

# Evidential strategies and grammatical marking in clauses governed by *verba dicendi* in Bulgarian

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## Abstract

The study explores the interaction between the participants in the communication process with respect to their knowledge about the situation presented in the utterance when transforming direct into indirect speech using a *verbum dicendi*. The speaker has a choice between firsthand (indicative tenses) which by definition denotes a witnessed situation and non-firsthand which presents the situation as non-witnessed. The interplay between the grammatical marking and the speaker's evidential strategy is analyzed by applying a corpus method. The data of the Bulgarian National Corpus are used to detect the preferences for a given strategy considering also the grammatical person which indicates the level of knowledge of the communicants about the situation: the 1<sup>st</sup> person shows the strong knowledge of the speaker, the 2<sup>nd</sup> person is related to the strong knowledge of the listener, and the 3<sup>rd</sup> person is associated with a weak knowledge of both participants. Illustrative examples representative for a given situation are extracted from the corpus and subjected to a context analysis.

**Keywords:** evidentiality, evidential strategy, grammatical marking, knowledge

## 1 Introduction

Bulgarian is among languages with grammaticalized evidentiality, but in sentences with a strong lexical marker such as a verb of utterance, the use of a non-firsthand evidential is not obligatory. Context-induced variability may be viewed as a deviation of the prototypical grammatical category, a manifestation of the grammatical periphery, i.e., obligatory features

whose realization is blocked by the context (Plungian, 2011). In this case, the grammatical category is not entirely blocked by the context (the verb of utterance), but there are several options due to the possibility of realization of the different values (grammemes) of the category.

## 2 Objectives

Our objective is to explore the interaction of the grammatical person in the main and the dependent clause when converting direct to indirect speech after a *verbum dicendi* and the evidential strategy used in the dependent clause. We analyze sentences with the following structure: in the main clause, there is a verb of utterance (we use the verb *казвам/казва* 'say imperfective/perfective' as it is the most frequent and with a generalized semantics to denote an utterance), and the dependent clause – a content clause serving as direct object of the verb of utterance introduced by the complementizer *че* 'that', comprises the converted speech.

(1) *They said that she was ill.*

We analyze two possible strategies in the dependent clause – firsthand and non-firsthand, and how they are motivated by the grammatical person, which relates to the knowledge of the speaker about the situation. We hypothesize that there is a strong relation between the grammatical person and the evidential strategy, as the grammatical person implies the level of knowledge of the participants in the speech act: the 1<sup>st</sup> person shows the strong knowledge of the speaker, the 2<sup>nd</sup> person is related to the strong knowledge of the listener, and the 3<sup>rd</sup> person indicates a weak knowledge of both participants. Our main goal is to find out which strategy is preferred depending on the grammatical person and the tense (considering the opposition between past and non-past tenses). To achieve this goal, we apply corpus-

based methods providing statistical information and analysis of sentences both extracted from the Bulgarian National Corpus (Koeva et al., 2012).

### 3 Evidentiality system and grammatical homonymy in Bulgarian

The evidentiality system of Bulgarian is classified by Aikhenvald (2004) as A1 type (i.e., firsthand vs. non-firsthand), given that the indicative is marked for firsthand, but in fact there are three morphologically marked non-firsthand evidentials: reported, marked by the omission of the auxiliary in the 3<sup>rd</sup> person; inferential, marked by the presence of the auxiliary in the 3<sup>rd</sup> person; dubitative, marked by the auxiliary *бил* in all persons. The non-firsthand evidentials arose from the perfect tense and further developed temporal paradigms (cf. Gerdzhikov, 2003: 214). An important feature of the evidentiality in Bulgarian is the appearance of the imperfect active participle – an innovation that does not exist in the other Slavic languages. It is used in the non-firsthand evidentials and cannot form the perfect indicative.

In the process of paradigm formation, several cases of grammatical homonymy emerged:

- Perfect indicative and aorist inferential (*чел е*). The disambiguation is very difficult, even in the context there are often multiple readings. There is an ongoing debate in the Bulgarian linguistics which form is used in dependent clauses after *verba dicendi* (Gerdzhikov, 2003: 233; Aleksova 2003; Aleksova 2004; Moskova 2019, among others).

- Inferential and reportative in the 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> person (*четял съм, четял си*) – the grammatical marking by the auxiliary applies for the 3<sup>rd</sup> person only;

- Reportative and dubitative: the reportative can express doubt (another point of view is that the auxiliary of the dubitative is omitted and it coincides with the reported);

- Perfect/pluperfect reportative and aorist dubitative (*чел бил*).

### 4 Statistical data

The first step of the present study is to provide statistical information about the evidential strategies in the relevant context. We use the Bulgarian National Corpus to obtain the number of occurrences of the firsthand and the non-firsthand evidentials after *verba dicendi* using as a search

method a regular expression for the following pattern:

- 1) verb of utterance (*казвам/каза* ‘say’) in the respective person in all tenses

- 2) the complementizer *че* ‘that’

- 3) a distance of 0-2 words between the complementizer and the verb in the dependent clause

- 4) firsthand evidential (all tenses of the indicative) / non-firsthand evidential (*l*-participle)

As the disambiguation of the perfect indicative and the aorist inferential is impossible, the perfect has been sorted as an indirect evidential.

The results are presented in Table 1.

Person in the main clause	Person in the dependent clause	Evidential	Number of occurrences (%)
1	1	Firsthand	9305 (91,96%)
		Non-firsthand	813 (8,04%)
1	2	Firsthand	2834 (90,2%)
		Non-firsthand	308 (9,8%)
1	3	Firsthand	11599 (90,8%)
		Non-firsthand	1175 (9,2%)
2	1	Firsthand	924 (90,15%)
		Non-firsthand	101 (9,85%)
2	2	Firsthand	9465 (95%)
		Non-firsthand	492 (5%)
2	3	Firsthand	3810 (84,72%)
		Non-firsthand	687 (15,28%)
3	1	Firsthand	5088 (91,23%)
		Non-firsthand	489 (8,77%)
3	2	Firsthand	2515 (65,36%)
		Non-firsthand	1333 (34,64%)
3	3	Firsthand	34106 (66,04%)
		Non-firsthand	17537 (33,965)

Table 1. Number of occurrences and ratio between firsthand and non-firsthand according to the

configuration of the grammatical person in the main and the dependent clause.

## 5 Analysis of the results

The total number of the sentences with the 3<sup>rd</sup> person in the main clause is the biggest one, i.e., the indirect speech is most often used to transmit the utterance of a non-participant in the speech act. Furthermore, among the sentences with the 3<sup>rd</sup> person in the main clause, most are those with the 3<sup>rd</sup> person in the dependent clause, too (the referent could be the same or different).

In all kinds of combinations of grammatical persons in the main and the dependent clause, sentences with the firsthand in the dependent clause prevails. This fact can be explained with the frequent use of the present indicative in the dependent clause, as in Bulgarian there is no tense agreement.

As it can be seen in the table, in the majority of configurations, the use of the firsthand is more than 90%. There are three combinations that increase the percentage of the non-firsthand evidentials:

2<sup>nd</sup> person – 3<sup>rd</sup> person (*you said that he did something*): 84% vs. 16%;

3<sup>rd</sup> person – 2<sup>nd</sup> person (*he said that you did something*): 65% vs. 35%;

3<sup>rd</sup> person – 3<sup>rd</sup> person (*he said that he did something*): 66% vs. 34%.

The common point of the three cases is the lack of the 1<sup>st</sup> person both in the main and the dependent clause. The combination of the 2<sup>nd</sup> person in the main and the dependent clause does not cause the raise of the percentage of the non-firsthand. The biggest increase of the non-firsthand may be seen in sentences with the 3<sup>rd</sup> person in the main clause – 35% and 34%. These cases imply the weakest knowledge of the situation by the speaker.

## 6 Two evidential strategies: general trends

In sentences with a verb of utterance in the main clause, both firsthand and non-firsthand may occur in the dependent clause, but with the opposite distribution when combined with past and non-past tenses.

### 6.1 Strategy 1: firsthand in the dependent clause (the converted speech)

In the non-past, the verb of utterance in the main clause appears to be sufficient to convey an indirect information (often associated with non-witness position). The use of the firsthand, i.e., the indicative tenses, does not necessarily imply firsthand information, having the potential to indicate both firsthand and non-firsthand.

(2) *Тя каза, че идва. / Тя каза, че ще дойде.*

‘She said she is coming. / She said she will come.’

On the contrary, in the past the use of the indicative tenses is restricted; we hypothesize that they emphasize the witness position.

### 6.2 Strategy 2: non-firsthand in the dependent clause

In the non-past the use of the non-firsthand evidentials is optional, they emphasize the non-firsthand information.

(3) *Тя каза, че идвала.*

‘She said she is coming-REP.’

In the past the use of the non-firsthand evidentials is regular with their respective values, except the inferential which rarely expresses inferred information, but rather is a neutral (non-emphatic) means to denote a non-witness position.

## 7 Analysis of instances of the evidential strategies

In what follows, we make qualitative analysis of sentences extracted from the BulNC and sorted by the person in the main clause. We aim at establishing how the choice of a given strategy is motivated by the grammatical person, at the same time considering the abovementioned relation between evidential strategy and tense (past or non-past).

## 8 1<sup>st</sup> person in the main clause

With the 1<sup>st</sup> person in the main clause the speaker reports their own information.

### 8.1 Firsthand

As the 1<sup>st</sup> person is associated with the actual speaker, the information in the utterance is presented as strong knowledge. The firsthand in the dependent clause occurs regularly in the non-past, but it is not unusual even if the event has a past

reference – as in (5), emphasizing the witness position.

(4) *Казах, че ти не разбираш.*

‘I said that you don’t understand.’

(5) *Казах, че беше така. Лъжец ли ме наричаш?*

‘I said it was like that. Are you calling me a liar?’

## 8.2 Non-firsthand

Using the non-firsthand the speaker focuses on their non-witness position about the situation in the dependent clause. In fact, a good number of the sentences with such interpretation contain a negative form of the verb ‘say’, by which the speaker distances him/herself from his/her own words.

(6) *Не казвам, че си искал да убиваш.*

‘I’m not saying that you intended to kill.’

Another group of instances of the non-firsthand combined with the 1<sup>st</sup> person is associated with an unusual situation: the speaker simulates that the information is indirectly acquired to underline that it is a false statement (a lie).

(7) *Казах им, че една ръждясала решетка се е строшила под вас. Казах, че случайно сте паднал и сте пропъзлял в укритие. ... Те приеха честната ми дума и си тръгнаха.*

‘I told them a rusty grille had broken under you. I said you accidentally fell and crawled into hiding. ... They accepted my word of honor and left.’

In some sentences the verb form composed of the auxiliary ‘be’ and the aorist active participle has a perfect reading and therefore should not be interpreted as non-firsthand. The perfect reading is often supported by the typical adverbials that collocate with the perfect, the so-called reference time adverbials, such as *already, always, ever, never*, etc., as opposed to the event time adverbials that denote the time point in which the event occurs and collocate with the aorist (after Reichenbach 1947).

(8) *Нали ти казах, че никога не съм изпитвала такива чувства спрямо някого.*

‘Didn’t I tell you that I have never felt like that about anybody.’

## 9 2<sup>nd</sup> person in the main clause

With the 2<sup>nd</sup> person in the main clause the speaker quotes the utterance of their interlocutor.

## 9.1 Firsthand

The firsthand in the dependent clause emphasizes the witness position of the actual speaker especially with the 1<sup>st</sup> person in the dependent clause.

(9) *Значи мойта идея ви допадна? – Та нали вече каза, че и сам бях стигнал до нея.*

‘So, you liked my idea? – But you already said that I came up with it myself.’

The witness position is possible also with the 2<sup>nd</sup> and the 3<sup>rd</sup> person in the dependent clause. In the sentences below the speaker presents his/herself as a witness to underline his/her strong knowledge. Interestingly enough, the two sentences contain a verb of mental activity so the speaker could not be a witness in the strict sense and the firsthand evidential is rather a means to demonstrate a strong knowledge.

(10) *Кажете, че излъгахте и още сега ще ви бъде простено.*

‘Say that you lied, and you will be forgiven right now.’

(11) *И не ми казвайте, че не знаехте, че пътят е забранен.*

‘And don’t tell me you didn’t know that this road was forbidden.’

In many cases the verb of utterance in the main clause implies that the information is non-firsthand and the use of a non-firsthand evidential is not necessary. This holds especially for non-past tenses.

(12) *Казваш, че те преследва чудовище.*

‘You say you are being chased by a monster.’

## 9.2 Non-firsthand

With the 2<sup>nd</sup> person of the verb of utterance, the non-firsthand strategy in the dependent clause has various manifestations.

The number of sentences where the *l*-form could be interpreted as a perfect remains unidentified, we consider lexical features and the general context.

(13) *Колко казахте, че **сте сътворили** досега?*

‘How many you said you have created up to now?’

(14) *Казваш, че **съм пораснал** ли... аз съм остарял!*

‘You say I have grown up... but I have grown older!’

A regular instance of the non-firsthand is the non-witness position of the speaker who quotes the listener’s words.

(15) *Каза, че си я познавал.*

‘You said you knew her.’

With the 1<sup>st</sup> person in the dependent clause, the non-witness position means that the speaker does not remember the situation described in it.

(16) *Казваш, че съм прекарал тук около три хиляди години. Може и така да е.*

‘You are saying that I spent about three thousand years here. That may be so.’

With the 3<sup>rd</sup> person in the dependent clause the inferential and the reportative differ by the presence or the omission of the auxiliary, the reportative focusing on the fact that the speaker quotes the listener’s words.

(17) *Казваш, че носела пистолет.*

‘You are saying that she had a gun.’

To express the present with a non-witness position, only the reportative is possible, as the inferential cannot have a present value.

(18) *Ти каза, че имало неща, които трябва да видя.*

‘You said there are three things I have to see.’

Dubitative interpretation is possible too, expressed with either dubitative or reportative.

(19) *Да живееш Негово Царско Височество! Виждаш ли как викам да живееш, пък ти си взел да казваш, че съм бил против.*

‘Live His Majesty! You see, I’m saying “live!”, and you say that I’m against.’

(20) *Хмм! А казваш, че били страхливци!*

‘Hmm! And you say they are cowards.’

### 9.3 Imperative

A special case are sentences with the imperative in the main clause by which the speaker wants the interlocutor to make a particular statement. In such context the future has the same function. The firsthand has not any specificity.

(21) *Кажу, че изпълняваш заповед на принца.*

‘Say you’re following the prince’s orders.’

In the majority of the sentences with non-firsthand in the dependent clause the speaker wants the interlocutor to make a false statement, i.e., to utter a lie.

(22) *Ако е някой за мен, кажи, че съм си легнал.*

‘If it’s for me, say I’m in bed.’

(23) *После за съда аз ще намеря добър адвокат. Ще отречеш признанието. Ще кажеш, че си бил пиан.*

‘Then I’ll find a good lawyer for the court. You will deny the confession. You’ll say you were drunk.’

A specific interpretation is found in sentences with negative form of the non-firsthand in the dependent clause – the speaker takes a non-witness position and asks the interlocutor to deny their assumption about the situation

(24) *Но ти нали не можеш да говориш! Не живееш в този свят, не знаеш, че се казвам Вероника! Снощи не си бил с мен, моля те, кажи, че не си бил! – Бях. Тя взе ръката му.*

‘But you can’t talk, can you! You don’t live in this world, you don’t know my name is Veronica! You were not with me last night, please say you were not! – I was. She took his hand.’

(25) *Шон, погледни ме в очите и ми кажи, че не си взел тези пари!*

‘Sean, look me in the eye and say you didn’t take that money!’

## 10 3<sup>rd</sup> person in the main clause

Using the 3<sup>rd</sup> person in the main clause, the speaker reports somebody else’s utterance.

### 10.1 1<sup>st</sup> person in the dependent clause

In sentences with the 1<sup>st</sup> person in the dependent clause there is no change in the ratio between firsthand and non-firsthand, i.e., the firsthand is the predominant strategy expressing strong knowledge of the speaker often resulting from their witness position.

(26) *Гералт казва, че вече съм много добра на махалото. Казва, че имам такова, във... Усет.*

‘Geralt says I am already very good on the pendulum. He says I have... uuuh... flair.’

(27) *Не може да се каже, че разговаряхме.*

‘It can’t be said that we talked.’

The use of the non-firsthand is associated with the emphasis of the reported speech.

(28) *Казва, че съм имала опашката на някакъв бог саламандър.*

‘He says I have the tail of some salamander god.’

(29) *Чисто и просто казва, че много съм пиел.*

‘She just says I drink a lot.’

## 10.2 2<sup>nd</sup> or 3<sup>rd</sup> person in the dependent clause

In sentences with the 3<sup>rd</sup> person in the main clause and the 2<sup>nd</sup> or the 3<sup>rd</sup> in the dependent clause we found the biggest increase of the non-firsthand in the dependent, because they exhibit the weakest knowledge about the situation.

In the non-past, it is still possible to express non-witness position by the firsthand, i.e., the lexical item (the verb ‘say’) is the only evidential marker.

(30) *Хем ми казаха, че не **нараняваш** хората.*  
‘But they told me you don’t hurt people.’

As for the past, the non-firsthand is preferred. In the Bulgarian linguistics there is a widespread opinion that the past indicative (especially the aorist) cannot occur after a verb of utterance. In fact, we found a few examples in which the past indicative is used to emphasize the speaker’s strong knowledge usually associated with a witness position.

(31) *Интересува ме кой е убил жената на Ленъкс. – Боже мой, Гренц не ви ли каза, че той **написа** пълно признание? Дори вестниците го публикуваха. Вие не четете ли пресата?*

‘I wonder who killed Lennox's wife. – My God, didn't Grenz tell you he wrote a full confession? Even the newspapers published it. Don't you read the press?’

(32) *Тад ѝ каза, че не **бе успял** да запише номера.*

‘Tad told her he hadn’t been able to write down the number.’

Although the non-firsthand is the prevailing strategy in the past, there are, however, sentences with a possible perfect interpretation.

(34) *Казваха, че **си загинал**.*

‘They said you were dead.’

Most often the non-firsthand denotes non-witness position when the information is reported. When the verb in the dependent clause is in the third person, the differentiation of the reportative and the inferential is possible.

(35) *Един шофьор ми каза, че **е видял** колата.*

‘A driver told me he saw the car.’

(36) *Каза, че **можело** да означава само едно – магия.*

‘He said it could only mean one thing – magic.’

Provided that the 3<sup>rd</sup> person allows for grammatical disambiguation between the non-firsthand evidentials (reported, inferential and dubitative) based on the auxiliary (omission, presence, *бил*, respectively), it is possible to verify

which non-firsthand strategy is preferred. To find out the ratio of the three non-firsthand evidentials, we searched for the following strings:

- reported: *каза* ‘he/she said’ + *че* ‘that’ + aorist/imperfect active participle;
- inferential: *каза* ‘he/she said’ + *че* ‘that’ + auxiliary *е* ‘is’ + aorist/imperfect active participle;
- dubitative: *каза* ‘he/she said’ + *че* ‘that’ + auxiliary *бил* ‘is DUB’ + aorist/imperfect active participle.

	with aorist active participle	with imperfect active participle	total
inferential	2396	464	2860 (54%)
reported	1449	934	2383 (45%)
dubitative	77	0	77 (1%)

Table 2. Ratio of the non-firsthand evidentials after *каза* ‘he/she said’.

The inferential appears to be predominant although after a verb of utterance reportative meaning is expected. On the other hand, the grammatical homonymy between the aorist inferential and the perfect indicative, both consisting of the auxiliary ‘be’ and the aorist active participle, is difficult to resolve in this context. Yet the imperfect inferential is distinguishable from the perfect indicative as it is formed with the imperfect active participle. Subsequently the instances with imperfect active participle should be interpreted only as non-firsthand. Here another type of grammatical homonymy impedes the analysis – the formal coincidence of the aorist and the imperfect active participles of verbs of the 3<sup>rd</sup> conjugation. The manual review of the search results showed there are only six instances of the sequence auxiliary + imperfect active participle of verbs of 1<sup>st</sup> or 2<sup>nd</sup> conjugation (out of 464) that could be unambiguously interpreted as imperfect inferential. The rest are ambiguous – a perfect indicative reading is possible.

## 11 Aorist inferential and perfect indicative – disambiguation impossible?

In the Bulgarian linguistics there are two opposite opinions about the grammatical form in

the dependent clause after a verb of utterance consisting of the auxiliary ‘be’ and the aorist active participle – it is interpreted either as aorist inferential or as perfect indicative with the respective arguments.

### 11.1 Arguments for aorist inferential

If we assume that in the original utterance as direct speech a past indicative tense (aorist or imperfect) is used, then in the converted indirect speech after the verb of utterance the respective non-firsthand (inferential) tenses would appear (Moskova 2019).

(37) *Иван: Аз пристигнах вчера. > Иван каза, че е пристигнал вчера.*

‘John: I arrived (AOR IND) yesterday. > John said he arrived (AOR INF) yesterday.’

On the other hand, the context implies a reported semantics and there is a specialized reportative evidential in Bulgarian.

### 11.2 Arguments for perfect indicative

The perfect has taxis use after *verba dicendi, sentiendi, cogitandi*. The perfect has been generalized as a universal tense to express an event which is prior to the event in the main clause regardless of the tense in the main clause, presenting the viewpoint of the cognitive subject (Nitsolova 2008: 298). In sentences with verbs of perception, there is often firsthand semantics.

(38) *Погледай ме на какво съм заприличала* (А. Каралийчев).

‘Look at what I have become.’

### 11.3 Contamination

Another possible interpretation is that a contamination of the perfect indicative and aorist inferential took place in contexts that support past and non-firsthand reading simultaneously.

## 12 Conclusions

Bulgarian is a language with grammaticalized evidentiality but displays complicated strategies in communicative acts with converted speech after verbs of utterance involving both firsthand and non-firsthand evidentials. Some problems are difficult to resolve due to the grammatical homonymy. However, conclusions about evidential strategies in the described context can be made.

The main viewpoint for the choice of evidential strategy is the knowledge of the speaker about the information they communicate. The 1<sup>st</sup> person in the main and/or in the dependent clause is connected to the predominance of the firsthand strategy. The non-firsthand evidentials combined with the 1<sup>st</sup> person are often associated with a false statement. The same function may have the 2<sup>nd</sup> person imperative or future of the verb ‘say’ in the main clause followed by non-firsthand in the dependent clause, with which the speaker expresses their wish the false statement to be made by the addressee.

The weakest knowledge of the speaker is encoded in the 3<sup>rd</sup> person and results in the increase of the non-firsthand in the dependent clause. The grammatical marking of the non-firsthand evidentials in the 3<sup>rd</sup> person allows for the differentiation of the inferential and the reported, but the homonymy between the aorist inferential and the perfect indicative remains difficult to resolve. The dubitative is marked in all persons and even in cases of homonymy with the perfect/pluperfect reportative, the disambiguation is easy in the context.

Despite the grammaticalization of the evidentiality, the verb ‘say’ is a strong evidential marker, and in some contexts, it is sufficient to indicate the non-firsthand.

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