}_{\text{evidential import}}$

         $\wedge \underbrace{p(v_0) \leq p(v_1)}_{\text{illocutionary relation}}]$