Evidential marking and the upgrading and downgrading of epistemic strengths in Mandarin conversations

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Evidential types  
(de Haan 2001; Willett 1988)

- **Direct evidence**

  我 剛才 看見 他 了。

  \[ wǒ gāngcái kànjiàn tā le \]

  1SG just.now see 3SG PERF

  ‘I saw him just now.’

- **Reportative/hearsay evidence**

  聽說 你 要 離開 香港。

  \[ tīngshuō nǐ yào líkāi xiānggǎng \]

  hearsay 2SG FUT leave HongKong

  ‘(I) heard you’re leaving Hong Kong.’

- **Inferential evidence ---- epistemic modality**

  裡面 肯定 有 人。

  \[ lǐmiàn kěndìng yǒu rén \]

  inside must COP people

  ‘There must be someone inside.’
Evidentiality vs. Epistemic modality

- “Evidentiality is a category in its own right, and not a subcategory of any modality” (Aikhenvald 2004:7)

- “Evidential distinctions are part of the marking of epistemic modality” (Willet 1988:52)

- Epistemic modality, in the diachronic pathway, often developed extended uses of inferential functions. It is this inferential uses of epistemic modality that intersect with evidentiality.
What is Evidentiality?

• **Narrow definition:** obligatory markers that are used to encode a speaker’s source/type of information (e.g. Aikhenvald 2004; Faller 2002; Lazard 2001; de Haan 2001).

• **Broader definition:** narrow definition+ the degree of the information’s reliability, probability or certainty, as well as speaker’s access to information (Tournadre & LaPolla forthcoming; Cornillie 2009; Rooryck 2001; Ifantidou 2001; Palmer 1986).
Previous research on evidentiality

(1) Sources/types of information
    (Aikhenvald 2004; Faller 2002; Lazard 2001; de Haan 2001)

(2) Expressions of speaker’s attitude towards the information

(3) Socio-interactional meanings
    (Kim 2011, 2005; Fox 2003, Kamio 1997; Hill & Irvine 1993)
Research questions

- What types of evidential strategies are found in Mandarin conversations?

- How do these evidential strategies interact with each other in Mandarin conversational discourse?
Data

25 Mandarin audio and video taped conversational interviews (≈30 mins.*25=750 mins.)
鳥居 Torii
Marks a high degree of the speaker’s commitment to the assertion. (Li & Thompson 1982; Li 2006)
06 IE: = 建 築 物 經 常 是 在 神 廟 的 入 口 處

= zhè gè jiànzhùwù jīngchéng shì zài shénmiào de rǔkǒuchù
this CL architecture often COP at shrine ATTR entrance

‘Quite often this appears at the entrance place of a shrine.’

07 IR: 嗯
èn
PRT
‘Yeah.’

08 IE: 日 本 的 廟 會 的 入 口 處 就 有
ribèn de miàohuì de rǔkǒuchù jiù yǒu
Japan ATTR shrine ATTR entrance right.on have

這樣 的 - 這樣 的 建 築
zhèyàng de - zhèyàng de jiànzhù
this.kind ATTR this ATTR architecture

‘Japanese shrines’ entrance place do have this kind of architectures.’
reinforce the initial epistemic strength

IE
- Initial claim without evidential marking
- SFP with strong commitment

IR
- Seek reasons
- Affiliative

IE
- Overt evidential marking
- Perceptual visual evidential *kan* ‘see’

IR
- Seek more information
- Affiliative

IE
- Specification
- High certainty
Drainage system
01 IE: 是 門 下面 的 那個 墊 的 £ 墊子 £
   shì mén xiàmiàn de nà ge diàn de £ diànzǐ £
   COP gate beneath ATTR that CL put.underneath ATTR cushion
   ‘(It) is that cushion thing underneath a gate.’

02 古代 的 那個 城 門
gǔdài de nà ge chéng mén
gate beneath ATTR that CL city
   ‘Ancient city gate’

03 那個 下面 的 > 那個 東西 <
nà ge xiàmiàn de > nà ge dōngxi <
that CL beneath ATTR that CL thing
   ‘That cushion thing underneath an ancient city gate’

04 或者 某個 建築物 下面 (.伸出來 的 那 一小 坡 £ 東西 £
   huòzhě mǒu gè jiànlùwù xiàmiàn (. shēncūlái de nà yī xiǎo tuó £ dōngxi £
or some CL architecture beneath stretch ATTR that one little CL thing
   ‘Or something stretching out from an (ancient) architecture.’
05 IR: 為什麼呢
wèishénme ne
why SFP
‘Why?’

06 IE: 它很近啊？你看它離地
tā hěn jìn a nǐ kàn tā lí dì
3SG very close PRT 2SG see 3SG from ground

07 馬上就到地上了吧
mǎshàng jiù dào dishang le ba
almost just arrive ground PERF SFP
‘You see, it’s so close to the ground, nearly touches to the ground.’

08 IR: 那你覺得上面是門啊
nà nǐ juédé shàngmiàn shì mén a
then 2SG think above COP gate Q
‘So you think the above is a gate?’

09 IE: (2.9) 啊也有道理好像沒=。
a yě yǒu dào lǐ háoxiàng méi
PRT also have reason seem NEG
‘Uh… (your logic) also makes sense, seems that there’s not…’
10 不一定上面可能是墙啊
bù yìdìng shàngmiàn kěnéng shì qiáng a
No above may COP wall SFP above
‘No, the above part is not necessarily a gate, could be a wall.’

11 那墙怎么会伸出这么多一个£一个£的这个呢
nà qiáng: zěnme huì shēnchū zhème yī gè £ yī gè £ de zhè ge ne
then wall why FUT stretch such one CL one CL ATTR this CL Q
‘Then how could a wall has those stretching parts?’

12 哦那就是房檐我看不清楚
o nà jiù shì fāngyán wǒ kàn bù qīngchǔ
PRT that just COP eave 1SG see NEG clear

13 它离地有多高
tā lí dì yǒu duō gāo
3SG from ground have how high
‘Well, so an eave? I can’t see clearly how far it is from the ground’
Mitigate the initial epistemic strength

- **IE**
  - Initial claim without evidential marking

- **IR**
  - Seek reasons
  - Neutral

- **IE**
  - Overt evidential
  - Direct evidential marking + common ground strategy

- **IR**
  - Challenge with interrogative
  - Disaffiliative

- **IE**
  - Negotiate with inferential evidentials
  - Retreat-defend

- **IR**
  - Challenge with Interrogative
  - Disaffiliative

- **IE**
  - Back down, provide another alternative
  - Recruit overt evidential (negate) as face-saving device
01 IE: 我覺得我要是想去的話
wǒ juédé wǒ yàoshì xiǎng qù de huà
1SG feel 1SG if want to ATTR word
‘I think if I want to travel…’

02 IR: 嗯
èn
PRT
‘Yeah.’

03 IE: 可能(·)嗯(·)在亞洲範圍之內.
kěnéng(·)èn(·)zài yàzhōu fànwéi zhī nèi
may PRT in Asia range NOM within
‘Maybe, well, within Asia…’

04 IR: 嗯
èn
PRT
‘Yeah.’

05 IE: 我想去新加坡
wǒ xiǎng qù xīnjiāpō
1SG want to Singapore
‘I would like to go to Singapore.’
Oh? Any big difference between that (Singapore) and Hong Kong?

They said there (Singapore) seems...seems to be less crowded compared with here (HK).

Here (HK) on the whole is more crowded than Singapore.

Then you travel there for viewing or seeing less people?
‘Cause they...there...they said there’s, well, a lot of cuisine there.’

‘Okay, yeah, this is sort of out of my expectation, you said you would like to go to Singapore.’
Modify the initial epistemic strength

IE
- Initiate a claim

IR
- Seek reasons
- Disaffiliative

IE
- Hearsay evidential
- Distance oneself

IR
- Challenge with interrogative
- Disaffiliative

IE
- Hearsay evidential
- Distance oneself
Answers to RQs

Different evidential strategies in Mandarin conversations

(1). Zero-evidential marking;
(2). Direct evidentials such as (ni) kan ‘(as you can) see’;
(3). Inferential evidentials such as haoxiang ‘seems/looks like’ and kending ‘must’;
(4). Hearsay evidential (tamen)shuo ‘they say’
Answers to RQs—cont'd.

How do these evidential strategies interact with each other in Mandarin conversational discourse?

• To negotiate the source and reliability of the expressed information.

• To modulate (reinforce & mitigate) interlocuter’s epistemic strength.
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