

Egophoricity. Simeon Floyd, Elisabeth Norcliffe, and Lila San Roque, eds. John Benjamins Publishing Company. 2018

Few airline passengers meet the one word question 'Coffee?' with a baffled stare; the question clearly means 'Would you like some coffee?' despite the absence of verbs and pronouns. Questions ask about the addressee or his ken and statements give information about the speaker or her ken. This pattern, which I shall call the 'conversational presumption', is built into the fabric of human communication; it permits languages even without verb agreement to make sparse use of pronouns. Witness Japanese *genki desu ka* (well COP Q) 'Are you well?' and *genki desu* (well COP) 'I am well'.¹ In particular, forms with inherently private evidential meaning (Wittgenstein's 'toothache') are restricted to first person statements (*ha ga itai desu* [tooth SBJ hurt COP] 'I have a toothache') and second person questions (*ha ga itai desu ka* [tooth SBJ hurt COP Q] 'Do you have a toothache?'); other contexts require different expressions (*ha ga ita gatteiru* [tooth SBJ hurt appear-PROG] 'He (you) appears (appear) to have a toothache'.). In a 1980 paper, Austin Hale mistook the intersection of the conversational presumption and personal evidentiality in Newar as an exotic form of person agreement, which he referred to as 'conjunct-disjunct' and, under the influence of Nicolas Tournadre's analysis of Lhasa Tibetan, later came to be called 'egophoricity' (Hill and Gawne 2017). I use the term 'Personal evidentiality' (equivalent to conjunct, egophoric, or participatory in descriptions of particular languages) for the marking of information as known through conscious personal involvement, e.g. 'I am a linguist', 'I work in London', etc. Since Hale's time linguists have struggled to overcome his error. The book under review is a step forward in this struggle, but the battle is far from won.

Before Hale, Edward Bendix correctly described Newar personal evidentiality as expressing “the evidential category of intentional action” (Bendix 1974: 54) and emphasized it “is evidential and

¹ Depending on how formulaic the expression, the pattern can be overridden. Thus, *ii desu ka* (good COP Q) can mean 'Are you ok?' or 'May I?'.

not a first-person verb ending: it may occur with any person” (1974: 49). Unfortunately, influential typologists such as Alexandra Aikhenvald have followed Hale and not Bendix. In her 2004 *magnum opus*, she describes Newar as displaying “conjunct and disjunct person marking” (2004: 204), claiming that such systems “are not evidential in nature” (2004: 127). In 2015 she reiterates that “[c]onjunct-disjunct systems do not mark information source” (2015: 257). Her analysis directly contradicts the recent specialist literature on Newar and Tibetan (see Hill and Gawne 2017 and references therein). The contributions to the volume under review generally help to escape the blind alleys of Hale and Aikhenvald, but the overall conceptual framework continues to conflate the conversational presumption and personal evidentiality. In the introductory essay the editors refer to “the association with first person declarative and second person interrogative clauses, as typical *egophoric distribution*” (p. 4, emphasis original).² By this definition the English noun 'coffee' follows an egophoric distribution, in the absence of information to the contrary it is understood as associated with the speaker in statements and the addressee in questions as we saw at the outset of this review, but presumably the editors would not see 'coffee' as an egophoric marker. Staying with English, the editors point out that in corpora 'hungry' follows this egophoric distribution (p. 66), but it is unclear how they intend this observation to fit into their overall account of 'egophoricity'. The editors' definition of egophoricity is in fact a definition of the conversational presumption; it overlooks the role of personal evidentiality that is key to the verbal systems of Newar, Tibetan, and other languages described as exhibiting 'conjunct-disjunct' or 'egophoricity'.

If one defines egophoricity (conjunct-disjunct in Hale's terminology) by starting with Hale and then backtracking, as Henrik Bergqvist does with the comment “the prototypical distribution of egophoric marking is not without noted exceptions” (p. 348), then there are no decisive criteria for pinpointing whether this or that concrete phenomenon is an egophoric marker. Approaching an evidential category via person agreement, as most of the book's authors do to a greater or lesser extent, gives the work a rather diffuse feel, with the hero of the title never quite in the reader's

2 Similar definitions occur in nearly every article (e.g. Fried, p. 198, Norcliffe, p. 306, Bergqvist, p. 347).

sights. The seeds of a superior analysis are scattered throughout the volume. In the introduction the editors note that Adrian Clynes (1995) treats the conversational presumption in Balinese as a 'pragmatic overlay' (p. 41), but they do not consider whether his analysis applies to other languages. Clynes is not explicit about what he means by 'pragmatic overlay', but my impression is that he means precisely that the distribution of the relevant morphemes is a result of the conversational presumption rather than the grammatical meaning of the morphemes themselves. In the second chapter, David Hargreaves demonstrates that in Newar, in addition to the personal evidential suffixes, temperature predicates (like in Japanese) and the auxiliary *-dhun* 'finish' also follow the conversational presumption in distribution; by finding an example of the conversational presumption outside of the pattern of evidential verb suffixation for which the term 'conjunct-disjunct' was invented, his analysis shows that personal evidentiality (conjunct) and the conversational presumption (covering at least conjunct-disjunct marking and the auxiliary *-dhun*) are distinct phenomena even in Newar. In the final chapter, Stephen Wechsler observes that a “personal taste statement like *Rollercoasters are fun* is most naturally interpreted as reporting that they are fun for the speaker, while the question *Are rollercoasters fun?* asks about the addressee's taste” (p. 476), or, paraphrased into my terminology, he notes that the conversational presumption is of much wider application than personal evidentiality. Nonetheless, his observation does not prompt him to disentangle personal evidentiality and the conversational presumption in general.

A common explanation for conjunct-disjunct/egophoric marking that accompanies Hale's conflation of personal evidentiality and the conversational presumption is the so-called 'rule of anticipation' whereby the “use of the conjunct form in a second person question anticipates the form used by the addressee in her answer” (Wechsler, p. 476).³ Robyn Loughnane points out that all evidentials—not just egophorics—follow the 'rule of anticipation' (p. 391); rather than questioners anticipating replies, this pattern is part of the general habit of addressees to answer the questions put

3 In Hale's original formulation “the conjunct-disjunct form of a true question anticipates that of its answer” (1980: 99).

to them and not some other question. In the same way that a question about the past (in a past tense) is typically answered with a statement about the past (in the same past tense), so too a question about something known from conscious personal involvement (marked with a personal evidential) is typically answered with a statement of information known from conscious personal involvement (marked by the same personal evidential category). There is no more a 'flip' or 'rule of anticipation' in the case of evidentials than in the case of tense. Simeon Floyd points out that egophorics do not consistently follow the rule (p. 278, also see Gawne 2016); addressees are always free to answer a slightly different question than the one asked. Taken together, the observations of Loughnane and Floyd are enough to abandon the 'rule of anticipation' as devoid of descriptive power. Nonetheless, Wechsler counts “the *interrogative flip*” (p. 475 emphasis original) among the main puzzles of egophoricity in need of explanation. Far from being a puzzle, the conversational presumption is built into the nature of all human communication and has no special relationship to personal evidentiality. Note that in Tibetan, the language for which the term 'egophoric' was invented, hunger, which in English has egophoric distribution, *cannot* be expressed with a personal evidential (egophoric), but instead must be reported with a sensory evidential (Tournadre's 'endopathic', e.g. *nga grod-khog ltogs-kyi-'dug* [I stomach hungry-PRES-SENS] 'I'm hungry'); egophoricity as a cross-linguistic typological category per se is a chimera.

The book contains 15 chapters. It begins with a long introduction, comprehensive in its coverage of the relevant languages and scholarship, but somewhat lacking a clear editorial vision and voice; it is more a bestiary than a taxonomy. There follow 11 studies of grammatical phenomena in specific languages: five Trans-Himalayan languages, namely Newar, Kurtöp, Yongning Na, Sherpa (a Tibetan dialect), and Wutun (a dialect of North West Mandarin Chinese), the two Trans New Guinea languages Duna and Kahuli, and one language each from the Mongolic, Barbacoan, Coconucan, and Arwako-Chibchan families, respectively Mangghuer, Cha'palaa, Guanbiano, and Ika. Each of these studies provides fresh data that is well contextualized within the volume's overall

scope.

I turn now to the remaining three papers. Loughnane's contribution, which compares the Newar and Oksapmin evidential systems, is a model of clear and elegant argumentation. She persuasively puts the case against Aikhenvald's view that conjunct-disjunct systems are not evidential and proposes that 'participatory' (what I call 'personal') should be added to the typological inventory of evidential specifications. This fine paper is destined to become a classic. In his contribution Wechsler notices the similarity between the egophoric and the Japanese experiencer predicates referred to above, proposing that both are types of 'self ascription' (p. 481). There are two obstacles to this analysis. First, the Japanese examples would be translated into Tibetan with sensory evidentials and not with personal evidentials (egophorics). So, *prima facie* the same explanation cannot account both for the Japanese experiencer predicates and Tibetan personal evidentials. Second, it is unclear how 'self ascription' handles some examples of Tibetan personal evidentials, such as '*di khyed-rang-gi gsol-ja yin* (this you-GEN tea COP.PERS) 'This is your tea' (which I made for you), which Wechsler does not address. Keith Slater's paper on the origins of the morphology that marks personal evidentiality in Mangghuer makes an important contribution to the cross-linguistic understanding of how evidential systems evolve over time. He writes:

We see this pattern repeated many times: non-ego categories generally acquire specialized marking, which is often relatively uniform, and sometimes drawn from unrelated grammatical subsystems, while the corresponding ego categories often simply retain earlier default forms which have narrowed semantically. Thus, the ego categories often have more morphological forms than do the non-ego ones. (p. 237)

Certainly in Tibetan what is now morphology for personal evidentiality continues earlier default forms that have semantically narrowed. My suspicion is that the conversational presumption itself explains why unmarked morphology is easy to reanalyze as personal evidential marking.

A cause of murkiness in the volume is that several of the authors do not acknowledge when different views are incommensurate or fail to take sides when two analyses contradict. In discussing the relationship among egophoricity, evidentiality, and person marking, the editors observe that

linguists describing particular languages tend to favor evidential explanations but typological theory builders favor person agreement (p. 49). This pattern immediately suggests that the former are correct, since they focus on actual language data rather than castles in the sky; the editors politely present both perspectives as potentially valid. Similarly, Gwendolyn Hyslop appears to accept both the accounts of Tibetan copula verbs of DeLancey (1992) and of Tournadre and LaPolla (2014), although the latter directly contradicts the former (p. 117). By improving the clarity of academic discourse a greater willingness to call a spade a spade would facilitate progress in research.

A more serious issue than ambiguous presentation of relevant scholarship is ignorance of it. Unfortunately, a few of the contributions show a decided lack of familiarity with important literature; given my background I notice this particularly with respect to Tibetan. Barbara Kelly analyzes “Sherpa as having perfective and imperfective aspectual distinctions rather than tense distinctions” (p. 143). In contrast, Tournadre et al. (2009) analyze Sherpa as having the five tenses: past (simple), perfect, present (general), present (progressive), and future. They take *-nok* as marking sensory evidentiality in all tenses except the future, which for semantic reasons is incompatible with sensory evidentiality, and the past simple, where sensory evidentiality is instead marked with *-sun*. Kelly overlooks the complementary distribution of *-nok* and *-sun*, treating them as unrelated affixes (pp. 144-146). In a related oversight, she unnecessarily analyzes *-nok* as eye witness in present and inference in past (p. 143), unaware that inferential semantics is a natural consequence of combining sensory evidentiality with perfect tense (Hill 2017). Slater suspects that the role of Amdo Tibetan as a *lingua franca* had a major impact on Mangghuer (p. 236, et passim). His major source for Amdo Tibetan is Haller 2000. It is unclear why he turns to this short paper rather than the full grammar by the same author (Haller 2004) or any of the other research on Amdo Tibetan (e.g. Ebihara 2008, Shao 2014). What Slater did consult he did not read carefully. He writes that “Mdzo-dge Amdo does not allow evidential distinctions in future contexts” (p. 238). In fact, a look at examples 33e and 33f and the ensuing discussion in Sun's (1993) paper, which Slater cites,

makes clear that this language does allow evidential distinctions in future contexts. In Wechsler's treatment of the famous Tibetan sentence *ngar dngul tog-tsam 'dug* (I.DAT money some exist.SENS) 'I have money!' (p. 485), he shows no awareness that *'dug* is a sensory evidential. Yukawa's (1966: 79) explanation for the surprise effect in this sentence is that, if you remembered putting money in your own pocket, you would use a personal evidential, whereas if you discover it in your pocket unexpectedly, you know it is there by *feeling* it. In addition to these more major lapses, there are also a few small mistakes in the handling of Tibetan and Tibeto-Burman.⁴

In conclusion, one longs after that simple lucidity that might have been if Bendix (1974) rather than Hale (1980) were the touchstone for Newar personal evidentiality; but what's done is done. This book takes an undeniable, if halting, step toward greater understanding of personal evidentiality and the conversational presumption. Hargreaves is doubtless right to predict that the latter “will turn out to have a wide range of explanatory applications, and potentially draw under one roof a wide range of semantic and pragmatic phenomena” (p. 103), but for this possibility to manifest personal evidentiality and the conversational presumption must more fully part ways in future research.

Until now these two distinct phenomena have been confusingly subsumed under the single notion of 'egophoricity'. There are at least two significant problems with conflating these two phenomena. First, if personal evidentiality is described as egophoric, a semantic evidential category is described according to coincidences with grammatical person that simply do not hold. In Newar and Tibetan at least all persons can and do occur with all evidential categories including the personal (conjunct/egophoric). Second, if the conversational presumption is described as egophoric, egophoricity will eventually be found in all languages and indeed all words in all languages, it will be vacuous and fail to describe the phenomena for which it was invented.

4 Newar is not Tibetic, and Sherpa is (p.36); Qinghai province is not directly north of Tibet (p. 37); Sinitic is a Trans-Himalan (= Tibeto-Burman) subbranch and not a distant relative thereof (p. 37); regarding the claim that Tibetan *yin* “had copula/auxiliary uses in Classical Tibetan, but no egophoric meaning” (p. 43), note that Takeuchi (1990, 2015) describes egophoric uses of *yin* already in Old Tibetan; Tibetan *yod* has not “lost its independent verb status” (p. 43), as shown in examples 46 and 47 a few pages earlier (p. 32) in the same chapter.

As a final observation, many of the papers appear to cite corpora, e.g. Hyslop's "Rice.Harvest20081022.159.064.B" (p. 119), Floyd's "CHSF2011_01_11S2_1893690" (p. 290), or Berqvist's "ELI_090823", but not a word is said about the conventions used in these citations or where the underlying data are available. In a world where it is easy and free to put research data in a public repository to not do so is inexcusable.

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Abbreviations

COP	copula
PERS	personal evidential
PRES	present
PROG	progressive
Q	question
SBJ	subject
SENS	sensory evidential

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