The syntax of evidentials in Azeri, Bulgarian, and Persian

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In this paper, we discuss the syntactic structure of evidential constructions, with data support from Azeri, Bulgarian, and Persian. The common trait among the three languages is that in all of them, evidentiality is linked with tense and aspect (so-called PERFECT OF EVIDENTIALITY, a term due to Izvorski (1997). For Izvorski the present perfect tense is ambiguous between evidential and perfect reading. We instead propose that there are two separate morphemes that occupy two different syntactic positions: evidential is in CP and perfect is in AspP. This proposal rules out the syntactic ambiguity of the constituent.

Our argument is based on data in (1) and (2), which are both pluperfect but (1) is direct and (2) is indirect. If the evidential reading was arising from the perfect morphology (Izvorski, 1997) we would expect the structures in (1) to be ambiguous, but they are not. The evidential reading of the pluperfect is achieved by doubling the PartP (Aikhenvald, 2004). We propose that the lower participle marks aspect where the higher one marks evidentiality. The examples in (2) show that: *ræft-**e*** is the perfect and *bud-**e*** is the evidential operator.

(1) a. Tehran ræft-**e**   bud   Ø.   [Persian]
         Tehran go.PAST.**PartP** be.PAST 3SG

     b. Tehran-a   get-**miş-di**   Ø.   [Azeri]
         Tehran-DAT go-ASP-PAST 3SG

     c. Vlakat   **beshe**   zamina-**l**   za Teheran.
         train.def be.PAST.3SG leave.PRF-**PartP** for Teheran
         'He had gone to Tehran.' [direct/*indirect]

(2) a. Tehran ræft-**e**   bud-**e**   (æst)   [Persian]
         Tehran go.PAST.**PartP** be.**PartP** (be.PRES.3SG)

     b. Tehran-a   get-**miş-i-miş**   Ø.   [Azeri]
         Tehran-DAT go-ASP-**be-PP** 3SG

     c. Vlakat   **e**   **bil**   zamina-**l**   za Tehean. [Bulgarian]
         train.def be.Pres.3SG be.PartP leave.PRF-**PartP** for Tehran
         '*Reportedly*, he had gone to Tehran.' [*direct/indirect]

What goes on in these constructions is that T gets [+Tense] in cases where there is a direct pluperfect reading, (1) but in cases with indirect reading the T is [-Tense].

Considering that examples above have a projection of CP, it is the TP that determines the tense of the structure due to feature inheritance mechanism (Chomsky, 2007). In (1), where we have direct pluperfect reading, only the tense feature on T is selected by C. In the indirect case, T cannot get interpreted for its tense features. We propose that in such cases the C has more features than the former case. So, the distinction in the evidential value is manifested in the distinction of the valued features in T.

In conclusion, we show that a unified syntactic account of evidentiality is possible in Azeri, Bulgarian and Persian, where evidentiality interacts with tense and aspect. This analysis is extendable to other languages where the phenomenon is manifested in a similar way, like Tsez (Khalilova, 2011), Uzbek (Straughn, 2011).

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