"BECAUSE MOTHER ISN'T AT HOME": EVIDENTIALITY AND METAPRAGMATIC KNOWLEDGE

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Abstract

This article reports a result of an experiment in investigating Tibetan children's comprehension and metapragmatic knowledge of evidentials. The experiment was conducted in a Tibetan school in Nepal with three groups of children: 9-year-olds, 11-year-olds, and 14-year-olds. Four questions were asked based on a story. These questions solicit answers that reflect children's understanding and awareness of evidential contrasts, namely direct versus indirect experience. Most children seem to understand that when one has eyewitness knowledge of an event, s/he needs to use the direct evidential. In contrast, if one does not see what happens, s/he needs to resort to the indirect evidential or modal. There is a relationship between age and metapragmatic knowledge of evidentials. A low level of metapragmatic ability occurs mainly in the youngest group (the 9-year-olds). The oldest group (14-year-olds) produce responses that reflect a higher degree of evidential awareness, such as the use of reasoning as a basis of justification. Most children who participated in the experiment produce evidentials appropriately, but they seem to have little understanding of what exactly these forms convey. The work fits into a growing body of research on children's production and/or comprehension of evidentials and modals. It points to a direction that production and comprehension need not correlate.

1. Introduction

Evidentials are linguistic units that encode the speaker's source of information.[2] Most evidentials are grammaticalized from free lexical items, which are mainly verbs. It is thus not surprising to find that these forms are often expressed in predicate category. They may be verbal suffixes (e.g., Tuyuca, Turkish), auxiliaries (e.g., Tibetan), or sentence-final particles (e.g., Akha, Hmong, and Japanese). Speakers of languages that grammaticalize evidentials have to choose among the forms that appropriately describe events they want to report. If they have eyewitness knowledge of an event, the form that indexes visual experience is selected. If they do not have visual evidence, they may use other forms of sensory evidence or markers of indirect experience such as hearsay or inference.

Certain Amazonian languages have elaborated evidentiality contrasts. Barnes (1984) reports that at least five basic types

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[2] Willett (1988) suggests that the definition of evidential meaning should be narrowed down to the information source. Like Aikhenvald (2004), he does not agree with Chafe's (1986) definition of evidentials in the broad sense as encoding the speaker's attitude toward knowledge of a situation.

of evidence are employed in Tuyuca: visual, non-visual (using other senses), non-direct or reported, apparent (based on observed evidence), and assumed (based on the speaker's logical reasoning or background knowledge). Some Tibeto-Burman languages such as Tibetan and Sunwar also have a subsystem of marking old versus new knowledge, so-called mirativity (DeLancey 1997; 2001).

However, in a good number of languages around the world evidential is not part of grammatical system. The speaker needs not verify his or her utterance unless being challenged. English is a clear example of such a language which uses what Aikhenvald (2004) calls "evidential strategies," rather than evidentials per se. Evidential strategies in English are expressed by means of modal verbs and adverbs like *reportedly*, *allegedly* and *apparently*. These forms are free lexical items whose extended pragmatic function is the marking of certainty.

Although there have been many works dealing with evidentiality from a variety of perspectives, especially since the pioneering collection of papers on this topic (Chafe and Nichols 1986), little study investigates in depth the development of these forms in children's speech.[3] Among important works, Aksu-Koç (1986) focuses on the acquisition of the linguistic means for past reference—tense, aspect, and mood markers— in Turkish by tracing the longitudinal development of these forms in the speech of four children. It is found that the acquisition of the whole range of meaning of evidentiality does not appear until the children reach the ages of 4;6-5;0, whereas that of temporal markings associated with the same forms appears in a much earlier age.[4]

In a longitudinal study of sentence-ending modals in the speech of three Korean children aged between 1;8 and 4;0, Choi (1995) proposes to investigate the acquisition of these modals by paying attention to caregiver-child interactions. Contrary to the result of Aksu-Koç's study, Choi found that children develop an understanding of epistemic modality from an early age (as early as 1;9). The study also reveals the developmental order: the forms marking new or unassimilated vs. old or assimilated knowledge are acquired before those indicating direct vs. indirect evidence. That is, miratives are acquired before evidentials.

Emphasizing on interactions between children and caretakers, Hongladarom (1993) demonstrates how Tibetan children (between 3 and 6 years old) are socialized

[3] Aikhenvald and Dixon (1998) examine the structure and distribution of evidentiality systems in Amazonian languages and point out that the widespread distribution of evidentiality in a guven area may indicate area diffusion.

[4] Aksu-Koç (1986, p. 258) remarks: "..., it can be said that by the age of 4;6-5;0 the tense/aspect/mood (TAM) inflections, in addition to being fully mastered, are effectively used for imposing different perspectives on events: the past perfect and the past progressive are used for backgrounding, and foregrounded information is differently expressed depending on whether it was obtained through direct vs. indirect experience."

to use evidentials and how they use them creatively. This study reveals how evidentials become manipulative tools for children when they tell their imaginative stories, or argue with peers. It contends that the presence of evidentials in a child's speech does not necessarily mean that the child possesses evidential awareness, and that evidential may be used with a wide range of functions in addition to reporting the source of information. What follows from this argument is that we should assess evidential awareness not only from children's production but also from their metapragmatic knowledge or an ability to comment on the linguistic forms, the subject of which is treated in this present study.

Works that concern children's comprehension of forms that indicate certainty are, for example, Moore, Pure, and Furrow (1990). They investigate English speaking children's understanding of belief by conducting two experiments dealing with modals such as *must* and *might*, and mental terms—verbs like *know* and *think*. These linguistic forms implicate different degrees of speaker certainty (for example, *must* in "It must be in the red box" conveys a higher degree of certainty than *might*). It is found that children from 4 years of age are able to locate a hidden object when presented with contrasting pairs of statements containing forms that index speaker certainty.

A conclusion that can be drawn from previous research dealing with children's comprehension and use of evidentials discussed above is that because evidentials are associated with the necessity to verify the truth of one's own knowledge and belief, they are complex linguistic forms that are generally acquired later in life. Even though children may be able to use them fluently, it does not mean that they acquire the full range of meanings the forms convey. Moreover, children of different age groups perceive linguistic forms with evidentiary connotations differently. This implies that older children should be able to explain about evidentiality better than young ones.

Taking this hypothesis into account, I conducted an experiment to test how children exhibit metapragmatic awareness of evidentials. Specifically speaking, I attempted to determine at what age, among 9, 11, and 14 years old, children were able to justify their evidentiality choices. I chose Tibetan, because the situation in this language is particularly striking. Evidentials in Tibetan also convey other semantic categories such as tense-aspect and participant distinction, so-called "conjunct and disjunct marking" (DeLancey 1996). The latter category is in turn related to the notions volitionality and control. As there are two subsystems related to the marking of knowledge in Tibetan: mirativity in the copula and imperfective aspect, and evidentiality in the perfective aspect, an ability to use evidentials indicates that the child comprehends the distinction between these two subsystems.

A question may be posed why evidential belongs to the pragmatic realm, hence justifying its relevance to "metapragmatic", not simply "metalinguistic" awareness. This is because evidentials are not mere grammatical markers, although in many languages their absence may render a sentence ungrammatical. Evidentials are closely tied up with situations. Tibetan presents a clear example of how contextually dependent these linguistic forms are. Unlike case markers or other grammatical morphemes, evidentials are not taught in school. There is no native term for the concept evidentiality or

mirativity. And unlike honorifics, they are hardly taught at home. These are the forms children must acquire through discourse. By interacting with adults and peers, and by observing how other people use these forms, children gradually learn to use them to fulfill their specific needs at hand.

2. Evidentiality in Tibetan

Tibetan is a verb-final language in which indexical auxiliaries indicate multifunctions of tense-aspect, speech act participants, and evidentiality or mirativity. For example,

(1) *ro̲* *le̲e-s-ta*
corpse arrive-DIR (soŋ)-UFP[5]

'A corpse (ghost) arrived' (I know because I saw it)[6]

While three adults are talking in the early afternoon, a 4-year-old boy who is playing with his car toy nearby suddenly interrupts them by uttering (1).. Using the direct evidential *sōŋ* (realized as lengthened [*s*] in spoken discourse), the boy may have wanted to draw an attention from his mother and her friends who at the time are deeply engaging in their conversation. It is not likely that he has actually seen a ghost. As soon as uttering (1), the boy receives the attention he wants. His mother reacts to his speech by saying *khāba khāba* 'where, where' and tells him to stay quiet.[7]

Other than marking source of information, the evidential *sōŋ* conveys perfective aspect and is used mainly in disjunct statements. When it appears in a conjunct context, with first person subject in a declarative mood (or second person subject in an interrogative mood), it conveys the speaker's lack of control such

[5] Abbreviations used in this paper include 3s = third person singular pronoun; DISJ = disjunct (refering to non – first person); DIR = direct evidential H = honorific; IND = indirect evidential; IMPF = imperfective; INF = inferential; LOC = locative; PF = perfective; UFP = utterance final particle.

[6] All examples discussed in this paper are from Standard spoken Tibetan (SST), or so-called "Lhasa khoiné," which serves as a *lingua franca* in Central Tibet and in exile Tibetan communities. It is similar to but not identical with, Lhasa Tibetan (LT) which is spoken in the Lhasa city, Tibet Autonomous Region. The difference that concerns us in this paper is that LT distinguishes between experience obtained through hearsay (-pa ree) and experience gained from inference (ɕaa). By contrast, SST does not make that distinction. The experiences acquired from the two channels are grouped together under the indirect evidential, *-pa ree*. SST is a *lingua franca* in the Kathmandu valley, where Tibetan refugees reside and is the mother tongue of the majority of young subjects who participated in the experiment reported in this paper. Only two of the 44 subjects sample used ɕaa in their answers. It is not clear whether they speak LT as a monther tongue. But this does not affect the overall result of the experiment. Though evidentiality is a novel feature of Tibetan grammar, it is by no means present only in SST or LT. According to Sun (1993), evidentiality is an important feature of the nDzor-dge dialect spoken in Sichuan Province, China. Hongladarom (1996; forthcoming) points out that evidentiality is an important feature of the Rgyalthang Tibetan dialect spoken in northwest Yunnan.

[7] The expression *khā ba khā ba* 'where, where' as used by the mother of the boy in this example is ambiguous. It may indicate the mother's curiosity of where the boy has seen the ghost. But more likely, it is used as a retort to the boy's preposterous utterance.

as in a dream or when s/he is sick. In that context, it has nothing to do with the marking of source of information. Other forms of evidentials in perfective system include *-pa r̲e̲e* and *ɕāa*. The former, a periphrastic construction consisting of the nominalizer *-pa* and a copula *r̲e̲e*, connotes the speaker's indirect source of information. *ɕāa*, a unique form found in the Lhasa Tibetan dialect, marks inference. Speakers of other Central Tibetan dialects employ *-pa r̲e̲e* to indicate both hearsay and inference.

Examples (2) – (4) below will clearly illustrate the three-way evidentiality contrasts in this Tibetan dialect.

(2) *khōŋ* *thēe* *sōŋ*
3s go (H) PF: DIR

'He went' (I know because I saw him leave)

(3) *khōŋ* *thēe-pa* *r̲e̲e*
3s go (H)-IMPF COP: IND

'He went' (I know because someone told me)

Other than marking indirect knowledge, *-pa r̲e̲e* in (3) can also be used to connote old knowledge: the speaker is talking about something he has known for a long time. The knowledge is well assimilated in consciousness. Therefore, information newly acquired such as in (2) can become old over the years. In that case, the indirect form is used. This is despite the fact that the speaker acquires information through direct experience.

(4) illustrates a common usage of the inferential *ɕāa*.

(4) *khōŋ* *thēe* *ɕāa*
3S go (H) PF: INF

'He went' (I know; for example, because his suitcase was gone, and I can deduce from what I know about his schedule)

In (4) the speaker does not see what happens but makes a statement based on direct experience of visible result and on his knowledge about the referred person. Note that certain languages such as Tuyuca (Barnes 1984) distinguish between knowledge acquired from observed evidence and knowledge obtained from the speaker's reasoning. Tibetan lumps these two categories together under the inferential.

Mirativity in Tibetan deals with existential verbs that express imperfective aspect. The major forms are *t̲u̲u* and *yɔ̲ɔ r̲e̲e*, as well as their quotative counterparts *t̲u̲usa* and *yɔ̲ɔ r̲e̲esa* (*-sa* is the quotative marker). As the metapragmatic study of evidentials does not deal with them, I will not go into detail about them in this paper. Interested readers can consult the use of these miratives in Hongladarom (1993; forthcoming) and DeLancey (2001).

3. Metapragmatic Awareness of Evidentials: An Experiment

3.1 Participants

An experiment was conducted at Srongsren Bhrikuti High School located in Bodha (Bodhanath), a Tibetan refugee community in Kathmandu, Nepal. The participants are 44 Tibetan speaking schoolchildren, age between 8 and 15 years old.[8] They are divided into three

[8] Our original plan was to have children of 3 and 6 years old participating in the experiment as the youngest group. But after conducting the experiment with the 9-year-old boarding children who were available on the first day,

groups: 8-9, 10-12, and 14-15. We will refer to these groups according to the average age: 9-year-olds, 11-year-olds, and 14-year-olds respectively. The children are from various parts of Tibet whose parents immigrated to Nepal. They are sent to the school, because their parents want them to be educated in a school run by the Tibetan government in exile. In this way, the parents hope the children will learn to speak Tibetan and have in-depth knowledge about their country's history and culture.

3.2 Procedure

The experiment tests children's ability to explain the normative usage of two evidential expressions in Lhasa Tibetan: *sõŋ* (direct experience) and *-pa ree* (indirect experience). Each child listens to the following story in Tibetan and answers four questions based on the story. The story and Question #1 (Q1) are recorded prior to the interview. When the experimenters (my Tibetan assistant and I) arrive at the school, children are called upon on a voluntary basis. Questions (2) – (4) are told in Tibetan to the child by my assistant.

3.3 Materials

Story

Tashi Lhamo, age 2, is the youngest girl of the family. This family consists of (maternal) grandmother, mother, Tashi's older brother, age 10, and her older sister, age 8. Tashi Lhamo has not been to shool yet, and she still has problem with toilet training. She often relieves herself on the bed and cushions and makes it dirty around the house. Usually the mother goes to work, and her older sibings go to shool. Tashi's mother sells carpets to tourists near the Bodnath Stupa, a site of tourist attraction. So during the daytime only Tashi stays at home with her grandmother. One evening her mother comes back home and finds that the carpet in the prayer room is wet.

Questions

Q1. If you were the mother, what would you say about Tashi Lhamo when you came home and found the wet carpet?

Q2. Why do you answer like this (referring to the answer to Q1)?

Q3. Is it okay if I say like this (using other contrastive evidentials, such as the indirect form if a child uses the direct evidential)?

Q4. Why it is okay or not okay when I say like that (referring to Q3)?

Q1 is designed to test children's use of evidentials in a given context. Q2 aims at eliciting metapragmatic explanation for evidentially marked utterances. Q3 and Q4 test a higher degree of understanding of evidential and metapragmatic knowledge.

Other than giving evidentiary justifications for their own usage, children who fully understand what evidentials are should be able to comment on the use of inappropriate forms.

we came to realize that children age 3-6 were not appropriate. Even older children had problems explaining their own use of language. We did not expect younger children to be able to contemplate on evidential usage, though they may have been able to acquire the forms and use them in a similar manner as adults.

3.4 Coding of answers

Answers for Q1 deal with linguistic forms. *-Pa r̲e̲e* is the expected form. *Sōŋ* is not appropriate for this case, as the speaker does not see what actually happens (the mother was not at home; she went to sell carpets). If the children use *sōŋ* in their responses, it can be interpreted that they do not understand evidential contrasts conveyed by these linguistic forms. Therefore, their answers are rated 0 point. On the contrary, if the expected form *(-pa r̲e̲e)* is used, their answers are rated 1 point. The linguistic forms that are not themselves evidential but convey the speaker's uncertainty (e.g., *yi̲ŋki r̲e̲e, yi̲nna, yi̲ŋsa r̲e̲e*) are considered directly related: they are given 1 point.

Table 1. Coding of answers for Q1

Linguistic forms	Points
-pa ree (indirect evidential)	1
yi̲ŋki ree (and other modals)	1
sōŋ (direct evidential), other irrelevant forms, or no answer	0

The subjects' answers for Q2 are divided into six categories: reasoning, result, context-related answer, irrelevant answer, and no explanation. Answers that reflect a high degree of evidential awareness are those that refer to reasoning as a basis of inference, in this case, the mother's background knowledge (*i.e.*, Tashi always urinates around the house).[9] They are given 3 points. Those that refer only to observed evidence (the wet carpet) are given 2 points. It may be wondered why background knowledge is given more weight than observed evidence. This is because background knowledge is abstract. It is hypothesized that the older children become, the more they will comment on evidential usage by referring to this notion. Younger children are expected to construe an evidentially marked utterance based only on what they see.

Context-related responses (such as those that make indirect reference to background knowledge) are given 1 point. Irrelevant responses (*i.e.*, children answer the question based on their own imagination, not on story comprehension) are given 0 point. An inability to justify the chosen form is also given 0 point. Q3 and Q4 require deeper understanding of the epistemological nature of evidential. A correct answer to Q3 is "no". This is given 1 point. An incorrect answer, "yes," is given 0 point.

[9] It is argued in this paper that an inferring act requires both presupposition and observed result. In my opinion, we will not be able to make a justifiable claim of what happens without using our background knowledge, which is the basis of reasoning. If I see a wet road, I cannot conclude that it might have rained unless I know that at that time of the year in that area it usually rains. Also, experience is an important basis of reasoning. It may be easier for me to infer about something if in the past I used to make such an inference and if it matches with what actually happens. Experience is then part of my background knowledge. Together with observed result, I can be certain to make an inferring act.

[10] Information in the parenthesis are my own interpretations.

Table 2. Coding of answers for Q2

Categories of responses	Examples of responses	Points
I. Responses that refer to reasoning	Tashi always urinates around the house.	3
II. Responses that refer to observed evidence	The carpet is wet.	2
III. Context-related responses	-The mother went outside (so she did not see what actually happened).[10] -Tashi is a small child (so she urinates without control).	1
IV. Irrelevant responses	-The mother wants to sell the carpet. -The girl drank a lot of water. -The girl is cold.	0
V. No explanation	-I don't know The subject keeps silent.	0

Table 3. Coding of answers for Q3

Types of answers	Points
Correct	1
Incorrect	0

4. Results

4.1 Correletion between age and metapragmatic knowledge of evidentials

The children's scores from the four questions are analyzed, using one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA). The results of the statistical analysis are as follows:

(i) Performances to Q1 ($F(2,41)=1.914$; $p>0.15$) and Q2 ($F(2,41)=3.017$; $p>0.05$) do not show statistical significances among the three groups.

Justifications that refer to the notions source of knowledge are given 1 point. No explanation or irrelevant responses that may take the form of repeating the answers given for Q2 is given 0 point.

The criteria used in rating the above questions not only demonstrate how the children's responses are analyzed, but more importantly they reveal pragmatic and epistemological conditions that govern evidentials.

Table 4. Coding of answers for Q4

Categories of responses	Examples of answers	Points
Responses that refer to the notion source of knowledge	-Mother didn't stay at home. -The mother doesn't know what happens.	1
Irrelevant responses/no explanation	-While wiping, the mother found a wet spot.	0

(ii) Performances to Q3 ($F(2,41)=4.067$; $p<0.03$) and Q4 ($F(2,41)=6.146$; $p<0.006$) are statistically significant: 14-year-olds outperform 11-year-olds, and 11-year-olds outperform 9-year-olds.

4.2 Details of responses

Tables 5-8 present number of justifications and percentage per category and age group concerning Q1-Q4.

Table 5. Responses to Q1: Evidential choices

Group	Indirect evidential	Modals	Direct evidential + no answer
9-year-olds (N =14)	6 (43%)	3 (21%)	5 (36%)
11-year-olds (N =15)	10 (67%)	2 (13%)	3 (20%)
14-year-olds (N =15)	11 (73%)	3 (20%)	1 (7%)

Table 6. Responses to Q2: Justifications for evidentiality choices

Group	Reason-ing	Result	Context-related responses	Irrelevant responses	No explanation
9-year-olds (14)	3 (21%)	2 (14%)	0 (0%)	3 (21%)	6 (43%)
11-year-olds (15)	3 (20%)	5 (33%)	4 (27%)	1 (7%)	2 (13%)
14-year-olds (15)	7 (47%)	3 (20%)	3 (20%)	2 (13%)	0 (0%)

Table 7. Responses to Q3: Alternation of evidentials

Group	Correct response	Incorrect response
9-year-olds (14)	1 (7%)	13 (93%)
11-year-olds (15)	1 (7%)	14 (93%)
14-year-olds (15)	6 (40%)	9 (60%)

Table 5 demonstrates that 11-year-olds and 14-year-olds use indirect evidential more than 9-year-olds. Interestingly, children also produce modals such as *yi̲nna, yiŋki ree,* and *yi̲ŋsa re̲e*. The first two forms are found only in the speech of 9-year-olds and 11-year-olds. All 14-year-olds use the form *yi̲ŋsa re̲e*. These forms contrast in degrees of certianty: *yiŋki re̲e* is highest on the scale, followed by *yi̲nna* and *yi̲ŋsa re̲e* respectively.

Reasoning occurs more frequently in the speech of 14-year-olds, whereas 11-year-olds use observed result as a basis of inferring. The category of no explanation is found mostly in the 9-year-olds. In addition, 9-year-olds give no context-related responses.

Most children (36 out of 44) select an incorrect answer for this question, which reflects that they have not fully understood the difference between indirect evidential and direct evidential. The children who select correct responses are mostly 14-year-olds. Their answers to this question match the justifications given in Table 8. Only two children from the 9-year-olds and 11-year-olds view that alternation between indirect evidential and direct evidential is possible. When compared to their justifications demonstrated in Table 8, we see that these two children are still confused about evidential contrasts.

In a similar manner with performance to Q3, the majority of the subjects cannot explain why alternation of evidential expressions is or is not possible. Those who answer that *sōŋ* can replace *-pa re̲e* give the same justifications as they have done to Q2 (*i.e.*, Tashi always urinates). Table 8 reveals that several 14-year-olds seem to master the normative usage of evidentials. Five out of six responses in this category receive full points. Examples of such responses are as follows:

(5)
S1 *ama malę̲e kōŋla möö tsinba ta̲ŋ yɔɔ̲ rə̲wa*
Before the mother came, she has peed, right?

S2 *amee hākō meetsāŋ*
Because the mother doesn't know

Table 8. Responses to Q4: Justifications for alternation of evidentials

Group	Source of knowledge	Same responses as those given to Q2	Irrelevant answer	No explanation
9-year-olds (14)	1 (7%)	0 (0%)	2 (14%)	11 (79%)
11-year-olds (15)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	3 (20%)	12 (80%)
14-year-olds (15)	6 (40%)	5 (33%)	2 (13%)	2 (13%)

S3 *ama naŋla yɔɔ marəwa*
The mother isn't at home, right?

These responses reveal that the children understand that they cannot use *sōŋ* in this context, because the mother does not see what happens—the event takes place before she comes (S1 and S3), and she is not certain what has happened (S2).

5. Discussion and Conclusion

This study concerns Tibetan children's comprehension and metapragmatic knowledge of evidentials with a hypothesis that comprehension and metapragmatic knowledge increase over age. An experiment is conducted with three groups of schoolchildren. Four questions, based on a story about Tashi, a two-year-old girl who has a habit of urinating around the house, are asked. Q1 and Q3 deal with evidential choices, namely what linguistic form the children choose in their utterances when they report what the mother would say after she came home and found a wet carpet, and whether they accept another form provided by the experimenter to replace the one they suggest. Q2 and Q4 are aimed at investigating the children's metapragmatic knowledge of evidentials. The children are asked to explain why they choose the form appearing in their response to Q1, and why they think alternation of the selected form is or is not possible. It is found that differences among the three groups in the mean scores of the answers to Q1 and Q2 are not statistically significant, but differences in the mean scores of Q3 and Q4 are.

That performances to Q1 are not statistically significant is because the majority of the subjects choose to report the event using the expected linguistic forms, which, in our case, include both indirect evidential and modals. Children of all the three groups show no difficulty in understanding the content of the story. They know that a linguistic form that conveys the speaker's indirect source of information or lack of certainty because the event is not perceived visually is needed.

In the conception of Tibetan speakers, there may be a rule underlying the use of evidentials and modals.[11] When one has eyewitness knowledge of an event, s/he is certain of what happens and is entitled to use the form that indicates direct experience. If one does not see what happens, s/he needs to resort to the form indexing indirect experience. Or s/he may use epistemic modals that are not directly related to source of information but concern attitude toward the situation to be described. From Table 5, we see that the number of modality choices among the three groups is quite low, and no group outperforms the other groups in this regard. Anyway, it will be interesting to find out in which situation modal or indirect evidential is preferred, at what age children are able to distinguish between modals from evidentials, and at what age they are able to discern any differentiations within the modal field itself.[12]

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[11] When I talk about the rule of using evidentials, it does not mean that I think every speaker must follow the rule. Rules are norms of usage upon which speakers who are not merely language users but also social agents can infringe. Without eyewitness knowledge, a speaker may choose to present their information using a direct evidential. In other words, no grammar prohibits speakers to lie.

[12] In their study of English children, Hirst and Weil (1982) found that comprehension of

The 14-year-old group tends to use reasoning as a basis of justification more than other groups. The 11-year-old children prefer observed evidence as a basis of inferring. This is not surprising, given that younger children have a tendency to justify their linguistic choices by referring to concrete conditions. This point is well supported by Bernicot and Laval (1996). They found that French children (age 10) are able to give comments about promising utterances by referring to the speaker's intentions. Younger children's remarks about promises make reference only to execution of the promised action.

The most difficult questions in the experiment are Q3 and Q4, which presuppose the subjects' deeper understanding of evidentiality. In order to answer Q3, the children must know that evidentials convey contrastive meanings. If one form is selected in the description of a certain event, it cannot be replaced by another form, which conveys a different source of information. Most younger subjects seem to be confused by the nature and meaning of these linguistic forms. It is also likely that they are confused by the nature of this metapragmatic task.

In order to answer Q4, the children must at least understand (1) what the indirect evidential conveys; (2) what the direct evidential means; and (3) the conditions these forms depend. Therefore, it is not surprising to find that only the 14-year-old group could answer this question, but even that less than half of them give appropriate answers.

When we look at details concerning justifications for Q4, there are several points that lead to a conclusion regarding the relationship between age and metapragmatic knowledge of evidentials. A low level of metapragmatic ability occurs mainly in the youngest group (9-year-olds). Responses reflecting a high degree of evidential awareness are made by the oldest group (14-year-olds). I do not find a single instance of response from both the 9-year-olds and 11-year-olds group that may be considered to reflect the children's true understanding of evidentials.

In conclusion, this study provides clear evidence that evidentials are complex linguistic forms for children to comprehend. They are not mere grammatical markers that can be taught directly. Most children who participated in the experiment produce evidentials appropriately, but they seem to have little understanding of what exactly these forms convey. The work fits into a growing number of research on children's production and/or comprehension of evidentials and modals. It points to a direction that production and comprehension need not correlate. That a certain linguistic expression emerges in children's conversations in an early age does not necessarily mean that they understand its true meaning.

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deontic modals lag behind comprehension of epistemic modals. It will be interesting to investigate if this holds true for Tibetan.

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