On the encoding of evidentiality in English: An experimental approach
Cassandra Chapman (joint work with Diane Doran and Daniel Schmidtke)
McMaster University

An evidential construction marks the source of information that a speaker has for their assertion. While every language has the means to express evidential concepts, an evidential is defined by obligatory grammatical marking. It has been argued that English does not encode evidentiality grammatically (cf. Aikhenvald, 2004). However, Asudeh & Toivonen (2012) argue that certain constructions in English do encode evidentiality. Specifically, Asudeh and Toivonen argue that English copy raising constructions (e.g., *John looks like he is cooking*) encode direct evidentiality, while unraised constructions (e.g., *It looks like John is cooking*) are unmarked for evidentiality. Thus, the former sentence is only felicitous in a situation where John is observed in the kitchen, whereas the latter can be used when one simply sees pots boiling on John's stove. In an online felicity judgement task, Rett & Hyams (2014) confirmed this basic evidential pattern. Nevertheless, the criteria used to distinguish direct and indirect evidence has been inconsistent in the literature. According to Asudeh & Toivonen (2012), direct evidence must involve direct perception of the sentential subject while other researchers argue that it is the type of evidence that must be direct; for example, sensory versus non-firsthand evidence (Aikhenvald, 2004). Recently, Matthewson (to appear) argues that cross-linguistic evidentiality can be further refined into three sub-dimensions, namely, evidence type, strength and location, which can each have a direct or indirect value. Matthewson argues that languages differ in which dimensions are incorporated into their grammars.

In this talk, we present results from a forced-choice acceptability judgement task, testing whether English evidential constructions are constrained by Matthewson's parametrized sub-dimensions of evidentiality. For consistency, we also included Asudeh & Toivonen's (2012) Evidence Source as a fourth dimension of evidentiality in our experiment. In order to facilitate the task of rating sentences that differ in a subtle way, participants were instructed that they were helping a non-native speaker, Idan, learn about the subtleties of English (cf. Rett & Hyams, 2014). In response to a discourse context, participants were asked to rate the acceptability of evidential sentences as well as a declarative control on a scale of 1 (unacceptable) to 6 (acceptable), as in (1). Contexts were manipulated to test for all possible combinations of evidential dimension and direct/indirect values. Copy raised and unraised structures were counterbalanced across participants.

(1)   Context: Idan walks into the house and sees that his wife is in the kitchen. She is wearing an apron that is full of flour and has chocolate on her face. Idan thinks to himself:
a. *Unraised*: It seems/sounds/looks like she has been baking.
b. *Copy raised*: She seems/sounds/looks like she has been baking.
c. *Declarative*: She has been baking.

Results indicate that three of these sub-dimensions, Evidence Type, Strength, and Source - but not Location - all significantly predict acceptability of English evidential constructions. Our results suggest that evidentiality is grammatically encoded in particular syntactic constructions in English and that its marking is obligatory (cf. Fox, 2001; von Fintel & Gillies, 2010). By controlling for the evidence available in the discourse context, we were able to use linguistic judgements to uncover the parameters relevant for the encoding of evidentiality in English.