On the Evidential Status of Presupposition and Assertion

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Abstract

This work tackles the evidential behavior of presuppositions and assertions by assessing their socio-interactional function in communication. It is argued that by asserting and presupposing contents in an utterance, speakers encode a personal experience and a factual type of evidentiality, respectively, the former entailing a stronger involvement of the speaker as committed source of some information. By discussing how evidential meanings can also be pragmatically-inferred, the present paper proposes to recast the presupposition-assertion distinction as a further level of evidentiality marking.

Keywords: Presupposition, Assertion, Evidentiality, Speaker commitment

1. Introduction

The way information source and speaker commitment to truth are marked in the world's languages has been the bulk of heated debates in the fields of philosophy and linguistic typology. These two meanings have generally been associated with evidentiality encoding, and the strategies by which speakers convey them in sentences may be morphological or lexical in nature (Chafe & Nichols, 1986; Willett, 1988; Fox, 2001; Aikhenvald, 2004). In recent contention (Faller 2002; Murray 2010), evidentiality - both in the *narrow* and in the

broad sense proposed by Chafe & Nichols (1986) - has been characterized not just as a grammatical category enriching a proposition with additional meanings about the source of information or the speaker's commitment to truth, but also as a meaning derivable from the surface structure and contextual use of speech acts (Faller, 2002; Murray, 2010). Put another way, the locutionary form of an utterance and the way it is used to achieve particular purposes in the conversation dispense cues about the source of the speaker's knowledge and his epistemic relation to it. Unlike standard strategies of grammaticalized evidentiality (Aikhenvald, 2004), the construal of evidential meanings out of inferential mechanisms and assessments of information statuses of sentence contents can be conceived of as expressing a *pragmatically-inferred* type of evidentiality (Blakemore, 1987; Mushin, 2001), differing from the overtly grammatizalized type for being conveyed through non evidentially-specialized linguistic devices.

This paper puts forward an account of pragmatically-inferred evidentiality as encoded by presuppositions and assertions. Besides delimiting gradients of sharedness of some content and signaling informativity hierarchies between sentence units, presupposition and assertion also provide hints at the speaker's degree of commitment to the truth of a proposition (Givón, 1982; Kerbrat-Orecchioni, 1986). It will be argued that this property inheres in the capability of presupposition and assertion of signaling two distinct types of epistemic stances in the conversation, with a stance entailing a stronger commitment and more direct sourceness than the other. The ultimate suggestion put forward in this paper is to recast the presupposition-assertion distinction as a *further level of evidentiality encoding* which, differently from dedicated systems of morphological and lexical markers, hinges on assumptions on the discursive function of presuppositional and assertive packaging as well as on the type of epistemic relations they build between speakers and propositions in an interaction.

2. Overview on Presupposition and Assertion

2.1 Presupposition

Since Frege's seminal observations on the semantic behavior of definite descriptions (Frege, 1892), the phenomenon of presupposition has drawn attention within different disciplinary domains, from philosophy (Frege, 1892; Russell, 1905; Strawson, 1950; Stalnaker, 1973) to linguistics (Garner, 1971; Fillmore, 1971; Givón, 1982), from cognitive psychology (Hornby, 1973; Loftus, 1975; Langford & Holmes, 1979) to neurosciences (Jouravlev et al., 2016; Masia et al., 2017).

Frege (1892) and Russell (1905) defined presupposition as the condition of truth of the sentence, in that, the truth value of a sentence depends on the truth value of its presuppositions. From a pragmatically-oriented perspective, Stalnaker (1973) depicted presuppositions as meanings stemming from speaker-proposition relations (Stalnaker, 1973, p. 447), that is, not from the truth status of a proposition per se, but from the particular way the speaker chooses to convey it in the conversation. Relevant to Stalnaker's approach to presupposition is the notion of *common ground* (Stalnaker, 2002); in this sense, he views

presuppositions as contents belonging to the common ground of both speaker and receiver prior to a communicative act.

Much debate has also centered on the status of presupposition triggers (Karttunen, 1971; Glanzberg, 2003), i.e. lexical expressions or syntactic constructions that project presuppositions in discourse (Kiparsky & Kiparsky, 1971; Lombardi Vallauri, 2009). The status of definite descriptions and their function of projecting existence presuppositions was the first to be studied by scholars (Frege, 1892; Russell, 1905; Donnellan, 1966), but presupposed contents can notoriously arise from a number of other expressions such as focus-sensitive particles, change-of-state predicates, defining relative clauses, factive predicates and adverbial subordinate clauses. Below, an example of each type is provided.

(1) a. *The growing debt* hampers public investments (definite description)

b. Will the Democrats *stop* making false promises? (change-of-state verb)

c. *Also* these reforms turned out to be a complete failure (additive particle)

d. *When they stole public money* nobody accused them (subordinate clause)

e. The deep crisis *in which you have thrown the country* (defining relative clause)

f. Jane *ignored* that Mark had an affair (factive predicate)

From an epistemological point of view, the aim and effects of using presuppositions in discourse attracted interest especially for their relation to *challengeability*, more precisely, for their capability of reducing the chance that some information might become the "matter of dispute" of the utterance (Givón, 1982; Kerbrat-Orecchioni, 1986). On this account, presupposition induces the receiver to direct his truth conditional assessments only on asserted contents and accept the presupposition as true for the current purposes of the conversation (Kerbrat-Orecchioni, 1986, p. 23-24).

The idea that presupposed information can skip the receiver's critical evaluation or challenging response has found cogent psychological grounding in behavioral and psycholinguistic experiments aimed at assessing its processing underpinnings in a sentence. Earlier studies based on verification paradigms (Hornby, 1973; Loftus, 1975; Langford & Holmes, 1979) showed that false presuppositions are less easily noticed than false assertions. Some later reading time or eye tracking studies (Schwarz, 2015; Tiemann et al., 2011) report faster eye movements and eye shifts on presupposed contents and longer shifts on asserted ones, which suggests that increasing effort is involved in assertion processing, as compared to the encoding of presupposed content. Correspondingly, presupposed contents are likely to be "shallowly processed", which may account for their less challengeable attitude in communication. This shallow processing may result from the expectation to already have an antecedent for the presupposition in some shared background knowledge. Put otherwise, presupposition bears the instruction that some content must be treated either as information already present in the common ground or as secondary to the purpose of the message.

When new presuppositions are conveyed by the speaker, their *accommodation* (Lewis, 1979) is called for in order to make sense of the utterance. As put by Lewis (1979), the process of accommodation requires the receiver to adjust her set of common ground assumptions to the requirements of the new presupposition. This leads to common ground accrual in a way that is similar to what assertions do in discourse, but also different from assertions with respect to (a) the type of epistemic relation that ties the speaker to the presupposed proposition and (b) the socio-interactional effects stemming from this bond.

2.2 Assertion

Broadly speaking, assertion refers to a speech act by which something is claimed to be true. In traditional philosophical trends, the correlation between assertion and truth has often been a constitutive one, in the sense that truth has been characterized in terms of assertion and assertion in terms of truth (Frege, 1892; Jager, 1970; Kemp, 1999).

So, by saying

    (2) The dwarf slept in the elf's house

the speaker's assumption that "The dwarf slept in the elf's house" must be true in order for the assertion to be felicitous.

To define the behavior of assertion in an interaction is also the belief status of the speaker with respect to the asserted proposition. Indeed, besides reporting a state of affairs, by making an assertion the speaker also informs the receiver that she[the speaker] believes that state to be true.

The belief-requirement associated with assertion also comes with a stronger commitment on the part of the speaker: "By the very act of making an assertion, the communicator indicates that *she is committing herself to providing the addressee with genuine information*, and she intends his recognition of this commitment to give him a motive for accepting a content that he would not otherwise have sufficient reasons to accept." (Sperber et al., 2010, p. 366) [italics mine]

It must be stressed, however, that the belief and commitment state ascribed to the speaker should not be viewed as constitutive traits of assertions, but rather as assumptions capitalizing on its packaging properties and pragmatic functioning in communication. In fact, it is not uncommon to assert states of affairs which are false (for deceiving purposes) or to whose truth the speaker is not actually committing. What happens when these uses occur is that the speaker is only "giving the impression" of believing and committing to the truth of the asserted proposition (Dummett, 1981, p. 300: "A man makes an assertion if he says something in such a manner as deliberately to convey the impression of saying it with the overriding intention of saying something true").

Unlike presupposition, assertion is *intended* to enrich the common ground of the receiver with information that is not already there. Assertions change the context in order to make clear that the context on which an assertion has its essential effect is *not defined by what is presupposed before the speaker begins to speak*, but will include any information which the

speaker assumes his audience can infer from the performance of the speech act. (Stalnaker, 1978, p. 323) [italics mine]

The stronger commitment entailed by assertion is also what grounds for its higher challengeability, since the truth value of some content is more likely to be critically evaluated when it is more relevant to the purpose of the conversation and when it is informationally more salient and important than other (presupposed) content(s) (Kerbrat-Orecchioni, 1986).

Similarly to presupposition, assertion has its own linguistic correlates, typically identified in indefinite descriptions (especially when embedded in presentative constructions) (3a), syntactically independent clauses (3b), non-restrictive relative clauses (3c), independent clauses projected by non-factive constructions (3d), among others.

> (3) a. *There is a spider* under the table
>
> b. *The Pope travelled to Argentina*
>
> c. The girls, *who were here yesterday*, all come from Nepal
>
> d. It's strange: *Mark left Jane's house before the end of the party*

Now, before canvassing the evidential behavior of assertions and presuppositions, a few preliminary remarks on what we have previously hinted at as pragmatically-inferred evidentiality (as opposed to overtly grammaticalized evidentiality) are needed, in order to better clarify the general framework in which the evidential phenomena taken under exam must be included.

3. Pragmatically-Inferred Evidentiality

In traditional typological approaches, evidentiality (whether expressed in the marking of information source or the speaker's attitude to knowledge) has often been characterized as delimiting a clear-cut and stable set of overt morphological or lexical markers in a language. In pragmatic approaches to evidentiality (Givón, 1982; Mushin, 2001; Fox, 2001), especially those concerned with unveiling the pragmatic functions of evidentials beyond sentence boundaries and within the more general domain of discourse, the focus of evidentiality encoding shifted from the grammatical to the contextual level. Besides the fact that, in a language, categories other than specialized evidentials may express evidentiality in a sentence (see, for example, Aikhenvald's discussion on complementation and lexical transcategorization, 2004), it is also fairly established that evidential meanings may arise from assessing the speech act status of a proposition (Faller, 2002; Murray, 2010), from expectations on discourse structure and its development as the conversation unfolds (de Saussure, 2011), and from assumptions on cooperational attitudes of interlocutors (Faller, 2002). As can be easily deduced, the evidential meanings gleaned from these – essentially underencoded – mechanisms do not usually receive overt grammatical marking in the sentence, but rather hinge on inferential processes akin to those underlying the computation of implicatures. The idea that evidentiality can also be pragmatically-inferred, as suggested by Blakemore (1987) and Mushin (2001), raised the question on what has to be counted as evidential in a language, and whether evidentiality has a stable grammatical status or is just

an abstract experiential meaning which languages encode in different ways, building on their lexical and grammatical endowment. In line with other contention on this debate (Blakemore, 1987; Mushin, 2001), I believe that also non-overtly grammaticalized expressions used to convey evidential meanings, although not constituting an evidential system *per se*, can be equally categorized as evidentials. Indeed, the fact that non-evidential communicative devices can be used to convey evidential meanings is indicative of their intrinsic evidential attitude, which is grammatically "silent" but which allows for such devices to be used for evidential purposes.

4. Epistemic Stances in Communication

Since Chafe & Nichols's 1986 collection of papers on evidentiality in the world's languages, it became well-established that a *broad* evidentiality, indicating the speaker's epistemic attitude towards information, was to be conceived along with a *narrow* type (information source). Although cogent evidence soon became available that grounded for the existence of a speaker attitude evidentiality, a more in-depth analysis of the types of relations that speakers hold with the knowledge negotiated in an interaction has been only recently proposed by Mushin (2001) in a study on epistemological stances in narrative re-telling.

Mushin points out that a crucial aspect of evidentiality marking is that it does not only involve bringing attention to how the speaker has come to know what she knows, but also how she assesses the context in which she has chosen to talk about certain topics (Mushin, 2001, p. 52). This assessment is what requires her to take a "stand" on how she has acquired the information. She calls this stand *epistemological stance*. Despite complying with this working definition, I propose to substitute the term *epistemological* with *epistemic*, being the former related to the subject that studies epistemic matters, and the latter to knowledge and justification of knowledge proper. So, I take the term *epistemic stance* to better suit the speaker-proposition relation described by Mushin.

In the view she presents, the notion of epistemic stance is tightly associated with the underlying pragmatic pressures that motivate the conceptualization of information in terms of a speaker's assessment of her knowledge, and the internal structure of these conceptualizations that result in a variety of mappings onto linguistic structure. (Mushin, 2001, p. 52)

Moreover, since these pressures are non-linguistic in nature, they can only be assessed and evaluated through an "analysis of speakers' linguistic strategies used to represent the status of their knowledge" (Mushin, 2001, p. 53). In Mushin's account, epistemic stance is a universal concept and an intrinsic property of all contexts of communication. The factors driving towards the adoption of either one or the other stance are, however, culturally and situationally inscribed. Inquiring the nature and evidential function of the linguistic strategies subserving the encoding of different epistemic stances in communication is what I will attempt to do in the follow up of this work. Before moving to this step, though, a brief outline of the epistemic stances underlying the evidential behavior of presupposition and assertion is in order.

4.1 Epistemic Stances and Speaker Attitude Evidentiality between Shared and Unshared Experience

4.1.1 Personal Experience Stance and Factual Stance

Mushin (2001) argues that when some event is directly experienced, the speaker may choose to adopt a personal experience stance to convey it. In her outline, the adoption of a personal experience epistemic stance towards information involves its representation as the product of the conceptualizer's direct and conscious perceptual experience. In many cases, the speaker is the only person who has access to the "truth" of the information. (Mushin, 2001, p. 59)

Since this stance delimits contexts where the conceptualizer "has witnessed an externally perceivable event" (p. 58), it usually entails representing information as the speaker's version of events. The linguistic outcome of this stance may be found in expressive exclamations designating a private state (*I'm hungry*) or in assertions of more public and objective states (*The road is full of holes*).

Another aspect Mushin addresses in relation to taking a personal experience stance is the *challengeability* of exchanged information. She contends that, due to the property of this stance to give the impression of certainty and confidence on the truth of a state of affairs, a challengeable response on the part of the receiver would be odd and infelicitous, as shown in the two examples below.

(4) A: I'm exhausted!

B: No, you're not.

(5) A: I had a car accident last week

B: No, you didn't

Conversely, in a context in which a student is about to receive the final mark of his exam from his professor, an exchange like (6) would no doubt be acceptable (from Mushin, 2001, p. 65).

(6) A: I know I failed

B: No, you didn't

So, the situation and the status of the participants in the interaction may allow addressing speakers' conversational moves in some way.

With respect to (4), (5) and (6) a caveat must however be expressed. At first blush, while (4) and (5) concern events which have directly and consciously involved the speaker, who is necessarily in possession of adequate evidence to back up her statement, in (6) the student only conveys a "feeling" of a given state of affairs, with no certain proof to substantiate its truth. And so the professor's challenging reply is directed to a statement which is not evidentially-grounded. Nevertheless, challenging an event or state which the speaker has directly experienced is possible when some wrong memory about a witnessed fact is conveyed as plain assertion. By way of illustration, consider a context in which Speaker A

goes to the supermarket and reads a notice reporting that tomatoes are sold at 1,50 euro per kilogram. Then she meets Speaker B, who had gone to the same supermarket some time before and saw the same notice. Speaker A fails to remember the exact price of tomatoes and says

(7) A: You know, at the supermarket tomatoes are 1,70 euro per kilo

B: You're wrong. They are 1,50 euro per kilo

Now, in such a case, Speaker A does not convey just a mere presumption of the price of tomatoes – because she is indeed in the position to report the fact as witness and direct experiencer of it. However, since she is fooling himself that she is reporting the correct price, she is only a deceiving source. Speaker B, who has likewise "witnessed" and read the notice about tomatoes, is entitled to address Speaker A's statement providing more accurate information. Now, a crucial difference between (6) and (7) is that while in the former case only speaker B (the professor) can be identified as the "experiencer of the truth", in (7) both speakers are the source of the information at issue, although one of them has lost it along the way.

On balance, when personal experience stance is adopted to talk about facts, which also persons other than the speaker might have experienced (which obviously does not hold for subjective states involving emotions or perceptions of the speaker), challengeability is not completely ruled out. Indeed, since the receiver is not "called upon" as co-source of the information provided by the speaker, she feels more confident in addressing it and assess the reliability of the speaker herself if she is in the position of possessing more reliable evidence than the speaker does. Moreover, as Mushin herself acknowledges, "the fact that the speaker can be questioned with regard to source of information is evidence that the information is not yet 'public property'" (Mushin, 2001, p. 75).

With a personal experience epistemic stance, the source of knowledge is identified with the speaker. In other cases, hints at any source of information may simply remain untold. Mushin highlights that this is the kind of stance taken by speakers to communicate information that is believed to be shared by everybody, therefore any explicit indication of the primary source is deemed irrelevant. In her taxonomy, this stance is referred to as *factual* (Mushin, 2001, p. 74): "Adoption of a factual epistemological [epistemic] stance is reflected in the absence of any representation of the source of information (and its status) in the construal. Adoption of a factual epistemological stance typically implies either that the information is assumed to be known by anyone in the speech community as general cultural knowledge or, more generally, that the source of information is unimportant to the establishment of the validity of the information".

Mushin maintains that speakers are generally bound to adopt a factual stance to report on "universally accepted world truths" (Mushin, 2001, p. 74), i.e., information that is epistemically neutral, as in the two examples below.

(8) The earth revolves around the sun

(9) The snow is white

World truths like (8) and (9) can obviously be not presented as subjective opinions of the speaker.

(8a) ?? It seems to me that the earth revolves around the sun

(9a) ?? I think that the snow is white

This can be put down to the fact that, through a factual epistemic stance, the speaker dissociates herself from the representation of truth (Mushin, 2001, p. 75) and does not tie to her own representation of events.

Mushin contends that a rhetorical (and, I would add, socio-interactional) effect of the speaker's dissociation from truth is that such truth is presented as unchallengeable. Differently from personal experience epistemic stance, where the source of information is identified with the speaker, with a factual stance the information source *is* a "public property" and so its epistemic origin is within everybody's reach, which means that the receiver shares the sourceness status with the speaker thus feeling less bound to question the truth of some information which also belongs to her epistemic domain.

Now, since these epistemic stances epitomize two different attitudes of the speaker to communicated information, in the remainder of this work, it will be convenient to separately refer to them as expressing a *personal experience evidentiality* and a *factual evidentiality*. Building on the definitions of presupposition and assertion provided in the preceding sections, in what follows, I will put forward an account of presuppositional and assertive packaging as markers of factual and personal experience evidentiality, respectively, capitalizing on their discursive properties and conversational contribution to the construction of sentence meaning. Although they cannot be categorized as a specialized set of evidentials, I suggest to encompass presupposition and assertion within those systems of non-specialized evidential strategies occasionally co-opted for evidential purposes in communication.

5. Presupposition, Assertion and Evidentiality Encoding

5.1 Assertion and Personal Experience Evidentiality

In Searle's (1969) classification of speech acts, assertions are described as acts by which we tell how things are in the world and which commit us to the truth of a state of affairs. The assumption of commitment (cf. Section 2.2) rests on the declarative syntax of assertion which is not only targeted at conveying a proposition – a function which it partly shares with other speech acts – but also hints at a strong certainty and confidence of the speaker on the truth of that proposition (Heritage, 2012). Now, what concerns us here is whether, even in the absence of explicit markers of narrow or broad evidentiality it is possible to view assertions as encoding meanings of personal experience evidentiality. For greater convenience, in the remainder of this section I will use the terms direct and personal experience evidentiality as interchangeable as they both indicate the speaker as the source of information and direct experiencer of a state or event.

To begin with, consider example (10) and its reformulation in (11):

(10) *Jane is pregnant, but I don't believe it

(11) Jane is pregnant, but Mark does not believe it

In both (10) and (11) that Jane is pregnant is conveyed by means of assertion. However, while a subsequent declaration of disbelief causes a violation in (10), it apparently fits the context in (11). It can be easily deduced that the different acceptability of the two sentences hangs on the subject of the declared disbelief, who is the subject of the first conjunct (*I*) in (10), and a third person (*Mark*) in (11). Indeed, while it is sound and reasonable that the speaker commits to the truth of something which somebody else does not believe, it is very unlikely that the speaker might commit to something she, herself, subsequently declares to disbelieve. This bears on what some (Owens, 2006) have called the *state of mind* accompanying assertive illocution, that is, the particular mental attitude attributed to the speaker when she produces an assertive speech act. In asserting some information, the speaker takes on the status of "believer", no matter his actual convictions on the stated truth. (This assumption also comes from the speaker's alleged compliance with the Maxim of Quantity by which if the speaker had intended to ascribe some information to some other source, she should have explicitly indicated it by saying something like "*X told that*…, or *I've been told that*…) This explains why a plain assertion would only admit a declaration of disbelief on the part of a person other than the speaker.

This "cognitive" property associated with assertion is however driven by more general cooperational constraints and, precisely, by the maxims the speaker is expected to abide by in the conversation. Expressly, in uttering (10), the speaker is violating the Gricean Maxim of Quality requiring him to make his contribution one that is true, to not say what she believes to be false and to not say that for which she lacks adequate evidence (Grice, 1989, p. 27). On this account, in making an assertion, not only is the speaker expected to believe the asserted proposition to be true, but she is also expected to have adequate evidence to claim it as true. Possession of evidence as a second crucial requisite for a felicitous use of assertion is which makes it akin to other strategies of direct evidentiality. However, one could argue that assertions can also be uttered in contexts where the speaker lacks adequate evidence and she is just reporting what somebody else has said. Put otherwise, I may commit to the fact that Jane is pregnant also if I lack adequate evidence to endorse its veracity. No doubt assertions are often used in this way but, in the absence of explicit indications to the contrary, the speaker is bound to be identified as the actual source of the information conveyed. To further strengthen this hypothesis consider the contrast between (12) and (13):

(12) *Jane is pregnant, but I don't know whether this is true or false

(13) Sam told me that Jane is pregnant, but I don't know whether this is true or false

Interestingly, in (12), the speaker declares herself ignorant of something she has previously asserted (with no other source indicated), which renders the sentence unacceptable. Conversely, if the fact that Jane is pregnant is explicitly indicated as being second-hand information (13), the speaker can more freely express herself as *not* knowing whether the

state of affairs is true or false. Moreover, the fact that Jane's pregnancy is only acquired as indirect evidence in (13) also allows the speaker to not qualify herself as a believer, which makes the first part of the sentence compatible with the subsequent declaration of ignorance.

That an evidentially unmarked assertion entails some form of direct evidentiality has also been observed in Cuzco Quechua (Faller, 2002). In this language, evidentiality is expressed through a three-way system of morphological markers: *-mi* marking expresses direct evidentiality, *-chá* indicates conjectural evidence and *–si* signals reported information. Faller notices that, in Cuzco Quechua, direct evidentiality may also be encoded by evidentially unmarked assertions. In this latter condition, however, evidential meanings would be derived via implicatural calculation (cf. Faller, 2002, p. 123: "*-mi* encodes the evidential value that the speaker possesses the best possible source of information for the type of information conveyed by the utterance. The same evidential value is *implicated* by simple assertions"). So, both (14) and (15) below would suggest that the speaker has directly experienced the fact that 'Pilar ate bread' (Faller, 2002, p. 18 and following).

(14) *Pilar-qa   t'anta-ta-**n**   mikhu-rqa-n.*

   Pilar-TOP   bread-ACC-**mi** eat-PST1-3

   'Pilar ate bread'

(15) *Pilar-qa t'anta-ta mikhu-rqa-n.*

   Pilar-TOP bread-ACC eat-PST1-3

   'Pilar ate bread'

Faller describes the use of *–mi* as strengthening the truth of the assertion *Pilar ate bread*. Put otherwise, without *–mi*, the speaker still *is* in possession of direct evidence, whereas with *–mi* marking the speaker "justifies his or her judgment of the proposition as "true" claiming that (s)he has the best possible source of information for it" (Faller, 2002, p. 23-24). The relevance of simple assertion to evidentiality encoding is further substantiated by the infelicity which a Quechua speaker would detect in a sentence like (16) (Faller, 2002, p. 148):

(16) *Para-sha-n,   ichaqa mana-**n**   riku-ni-chu*

   Rain-PROG-3 but not-**mi**   see-1-NEG

   'It is raining, but I do not see it (rain)'

Both with or without *–mi* marking on the proposition *para-sha-n* ('It is raining'), the subsequent denial of direct experience would be interpreted as contradictory, similarly to the effect observed in (10) (Faller, 2002, p. 148: "While the evidential meaning of simple assertions can be overridden by the surrounding context, it is very hard, if not infelicitous, to cancel it overtly").

Before moving to the evidential function of presupposition, a few concluding remarks are needed in order to ward off potential terminological inconsistencies. On a priori bases, one would reasonably object to classifying assertions as markers of direct or personal experience

evidentiality due to the inference-based derivation of their evidential meaning. In fact, since interlocutors must capitalize on packaging cues and cooperational assumptions (see the above discussion on the Maxim of Quality), it may be more convenient to look at these mechanisms as expressing an inferential/conjectural type of evidentiality (Aikhenvald, 2004). The conundrum is in fact justified and deserves some little reflection. Conjectural evidentials have the function to reduce one's certainty to the truth of a statement. By uttering (17a) or (17b)

(17a) It is possible that Jane is pregnant

(17b) Maybe Jane is pregnant

the speaker weakly commits to the fact stated since she does not possess absolute and uncontrovertible evidence to endorse its truth. In fact, she may also continue the sentence by saying *…but I don't know whether this is true or false,...but I don't believe it*, or the like. So, conjectural evidentials are not incompatible with declarations of ignorance or disbelief, because they entail a weaker commitment of the speaker as well as her less direct involvement as source. In my view, the fact that assertions containing conjectural evidentials can be denied or challenged is suggestive of the non intentionality of the speaker in conveying the proposition falling within their scope (Saussure & Oswald, 2009). Put otherwise, in producing an utterance like (17a) or (17b) the speaker cannot be deemed willing to inform the receiver about Jane's pregnancy, but rather that this fact is possible, though not necessarily true. Or, maybe, she may want to implicitly induce the receiver to form a thought or a conviction about some other state of things (e.g. *Let's keep an eye on Jane because she may feel sick from time to time*; *It is possible that we'll have to do her job over the next months*, etc.). As far as I can guess, things are a little different with evidentially-unmarked assertions since, in such a case, the speaker *does* commit to the truth of the uttered proposition and presents herself as the source of it. As already pointed up by Saussure & Oswald (2009), the fact that a declaration of ignorance or disbelief cannot follow direct assertions without giving rise to contradictions is indicative of the stronger involvement and vicinity of the speaker to the asserted proposition and, accordingly, of her promotion as the source of it. So, the choice of the label "direct" or "personal experience" evidential for assertions is intended to emphasize the ultimate socio-interactional status of the speaker as it is understood by the receiver once the inferential calculation (based on contextual and packaging cues of sentence contents) has been carried out. In sum, with conjectural evidentials the receiver does not identify the source in the speaker herself because her evidence is weak and based on mere cogitation. With assertions, instead, once evaluations on cooperative behaviors and information packaging strategies are elaborated on, the receiver eventually gets to recognize the speaker's involvement as the committed source of the message.

5.2 Presupposition and Factual Evidentiality

We have seen that declarative sentences are a common device to exchange factual information, such as absolute truths or world knowledge assumptions. However, information presented as shared may find many other encoding formats. In this section, I will seek to

outline how also presupposition can express meanings of factual evidentiality, notably, meanings of "shared commitment" and "shared sourceness" in a sentence.

In Section 2.1, I defined presupposition as content taken for granted in the conversation (Stalnaker, 1973), whether it holds in the common ground of both speaker and receiver or in the current universe of discourse (Lombardi Vallauri, 2009). The non-relevance and background status associated with presupposition is not only what makes it less challengeable in an interaction (Givón, 1982), but also what makes it resistant to hosting expressions of direct or conjectural evidentiality, as shown in the examples below.

> (18) a. *When Jane [apparently] left for Paris, her boyfriend broke with her
>
> b. *It's strange that [it seems] to be raining
>
> c. *Mark ignored that [I assert] Sarah has gone away
>
> d. *When [I saw] Sam scored a goal at the football match, his coach was on cloud nine

Intuitively, the oddness of the sentences in (18) stems from the "epistemic clash" engendered by uttering information, whose truth is already taken for granted by the interlocutors, within the scope of direct and conjectural evidentials. As already seen, direct evidentials present the speaker as the only committed source of a proposition, while with conjectural evidentials the speaker weakens her certainty on truth, which can only be accessed capitalizing on available contextual cues or cooperational assumptions. In both cases, the speaker modulates her relation to the proposition: using direct evidentials, she re-states her commitment and interactional profile as source, which, in the above examples, is inconsistent with the epistemic function of presupposition of placing some information within the common ground of speaker and receiver, who are expected to both commit to the truth of information and to both qualify as its source. With conjectural evidentials the speaker presents the truth of the presupposed proposition as less certain and as to be accessed through inferential reasoning, which contravenes the implicit "truth acceptance" contract that ties the speaker and receiver to the presupposed content.

It can be easily deduced that the same constraint does not affect assertions, on whose truth the speaker can more freely modulate her commitment or express varying degrees of certainty.

> (19) a. Jane apparently left for Paris
>
> b. It seems to be raining
>
> c. I saw that Sam scored a goal

Anomalies akin to (18b) and (18c) are also those stemming from the combination of factive dependent clauses with expressions like it turns out, it is true, it is possible.

> (20) a. *The fact of John's being ill turns out
>
> b. *John's being ill is true

In (20a), that John is ill is presupposed by means of a defining relative clause. The shared status of the proposition is what makes it incompatible with a predicate (turns out) whose meaning is to actually present an event as something new for the receiver. In fact, one would utter a sentence like (21) if she knew that her interlocutor was already informed about Jane's pregnancy.

(21) It turns out that Jane is pregnant

By the same token, if John's illness were presupposed by means of a complex genitive phrase, as in (20b), no further judgment could be stated on its meaning, because its truth would already be agreed upon by the interlocutors. As might be expected, the same presuppositions would felicitously match with factive predicates, due to their presupposition-triggering function.

(22) a. Mary didn't know the fact of John's being ill

b. Mary totally ignored John's being ill

The above constraints can be explained as suggested by Stalnaker (1978) in the following terms:

A speaker should not assert what he presupposes to be true, or what he presupposes to be false. Given the meaning of presupposition and the essential effect ascribed to the act of assertion, this should be clear. To assert something incompatible with what is presupposed is self-defeating; one wants to reduce the context set, but not to eliminate it altogether. And to assert something which is already presupposed is to attempt to do something that is already done. (italics mine) (Stalnaker, 1978, p. 325)

For assertion, it was argued that the attribution of the source to the speaker hinged on her assumed compliance with the Maxim of Quality and with the Maxim of Quantity (cf. Section 4.1). With respect to the latter, the receiver understands the use of assertion to suggest that if no other source is on display in a sentence, the speaker must be identified as the only source of its truth. Analogous considerations can be made for presupposition. I have interpreted the anomalies in (18) as raising from a mismatch between the epistemic implications of the packaging properties of presupposition and those related to direct and conjectural evidentials. As already hinted at, presupposition, whatever its context of occurrence, dispenses the instruction to encode some information as already belonging to the common ground of the conversation, which means that both the speaker and receiver are tied to its truth and both must be identified as its source. In some sense, this can be regarded as the default evidential meaning "attached" to presupposition and that is automatically derived by the receiver when no other sources are explicitly indicated in the sentence. In the examples in (18), the direct and conjectural evidentials are realized in a sentence unit which, due to its presuppositional status, creates a context of shared sourceness between the speaker and receiver and delimits a domain of epistemic "neutrality" where neither the speaker nor the receiver can "personalize" the knowledge exchanged or recast it from their own subjective perspective.

Violations such as those exemplified in (20) may find a possible explanation also in the flouting of the Maxim of Manner, which I recall below (Grice, 1975):

Be perspicuous

1. Avoid obscurity of expression

2. Avoid ambiguity

3. Be brief (avoid unnecessary prolixity)

4. Be orderly

Of the four sub-maxims, the third is probably the most relevant for the phenomena above discussed. In fact, in uttering (20a) or (20b), the speaker produces unnecessary redundancy as she claims the truth of a proposition which the receiver is assumed to already believe as true. In this sense, none of the two sentences would provide the receiver with purposeful and relevant information about what she already knows and, accordingly, no common ground update takes place, which contravenes basic principles of relevance (cf. Sperber & Wilson 1986, p. 254).

Kiparsky & Kiparsky notice that a similar behavior is displayed by clauses with a presuppositional packaging when they are projected by assertive predicates like *maintain*, *assert* and *conclude*, among others (Kiparsky & Kiparsky, 1971, p. 347).

> (23) a. *I *maintain* your saying so
>
> b. *We may *conclude* the fact of his having proposed several alternatives
>
> c. *I *assert* the fact that I do not intend to participate

The mismatches in (23) stem from the contradiction to find a presuppositive clause following an assertive predicate in the main proposition. *Maintain*, *assert*, *conclude*, *claim*, etc, all entail the speaker committing to the truth of a state of affairs that is *new* to the addressee, whereas the structure of the dependent clause is presuppositional, meaning that it must be interpreted as already holding in the context set or, at least, in the receiver's background knowledge.

As can be expected, presuppositional clauses would also be incompatible with predicates conveying conjectural meanings, being the function of these latter to reduce the speaker's certainty on the truth of a proposition falling within their scope (Kiparsky & Kiparsky, 1971, p. 347).

> (24) a. Everyone *ignored*/*supposed* Joan's being completely drunk
>
> b. I *regret*/*reckon* having agreed to the proposal

Generally speaking, the above examples all highlight a difficulty of presuppositions to be projected under the scope of both direct and indirect (and conjectural) evidential expressions. We have seen that, in presenting some content as presupposed, the speaker can neither *re*-commit to its truth, nor distance herself from it, a condition which we have referred to as

epistemic neutrality with a sourceness status shared between speaker and receiver. Differently from the subjective construal induced by asserting some information, the function of presupposition is seemingly to create a context of *intersubjectivity* among the participants in the interaction. Nuyts (2001, p. 114) outlines this notion in the following terms:

Shared evidence – or the assumption of shared evidence – leads to an intersubjective view of the state of affairs expressed by the speaker.

As already pointed out, the "assumption of shared evidence" is the default evidential meaning tied to presuppositional packaging, whatever the actual knowledge status of the interlocutors. In this sense, the epistemic clashes determined by combining assertive predicates with presuppositional dependent clauses hang on the speaker's adopting two different epistemic stances within the same communicative act.

Kiparsky & Kiparsky (1971) also noticed that factivity of a clause may arise not only with the use of factive predicates but can also be determined by the syntactic position of the clause itself and, accordingly, by its topical and focal status in the sentence. They remark that when a clause is projected by a factive verb, it can be freely placed in first or second position in the sentence with no alterations of its presuppositionality (examples (25)a. and b.). Conversely, when a syntactically dependent clause is in the scope of a non-factive predicate, it can only have a sentence-final position (26b)-(27b), where it acquires a focal status since, in sentence first-position (26a)-(27a) it would be interpreted as slightly more presuppositional, and therefore factual, which hampers any modulation of epistemic attitude and source meanings on the part of the speaker through the use of conjectural evidentials.

(25) a. That there are porcupines in our basement *makes sense to me*

 b. *It makes sense to me* that there are porcupines in our basement

(26) a. *That there are porcupines in our basement *seems to me*

 b. *It seems to me* that there are porcupines in our basement

(27) a. *That Jane has left for Paris *is likely*

 b. *It is likely* that Jane has left for Paris

To sum up, presupposition can be regarded as an outward sign of the speaker's intention to convey some information as also involving the receiver's epistemic commitment and participation in the status of source. This makes presupposition packaging a possible strategy to encode a factual type of evidentiality in discourse, which accordingly grounds for a more strongly objective representation and a less strongly challengeability of its truth conditional meaning. So, whether its use is aimed at discourse cohesion building, at saving processing effort, at ensuring economy in sentence production, presupposition inevitably impinges on the epistemic consequences of conveyed information as well as on the interpretation of its evidential status in an interaction.

6. Conclusion

In this paper, I sought to provide an evidential account of presupposition and assertion by recasting them as markers of speaker attitude evidentiality. Drawing upon Mushin's taxonomy of epistemic stances, I discussed the relation that assertion bears to the adoption of a personal experience epistemic stance and that which correlates presupposition to the adoption of a factual epistemic stance. Being both stances a manifestation of the speaker's relation to truth, I suggested to refer to them as personal experience evidentiality and factual evidentiality, respectively. The purpose of this work is to delve into the domain of what has been referred to as pragmatically-inferred evidentiality (as compared to overtly grammaticalized evidentiality) discussing the behavior of two discourse devices whose evidential contribution to sentence meaning has never been extensively dealt with in early and recent contention on evidentiality encoding. However, I do not believe the account herein proposed to be conclusive in its scope in the interplay explored, since some more in-depth reflection – hopefully backed by corpus-based data – is no doubt necessary for a better understanding of the relevance of the presupposition-assertion distinction to evidentiality marking in communication.

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