Zachary Wellstood
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Professor Singler
Term Paper

Grammaticalized Evidentiality in Pidgins and Creoles

In *Defining Creole*, McWhorter suggests the following, "Evidentials are a paradigm example of grammaticalization leading to ornaments on natural language. This is just the kind of feature one would expect to be rare to absent in pidgins […] as well as evolve over time in a natural language that was born as a pidgin." (McWhorter, 2005). Interested by his firm claims there and elsewhere that grammaticalized evidentiality is absent in all creoles known to him (except one, which he mentions and which I will address: Chinese Pidgin Russian), I have chosen to examine this issue more closely based on the presence of evidentials in substrate languages. I will focus on research done with Chinese Pidgin Russian, Chinook Jargon, Michif, and Tayo in order to show that McWhorter's claim reflects a much more black-and-white picture of evidentiality in creoles than what actually exists outside of the most heavily studied creole languages of the greater Atlantic and Pacific. Grammatical evidentiality can, indeed, show up in "young" languages.

I am working under a definition of evidentiality markers provided by Blain and Déchaine et al. (2007).[1] Cross-linguistically, evidential markers have manifested all over the globe. They may appear in various forms, from freestanding particles to bound morphemes. For instance, Plains Cree contains several – one of which is a REPORTATIVE evidential in the form of a particle:

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[1] "Evidential markers are elements that introduce the speaker's perspective regarding the information being presented (Chafe and Nichols 1986) and indicate the speaker's degree of commitment to the truth of what s/he is uttering."

(1)   Plains Cree REPORTATIVE
          …, êkotê ê-sa-sâsakitisihk   *êsa*, …
               there   CONJ-RED-lie.on.back(3)   REPORT
          "…and [reportedly] he was lying there on his back…"
          (Blain and Déchaine et. al 2007, emphasis mine)

It is also important to note, as Aikhenvald (2004) points out, that an evidential morpheme often corresponds with a verb (HEARSAY with "to hear"), but evidential morphemes are unique because their core meaning "has to [be] 'source of information'," (Aikhenvald, 2004). Strictly speaking then, the English verb "to hear" is not an evidential – it is a verb form which corresponds to a type of sensory experience, but is not an obligatory component of our day-to-day utterances. Crucially, in light of this, McWhorter's proposition to which I originally alluded, is not that creoles cannot express sensory experiences – it is that they do not have a dedicated grammatical paradigm of evidentiality because this feature evolves over time, and this is where I will direct the focus now.

McWhorter (2005) does acknowledge that Chinese Pidgin Russian is recorded as having an obligatory evidential paradigm, but does not discuss it in-depth, so a brief overview may be in order. As presented by Nichols (1986), Chinese Pidgin Russian originally came out of trade between Chinese speakers and Russian speakers during and after the 1900s. The primary records analyzed by Nichols were written by an explorer named V. K. Arsen'ev. His records seem to show a distinctive evidential grammaticalized from the Russian existential copula, *est'*. It is postposed to the verb, and its meaning varies depending on the aspectual nature of the verb (which Nichols [1986] characterizes as either PUNCTUAL – NONPUNCTUAL). In the following table adapted from Nichols (1986), the distribution of the evidential is shown in relation to tense, the semantic nature of the verb, and its meaning:

	PUNCTUAL	**NONPUNCTUAL**
PAST	inferential (3rd pers.)	$(\emptyset)^2$
	immediate (1st pers.)	
PRESENT	—³	immediate
FUTURE	predictive	$(\emptyset)$

For example:

(2) A-a! Ljudi pomiraj *est'*.
 EXCL person die EVID
 "Oh! The man must have died."
 Nichols (1986), emphasis mine

 In the scenario during which this was uttered, it was inferred from evidence (vultures circling above) that the man had died, which was shortly confirmed thereafter. Because *pomiraj* in Chinese Pidgin Russian is considered to be a punctual verb, the use of *est'* here indicates an INFERENTIAL. As far as simple grammars go, the conditioning of evidentials on a built-in feature of verbs seems quite complicated. Furthermore, the distribution of this paradigm (in a "young" language) aligns with similar tense-aspect-conditioned evidential systems of Turkish, Tibetan, and Sherpa (Nichols, 1986). Aikhenvald (2004) presents generalizations across languages about the relationship between tense, aspect, and evidentiality, which Chinese Pidgin Russian also follows. So, from this, we can see that evidentials present in the substrate can manifest themselves in a creole. In the case of Chinese Pidgin Russian, this is *the only* obligatory verbal morphology.

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² $(\emptyset)$: the tense-aspect category does occur and does appear to bear evidential meanings, but no such evidential meanings are marked with *est'*.
³ —: the tense-aspect category does not occur.

Another key example used in McWhorter's paper (2005) is Chinook Jargon, a creole which arose as a trade language between Europeans and Native Americans in the Pacific Northwest. Contributing languages include English, Salishan languages, and a pre-existing pidgin, Nuuchahnulth Wakashan (Robertson, 2011). The Native Americans, and consequently Chinook Jargon, lay in a region which was particularly rich linguistically. Most native languages spoken in this area formed a Sprachbund containing grammatical evidentiality, which is why McWhorter notes vehemently that Chinook Jargon is *not* documented as carrying over the evidentials from any of these potential substrate languages (McWhorter, 2005:87). He uses this as a key point in support for his hypothesis that evidentiality is an "ornament" in old languages; however, his precarious analysis is problematic partially because of the scarcity of data available on Chinook Jargon (even he notes this), but mainly because of the lack of attention he has paid to the creole. Essentially, his analysis stops at saying that Chinook Jargon lacks evidentials and reaffirming his own hypothesis.

In a comprehensive (300-page) analysis of Kamloops Chinúk Wawa (aka. Chinook Jargon), Robertson (2011) studies and analyzes texts written circa 1900 in a specialized alphabet called Chinuk pipa. It is worth noting that this language, Chinúk Wawa, has a fair amount of dialectal variation amongst speaking communities. It was documented first by Lewis and Clark in the 19th century. As Robertson (2011) says, the speakers' mother tongues were neither English nor a Chinookan language. Robertson's research on Chinúk Wawa provides crucial information about a developed, obligatory system of evidentiality from the substrate, which operates sententially. The paradigm makes a distinction between INFERENTIAL and HEARSAY, in realis and irrealis modalities. For instance, a null evidential is used when asserting an ASSUMED (realis)

piece of knowledge (Robertson, 2011:149). This contrasts with the INFERENTIAL (irrealis) evidential, *klunas*. Take the following example:

(3)   Ø   waɪt   man   aʤu=   klaska   krai   tomtom
         ASSUMED   white   man   IMPFV   3PL   to.weep   heart
         'The whites have been feeling devastated[...]' (Robertson 2011)

         Which contrasts evidentially with the following:

(4)   ***klunas***   naika   krai   iht   awr
         INFER   1SG   to.weep   one   hour
         'I reckon I cried for an hour.' (Robertson 2011, emphasis mine)

There is a further distinction in information with secondhand evidence – the HEARSAY evidential is *klaska wawa*. The Chinúk HEARSAY evidential seems to occur in similar environments as the Plains Cree REPORTATIVE. The evidentials presented by Robertson (2011) are not only semantically conditioned, but also syntactically. They are also not of English origin. Chinúk Wawa actually *does* have a working paradigm of evidentials, at least in the Kamloops dialect. This information directly contradicts, if not disproves, McWhorter's use of Chinook Jargon as evidence for his proposition that evidentials are universally more marked ornaments of natural language. It is further evidence of pervasive input from the substrate.

An additional Amerindian language, which I think may be an equally viable vantage point for evidentiality is Michif. Michif was spoken relatively recently in history, and its speaking community centered around the midwestern Canadian prairies, Montana, and North Dakota in the United States. The primary input languages were French and Plains Cree, with Ojibwe and English documented a bit as well; the distribution of these components in Michif are relatively balanced compared to creoles, such as those in the Caribbean or the Pacific because the

community who used it tended to be fully bilingual in both input languages. As time passed, the community became monolingual in Michif. For the most part, verbs, demonstratives, and interrogatives in Michif are of Cree origin, and nouns are of French origin (Bakker and Papen, 1996).

Plains Cree, the lingua franca of the area and an important part of Michif, had a morphological set of evidentials, as noted above (cf. example 1). However, data on transferral of these evidentials into Michif are unfortunately minimal. Evidentials may easily be documented as verbs or particles, and there has not been a study of Michif specifically in search of them. In a grammar of Michif written by Bakker (1996), evidentiality is not mentioned. Even so, in comparing the set of Plains Cree evidentials (from Blain and Déchaine, 2007) with a transcript and gloss of a Michif story obtained from Bakker (1997); I did discover something relevant and conspicuous:

(5)   "[…] itêyiht-am   ***êsa***,   'une   bonne   place   ôma   si-nipi-yân.' "
         think.of.it-he.it   it.is.said   a   good   place   this   COMP.FUT-DIE-1S
         " And he thought, well, [if I'm gonna die, I'll sit down beside this tree], a good place
         to die."
         (Bakker 1997:5-6, emphasis mine)

There is the REPORTATIVE evidential, *êsa,* being used in Michif dialogue. It is from Plains Cree (for a discussion of its use in Plains Cree, see Blain and Déchaine, 2007). This morpheme appears to be in a similar syntactic position as is described in Blain and Déchaine (2007). Interestingly, the REPORTATIVE in Plains Cree is distinct from a QUOTATIVE, but both are used to introduce things which people have said. *Êsa* is described as "indicat[ing] that the narrator did not personally witness or experience the event […] Morphosyntactically, *êsa* is an invariant particle," (Blain and Déchaine et. al 2007). The QUOTATIVE *itwê-* in Plains Cree is morphologically inflected as a verb which is postposed to its proposition. It is curious that the

invariant particle for the REPORTATIVE is used in Michif, while the verbal QUOTATIVE is not documented in the transcript at all. It is even more curious that the verb *itêyiht-am* in the sentence above is used in Michif, because this is a distinct form of another corresponding QUOTATIVE evidential in Plains Cree, *îtêyim-*, which Blain et. al (2007) translate as "think thus."

The gloss provided by Bakker describes *êsa* as, "it is said," which aligns quite nicely with its use as a REPORTATIVE in Plains Cree. It is not clear from this example, however, if other evidentials such as *êtikwê* (DUBITATIVE) or *itwê-* (QUOTATIVE) play a significant role elsewhere in the Michif discourse – or even if the occurrences of *êsa* and *itêyiht-am* should be treated as verbs from Cree or as distinct evidential particles. What should be clear, though, is that the situation is not as distinctly defined as McWhorter makes it out to be in *Defining Creole*, and the evidential nature of the particle in the Michif transcript should not be discounted. It would appear as if evidentials may have permeated this linguistic system as well.

Moving to the Pacific, in an analysis of Tayo, a French-lexifier Melanesian language with subtratal input from several Kanak languages, Siegel et. al (2000) and Corne (1999) posit the possible existence of pre-verbal evidentials. Evidentiality is a feature of the Tayo substrate languages. The evidentials in Tayo itself, which are referred to also as emphatics (Siegel 2000:92-3), are from the French form *rien que,* "nothing but," and appear written in Tayo as *ryaṅke*. There is also a variant of this form – *aṅke* (Siegel 2000, 2010:829) which can appear in the similar contexts. Here are two examples presented by Siegel (2000), collected by Corne (1999). The emphasis is my own.

(6)   nude   ***ryaṅke***   parle kom sa   pu   rigole
                 2DL   EMPH   speak like that for   laugh
                 'We're just chatting, nothing serious.'

(7)   sola ***aṅke*** fe   aṅ   graṅ   barach   si   larut
            3PL EMPH make a   big   barricade   on   road
            'They've made a big barricade on the road.'

The context and the translation of each utterance are relevant to the evidentials. For instance, the translation of (7) into the past perfect suggests that the speaker is sure of this fact. As a parallel example, Tibetan distinguishes FIRSTHAND and NON-FIRSTHAND evidence, but only in the perfective. (Aikhenvald 2004). Aikhenvald (2004) notes further that there is a connection between the past tense, perfective, and evidentials. In the Tayo utterances above, one could conceivably still get the intended meanings without *(ry)aṅke*. The use of them may reinforce the truth of the statement and the speaker's source of knowledge, which are reflected in the corresponding English translations.

The information presented about Chinese Pidgin Russian, Chinúk Wawa, Michif, and Tayo, does seem to contradict, or at least challenge, the claim by McWhorter which spurred this research into action. While it may be the case that *most* creoles do not have a grammatical system of evidentiality, it is also the case that the majority of heavily documented and researched creoles have neither a superstrate nor a substrate which possess such a paradigm. Saramaccan, McWhorter's example for his propositions of what is simple and what is not, has input from English, Portuguese, and Gbe Languages, among a few other African varieties. It is just one language variety and it hardly makes sense to set a standard tried against only *one* language.

I have created a table below to model the input languages, their corresponding pidgins and creoles, and the possession or lack of evidentials. (Y = has grammatical evidentials; N = lacks; ? = unsure)

	Superstratal Evidentials?	Substral Evidentials?	Contact Language Evidentials?
Chinese Pidgin Russian	N	Y	Y
Chinúk Wawa	N	Y	Y
Michif[4]	N	Y	?
Tayo	N	Y	Y[5]
Saramaccan	N	Y	N
Hawaiian Pidgin English	N	N	N
Haitian Kreyòl[6]	N	Y	Y
Guyanese Creole	N	N	N

From the four languages I have covered in this paper, and four other contact varieties chosen to explore my point further, it would seem as though Saramaccan is an outlier in lacking evidentials which were present in the Fongbe language of its substrate (Lefebvre et. al 2004). Where a substrate language possesses grammaticalized evidentials, it would appear as though this feature is pervasive enough to make it into the contact variety. If there is no history of grammatical evidentiality in the contributing languages, it does not appear in the creole. This

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[4] Though Michif is technically a contact language with no clear superstrate/substrate, I have chosen to count the European input languages (French & English) as superstrate and the Amerindian input (Plains Cree & Ojibwe) as substrate.
[5] Siegel (2000, 2010) notes the distinct similarity of the "emphatics" to evidentials, so I will count them as such.
[6] Lefebvre et. al (2004:108)

small comparison of eight creoles is not necessarily enough to generalize the persistence of evidentials in all creoles, but it does provide some context for them where they do show up.

In Chinese Pidgin Russian, for instance, the evidential *est'* and its multiple meanings match with generalizations made by Aikhenvald et. al (2004) about the relationship between tense, aspect, and evidentiality in various languages. Moreover, the contrast between overt marking of INFERENTIAL − HEARSAY − ASSUMED in Chinúk Wawa matches Aikhenvald's description of possible evidential systems with a three-way distinction. Chinúk Wawa's would likely be a B1 system (Aikhenvald 2004:42). This shows that the evidentials which arise in contact languages do seem to pattern similarly to other cross-linguistic patterns and are not quite amorphous at all.

McWhorter's definition of simplicity hinges upon generalizations made across creoles which share similar lexifiers *and* have substrates which happen to lack evidentiality. It becomes problematic as a universal criterion for simplicity to set a standard based upon features of creoles formed from similar superstrates and substrates under similar circumstances. Moving out of the European-lexified, mostly African-substrate domain is when we can get a broader sense of which features may be considered "essential" to the discourse in a "young language."

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