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4 Considerations for the analysis of indirect evidentiality in Udmurt

Abstract: The paper discusses how the use and interpretation of the morphological indirect evidential in Udmurt (Uralic, Permic) is affected by epistemic categories other than evidentiality. The goal of the paper is to explore the reasons why a piece of information can be marked by the indirect evidential besides the specification of information source. The analysis shows that the following factors have a decisive role in the use and interpretation of indirect evidential forms in addition to the type of source of information: 1) assimilated and non-assimilated status of information; 2) reliability of information; and 3) the speaker's epistemic authority. By taking these factors into consideration in the analysis of evidential markers, the motivation behind “non-canonical” uses can be explained more consistently.

Keywords: indirect evidentiality, mirativity, reliability, epistemic authority, Udmurt language, second past tense

4.1 Introduction

The paper discusses how the use and interpretation of the Udmurt morphological indirect evidential (also known as second past tense) is shaped by epistemic categories other than evidentiality. The term indirect evidential is used in the paper to denote a marker that refers to events or state of affairs that the speaker did not witness or experience.¹

¹ Synonymous terms in the literature are *non-eyewitness evidential*, *non-firsthand evidential*, *mediative* and *indirective* (cf. Aikhenvald 2004:394).

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Udmurt is a Uralic language, part of the Permic subgroup in the Finno-Ugric branch. It is spoken in the Russian Federation, primarily in the territory of the Udmurt Republic and neighboring areas. The ethnic population is cc. 380 000, and the number of speakers is cc. 267 000, which is approximately 70% of the ethnicity (Rosstat 2020). Udmurt is an endangered language, and a continuous decrease can be observed in the number of speakers, who are Udmurt-Russian bilinguals. Udmurt is a member of the Volga-Kama linguistic area, which comprises Uralic (Komi, Mari, Mordvin) and Turkic (Tatar, Chuvash, Bashkir) languages (Bereczki 1998; Helinski 2003).

The Udmurt marker under discussion forms a past tense paradigm (called the second past tense in the descriptive literature of Udmurt) and it is associated with the expression of indirect evidence types, which usually means inferred or reported information,² or, more generally, information acquired without having firsthand experience about the events in question (Leinonen and Vilkuna 2000; Siegl 2004; Kubitsch 2022). The paradigm is also frequently characterized as a non-eyewitness past tense. In example (1),³ the utterer did not witness the event (Ilya throwing a pebble), they either saw the result of the action (damage on the car), or learnt the information from someone else.⁴

- (1) *iĭa tolon kəŋ-jen=a mar=a lez-em maŋina-je*
 Ilya yesterday pebble-INS=Q what=Q throw-pst2[3sg] car-poss.1sg
 ‘Yesterday, they say/apparently, Ilya threw a pebble or something at my car.’
 (udmurto4ka.blogspot.ru, 06/05/2014; last accessed: 25/11/2024)

However, besides the information source, other factors affect the use and interpretation of these so-called second past tense forms in discourse. The notions to be explored in the paper are the following:

1. the assimilated and non-assimilated status of information,
2. the reliability of information in a given speech situation and
3. the speaker’s epistemic authority.

² There are evidential systems in which non-visual sensory information is also marked as indirect (Aikhenvald 2004:64–65). In Udmurt, visual and non-visual sensory evidence types are not regarded as indirect evidence.

³ Since different functions and interpretations are presented in the paper, I choose to gloss the forms under discussion as pst2 (second past tense) and not according to their current function (such as evidential, mirative, etc.).

⁴ Where it is possible, in the English translation of the examples, I use expressions which convey similar meanings to that of the indirect evidential forms for the sake of easier understanding.

A piece of information can be marked with the indirect evidential if it is non-assimilated or less reliable, while if it is considered reliable, or common, i.e., assimilated information, it will not be marked for indirect evidence even though the actual information source was not direct experience. Furthermore, indirect evidential forms can disclaim the speaker's epistemic authority (cf. Bergqvist and Grzech 2023), as well as indicate non-shared knowledge between the discourse participants (cf. intersubjective distribution, Bergqvist and Knuchel 2019). It is also shown in the chapter that the forms that are the paradigmatic counterpart of indirect evidentials, which are neutral from an evidential point of view, tend to have interpretations systemically opposing that of the indirect evidential forms (see examples (6), (10) and (13)). Some of the above-mentioned notions have already been described to a varying extent in the relevant literature on Udmurt (Serebrennikov 1960; Leinonen and Vilku 2000; Siegl 2004) but only as functions of the second past tense, while they should rather be regarded as organizing principles in the application and interpretation of the evidentially marked forms and, possibly, that of their evidentially neutral counterparts.

The goal of the paper is to characterize how the aforementioned factors (1. assimilated and non-assimilated status of information; 2. the reliability of information; 3. the speaker's epistemic authority) shape the use and interpretation of the indirect evidential in discourse. This way, we get a better understanding not only about *what* an indirect evidential marker can do but also *why* a piece of information is marked in a given speech situation and not in another. The observations confirm that the choice for the indirect evidential roots in the speaker's way of situating their knowledge against that of the other speech act participants' and their respective position to the event in question (Bergqvist and Grzech 2023:24). Thus, the choices and interpretations that differ from the ones expected according to an analysis in terms of the source of information can be explained (Sun 2018:58, Mushin 2001:53–55).

The chapter is organized as follows: Section 4.2 gives a general overview of morphological evidentiality in Udmurt and discusses the context sensitivity of the indirect evidential marker. Section 4.3 presents the data used for the study and the background of the research. Section 4.4 considers the factors affecting the interpretation and use of indirect evidential forms other than the type of information source. Section 4.5 summarizes the results.

4.2 The morphological marking of evidentiality and the past tenses in Udmurt

In Udmurt, similarly to other languages in the Volga-Kama linguistic area (cf. Bereczki 1998), the morphological marking of evidentiality is possible only in the past tenses, and it is fused with the morphological marking of the past tenses.⁵ The variation in the evidential system is between past tenses semantically and functionally marked for indirect evidentiality, and past tenses which are unmarked from an evidential point of view. In this sense, evidentially-marked discourse is opposed to neutral discourse (cf. Lazard 2001:366).⁶ Marking evidentiality in Udmurt is not obligatory⁷ – we may instead speak about preferences in certain speech situations. It is the speaker's choice whether they mark their statement or not. However, this choice is affected by factors beyond the information source, and results in highly context sensitive patterns of interpretation (cf. Mithun 2020).

Since the morphological marking of evidentiality and morphological past tenses are intertwined, it is necessary to give a brief overview of the past tense system of Udmurt to understand its evidential system. The language has a complex past tense system consisting of two synthetic and a number of analytic past tenses.

Let us first consider the two synthetic past tenses. The first one, called the *first past tense* in most of the descriptive literature on Udmurt, is described as the default choice for narrating past events, and as neutral from an evidential point of view, meaning it does not reflect on the source of information (Leinonen and Vilkuna 2000; Kubitsch 2023). Morphologically, it is encoded by the marker *-i*, which has Proto-Finno-Ugric origins (Bartens 2000:190–191). The second synthetic past tense is considered evidentially marked from a semantic-functional point of view, and it is used to signal indirect information sources. This tense is called the *second past tense* and it is morphologically marked by *-m*, which originates from the marker of the perfect participle (Bartens 2000:202–203). The Udmurt synthetic past tenses have also been described in terms of eyewitness and non-eyewitness opposition, primarily in Soviet and Russian descriptive grammars (e.g., GSUJa 1962; Teplashina and Lytkin 1976; Tarakanov 2011), but recent studies focusing specifically on the past tenses and evidentiality confirmed that postulating such

⁵ With the exception of Mordvin, which does not have grammatical evidentiality.

⁶ Lazard (1999:98) calls these markers *mediatives* and the corresponding category *mediativity*. Other terms, *indirectives* and *indirectivity*, are also used by Johanson (2003:61–62) in connection with Turkic languages to describe such markers and the category, respectively.

⁷ In fact, obligatory marking is hardly conceivable in languages where the evidentially marked form is in contrast to an evidentially unmarked one. Nevertheless, typology often lists obligatoriness as a criterion of grammatical evidentiality (cf. Aikhenvald 2004:10).

an opposition simplifies the relationship between the past tenses (Leinonen and Vilkkuna 2000; Szabó 2020; Kubitsch 2023). It is not the aim of the current study to elaborate on this relationship. Nevertheless, it is analytically meaningful to contrast the situated use of indirect evidential forms (both in the synthetic and analytic past tenses) with their evidentially unmarked counterparts.

Considering the analytic past tenses, these are generally built up from a verb form of one of the synthetic tenses (present, first past tense, second past tense and future) and one of the past tense forms of the verb ‘be’. The form of the verb ‘be’ is either *val* (the first, i.e., evidentially unmarked past tense), or *vilem* (third person singular form of the second, i.e., evidentially marked past tense). Table 1 gives an overview of the past tense system of Udmurt.

Table 1: The past tense system of Udmurt (based on Kelmakov and Hännikäinen 1999:244–246; Kozmács 2002:86; Tarakanov 2011:195–201 and Saraheimo 2022:199–200).⁸

Past tense	Form	Function
First past	PST1	default past tense evidentially unmarked
Second past	PST2	non-witnessed past tense evidentially marked
First remote past	PST1 + <i>val</i>	pluperfect, general remote past future counter-factuality evidentially unmarked
Second remote past		pluperfect, general remote past
	PST2 + <i>val</i>	evidentially unmarked
	PST2 + <i>vilem</i>	evidentially marked
Durative past		antecedent, frame of an already ongoing event
	PRS + <i>val</i>	evidentially unmarked
	PRS + <i>vilem</i>	evidentially marked
Frequentative past		regular activity in the past
	FUT + <i>val</i>	evidentially unmarked
	FUT + <i>vilem</i>	evidentially marked

⁸ For the second remote past tenses, the construction PST2 + *val* appears in textbooks and descriptive works (Kelmakov – Hännikäinen 1999; Kozmács 2002; Bartens 2000), it is debatable whether it should be treated as a tense. These forms are extremely rare and they could be a regional variant (Saraheimo 2022:170). In my experience, native speakers regarded this construction strange or incorrect.

Similarly to the synthetic past tenses (Bartens 2000:208–209; Leinonen and Vilkkuna 2000:510; Saraheimo 2022:189), the difference between the analytic past tenses formed with *val* or *vilem* is traditionally described as being evidential in nature (see example (2) for the durative past tense).

- (2) a. *perec kifnomurt otin ul-e val*
 old woman there **live-PRS.3SG be-PST1**
 ‘an old woman lived there’ (Bartens 2000:209)
- b. *perec kifnomurt otin ul-e vil-em*
 old woman there **live-PRS.3SG be-PST2[3SG]**
 ‘they say/apparently, an old woman lived there’ (modified by the author)

Considering that the relationship between the synthetic past tenses is more complex than descriptive works suggest, a similar level of complexity can be assumed for the analytic past tenses from an epistemic point of view.⁹ However, the various functions of the analytic past tenses are still under investigation in Udmurt linguistics, and we still have little knowledge about their actual use in discourse (although there is recent research on the topic e.g., Georgieva 2018; Saraheimo 2022).

As mentioned before, the conventional readings of the second past tense and the analytic past tenses formed with *vilem*¹⁰ have an evidential component (cf. examples (1) and (2b)). However, other interpretations are also possible, depending on the context. This context-sensitivity can be clearly seen if we ask native speakers to interpret decontextualized instances of second past tense forms. The sentence under discussion is in example (3).¹¹

- (3) *tun:e gurt-in til-ez kisi-Ķ:am*
 today village-INE electricity-ACC **switch_off-PST2[3PL]**
 ‘Today they switched off the electricity in the village.’
 (udmurto4ka.blogspot.com, 16/01/2015, last accessed: 20/08/2024)

⁹ In addition, both tense forms of the verb ‘be’ have several non-temporal uses and they seem to have developed discourse-interactive functions in the analytic past tenses (Saraheimo and Kubitsch 2023).

¹⁰ In the study, the terms *second past tense forms* and *indirect evidential forms* include both synthetic second past tense forms as well as analytic past tense forms formed with the second past tense form of the verb ‘be’ (*vilem*). Similarly, the terms *first past tense forms* and *evidentially unmarked forms* are used to refer to both synthetic first past tense forms and to the analytic past tenses formed with the first past tense form of the verb ‘be’ (*val*).

¹¹ The original blog entry did not contain the word *gurtin* ‘in the village’. It was added by the author of the study during the elicitation sessions.

An obvious interpretation for the second past tense form is that it expresses indirect evidence. This interpretation is plausible in speech situations when the speaker has hearsay information about the electricity having been switched off, or it can be their own inference, for example, trying to switch the light on, or seeing that there is no electricity in the neighboring houses either. Another possible interpretation is connected to mirativity, meaning that the second past tense form indicates realization as well as that this piece of information does not correlate with their previous expectations, or that it was surprising, in the case that the outage was not prescheduled. A third type of interpretation is that the second past tense shows that the speaker does not know the circumstances of the event very well – they do not know who switched the electricity off or why it was switched off. Such semantics are connected to epistemic modality. Naturally, these interpretations are not independent from each other – one can try to switch the light on at home and realize that there is no electricity, or one can have restricted knowledge about the circumstances for the outage, for example, because they only have knowledge based on hearsay.

However, the interpretations presented above in connection with example (3) are not equally plausible as even in decontextualized instances, there were some tendencies among the consultants in the interpretation of second past tense forms. The question is why one interpretation is more favorable than another in a given context. Answering it can tell us about the factors that play a role in choosing second past tense forms. As suggested by example (3) above, these forms can have various uses and interpretations besides marking the information source. These uses are not strictly evidential but are frequently associated with evidential markers in the languages of the world, and they are also linked to other epistemic categories such as mirativity or epistemic modality. Moreover, first past tense forms, even though their conventionalized meaning is neutral from an evidential point of view and can be considered a default past tense, also have interpretations opposing to that of the second past tense forms.

4.3 Research material and background

The claims made in this paper are rooted in larger research carried out by the author (cf. Kubitsch 2023). This research focuses on the interpretation and structural properties of second past tense forms as well as on their relationship with the first past tense. The material and results of this larger study serve as a starting point for the observations presented in the following sections.

Research material includes three types of data: written texts, elicitation sessions with native speakers and linguistic data collected through a questionnaire.

The three different types of data collection build on each other in terms of content. In addition, data collected using the online Udmurt corpora¹² (Arkhangelskiy 2019) were also used. The amount and variety of data enable us to have a more accurate understanding of the use and functions of the second past tense and Udmurt evidentiality.

Text analyses were the first phase of the research, and it enabled us to identify the functions of the second past tense in context using contemporary linguistic material:¹³ the text material includes three hundred blog posts in Udmurt, containing a total of 86,571 words.

Another segment of the research material is 27 elicitation sessions, which were conducted and recorded by the author in the spring of 2019 and 2020 in the Udmurt Republic. During the sessions, consultants were given 35 sentences in Udmurt written on a piece of paper containing past tense forms without any broader context. Both the first and second past tense occurred in the sentences, but the latter was strongly predominant. The sentences, with two exceptions, were authentic, taken from blogs and the press, and, in some cases, have been slightly modified for the sake of transparency. The metalanguage of the sessions was Udmurt.

First, the consultants read the sentences aloud and they were asked to provide a possible speech situation in which they thought each sentence would be appropriate. No other instructions were given in connection with the sentences, but consultants were allowed to contemplate them and elaborate the speech situation in their own way. The aim was to determine how the speakers interpreted the sentences containing past tense forms, the meanings and range of uses they associate with the second past tense. Occasionally, additional clarifying questions were asked by the interviewer, such as *Do you think the person uttering the sentence was surprised? Do you think the person asking this question is expecting an answer? How do you think the person knows this piece of information?*

After discussing a possible speech situation, in several cases, the consultants continued to work with a version of the sentence that the interviewer had modified, most often the second past tense verb form having been replaced with its first past tense counterpart. The modified sentences were read aloud by the interviewer and consultants were asked to state whether and in what way the meaning of the

¹² The Udmurt corpora (Arkhangelskiy 2019) consist of a main corpus and two sub-corpora. The main corpus, which comprises mostly press and blog texts and the Udmurt translation of the New Testament, contains 9.57 million tokens. One sub-corpus consists of social media entries with 2.66 million Udmurt-language tokens, the other sub-corpus mostly represents dialectal varieties with 11.000 text words and additional audio materials. For the study, entries of the main corpus and the social media subcorpus were used.

¹³ For the individual results of these analyses, see Kubitsch (2022).

sentence or the speech situation had changed. This way of working proved to be fruitful to discover new ranges of use and differences between the past tenses, and also to include aspects of the context by enabling native speakers to articulate *their* interpretation (which turned out to be more varying than the ones discussed in descriptive works) and not only having them validate the ones we expect based on our knowledge about Udmurt and evidentiality in general.

Finally, the questionnaire was conducted online between December 2019 and February 2020. Similarly to the elicitation sessions, the questionnaire included sentence evaluation tasks. It was designed on the basis of previously completed sessions, and the response options tested the different aspects that these sessions had revealed.

The questionnaire consisted of four parts. Here, I only discuss the parts relevant from the point of view of the paper.¹⁴ In these parts, speakers had to choose statements related to a given sentence and rate the truth value of the statement on a scale from 1 to 6. More than one answer could be selected at a time. Each sentence appeared twice – their corresponding statements were identical, the only differences were in the order of presentation and tense (first or second past tense).¹⁵ These statements were primarily connected to the domains of information source, informativity and reliability. A total of 76 respondents completed the anonymous questionnaire. Example (4) below shows an entry from the questionnaire translated to English.

(4) Today they switched off [pst2] electricity in the village.

1. What do you think, how does the person saying this sentence know that electricity was switched off?
 - 1) (S)he knows well why electricity was switched off.
 - 2) (S)he heard from someone else and now is telling it himself/herself.
 - 3) (S)he tried to turn on the light at home, but there was no electricity.
 - 4) (S)he does not know well why electricity was switched off.
 - 5) Other: (free answer)

¹⁴ The questionnaire also surveyed some structural properties of the second past tense as well as its combination with other modal operators. These properties are not discussed in this paper.

¹⁵ The sentences appeared in a “mixed” order, that is, in the first half of the questionnaire speakers at first saw the first past variant of some sentences, and the second past version of others. This way, it was possible that they evaluate the first past tense not only in connection to the second past tense.

2. Did the person saying this sentence know in advance that electricity would be switched off?
- 1) Yes, (s)he knew it in advance.
 - 2) No, (s)he has just realized there is no electricity.
 - 3) (S)he did not know, and (s)he is now slightly surprised.
 - 4) We do not know from this sentence if (s)he knew in advance that electricity would be switched off.
 - 5) It is irrelevant whether (s)he knew in advance that electricity would be switched off, (s)he is merely telling a fact known to everyone.
 - 6) Other:
3. In your opinion, does the person saying this sentence think that electricity has really been switched off?

does not think so						thinks so
1	2	3	4	5	6	

Finally, the Udmurt corpora were used to look up second person second past tense forms. These forms were not under scrutiny during the elicitation sessions or in the questionnaire, and the examined texts of blogs only contained two instances of them. Nevertheless, second person forms give us important insights if we wish to discover the use of second past tense forms in interaction (cf. Kubitsch 2024).

4.4 Factors affecting the use and interpretation of the indirect evidential

This section discusses the factors that have an effect on the use and interpretation of indirect evidential forms besides the type of information source. These factors do not only affect the meaning but also the felicity of indirect evidential forms. These are connected to the knowledge status of the discourse participants and their evaluation of the information in question.

4.4.1 Assimilated and non-assimilated information

Non-assimilated information is connected to mirativity, which is frequently defined as the semantic category of new, unexpected or surprising information (DeLancey 1997:33), and it can be encoded in languages as a grammatical category (DeLancey 2012:533). Surprise has been considered to be the core semantic component of mira-

tivity for a long time, but nowadays the category is rather viewed as signaling new or non-assimilated information (Bergqvist and Kittilä 2020:2). In many languages, mirativity is semantically and pragmatically related to evidentiality (Peterson 2010:132) and markers of indirect evidence often express mirativity as well (DeLancey 2001:378).

Udmurt indirect evidential forms are used to mark non-assimilated, new or even surprising and unexpected information, and this can overrule the specification warranted by the information source. New, non-assimilated information in the discourse can be morphologically marked as having been acquired through indirect means regardless of the actual source of information. In this regard, it is primarily the speaker's point of view that is relevant, but there are instances that suggest that the point of view of other discourse participants can also be taken into account when choosing between the evidentially marked and unmarked form. Furthermore, the choice may depend on whether the information is (or is assumed to be) assimilated or non-assimilated in the broader context; in other words, whether it is shared or unshared between the discourse participants. The latter notion is connected to intersubjectivity (see examples (8) and (9)).

This mirative use of the second past tense is described in the literature of Udmurt, and it was mentioned in the very early grammatical description of the past tenses (Serebrennikov 1960). Whether the state of affairs has just been realized by the speaker and whether the information is a novelty have a prominent role in the interpretation and use of indirect evidential forms.¹⁶ Furthermore, the expression of mirative notions is not necessarily an extension beside expressing indirect evidence – there are speech situations when only the mirative interpretation is felicitous. This can clearly be observed when the information source is obviously direct (i.e., the speaker has visual evidence, or direct, personal experience). This also means that having a direct information source (in these cases, derived from the presence of the speaker) does not exclude the use of the indirect evidential, although its interpretation changes. In example (5), the speaker is clearly a participant of the situation, which is also confirmed by the first-person plural form of the verb *vuim* 'we arrived'. The second past tense form of the verb 'be', *vilem*, appears specifically to mark the newly acquired information,¹⁷ which is the distance of the dormitory from the university. The speaker only realized that the dormitory

¹⁶ In "small" evidential systems (i.e., systems with two choices), it is typologically common that the marker of indirect evidence also has a mirative connotation (Aikhenvald 2012:465).

¹⁷ It is also noteworthy that the indirect evidential form of the 'be' verb, especially the third person singular, positive form (*vilem*), has a significant role in expressing non-assimilated information. The grammatical descriptions that mention the mirative function often consider only *vilem* to be capable of conveying realization (see Serebrennikov 1960; Winkler 2001). This observation is not true, though, as other second past tense forms can have this interpretation, too. Nevertheless, dur-

was quite far from the university when they arrived there. They expected it to be closer, which can cause surprise, too. Other linguistic elements also support the interpretation that the information has not been assimilated so far, such as the *ik* emphatic particle and the *-ges* derivational suffix, which can also have an intensifying meaning in addition to forming the comparative.

- (5) *nu, jaram, kizi ke ozi vu-i-m obc:ezit'ije dor-i*
 PTC PTC how if so arrive-PST1-1PL dormitory side-ILL
(kyjokin-ges ik vil-em un'iv'ersit'et-leε).
 far-INTS PTC **be-pst2[3SG]** university-ABL
 'So, all right, somehow, we arrived at the dormitory (it turned out, it was quite far from the university).
 (tubat.blogspot.ru, 28/08/2014, last accessed: 06/01/2020)

Contrasting this type of use of the first and second past tense forms (see example (6)), we can see that the latter can be associated with assimilated information.

- (6) *nu, jaram, kizi ke ozi vu-i-m obc:ezit'ije dor-i*
 PTC PTC how if so arrive-PST1-1PL dormitory side-ILL
(kyjokin-ges ik val un'iv'ersit'et-leε).
 far-INTS PTC **be.pst1** university-ABL
 'So, all right, somehow, we arrived at the dormitory (it was quite far from the university).'
 (modified example)

When native speaker consultants were asked in the elicitation sessions about the differences between the sentences seen in example (5) and (6) and about the situations these utterances may occur in, 55% of the answers suggested differences in terms of novelty and realization. This pair of sentences also appeared in the questionnaire and the results confirm the findings of the elicitation sessions. First past tense forms were rather associated with information corresponding to expectations and with factuality, and second past tense forms – with the novelty of the information.¹⁸

ing the sessions with the consultants, speech situations connected to non-assimilated information, realization or surprise were provided more frequently if the form *vilem* appeared in the sentence.
 18 The values in the figures will not add up to 100% as a single consultant could mark more than one option for the interpretation of past tense forms.

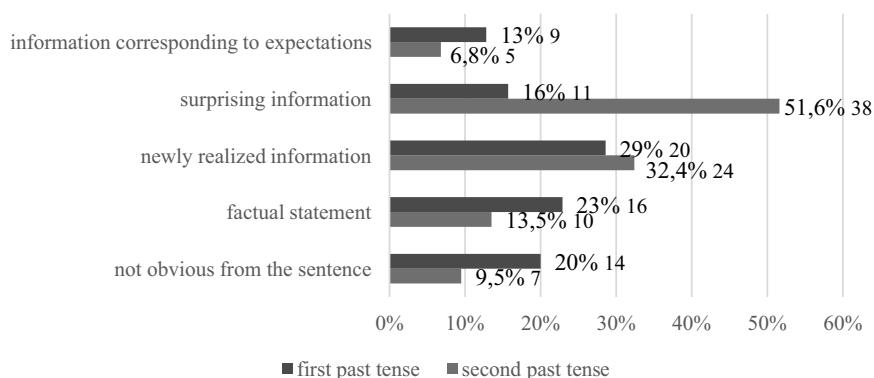


Figure 1: Proportion of answers in the questionnaire to the sentences in examples (5) and (6) in terms of information status.

Even though the mirative interpretation of indirect evidential forms is prevailing if the source of information is direct, it is important to note that it does not only occur in such cases. Example (7) is a claim about old people and their wisdom. According to the original context, poplars were planted around the village because the elders were afraid of fire and poplars do not burn up so quickly. The original speaker, who is a young woman, receives this piece of information from her grandmother and based on this, she claims what can be seen in example (7).

- (7) *vizmo-jec ik so vaʃkala-os vili-ʃam.*
 smart-ADJ.PL PTC that old-PL **be-PST2[3PL]**
 ‘It turned out, these old ones were smart.’

(udmurto4ka.blogspot.com, 19/01/2015; last accessed: 20/08/2024)

Considering the original context, this instance could rather be considered inference based on reported information. Nevertheless, the mirative overtone can also be postulated as the speaker has just realized the wisdom of the elders. However, when native speakers were presented with the decontextualized sentence, the mirative interpretation prevailed. In the elicitation sessions, when the consultants had to characterize the differences between the sentence in example (7) and its counterpart containing the first past tense verb form, 33% of the answers revealed differences in terms of information status, meaning that the second past tense form conveys non-assimilated information, meanwhile the first past tense form shows assimilated information. According to this, the second past tense form is applicable if the speaker is amazed by the intelligence of the elders or it is a novelty to them, while the first past tense form indicates that this is a factual statement, a piece of information that was already known to the speaker. However, it is important to

note that in the example above the information source is again fairly obvious even without a broader context – the word *va/kala* ‘old, ancient’ presupposes that the discussion is not about simply older people, and the distal pronoun *so* ‘that’ also distances the utterer from the subject.

Examples so far have considered whether the information is assimilated or non-assimilated from the point of view of the speaker. It can be observed, though, that the shared or unshared status of the information between the discourse participants can also affect the use and interpretation of second past tense forms. These forms can be used if the speaker shares a piece of information that is assumed to be a novelty or non-assimilated from the point of view of the other discourse participants. This is connected to the intersubjective distribution of knowledge (Bergqvist and Knuchel 2019). Example (8) is connected to the language use of Udmurt in different regions. The author and her colleague, who are both Udmurt bloggers, are at the radio station for an interview. The author compares her way of speaking Udmurt to one of her colleagues’. This colleague speaks Udmurt eloquently, which the author finds good, while the author speaks Udmurt slowly and in a faltering way. Then the author quotes the interviewer, who makes a comment about language use in a village near the place where the interviewer is from.

- (8) *kibaryina fu-e: “uso pal-jos no taf-taf udmurt eamen*
 Kibardina say-PRS.3SG Uso side-PL too tight Udmurt PP
veraċko vil-em. mi pal-jos kaj”
speak-PRS.PL3 be-PST2[3SG] we side-PL as
 ‘Kibardina says: Around Uso they actually speak only in Udmurt, too. Just like us.’”
 (udmurto4ka.blogspot.com, 25/09/2013, last accessed: 20/08/2024)

This piece of information is a direct quotation of the interviewer. It is introduced by a verb of speech, *fu* ‘says’. It is also marked typographically with a colon sign. The pronoun *mi* ‘we’ refers to Kibardina and people coming from the same region as her. This means that the utterance is constructed from the point of view of the quoted speaker: they are the deictic center. Here, the construction *veraċko vilem* comprises the present tense third plural form of the verb ‘speak’ (*veraċko*) and the second past tense form of the ‘be’ verb (*vilem*). Without any context, such constructions can have two interpretations: they can be interpreted as a durative past (cf. Table 1 in Section 4.2), i.e., they spoke/used to speak this way, or, they can be interpreted as a present tense form verb referring to the current state of affairs with *vilem* marking the novelty or realization of the information, i.e., they speak in this manner in the present and this is an information update. In the context of example (8), the latter interpretation is more plausible since we can postulate that this piece of information is not a novelty from the point of view of the quoted

speaker (Kibardina, the interviewer) as likely she knows how people speak around the village Uso, which is near her home village, but can be considered generally new in the discourse. The information can even be surprising to the audience, as the use of the Russian language and Russian code-switching in the Udmurt language use are quite typical. This means that second past tense forms can be used to reflect the information status of the other discourse participants, at least when discussing non-assimilated information.

The above-mentioned function of *vilem* has already been discussed to some extent by Saraheimo and Kubitsch (2023) but it is important to emphasize that not only the indirect evidential form of the ‘be’ verb can be used in this way. Consultations with native speakers revealed that other verbs in the second past tense can have this interpretation too. Example (9) discusses the death of the famous weapon engineer, Kalashnikov, who lived and worked in the Udmurt Republic. Considering that this is the death of a famous person, it is likely that the information source of an average speaker is indirect.

- (9) *kalasɲnʲikov* *kul-em*.
 Kalashnikov **die-PST2[3SG]**
 ‘Kalashnikov has died.’

(marjamoll.blogspot.ru blog, 28/11/2023, last accessed: 31/03/2024)

When native speakers were asked to explain the differences between the example above and its counterpart using the first past tense, naturally they differentiated them alongside various factors (as no context was provided). Approximately 22% of the explanations claimed that there is a difference in terms of novelty, the assimilated nature of the information, and some explanations suggested that the second past tense form is preferred if we present this piece of information as news, something people presumably do not yet know about, meaning the information is unshared between the discourse participants. On the same note, the first past tense form is preferable when we speak about a piece of information that is already shared between the participants, or, in other words, common, factual knowledge. This shows that assimilated, already-known information does not need to be marked for indirect evidentiality even though the information source is indirect. Such differentiations also suggest that the way the speaker wants to present their knowledge in comparison to the knowledge of the other discourse participants affects the use of indirect evidential forms (or more broadly speaking, the use of the past tenses). Thus, such forms are also tools to express the intersubjective distribution of knowledge.

4.4.2 Reliability of information

Another notion that affects the interpretation and use of second past tense forms is the speaker's estimation about the reliability of the information. This is connected to the degree of certainty about the truth of the information, therefore, to the category of epistemic modality. According to Wiemer (2018:101–102), reliability is the mediating concept between evidentiality and epistemic modality, and the degree of reliability is at stake when certain epistemic overtones are associated with certain sources of information. Earlier works on the Udmurt past tenses and evidentiality do not contemplate their relationship with epistemic modality.¹⁹ The only exception is the work of Leinonen and Vilkuna (2000:497) who suggest that “both past tenses are possible, depending whether or not the speaker wishes to express confidence in the reliability of his information”. The research material confirms this and clearly shows that the past tense forms taking part in the morphological marking of the information source are implicitly related to the degree of certainty, the speaker's responsibility, and the reliability of the information (Kubitsch 2023). These correlations derive from the pragmatic relation between the source of evidence and its strength and reliability (cf. Givón 2001, 1:326; Boye 2012:130). If the speaker has indirect evidence, which is less strong based on the hierarchy of accessibility proposed by Givón (2001, 1:327–328), it may imply that they cannot take full responsibility for the truth-value of the information and thus the degree of certainty may be lower.

It is important to point out that the expression of less reliable information or doubt is not part of the semantics of second past tense forms. Nevertheless, statistics show that these forms imply a lower degree of certainty, especially if they are compared with first past tense forms. Figure 2 summarizes the results from the questionnaire in connection with epistemic certainty (cf. example (4) in Section 4.3). On the scale, value 6 means that according to the estimation of the respondent, the utterer of the sentence considers the propositional content true, while value 1 means that they do not. These results suggest that the degree of certainty is lower with a second past tense verb than with a first past tense verb.

¹⁹ Some works characterize the paradigm and its functions as modal (Serebrennikov 1960; Winkler 2001), but this is because of the concept the authors employ about the relationship between evidentiality and modality rather than because of the functions of the second past tense.

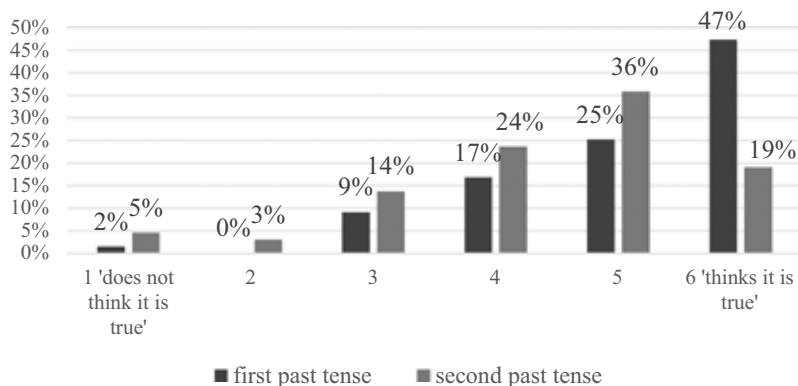


Figure 2: Evaluation of sentences from the point of view of epistemic certainty in the questionnaire (aggregated results).

The use of the second past tense forms suggests that a high degree of certainty can override the choice that would be warranted only by the type of evidence. If the speaker is confident about the truth of the proposition, if they want to present it as a factual statement, they do not need to use the second past tense forms, even though they do have an indirect information source. Example (10) is from the Udmurt Wikipedia site of a famous Udmurt poet from the last century, Flor Ivanovich Vasilyev. His biography is narrated in the first past tense. The first past tense is often the default choice for narrating events that happened in the past, but we also need to take into consideration that in this case, indirect evidential forms are not used because the information is presented as true, credible and factual, and this makes the actual information source obsolete.

- (10) *6-ti ijuł-e 1978-ti ar-in, ėures vil-in ki/kit*
 6-ORD July-ILL 1978-ORD year-INE road upper_part-INE terrible
uċir-e ŋej-em bere, bol'n'iŋsa-in infarkt-leċ
 event-ILL get_into-NMLZ after hospital-INE heart_attack-ABL
kul-i-z.

die-PST1-3SG

‘On 6th July 1978, after getting into a terrible road accident, he died of heart attack in the hospital.’

(https://udm.wikipedia.org/wiki/Васильев,_Флор_Иванович; last accessed: 11/08/2024)

Furthermore, considering example (9) above about the death of Kalashnikov, consultants did not only associate second past tense forms with the novelty of

information, but also with its reliability. According to these explanations, the piece of information (death of Kalashnikov) expressed using the second past tense is less reliable, and there is a “possible margin of error” when it comes to the truth. During discussions of this example in the elicitation sessions, 30% of the answers differentiated between the first and second past tense along these lines. For example, someone hearing about the death of Kalashnikov only from a friend or from their mother could use the second past tense in order to signal a lower degree of certainty as well as a lower degree of responsibility for such a claim at the same time. But if one knows it from the television or reading an official statement about this, they could present the information using the first past tense. This also shows that the information source is not always negligible when discussing the connection between indirect evidential forms and reliability, but the ranking of different sources for the information depends on the content itself, on the speaker’s subjective evaluation of the information source, as well as on how the speaker wants to present their knowledge. Nonetheless, the Udmurt results support Wiemer’s (2018:99–102) view that reliability plays a mediating role between evidentiality and epistemic modality – first and second past tense forms acquire interpretations connected to epistemic certainty when reliability is at stake. In the previous section, it was mentioned that second past tense forms are clearly interpreted as signaling non-assimilated information, or an information update if the information source is obviously direct. Interpretations of the second past tense connected to reliability, however, only appear when the information source is indirect. There were no such instances where the information source was clearly direct, yet, second past tense forms occurred to indicate a lower degree of certainty. This suggests that the interpretation of these forms is strongly connected to the indirectness of the information source (cf. Givón 2001, 1:326–328).

Similar considerations can be observed in example (11), which describes events that happened in the 1960s.

- (11) *60-ti ar-jos-i kolxoz-jos vorsa-eki-ni kutski-Ķ:am,*
 60-ORD year-PL-ILL kolkhoz-PL close-RFL-INF **begin-PST2[3PL]**
noġ gurt kalik muket az-e koġk-em.
 and village folk other area-ILL **leave-PST2[3SG]**
 ‘It is said, in the 60s, they started closing the kolkhoz and villagers left for other regions.’

(marjamoll.blogspot.ru, 03/08/2014; last accessed: 20/08/2024)

Most of the consultants claimed that indirect evidential forms here express that the utterer did not experience the events that happened in the 1960s. When it came to the differentiation between the indirect evidential and the evidentially neutral

past tense, 42% of the answers drew distinctions in terms of information source. However, another large proportion of answers, approximately 23%, stated that indirect evidential forms indicate that the speaker is not sure whether the events had happened exactly the way they were portrayed in the sentence, i.e., the information is not completely accurate or reliable. In comparison, evidentially unmarked forms can be used if the speaker either actually experienced these events, lived in the 1960s, believes that the information is true or, for example, they conducted research on the topic and make their claims based on this research. So far, we could see that the source of information, its novelty, and the speaker's evaluation about its reliability have a role in the use and interpretation of indirect evidential forms. Observations in connection with example (11) shed light on the fact that not only these notions, but also, in a broader sense, the speaker's relative right to claim knowledge are important. If someone conducted research on the topic or lived in the era, they have more right to speak about the events without the overt marking of their indirect information source. This is connected to the notion of epistemic authority, and will be discussed in the following section.

4.4.3 Epistemic authority and epistemic primacy of the speaker

Epistemic authority concerns the speaker's rights to knowledge, and their ownership of knowledge (Bergqvist and Grzech 2023:20). A strongly connected notion is epistemic primacy, which is the relative right to claim ownership of knowledge. Epistemic primacy is inherently relative and it depends on the knowledge status of the other discourse participants (Stivers, Mondada, and Steensig 2011:13–14). Also, epistemic authority is gradable as one may know more or less, but epistemic primacy is not – one either has it in a given speech situation or not (Grzech 2020:29). The two terms, although they are not entirely equivalent, are often used synonymously.

In connection with the Udmurt second past tense, it can be observed that highlighting the speaker's indirect evidence or presenting the information as inaccessible are tools for disclaiming the speaker's epistemic primacy or lowering the degree of their authority to claim ownership of knowledge.²⁰ Example (12) is an excerpt from an interview with an Udmurt writer. The sentence containing the second past tense form is glossed separately in (12b).²¹

²⁰ This aspect was not specifically examined in the research the study is based on, but the research material and the results were evaluated later on from this point of view, too.

²¹ The example is from 'Udmurt Dunne', which is the most popular and highly esteemed journal published in Udmurt.

- (12) a. Interviewer: *kileme vap: ton, rafit, jkolain difetskikud, l'leon'id il'it'e br'ezn'evli no goztet istemed. val-a siŕŕe ut'eir? val ke, kizi dietid bad:žim kivalentli vazickini?*
 Interviewee: «*moskva. kr'eml'. br'ezn'evu, podgornomu, kosig'inu*» – *oži goztisa lezi val. vuiz-a so ofe:i, ug todicki.*
 Interviewer: 'I heard: you, Rashit, when you were studying at school, you even sent a letter to Leonid Ilyich Brezhnev. Did it really happen? If so, how did you have the courage to turn to the great leader.'
 Interviewee: "Moscow, Kremlin. To Brezhnev, Podgorny, Kosygin" – that is how I had sent it. Whether it arrived, I don't know.'
- b. *l'leon'id il'it'e br'ezn'ev-li no goztet ist-em-ed.*
 Leonid Ilyich Brezhnev-DAT PTC letter **send-PST2-2SG**
 '[. . .]you even sent a letter to Leonid Ilyich Brezhnev.'
 (Main corpus, Udmurt Dunne, 07/09/2007, last accessed: 14/06/2024)

Here, the interviewer highlights that they have hearsay information with the *kileme vap* 'I heard' construction as well as with the use of the indirect evidential form *istemed* 'you sent'. It could be argued that the use of the indirect evidential form is motivated by the indirect evidence of the utterer, however, if we have a look at another part of the interview in example (13), we can see that the interviewer chose the evidentially neutral form, even though, factually speaking, their information source is still indirect. The sentence containing the first past tense form is glossed in (13b).

- (13) a. Interviewer: *žzut'e kilin no kniga pefeatlad.*
 Interviewee: *ma, kitie ton vajze todickod?*
 Interviewer: 'You published a book in Russian, too.'
 Interviewee: 'What, how do you know everything?'
- b. *žzut'e kil-in no kniga pefeatla-d.*
 Russian language-INS PTC book **publish[PST1]-2SG**
 'You published a book in Russian, too.'
 (Main corpus, Udmurt Dunne, 07/09/2007, last accessed: 14/06/2024)

This suggests that the use of the second past tense form in example (12) is also motivated by the fact that they make claims about the actions of the other discourse participant done in their childhood. The strength of their information source is weaker, and it is less credible compared to the person who actually carried out those actions. Therefore, in this situation, the interviewer does not have the relative authority to claim ownership of knowledge about the other person's action, especially since the action is about sending a letter to the leaders of the Soviet Union. The interviewer

chooses to use the first past tense when they speak about the publishing of a book in Russian in example (13), though. Of course, the existence of a published book is more traceable and tangible than the existence of a more or less personal letter. In this case, there is no need to disclaim authority of the information, hence, the first past tense is used. The reaction of the interviewee (What, how do you know everything?) also suggest that presenting the information in the first past tense puts the speaker in a more knowledgeable position compared to statements made in the second past tense.²²

Similar considerations should be taken into account in connection to the reliability of information – information marked with the second past tense can be regarded as less reliable or accurate because the speaker does not have the authority to claim knowledge. This differentiation appeared in example (11), too, which discussed events that happened in the 1960s. First past tense forms were considered applicable in the case of direct experience as well as if someone lived in that era. The latter is crucial from the point of view of epistemic authority – even though someone lived in the 1960s, they do not necessarily have more direct experience about closing down the collective farms than someone who was born after the 1960s. Nevertheless, those who lived in the 1960s can be considered more knowledgeable as they have a more direct, personal connection to these years and the events happened then compared to people who had not yet been alive. This more direct personal connection enables them to claim epistemic authority. The same stands for the fact that second past tense forms were not preferred if consultants provided a context about someone having conducted research on a topic under discussion.

4.5 Summary

This paper discusses how the use and interpretation of second past tense forms, which are associated with the expression of indirect evidentiality, are affected by various factors other than the marking of information source and type. The analysis shows not only that the Udmurt second past tense is suitable to convey other epistemic notions besides evidentiality, but also that these notions have a decisive role in its usage.

²² One of the reviewers pointed out that it is also possible that the second past tense is used as an element of audience design since sending a letter as a child to the leaders of the Soviet Union is considered something that would be surprising to the audience.

If the specification of the information source is irrelevant, other factors guide the interpretation and use of the morphological marker, which otherwise encodes indirect evidentiality. The specification of the information source is not relevant if it is obvious or can be identified with great probability based on the speech situation and content. It is not relevant either if the information is considered reliable, or shared and/or common knowledge. Even though the study focused on the forms related to indirect evidentiality, examples show that these factors are also relevant for the evidentially unmarked first past tense forms. However, further research is necessary to investigate whether its opposing uses and interpretations to second past tense forms appear only in contrastive situations or whether they belong to the individual interpretation of these tense forms.

Three factors have been reviewed: the assimilated or non-assimilated status of information, the reliability of the information, and the epistemic authority and epistemic primacy of the speaker. The first two factors are connected to the category of mirativity (and intersubjectivity if we take into account the point of view of discourse participants other than the speaker) and epistemic modality, respectively. Regarding the first concept, based on the results, second past tense forms are preferred if the information is non-assimilated, newsworthy and unshared between the discourse participants. On the same note, first past tense forms are preferred if the information is assimilated, shared, and can be considered common knowledge. Considering reliability, second past tense forms are opted for if the information is debatable, less accurate or less reliable, while reliable, factual, accurate information is rather presented using first past tense forms.

The third factor differs from the others as it does not concern assumptions about knowledge or information (i.e., whether it is non-assimilated, unshared or less reliable) but targets the speaker in terms of their right to claim ownership of knowledge. Meaning, the speaker's epistemic authority and/or epistemic primacy guide whether the speaker has the right to present a given piece of information as assimilated, shared or reliable. In this regard, second past tense forms can be applied to lower the speaker's authority and disclaim primacy. Such a consideration highlights that the way the speaker wishes to showcase their knowledge in a given speech situation is more relevant than the factual truth about their actual knowledge and the information.

The example of Udmurt shows that evidential specifications cannot be discussed in isolation from context and interaction. The observations made in connection with Udmurt evidentiality may also tell us more about the dynamics of similar evidential systems, in which the counterpart of an evidentially marked form is neutral in this respect. We can find such systems in several languages of

the so-called evidentiality belt (Aikhenvald 2004:288–290). In such systems, the choice between evidentially marked and unmarked discourse is up to the speaker's decision. Based on Udmurt, using or not using these forms may depend on the subjective relationship and evaluation of the speaker towards the information (i.e., its source, or whether it is a novelty, or whether it is considered reliable) and evaluations about the knowledge status of the discourse participants (i.e., whether the information is a novelty to the other discourse participants, too) as well as their respective position (i.e., their right to claim knowledge). By taking these factors and their effect into consideration, the motivation behind “non-canonical” uses of evidential markers can be explained more consistently.

List of abbreviations

1, 2, 3	first, second, third person
ABL	ablative case
ACC	accusative case
ADJ	adjective
DAT	dative case
FUT	future tense
INF	infinitive
INE	inessive case
INS	instrumental case
INTS	intensifier
ILL	illative case
NMLZ	nominalizer
ORD	ordinal
PRS	present tense
PST	past tense
PST1	first past tense
PST2	second past tense
PL	plural
POSS	possessive
PP	postposition
PTC	particle
RFL	reflexive
SG	singular
Q	question particle

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