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More on Interpretive Use Markers
Academia Grammaticorum Salensis Octava
Salos, August 2011

Introduction

The notion of interpretive use was introduced in the framework of linguistic pragmatics. It has, however, proved fruitful in grammatical research as well, cf. the notion of interpretive deontics, introduced in Holvoet (2005), Holvoet & Konickaja (2011).

The grammatical marking of interpretive use is a promising topic of research into grammar and its interaction with discourse.

Interpretive use defined

“Any representation with a propositional form, and in particular any utterance, can be used to represent things in two ways. It can represent some state of affairs in virtue of its propositional form being true of that state of affairs; in this case we will say that the representation is a *description*, or that it is used *descriptively*. Or it can represent some other representation which also has a propositional form — a thought, for instance — in virtue of a resemblance between the two propositional forms; in this case we will say that the first representation is an *interpretation* of the second one, or that it is used *interpretively*. (Sperber & Wilson 1986, 228–229)”

Echoic interpretations

Quotations are an obvious instance of interpretive use. But alongside quotations Sperber and Wilson distinguish **echoic interpretations**. Consider:

John is not coming with us any more. He's fed up with our silly jokes.

He's fed up with our silly jokes can be

1. the speaker's account for the reasons of John's refusal, or
2. (ii) an echoic interpretation of John's utterance (often reproduced with matching mimic)

In the former case this sentence is used descriptively, in the latter it is used interpretively.

A typical instance of interpretive use is, in Sperber and Wilson's view, irony: when intended ironically, *That was a nice thing to say!* does not refer to an extralinguistic state of affairs but to an imaginary utterance imputed to some interlocutor supposed to have used this utterance descriptively. (This is not the only explanation of irony on record. In traditional Grice'an theory an ironical effect is achieved by conspicuously flouting the maxim of quality.)

Interpretive vs metalinguistic

Note that interpretive use is not the same as metalinguistic use: in the above example, the sequence *he's fed up with our jokes* is used interpretively in the sense that it refers to somebody's utterance of the type *I'm fed up with your jokes*. It is not used to refer to itself, however, as it would be if we'd say that *fed up* is an instance of a phrasal verb, or that it is a past passive participle.

Interpretive use markers

Several authors have advanced the idea that languages may develop markers of interpretive use, e. g., discourse particles marking the fact that the utterance in which they occur is to be understood interpretively (Blass 1990, Blakemore 1999, Ifantidou 2001).

These authors consider evidentiality, or at least hearsay markers, as a type of interpretive use.

This view has not met with a positive response among investigators of evidentiality, and is

vulnerable because not all types of evidentiality reflect verbal means of transmission of information (e. g., inferentials, miratives...). The only type of evidential that would make a chance of being recognised as interpretive is hearsay markers, but what do we do with the remaining types?

Interpretive use and evidentiality

- In my view, Blass, Blakemore and Ifantidou are right in assuming that languages may develop linguistic (grammatical and lexical) marking of interpretive use, but they are wrong in identifying this encoding with evidentiality.
- Even when involving exclusively verbal means of transmission of information (quotatives), evidentials are NOT interpretive use markers.
- Interpretive use marking is a *sui generis* type of linguistic marking, related to but not identical with the marking of epistemic modality and evidentiality.

Interpretive use in grammar

The grammatical marking of interpretive use is underinvestigated: the only instance that has received some attention is that of *interpretive deontics* (Holvoet 2005, Holvoet and Konickaja 2011, Holvoet, forthcoming).

Interpretive deontics are forms and constructions referring to other people's acts of volition, typically to what other people expect from the speaker.

E.g. Russian

Сиди здесь! 'Sit here'

Все ушли домой, а я сиди здесь и работай! (Interpretive imperative, used to refer to an obligation imposed by other people and resented by the speaker)

The claim that *я сиди здесь* is interpretive means that the speaker is referring to an imaginary utterance imposing on him the obligation which he resents; this utterance could have taken the form *Ты сиди здесь и работай*, and *я сиди здесь и работай* is interpretive in referring to this imputed utterance through resemblance in form (in particular, the use of the 2nd person imperative which would normally never combine with a 1st person).

The purpose of this construction is not so much to inform the hearer that some person expects something from the speaker, as to inform him that the speaker resents this expectation. As Sperber and Wilson state about echoic interpretations: "these interpretations achieve relevance by informing the hearer of the fact that the speaker has in mind what so-and-so said, and has a certain attitude to it" (Sperber & Wilson 1986, 238)."

Note the following differences with regard to evidentials:

- a thought (an expectation) is imputed (it need not have been verbalised)
- the expectation is not an object of assertion; it is presupposed and commented upon (as in the case of the complements of commentative predicates: *What a shame we should be sitting here and working!*)

Interpretive hortatives

Another instance is the Latvian hortative particle *lai* (from *laist* 'let'): in conjunction with 3rd person forms it provides a hortative construction:

Lai viņi iet uz mājām. 'Let them go home.'

Actually *lai* may be combined with any person, but if it combines, say, with a 1st person, it will be

interpretive. E.g., *lai* + 1sg. is used in so-called deontic requests:

Ko lai es viņam saku? 'What should I tell him?'

Deontic requests are interpretive in that they anticipate, and in this sense interpret, a directive from the addressee.

Types of interpretive deontics

- Requests for permission are interpretive in that they anticipate (and thereby interpret) a speech act granting permission. (Polish *niech usiądę* 'allow me to sit down')
- Deontic requests also anticipate a directive (Latvian *Ko lai daru* 'What am I to do')
- Rhetorical deontic requests seemingly anticipate a directive but actually comment on the impossibility of a course of action alternative to that actually taken (*Ko lai es būtu darījis* 'What was I to do?')
- Negative evaluation of other people's expectations is interpretive when its expression is achieved by means of an echoic interpretation of an imputed directive (cf. the Russian interpretive imperative) etc.
- The meaning of negative evaluation of other people's expectations may develop into that of a negative evaluation of other people's claims or assumptions, cf. Latvian

Es lai būtu palīdzējis zaglim?!

1. Was I to help a thief?

2. Do you believe I could have helped a thief?

- the element of negative evaluation may be lost so that the construction refers to people's expectations in a neutral way:

Slovenian (*naj* is a hortative particle, cf. Polish *niech < niechaj*)

Politiki naj bi uresničevali želje ljudstva

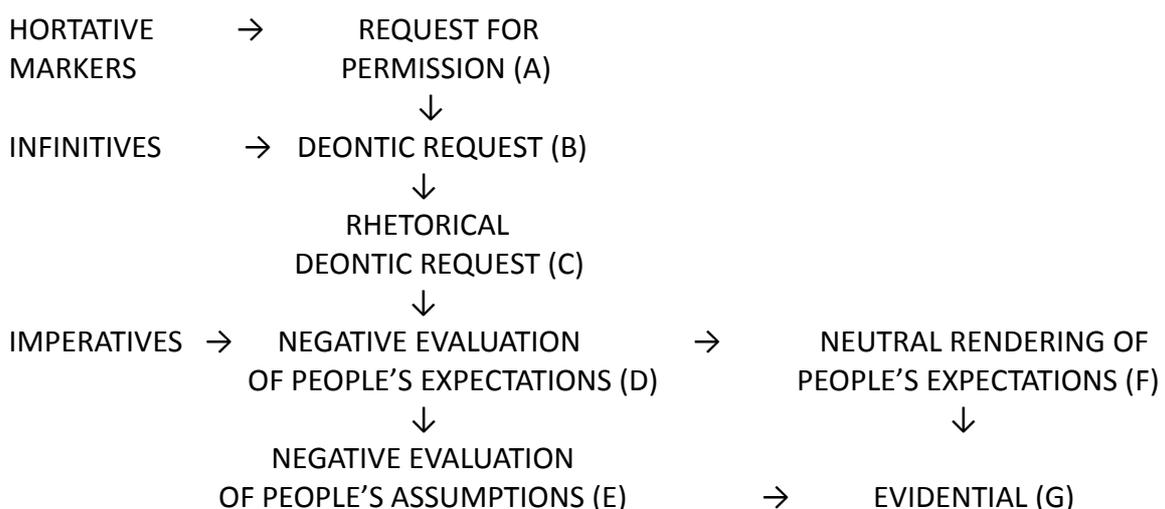
'Politicians are expected to realise the will of the people'

- the final stage is a hearsay marker:

Slovenian

Taka izjava naj bi bila dana 'such a statement is said to have been made'

The semantic map of interpretive deontics



Source: Holvoet & Konickaja (2011)

Dedicated markers of interpretive use?

In the domain of grammar, interpretive deontics are usually peripheral uses of forms that are descriptive meanings in their central uses, cf. the Russian interpretive imperative.

Even if we imagine a situation in which a deontic form falls into disuse in its basic, descriptive function, and only the interpretive deontic function is left, it is doubtful whether the result will be a dedicated marker of interpretive use. Rather, it will be a deontic marker representing a particular subtype of deontic meaning, viz. other people's acts of volition. The specifically interpretive flavour of Russian *сиди* in *я сиди здесь* rests on its parasitical character with respect to the descriptively used *сиди*.

One could therefore argue that completely grammaticalised interpretive deontics (provided they exist) would actually be **post-interpretive**: they are grammatical forms that have acquired their present meaning by having passed through an interpretive stage.

Discourse particles

Dedicated marking seems to occur in the domain of discourse particles (sentential modifiers) – the domain in which Blass, Blakemore *et al.* were actually looking for them.

Interpretive use particles will typically have scope over larger entities than grammatical markers. In Russian *а я сиди здесь* the form *сиди* could be said to be an interpretive fragment inserted into a descriptive utterance: *I am expected to sit here* is a descriptive utterance, but Russian allows 'am expected to sit' to be expressed by an interpretive construction.

Particles used to mark interpretive use will typically have scope over sentence-length fragments or utterances.

A dedicated marker: Russian *мол*

A dedicated marker of interpretive use is Russian *мол*, which, according to the 4-volume Russian dictionary (ed. Evgen'eva), is used „для указания на то, что приводимые слова являются передачей чужой речи или чужих мыслей”.

Не пускают и поглядывают на нас: ну как, мол?

'They won't let us in and throw glances at us {MOL} "well?"'

(example from the same dictionary).

English rendering: 'they seem to be saying...'

'as if they were saying...'

Мол comes from the verb *молвить* 'say' but did not develop into a hearsay marker.

Interpretive use marking vs evidential marking

Мол can never be used as a hearsay marker. Compare *мол* with the Polish hearsay marker *podobno*:

Marysia podobno przyjdzie jutro.

**Маша, мол, придет завтра.*

(intended meaning: 'It's said Mary will come tomorrow.')

Мол does not necessarily refer to a content that is verbalised in an extralinguistic situation: a thought may be involved as well.

The use of *мол* does not necessarily involve an assertion, whereas that of a hearsay marker usually does:

Ну как, мол? ('as if he was saying: "Well?"')

**Но i co подобно?* (*Allegedly so what?)

Even if *мол* is used to refer to a real (not merely imputed) utterance, its effect is completely

different from that of an evidential particle.

Свежий пример: во время парижской недели моды ходили всяческие слухи, что, мол, бедная, бедная Жиль Сандер осталась без своего лейбла Prada [...]
(Russian National Corpus)

'Here's a fresh example: during the Paris Fashion Week various rumours were circulating to the effect that poor, poor Jil Sander was left without her label *Prada*'

The interpretive use marker *мол* seems to be needed, first of all, to allow the speaker to disclaim the elements of subjective evaluation contained in the original utterance: *бедная, бедная* probably does not reflect the speaker's (author's) attitude (his intention is probably ironical). In this respect *мол* differs from hearsay markers, which are used to convey propositional content without subjective evaluation, cf.

Biedna Marysia choruje. 'Poor Mary is ill.'

Biedna Marysia podobno choruje. 'Poor Mary is said to be ill.'

(*biedna* reflects the speaker's attitude, or one he identifies with)

Quotation and echoic interpretation

In this sense an echoic interpretation is similar to a quotation, but, unlike a quotation, it need not be accurate: there must be a resemblance between the replicated and the replicating utterance. In the above Russian example, reference is made to a number of utterances, which cannot all be quoted; the echoic interpretation, however, is similar to them all in that it reproduces the contents and the subjective evaluation contained in them (their propositional content might even be irrelevant, as reflecting an event generally known in fashion circles).

Latvian *sak*

Latvian has an almost exact counterpart to Russian *мол* in the shape of *sak* (truncated form of *saka* 'says/say'):

Mani ieraugot, Juhanness parasti sabozās un pagrieza galvu sānis. Sak, ja tu mani redzi, tad ir labi – es tevi neredzu.

'Catching sight of me, Juhanes usually bristled and turned his head away [as if he wanted to say] "If you take notice of me, that's as you please, but I won't take notice of you".'

(Skujņiņš, LLVV s.v. *sak*)

Sak is never used as a quotative marker: in this function, Latvian uses special evidential forms of the verb:

Viņš negribot mani redzēt 'He reportedly does not want to see me.'

Lithuanian *atseit*

Lithuanian sometimes uses *atseit* (< *atsieiti* 'it costs, it means, it comes down to') as an interpretive use marker, but this unit combines several functions: it may be epistemic and evidential as well. Often it seems to express just scepticism as to the truthfulness of the contents referred to:

Tai jis pasakojo, kad atseit virusai buvo sukurti kaip robotukai, kad tarnautų žmogui, ir paskui pablūdo.

'He said that {ATSEIT} viruses had been created as tiny robots, to serve man, but ended up by going mad.'

Here *atseit* could be a redundantly used evidential marker, or a marker of epistemic stance.

But sometimes *atseit* clearly marks interpretive use:

Policininkai sako, kad atseit mes nieko prieš, kad jūs čia plaukiotumėt, bet gavom iškvietimą (iš prokuroro) ir turim jį kaip nors reaguot.

'The policemen say that {ATSEIT} we don't object against your going boating here but we received a call (from the prosecutor's office) and we must react in some way.'

Here the retention of the 1st person pronoun points to the interpretive function. Note the lack of quotation marks: these would normally be requisite in view of the person switch from 3rd to 1st, but this person switch is here licenced by *atseit*.

Atseit is also frequently used to refer to a thought:

Jis tik papurtė galvą, atseit netrauk, o po to apsižiūri, kad dančio nėra. (Int)

'He shook his head {ATSEIT} 'Don't pull', but a moment later he realised the tooth was out already.'

As pali<n>kčiojau galvą atseit supratau ką jis norėjo pasakyti, bet iš tikro nieko nesuprantu. (Int)

'I nodded {ATSEIT} I had understood what he wanted to say, but actually I had not understood a thing.'

Polish

Polish has no regular marker of interpretive use, though *niby* 'as though, in a way, something like' occasionally comes close to it:

Cała ta orkiestra świątecznej pomocy jest jedną wielką utudą. Takim mrugnięciem oczkiem, że niby jesteśmy lepsi. (Int)

'That precious Great Orchestra of Christmas Charity is one big hoax. It's like a wink of the eye {NIBY} that we are the better ones.'

('It's like a wink of the eye saying 'We're the better ones'.')

The original meaning of *niby* is 'like' (*niby grom z jasnego nieba* 'like thunder from a clear sky').

But this use of *niby* seems to be marginal. Other means of marking interpretive use are considerably less grammaticalised and seem to be created more or less *ad hoc*, like *coś w rodzaju* 'something like':

Einstein bowiem nigdy nie odrzucił do końca „koncepcji boga“, ale twierdził coś w rodzaju, że „nigdy nie uwierzę w boga osobowego“.

'For Einstein never completely discarded the 'idea of God' but said something like 'I will never believe in a personal God.'

Sources: similarity

Very often one discourse particle seems to combine interpretive, evidential and epistemic uses. A notional category subsuming these three grams is 'similarity': interpretive use rests on the similarity between the replicated and the replicating utterance. Similarity (between states of affairs rather than between utterances) is also one of the basic ways to conceptualise likelihood (*This sounds like a flute = This very likely is a flute*). Three possibilities present themselves:

- similarity between states of affairs → epistemic modality (*It's like they are Japanese*)
- similarity between an utterance and a state of affairs → evidentiality (*They say like there's going to be a war*)
- similarity between utterances → marking of interpretive use (*They said something like...*)

Examples: Polish *podobno* (from *podobny* 'similar') originally meant both 'probably' and 'reportedly'; now only the hearsay meaning is retained.

Polish *niby*, originally meaning 'like', develops epistemic, evidential and interpretive uses.

Saying

Verbs of saying yield both hearsay markers and interpretive use markers:

– Czech *prý* < *praví* ‘says/say’ is a hearsay marker:

K tomu došlo před 4467 miliardy lety a to je prž také „oficijlnř“ datum zrozenř Země.

‘This happened 4467 billion years ago and that is also, so they say, the ‘official’ data of the creation of the Earth.’

– Russian *mol* and Latvian *sak* are interpretive use markers, but might have been hearsay markers at some earlier stage.

Beyond interpretive use marking

Markers of interpretive use may move on beyond this function and develop ‘post-interpretive’ functions.

An instance of this is the evidential use of Slovenian *naj* (and the Polish modal verb *mieć*): it has arisen from interpretive deontics but is no longer interpretive (nor is it deontic, of course).

In a similar way, particles marking interpretive use may move on to other functions. The most obvious evolution is that towards epistemic modality: echoic interpretations always reflect a certain (often negative) attitude of the speaker towards the intention behind the replicated utterance, hence a possible path to ‘dubitative’ marking.

This is another reason why interpretive use markers may be difficult to set apart from markers of epistemic modality: many units may be polyfunctional from the start (e. g., those based on the notion of ‘similarity’), others may have a ‘post-interpretive’ epistemic value. It remains to be investigated whether interpretive use markers may develop into evidential (hearsay) markers (apart from the special case of interpretive deontics discussed above).

Areal links?

Marking of interpretive use is probably not one of the widespread grams represented in every other language. Their occurrence might well be an areal feature. So, for instance, the existence of lexical markers of interpretive use in Russian (*mol*), Latvian (*sak*) and Lithuanian (*atseit*) is probably not a coincidence. Further westward, e. g., in Polish, the use of particles like *niby* in interpretive use is at best marginal.

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