

Evidential Adverbs and the Construction of Authority: A Cross-Disciplinary Perspective on Media Discourse

Keywords: evidentiality; media discourse; authority; manipulation; corpus linguistics

Evidentiality is commonly defined as the linguistic encoding of information source (Chafe & Nichols 1986; Aikhenvald 2003). In English, where evidentiality is not grammatically obligatory, it is frequently expressed by lexical markers such as adverbs (reportedly, officially, purportedly, legitimately). While these forms have traditionally been analyzed within linguistic frameworks, recent research suggests that they also play a role in shaping discourse and influencing interpretation, particularly in media contexts (Masia 2021).

This study proposes a cross-disciplinary perspective on evidential adverbs. It examines how evidential adverbs with a focus on appeal to authority are strategically employed in English media discourse to influence reader's perception. Drawing on insights from media studies, epistemology, and social cognition, the study explores how linguistic expressions of evidentiality reflect wider mechanisms of credibility, trust, and responsibility in public communication. The analysis engages with the idea that linguistic categories can be better understood through parallels with non-linguistic domains, such as social models of knowledge distribution and institutional authority.

The empirical analysis is based on data from the SiBol corpus (Corpus of English Broadsheet Newspapers), processed using Sketch Engine. A set of evidential adverbs (officially, reportedly, purportedly, legitimately) was selected based on their potential to encode different types of authority or distance from information. The study combines corpus-driven methods (frequency, collocation, concordance analysis) with qualitative discourse analysis in order to examine how these adverbs function in context.

The results suggest that evidential adverbs contribute to a discursive negotiation of epistemic stance, in which speakers balance credibility and responsibility. Adverbs such as officially and legitimately tend to align propositions with institutional authority, thereby reinforcing their perceived validity. In contrast, reportedly and purportedly allow journalists to distance themselves from the information, redistributing responsibility while maintaining the appearance of reliability. This distinction reflects broader communicative strategies that are not limited to language, but are also observed in social and cognitive processes of knowledge management.

The paper argues that evidentiality in media discourse can be interpreted as part of a wider system of epistemic mediation, where language functions as an interface between information, authority, and audience interpretation. By integrating linguistic analysis with insights from other disciplines, the study demonstrates how cross-disciplinary dialogue can enrich our understanding of how meaning is constructed and negotiated in contemporary discourse.

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