Impersonal Subjects Have No Taste
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In Tibetan, the sentence-final verb zer (pronounced sa) is ambiguous between a specific quotative (Qt) reading (1a) and an impersonal hearsay (Hr) reading (1b):

1  a. kha lag yag po ’dug zer
    food good direct exist. Qt
    "[pro] said that the food is good."

b. kha lag yag po yod red zer
    food good indirect exist. Hr
    "[they] say that the food is good."

In (1a), the unspecified subject of zer is picked up anaphorically from context; although it may also be specified overtly, as in this follow-up to (1):

2. Q. sus zer A. khong-gis zer
    who(ERG) Qt he-ERG Qt
    "Who said that?"
    "He said it."

In (1b), however, the subject of zer is impersonal — i.e. there is no specific "sayer."

The fact that zer embeds evidentials (e.g. direct ’dug and indirect yod red) appears to suggest that the full range of evidentials can occur under zer. To the contrary: when zer embeds a subjective evidential, then only the quotative reading is possible:

3. mog mog zhim po ’dug zer
    momo tasty direct exist. Qt/*Hr
    "[pro] said that momos/the momos are tasty."
    *"[they] say that momos/the momos are tasty"

By "subjective", we mean an evidential that is evaluated from the point of view of an assessor (Stephenson 2005); the direct evidential ’dug displays its "subjectivity" for example in statements of personal taste (Lasersohn 2005):

4. Q. snying rje po ’dug gas A. snying rje po ’dug
    beautiful direct exist. Q beautiful direct exist.
    "(Do you think) it's beautiful?"
    "Yes, it's beautiful."

Said in the context where two girls are gazing at one and the same flower, we find only direct ’dug and not its indirect counterpart yod red. (Note the rule whereby the evidential chosen in the question "anticipates" the form to be used in the answer, Tournadre & Dorje 2003.)

Adjectival predicates such as yag po "good", zhim po "tasty" and snying rje po "beautiful" usually serve to express speaker assessment and so normally occur with the direct evidential ’dug (as in 1a, 3, and 4). However, occasionally they occur with the indirect evidential yod red:

5. mog mog zhim po yod red
    momo tasty indirect exist.
    "Momos are tasty."
Here, the use of *yod red* in place of *'dug* "shifts the emphasis of the statement from the attestative fact [that the speaker finds momos tasty] to the general fact that Tibetans believe that momos are delicious" (Chonjore & Abinanti 2003:112.) (5) might be used, for example, to convince somebody who has not tasted momos that they are in fact delicious; and (5), unlike its counterpart with direct *'dug*, does not require that the speaker have tasted momos before. (Although if he hasn't, he had better be very sure that the statement is true.)

The ban prohibiting the co-occurrence of subjective evidentials and impersonal hearsay is nicely illustrated by the following example:

6. Q: ...
... kha lag yag po *'dug* gas
... food good direct exist. Q
"Are the restaurants at the airport good?"
A ...
... nga kha lag bzas med
I food eat neg. ego exist.
"Um... I haven't eaten the food (at those restaurants)."
... kha lag yag po *yod red* / *'dug* zer
food good indirect exist. / *direct exist. say
"...(but) they say the food there is good."

Although the question (6Q) is formed with the direct evidential (*'dug gas*), the answer (6A) embeds the indirect evidential under *zer* (*yod red zer*), and not the direct (*'dug zer*). Without a specific "sayer" provided by the discourse, the elided subject of *zer* must be read impersonally; therefore *'dug zer* is blocked.

Seen from one angle, the ban flies against intuition. Surely, my evidence for asserting (6A) is a collection of statements made by individuals to the effect "the food (at this restaurant) is good (*'dug*)." That is, my overhearing a considerable number of subjective *'dug* statements would appear to be the justification for my assertion that "They say the food is good." And yet in spite of this, I cannot answer with *'dug zer* in (6A).

We propose the following solution. The determination of the truth value of sentences with *'dug* relies on a contextually supplied assessor index (Lasersohn 2005). In a matrix clause (such as 4A), this index is fixed as the speaker. In a quotative (like 1a), the index is bound by the contextually supplied subject of *zer*. In contrast, no assessor index is involved in the determination of the truth value of sentences with *yod red* (such as 5).

The ban against embedding subjective evidentials under impersonal hearsay, then, reflects a general constraint against binding by impersonal subjects. To interpret embedded *'dug*, its assessor index must be bound. However, impersonal subjects cannot serve as binders. Therefore, only indirect evidentials (which lack the assessor index) can be embedded under impersonal hearsay.

Support for this conclusion comes from the following English sentence:

7. They say they like apples.
   a. => they, say they, like apples (specific quotative)
   b. => it's said they like apples (impersonal hearsay)

On the impersonal hearsay reading, the matrix subject cannot bind the embedded subject (i.e. it can't mean "people, generally say that they, like apples."

The broader implications of this work are twofold: first, that even evidentials which are paradigmatic alternates may be structurally distinct from one another; and second, that predicates of personal taste are not inherently subjective: in some languages, at least, the assessor index is provided by lexico-syntactic means external to the predicate itself.
References