CONTEXTUAL FUNCTIONS OF EVIDENTIAL MARKERS IN CONTEMPORARY UZBEK DISCOURSE

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Abstract. This article examines how the Uzbek expressions ekan, emish, -ibdi and shekilli contribute to the interpretation of information source and speaker stance in everyday discourse. Drawing on descriptive research on Uzbek grammar and cross-linguistic evidentiality, the study compares purpose-built minimal pairs and short illustrative exchanges. Four interpretive dimensions are proposed: inferred discovery, attributed report, result-based inference, and qualified conjecture. The analysis shows that evidential meaning cannot always be separated from tense, aspect, epistemic commitment or interactional context. The examples are constructed for linguistic illustration rather than collected from a corpus; the paper does not report frequencies or experimental results.

Keywords: Uzbek language, evidentiality, discourse pragmatics, epistemic stance, ekan, emish, -ibdi, inference.

INTRODUCTION

In conversational Uzbek, speakers may indicate not only what happened but also how they came to know about an event. An utterance can be presented as an observed fact, an inference from its consequences, a piece of second-hand information or a tentative explanation. These distinctions matter because interlocutors continually assess the basis and reliability of propositions in conversation. The linguistic resources involved are not reducible to a single obligatory grammatical category.

The Uzbek forms ekan, emish, -ibdi and shekilli are especially useful for exploring the relationship between grammatical form and communicative interpretation. Their use is sensitive to the proposition, verbal morphology, genre and the speaker's communicative purpose. A report may be treated neutrally, distanced from the speaker or invoked as an unexpected discovery; a conjecture may signal genuine uncertainty or polite restraint.

The aim of this article is to formulate a compact, context-sensitive framework for analyzing selected evidential expressions in Uzbek. Its guiding question is how linguistic context and interactional position distinguish source-of-information meanings from broader modal and interpersonal effects. The analysis concerns standard Uzbek in Latin-script representation, with illustrative sentences prepared specifically for this study.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Evidentiality is commonly defined in relation to the linguistic marking of information source, although its boundaries with epistemic modality vary across languages (Aikhenvald, 2004). Willett (1988) offers a comparative account of direct and indirect evidence, including reportative and inferential subtypes. These perspectives encourage an analysis that avoids treating every indication of uncertainty as an evidential marker.

Johanson (2003) places Turkic expressions of indirectivity within a comparative grammatical framework. For Uzbek, the descriptive tradition represented by Sjoberg (1963) provides a foundation for recognizing the interaction of verbal constructions and sentence structure. Such grammatical description remains necessary before assigning discourse functions to individual forms.

More recently, Üzüm (2023) has described Uzbek evidential options including -ibdi, ekan and emish, while investigating the development and functions of the inferential marker chog‘i. Her analysis demonstrates the importance of studying newer inferential expressions alongside established forms. The present article adopts this broad linguistic perspective but works only with constructed examples and makes no corpus-based claims.

An important theoretical distinction concerns the source of knowledge and the speaker’s degree of commitment. Information may be second-hand without being doubted, while a direct perception may support a cautious prediction. Accordingly, evidential labels should be tested against their local context instead of being inferred automatically from a single lexical item.

MATERIALS AND METHODOLOGY

The study employs qualitative semantic-pragmatic analysis and minimal-pair comparison. Its dataset consists exclusively of invented Uzbek sentences and brief conversational settings designed to display interpretive contrasts. English glosses convey the relevant meaning but do not represent a formal interlinear morphological annotation. No recorded speakers, informants, naturally occurring messages or quantitative corpus are used.

The analytical procedure has four stages. First, the propositional content is identified independently of the possible evidential value. Second, the potential information source is specified: witnessed, inferred, reported or unspecified. Third, the degree of speaker commitment is assessed from surrounding lexical choices. Fourth, the sequential position of the utterance is considered, especially whether it responds to a question, announces a discovery or passes on somebody else’s report.

Because the examples are constructed, each interpretation is presented as a plausible contextual reading rather than an invariant dictionary definition. Alternative readings are explicitly acknowledged. The resulting classification is a heuristic for discourse analysis and language teaching, not a complete description of all dialectal, historical or stylistic uses of the forms.

RESULTS AND LINGUISTIC ANALYSIS

1. Discovery and retrospective recognition with ekan. Compare “U uyda” (“He/she is at home”) and “U uyda ekan” (“So he/she is at home / It turns out that he/she is at home”). In a context where the speaker has just learned the person’s location, ekan can support a reading of newly established knowledge. It does not, by itself, specify whether the discovery arose from observation, testimony or another clue. The surrounding discourse must identify the source.

2. Attributed information with emish. Consider “Ertaga yig‘ilish bo‘ladi” (“There will be a meeting tomorrow”) alongside “Ertaga yig‘ilish bo‘lar emish” (“Apparently, there is going to be a meeting tomorrow, according to what is said”). In a report-sharing context, emish can signal that the proposition originates beyond the immediate speaker. The marker need not entail that the speaker rejects the information; sceptical or ironic distancing requires additional contextual support.

3. Result-based inference and the form -ibdi. The invented exchange “Deraza ochiq. Kimdir kiribdi” (“The window is open. Someone has apparently come in”) illustrates a possible inference from a visible result. Yet -ibdi participates in a wider verbal system and can have other narrative or experiential uses. It is therefore methodologically unsafe to assign a single evidential source to every occurrence without checking the event structure and discourse setting.

4. Tentative inference with shekilli. In “U hali kelmagan shekilli” (“It seems he/she has not arrived yet”), the expression may mark a cautious conclusion, perhaps because the expected person is absent. The sentence does not establish the speaker’s evidence on its own. The comparison with a bare assertion, “U hali kelmagan”, shows how a conjectural expression can lower categorical commitment while leaving the basic proposition recognizable.

The four cases show that a functional scheme must distinguish forms, information sources and epistemic attitudes. Ekan may frame discovery, emish may attribute a proposition to others, -ibdi can occur in result-oriented inference, and shekilli may qualify an assessment. These are contextual tendencies illustrated by the examples, not exclusive or statistically demonstrated assignments.

A further methodological issue is translation. English items such as “apparently,” “it turns out,” “reportedly” and “it seems” can approximate particular readings, but they do not map one-to-one onto Uzbek expressions. Translation choices should therefore be reported together with a description of the imagined speech situation. Otherwise a translation may conceal distinctions encoded through verbal morphology or discourse particles.

DISCUSSION

The illustrative analysis indicates that Uzbek evidential interpretation benefits from a layered description. The first layer is morphological or constructional form; the second concerns the type of access to information; and the third concerns interactional stance. These layers interact but should not be collapsed. In particular, the reporting of another person’s claim is conceptually different from the speaker’s evaluation of its credibility.

The relation to conversation structure is equally significant. A marker of discovery may be natural after unexpected news, while an attributed report may be used to introduce a rumor, summarize a conversation or avoid claiming personal authority. The same expression can acquire different effects in a formal announcement, a family exchange or an online message. Genre and participant relationships therefore belong to the analysis.

For Uzbek-language pedagogy and text interpretation, minimal pairs are a useful starting point. Learners may be invited to identify a likely source of information, compare alternative formulations and explain which assumptions their interpretation requires. Such tasks can reveal the difference between grammatical meaning and context-dependent inference without presenting invented sentences as representative samples of authentic usage.

The scope of the present contribution is limited. It does not test native-speaker judgments, dialectal variation or the frequency of particular constructions. Future work should examine ethically collected and appropriately annotated Uzbek discourse, compare spoken and written genres, and use independent coding to investigate how often different evidential readings are supported by surrounding context.

The description also leaves open important analytical issues, including combinations with negation, questions, quotation and other modal expressions. More detailed grammatical study is needed to determine which contrasts depend on the marker itself and which emerge through the utterance as a whole. A restrained interpretation is preferable to a rigid one-form/one-function taxonomy.

CONCLUSION

Evidential expressions in contemporary Uzbek provide speakers with resources for organizing information in relation to its source and their own epistemic stance. The constructed comparisons of ekan, emish, -ibdi and shekilli highlight possible functions of discovery, attribution, result-oriented inference and tentative judgment. Their communicative interpretation, however, depends on grammatical configuration and local discourse context.

The main conclusion is methodological: linguistic analysis should separate overt form, hypothesized information source and interactional effect, then assess these dimensions together. The proposed framework offers a basis for

teaching and further inquiry, while empirical confirmation requires a systematically collected corpus and speaker-based validation.

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