

Power dynamics and pragma-cultural sources of unsourced evidentiality in Persian

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This paper investigates participants' reflections on power relations embedded in the cultural-pragmatics of unsourced evidentials in Persian texts. Using Fairclough's (2013) critical discourse analysis, we adopted Hanks' (2018) ethnography of referential practices and Foucault's (1980) power dynamics to analyse 16 Persian texts through follow up interviews and focus group discussions on two opposing pairs of texts – one pair on Iranian national identity versus Persian literature, and another on Iranian politics versus religion. Our analysis revealed that unsourced evidentials appear in Persian predominantly due to censorship and sometimes due to deliberate use by authors (e.g., for winning an argument). Text consumers often overlook unsourced evidentials while reflecting on politico-religious referents, such as inequalities and bigotry. This has roots in Persian literature, religion, and politics of power embedded in the culture, and the participants' attention to inequalities and discriminations has roots in referential practices in current Iranian discourse.

Keywords: unsourced evidentials, pragmatics, discourse, subjectivity, power relations, politico-religious roots, referential practices, literature

1. Introduction

This paper investigates the production of unsourced evidentials in modern Persian texts and their consumption by Iranian readers. Four Iranian international postgraduates at an Australian university read four texts with politico-religious and national themes, and their reactions to the texts in light of the unsourced evidentials and the different referents in them were investigated. At the level of production, we unpack cultural-pragmatic roots of unsourced evidentiality in the

Persian language. At the level of consumption, we focus on how text consumers overlook unsourced evidentiality and pay attention to other referents in texts.

Evidentials are defined as linguistic devices which individuals use to support their ideas in terms of degrees of certainty about topics they write or talk about (Shokouhi, Norwood, and Soltani 2015). In expressing their attitudes, speakers appeal to linguistic and pragmatic cues to convey their hesitation, beliefs, anticipations, assumptions, inferences, inductions, and so on (Chafe 1986), which can be instances of evidentials. Generally, there are two types of evidentials, namely, sourced and unsourced. When speakers provide the source of information to support their ideas or arguments, they use an instance of sourced evidentials. The following examples clarify two kinds of sourced evidentials.

- a. Andy *thinks* Jennie did not tell the truth (mindsay).
- b. Kate *says* she was home last night (hearsay).

In the first example, Andy is the source of information since his state of mind is clarified. This kind of sourced evidential is named *mindsay*. Example (b), the other type of sourced evidential in which Kate is the source of information and announces something, is called *hearsay*.

Unlike sourced evidentials, unsourced evidentials hide the source of information in several ways, in which case pragmatic knowledge including the socio-politics of texts (pragma-cultural knowledge) is required to identify the source of the evidential used. It is not only a passive construction that hides the source of information, but active sentences can also be seen as instances of unsourced evidential, as in the following example:

- c. *Many scientists* believed that Covid-19 medicine is not possible.

In sentence (c), the source of the information is not clear as the writer does not reveal additional information about *many scientists*. The reader does not know their names or the name of the institution they work for. The accuracy and reliability of the information conveyed through the pragmatics of the language, which in this case is unsourced evidential, can be doubted and the writer is responsible for them (Shokouhi et al. 2015).

Evidentials can be defined and categorised based on their syntactic, semantic, and pragmatic properties. Aikhenvald (2015) defines evidentials as a syntactic category which attaches to verbs. Murray (2017) believes that languages define evidentials based on different sentence types such as declarative and interrogative. She also believes that evidentials are placed between modals and moods. Murray holds that other linguistic categories, such as morphemes, can also define evidentiality since they can suggest sources of information. Hence, evidential markers

vary in different languages: some languages hide markers of evidentiality while, in others, these are explicitly disclosed through bound morphemes.

In the Persian language, while evidential markers are seldom revealed, aspect markers such as *mi-* (relating to imperfective/progressive aspect) can indicate evidentiality (Lazard 2001). In fact, pragmatic knowledge is required for their identification. Jahani (2000) studied linguistic items of Persian semantically and regarded Persian as an indirect language in terms of conveying ideas. She discussed indirectness through the information conveyed either someone's report, called reportative, or via drawing conclusion from an utterance, named inferential. Relevantly, Shokouhi et al. (2015, 475) divided the use of evidentials in the Persian language into four types as follows:

- Type I: The source of information is (an) identified person(s)
- Type II: The source of information is (an) unidentified person(s)
- Type III: The source of information is an identified institution
- Type IV: The source of information is an unidentified institution

The authors suggested that writers might use evidentials for different purposes. For example, columnists might employ Type I (identified individuals are sources of information) to increase the persuasive power of texts. Building on Shokouhi et al. (2015), we attempt to explore the possible roots for the use of unsourced evidentials by text producers and how they lead their consumers to accept text ideas.

2. Typology of evidentiality

Previous studies on evidentiality in general, and in the Persian language in particular, have often examined syntactic, semantic, and pragmatic properties. Sadighi and Mobashernia (2012) analysed four modern Persian texts chosen from different genres, namely, linguistics, political sciences, statistics, and psychology to examine the potential correlations between those genres and evidential markers. Their results revealed that genres influence the use of evidential markers in texts. For example, unsourced evidentials are more likely to appear in psychology texts. Their study is important in that it established associations between genres and the use of evidential markers. Nevertheless, the authors neither explored nor provided reasons why certain genres use more instances of unsourced evidentials than others, or how text consumers react to them.

Dehkordi Ebrahimi and Allami (2012, 1901) analysed how evidentiality is represented in the writing practices of Iranians. Using metadiscourse and intertextuality, they suggested their own typology of evidentials in the Persian language. They discussed that evidentials can be divided into several types: "specific", which

includes “direct” and “indirect”, and “non-specific”, which can be divided into “ambiguous” and “unambiguous”. Although their study is significant in that they have proposed a new typology of evidentiality, they did not examine (un)sourced evidentials in an interactive context, like this study does, wherein participants analyse texts and discuss them in follow up focus group discussions.

In another study, Rahimifar, Rezai, and Motavalian (2017) analysed evidentiality in Persian based on the perfective aspect. They maintained that the present and past perfect convey evidentiality. They discussed that perfective aspect bears indirect information. Hence, they can be categorised as instances of unsourced evidentials. In other words, perfective aspect can be an evidential marker. Their study is important since they examined how perfective and non-perfective aspect might be related to unsourced evidentiality. However, similar to previous studies, they focused on syntactic aspects of unsourced evidentials rather than examining how evidentials might influence text interpretations.

Davari and Naghzhguy-Kohan (2017, 182) analysed the Persian verb *dâštan* ‘have’, for its evidentiality properties. They discussed that *dâštan* can be associated with occurring situations or “prospective metonymy when applied to achievement events”. As regards prospective achievement, they discussed that the source of evidence is known. That said, speakers can use it in familiar situations where they are present, and it can be used to attract the attention of others to an ongoing situation. Their study analysed the semantic properties of a verb in Persian from the perspective of a speaker or a writer. Accordingly, the role of a consumer in analysing evidentiality is still underexplored.

From a pragmatic perspective, Nishi (2018, 93) analysed the Japanese verb *iu* ‘to say’ as well as the second and third person forms of it (i.e., *itte ita*), and made associations between their use and evidentiality function. After analysing naturally-occurring conversations among his participants, Nishi suggested that, when psychological impacts associated with utterances were high, the situation was conducive to the non-use of evidential markers. For instance, when a son is sick, the father is expected to be worried about his child’s health. He is not supposed to use evidential markers since, culturally, they insinuate that the father is psychologically distant and his child’s health does not matter to him. Hence, they normally use markers without evidentiality.

Ifantidou (2005), in a different study, explored how individuals develop their knowledge of and learn to use evidentiality in Modern Greek. To this end, she involved children aged between 4 and 11, and examined the developmental stages among her participants by analysing several verbs of perception (e.g., think, seems, guess, etc.) related to evidentiality. Ifantidou (2005, 387) suggested that children’s development of evidentials follows three factors, namely, “growing, pragmatic, and cognitive complexity”. This and similar studies (e.g., Cornillie

2004; Gu 2015; Lo 2004) examined the behaviour of evidentiality as appearing in texts. Yet, a gap still exists as to how unsourced evidentials are consumed by individuals and what pragmatic and cultural influences impact readers' interpretations of them. To address this issue, this study asks:

What are the pragma-cultural nuances of unsourced evidential in modern Persian texts and how do they inform readers' interpretation?

This study contributes to our knowledge about evidentials and their relations to the dynamics of power structure, and suggests possible grounds for the appearance of unsourced evidentials in texts. Moreover, this study analyses the ways in which unsourced evidentials are reacted to. Hence, it can improve our understanding of how unsourced evidentials might position consumers to accept writers' ideas.

3. Conceptual framework

The conceptual framework of this study is based on the theories proposed by Foucault (1972, 1994a) and Fairclough (2013). Foucault (1982) defines subject formation in association with discourse and power relations. Discourse is seen as a group of statements and signs which form and maintain modes of existence, knowledge, and subjectivities, and an indispensable component of discourse is power. Foucault (1980) distinguishes between two types of power, namely, repressive and productive. While the former is about prevention and prohibition, the latter creates discourses and knowledge. It is "a productive network which runs through the whole social body, much more than as a negative instance whose function is repression" (Foucault 1980, 119). This study considers power relations as productive forces in discourses which have disciplinary consequences in constructing knowledge. Knowledge is defined as objects produced or excluded within discourses, what is to be said and what avoided (Foucault 1980). Knowledge is whatever can be written, talked, and thought about, comprehended within discourses, and regarded as true. Foucault does not regard knowledge as a stand-alone notion but in association with power relations. Hence, he introduces the power-knowledge complex, meaning that power relations and knowledge reinforce each other. Power relations create knowledge which subsequently maintains those relations, exercises them through circulation of certain ideas or disperses them when subjects interact with each other.

The texts employed in this study (see Section 4) reflect Foucault's notion of power-knowledge complex in several ways: texts about Ferdowsi (a Persian poet in the 10th–11th centuries and a symbol of Persian nationalism) convey and

maintain the power-knowledge complex in association with nationalism, ethnic groups, and political issues. While one text introduces him as a poet whose ideas promote women's values in society, the other presents him as a racist and misogynist poet. These texts reinforce political power either for the Islamic Republic of Iran (IRI) or against it since the political power in Iran is tightly associated with and originates from discourses of religion standing against rival discourses such as nationalism (Boroumand 2020). Hence, the text in favour of Ferdowsi somewhat reinforces discourses of nationalism as a competing discourse for the IRI's political power while the text against Ferdowsi relatively bolsters the political power of the IRI. The other pair of texts are political texts for and against Rouhani, the former president of Iran. On the one hand, they discuss knowledge around the legitimacy of the IRI and its Supreme Leader to reinforce their power. On the other hand, as they are written by rival revisionists or hardliners and reflect revisionist or hardliner discourses, they maintain power relations around their own political parties.

A second component of the conceptual framework is subjectivities determined by power relations. Power relations either control individuals or make them act upon themselves to construct themselves as the subjects to certain discourses and existing power relations within them (Foucault 1994a). Subjectivity is a form which individuals take, and there are two interpretations for it: "subject to someone else by control and dependence; and tied to his own identity by conscience or self-knowledge. Both meanings suggest a form of power which subjugates and makes subject to" (Foucault 1982, 781). Subjectivities in this study are associated with pragmatic aspects of evidentiality when participants read texts. At the level of production, we try to investigate how power relations pave the way for unsourced evidentials to appear in texts, and how authors circulate them as knowledge or truth. Drawing on Shokouhi et al. (2015) and as related to the texts for and against Ferdowsi, the authors used unspecified persons (e.g., some poets, many women, many people, etc.), while, in the political texts, the authors utilised both unspecified persons (i.e., many members of parliament, some ministers, etc.) and unspecified organisations (such as, some intelligence and security services, some government organisations, etc.). Subjectivities in association with power relations, as analytical tools, are employed to scrutinise in what ways text authors are authorised to use and circulate unsourced evidentials via the texts.

Moreover, at the level of consumption, subjectivities are used to investigate how participants, as subjects to educational, social, and political discourses (Ball 2013), interpret the use of unsourced evidentials in texts. As related to the political, social, and historical roots, we try to unpack how and why our participants, as subjects to various discourses, analyse or overlook instances of unsourced evidentials manifested in texts as the final products of discourses and power relations.

Since one might argue that power is not the only cause of unsourced evidentials, we also like to see this phenomenon through Hanks' (2018) 'referential practice', insofar as cognitive perception is as important as power relations in signalling specific referents for the realisation and achievement of communicative practices. To this end, we will look at linguistic features that are socially constructed and used by people in their everyday discourses and how they live by such features (see Section 6.1 below for term *Sigheh*, which signals a cognitive symbol of sexism in Shiite Islam).

Fairclough's (2013) theory used in critical discourse analysis (CDA), a third component of our conceptual framework, will be employed in order to interpret the data in terms of unsourced evidentials that appear in texts and how participants react to them. Further, Fairclough's CDA provides an analytical tool for text production and consumption since text is defined as a final product of discourse, discursive, and social practices. Social practices are beliefs, knowledge, and identities formed and reformed in the society and are associated with the social functions of language. Here, two notions should be clarified: first, the role of language as a socially shaped phenomenon which at the same time shapes social aspects of our life. Second, social context is related to the social practices and power relations within society. Social context, including society, organisations (e.g., educational organisations), and domains, constitutes a scene informing and shaping struggles over power relations, and is related to discursive practices. Discursive practices which give rise to text production often designate what appears in texts and what should be avoided. Fairclough's CDA, at the level of production, provides germane tools to address how unsourced evidentials come to appear within texts due to power relations.

Finally, as we have chosen texts about Persian literature and attempt to explore whether it informs the appearance of unsourced evidentials, we must explicate the associations between Persian literature and theories of discourse employed in this study. Persian literature can be associated with power relations as it is influential in shaping the ideas of a great proportion of Iranians. As Shokouhi and Latifi (2019) emphasised, some poets such as Ferdowsi, Sa'di (13th century), Naser-Khosro (11th century), etc. have affected ways of thinking, talking, criticality, and education pathways in Iran. For example, Sa'di, in his work *Golestan* (literally 'Blooms'), which is comprised of eight chapters and is a combination of poetry and prose, proposes a wide range of advice, called *pand o andarz*, a popular phrase in Iranian folk culture, including how people should talk and behave, or the advantages of remaining silent. Such points, as proposed by Sa'di, are greatly aligned with theories of power (Foucault 1982) as Sa'di's ideas (among other poets') have penetrated daily education, and people's lives in Iran. Since the works of these literary figures are essential in schools, this study tries to address

whether and how the teaching of Persian literature informs the use and consumption of unsourced evidentials in modern Persian texts.

4. Research process

Sixteen text readings and the related follow up interviews and group discussions by four Iranian postgraduates constitute the data of this study. Ethics Approval for conducting this study was obtained through the University, and pseudonyms are used to safeguard the privacy of the participants involved in data collection. Elnaz and Nasrin are the female participants. Both are PhD students at School of Arts and Education. Soroush and Pedram are the male participants. Pedram is an MSc student in Information Technology and Soroush is doing his MSc in Mechanical Engineering.

The reasons for choosing these participants are as follows. First, both researchers are Iranian academics in Australia and the participants are Iranian students in Australia. Such positionalities, including the same mother tongue and nationality, as Wiederhold (2015) maintains, built a trust for data collection and interpretation. Second, as the texts are in Persian and the study focuses on how text consumers deal with unsourced evidentials, we needed to involve native Persian speakers to ensure they would not face comprehension problems (see Zaini 2018). Participants were also allowed to engage in help-seeking activities, including using dictionaries in cases where unfamiliar words or comprehension problems arose.

Data collection involved our participants' engagement with four texts. One pair of these included one text advocating Ferdowsi's literary-cultural and nationalistic views and another condemning his ideas. Texts on Ferdowsi were chosen due to his position in Iranian society. He is known as a symbol of Persian language, literature, and unity among Iranians (Katouzian 2010). Based on this reasoning, parts of Iranian society believe that Ferdowsi, a symbol of unity, can ameliorate the nation's unification against Mulla's dictatorship and their despotic regime in Iran (Dabashi 2019). The other pair of texts, which discussed political-cultural issues of current Iran, included one text in favour of the performance of Rouhani and another against his strategies. The reasons for choosing these texts is related to the vulnerable current economic and political situation of Iran, which has been produced by the four decades of religious hegemony. This situation is now very much conducive to nationalism.

In order for the participants to recall the details of the texts, they were given three highlighters and asked to highlight the parts they agreed with (in green), disagreed with (in red), and those they were ambivalent about (in yellow). High-

lighting the texts does not mean they could not change their ideas, but the coloured parts would give them indications about different segments of texts and prepare them to answer interview questions. Then, they were involved in interviews to explain and support their attitudes about the texts. Finally, they joined in a focus group discussion (FGD) to share and discuss their ideas with each other. They also had the chance to change their ideas, but they were asked to note any changes in their interpretations in order to report them in their second individual interviews.

Once the audio recordings were completed, we started data transcription and coding following Saldana (2016). As this paper focuses on unsourced evidentials, we took out quotes and participants' reflections on two previously mentioned types of unsourced evidentials – individual and organisational. It is worth noting that all the data were translated from Persian to English. As both researchers are fluent in Persian and English, one of the researchers first translated the data, and then both researchers met several sessions to review the translation, discuss its accuracy, and reach a consensus.

5. Engagement with unsourced evidentiality

This section is divided into two parts: in the first part, we provide and analyse examples of the type of unsourced evidentiality called *unidentified individual*, and in the second part, we provide examples on the type known as *unidentified institution*.

5.1 Unidentified individuals

The first example of this type is extracted from the text against Ferdowsi, where the author includes a direct quotation on behalf of unidentified persons:

- (1) Some of Ferdowsi's advocates say: Ferdowsi has put some ideas into the mouth of characters to obscure his viewpoints about women.

Pedram, in the interview, said:

The author's knowledge about literature and literary theories is limited. Sometimes, writers seem to spread negative ideas by putting vulgar or rude words into the mouth of villains to show iniquity in society or criticise some people.

Pedram unfolds the information in the text based on Ferdowsi's literary vision and its association with referential practices. By making a covert contrast between Ferdowsi as a symbol of knowledge and text, he is establishing a referential prac-

tice. His attitudes about Ferdowsi led Pedram to blame the text's author for their lack of knowledge of literary theories, which informed his counterargument that Ferdowsi has used villains to portray how inequality exists in society. This meaningful chain is understood through the pragmatic knowledge and priority of referential practices for Pedram. However, his tendency to take notice of the above-mentioned referential practices (e.g., Ferdowsi, Persian literature or literary theories) gave rise to his disregard for the unsourced evidential (i.e., "some of Ferdowsi's advocates"). In another example, from the same text, Soroush mentioned in the FGD that he disagreed with the following sentence:

- (2) So many Persian poets have praised Turkic Kings and they have received money and tips instead. In fact, they have earned a living by praising and eulogising them.

Soroush mentioned:

There are two points in the sentence: first, the author is racist. S/He has a derogatory tone as s/he considers Persians in an inferior position to Turks. Second, what is wrong with earning a living by composing poems? It is like doing research and earning money like a postdoctoral researcher.

Soroush initially pays attention to the mention of "Turkic Kings", which has racist connotations for him. He attributes this to author's derogatory tone and the implied inferiority of Persians compared to Turks. Then, he discusses that the author's conclusion is not valid since in the modern world, people do various jobs, such as research, to earn money, and writing poetry could also be considered a job. This could be attributable to Soroush's academic journey. The interplay between these referential practices is significant in that, although he overlooked the use of "so many Persian poets" as an instance of unsourced evidential, his orientation to racism, as well as other referents, sparked his critical reflection.

In another example, Elnaz in an interview on the text in favour of Ferdowsi criticised the following sentence:

- (3) Some recent famous feminist women in Iran have behaved irrationally. They call themselves feminists, but they are in fact anti-men.

She said:

Feminism in Iran doesn't mean to be anti-men. Men have always discriminated against women in history and now some women are standing against this suppression.

Elnaz previously mentioned she holds feminist attitudes and interpreted the text based on her gender-related perspectives (for feminist identity construction, see

Hirschey Marrese 2021). Her orientation to sexism, as a referential practice, instigated her critical reflections on the text. Thereafter, she related sexism in Iran to bigotry and suppression. Such a pragmatic association between referential practices (e.g., sexism and bigotry) creates a thread to the ideas in her discussion. However, she did not question the text for not revealing the name of some of “recent famous feminist women” who hold negative attitudes towards men. The next example is related to an FGD in favour of Rouhani when Nasrin questioned the following sentence:

- (4) Even some of the General Managers of many Western and Arab countries were not willing to meet with some of our ministers.

Nasrin said:

I agree with the sentence as in the previous government, the international relations were really murky. Iran was a very isolated country. Nowadays, the situation is slightly better.

Nasrin agreed with the sentence based on her political viewpoints, but she did not question the text for the use of the two instances of unsourced evidentials, namely, “some of the General Managers” and “some of our ministers”. The text does not clarify the identities of those general managers, their nationalities, and does not give extra information about the organisations they work for. Similarly, they do not know the names of those ministers who are shunned by some general managers. The final example in this section concerns Elnaz’s attitude towards the text against Rouhani:

- (5) Some sociologists criticised the free Basket of Goods distributed among people and mentioned it as a strategic mistake from the very beginning to the very end.

Elnaz mentioned she was ambivalent about the texts because:

I really doubt whether and how the Basket of Goods can be a mistake. The text doesn’t discuss on what basis this is a mistake. When we write our thesis, our supervisors expect us to discuss our ideas deeply, but this text fails to do so.

While Elnaz did not comment that the text has used an unsourced evidential (“some sociologists”) or why it does not give extra information about those sociologists, she reflected on the text critically, which can be attributed to her academic journey. In her PhD journey Elnaz has learned that a superficial indication as such is not convincing; the author of the text should have rather dug deeper into addressing different aspects of that mistake.

5.2 Unidentified institution/organisation

In an example, taken from the text against Rouhani, Pedram disagreed with the following sentence:

- (6) Rouhani could put an end to unethically in some governmental organisations which was a legacy of the previous government.

In the FGD, he added:

The text, shallowly, claims that immorality in the society was a product of the previous government. That is preposterous. It means we didn't have immorality 10 years before that, let's say. The IRI has been full of corruption from the very first day.

Although Pedram did not analyse the unsourced evidential in text ("some governmental organisations"), he prudently evaluated the text critically. If we pragmatically unfold his referential practices, we see his attitudes towards immorality, different governments in Iran, and the history of the IRI regarding corruption, which are meaningfully connected to each other. This is associated with his political orientation, which leads him to pay attention to certain referential practices (e.g., immorality in IRI) as related to the habitus of political genres, and overlook others (i.e., unsourced evidentials). Likewise, Nasrin was ambivalent about the following sentence from the text against Rouhani based on this logic that the text is deliberately vague:

- (7) A few hours before the conference, the government announced that some of the student bodies, participating in the session, did not have the right to ask questions from Mr. President.

In an interview conducted after the reading, Nasrin stated:

I was a political activist when I was a student in Iran. I participated in similar meetings. I am not sure how the text claims that some people did not have the right to ask questions. So, why did they participate in those sessions? Based on my experience, I am not sure how accurate this sentence is.

In association with her identities, Nasrin analyses the text by making connections between student organisations, political activism, and participation in political meetings as referential practices. This sequence of referential practices establishes her critical reflection on the text despite the fact that she ignored "some of the student bodies" as an instance of unsourced evidential. The next example from the same text also demonstrates another instance of unsourced evidential:

- (8) Only certain organisations had the right to ask questions from the president.

In this sentence, “certain organisations” is an instance of unsourced evidential as the text does not reveal additional information about the organisations which had the right to ask questions from the president. The participants did not question this sentence. Another example comes from the text in favour of Rouhani:

- (9) Before the book and newspaper fair started, some intelligence agencies appeared to control everything.

Elnaz, in the FGD, mentioned:

Well, the whole country is run by surveillance. People are always monitored not to disobey the ideologies advocated by the regime.

Elnaz interpreted this sentence drawing on her lived experience in Iran. She indirectly criticised the IRI based on the reasoning that the intelligence services watch people and they demand that people’s behaviour be congruent with the regime’s agenda. As there are multiple intelligence agencies in Iran and the text does not reveal extra information about them, the text uses an instance of an unsourced evidential. However, the referential practice for Elnaz is the notion of surveillance rather than the unsourced evidential.

6. The pragmatics of evidentiality

All the previous quotes by our participants indicate one common point: participants did not question or analyse the use of unsourced evidentials in texts, while they demonstrated that they criticised texts for their political, social or economic ideas. In light of the theories discussed above and in association with pragmatics and ethnography, unsourced evidentials are analysed below at the level of production and consumption.

6.1 The pragmatics of production

At the level of production, unsourced evidentials can be discussed through Foucault (1978, 27) as “silence in discourse” and in terms of how they appear in texts (Fairclough 2013). Silence in discourse can be defined as concepts, ideas or objects (i.e., remarks) which the subjects avoid mentioning. Drawing on Foucault (1978), when certain discourses do not allow an idea to be expressed, that idea and those related to it are unexpressed. For example, when sex becomes taboo, a wide array of objects including homosexuality, sex with underage people, and sex education become taboo. Sexual phrases are repressed as if they do not exist. The language of sex is restricted, and the subjects should not discuss it publicly. However,

those repressions have led to the proliferation of discourses about sex so that sex appears in covert ways while “authorised vocabulary” and a “rhetoric of allusion and metaphor” are codified (Foucault 1978, 17). Such changes and vocabulary are controlled and rigorously defined. As an example, after the 1979 revolution in Iran, all premarital sexual activities or those out of the institution of marriage were banned and the language of sex was strictly prohibited by the ruling clergies. However, two oppressive decades passed, and they noticed the language of sex and sexual activities cannot be repressed. Referring to religious discourses, they divulged *Sigheh*, which is a temporary marriage in Islam. These days, Shiite clerics promote *Sigheh* publicly and even encourage it. Such a drastic change is related to the proliferation of discourses after a period of silence.

Firstly, there is the possibility that the authors use unsourced evidentials to hide certain ideas (e.g., open criticism of the IRI) since those ideas, as objects of certain discourses (e.g., political discourses), should be kept silent, whereby pragmatic knowledge would likely help recover the hidden information. Examples (6), (8), and (9) above could be related to this possibility. In Example (6), the author did not mention the name of “some governmental organisations”. Similarly, in Example (8), the author did not specify “certain governmental organisations/institutions”. A reason for hiding information about these organisations can be potential consequences for the prosecution of authors. In Iran, every governmental organisation has a security sector which has prosecution power against individuals and other organisations. As Goldman (2016, 81) mentions: “avoidance of being caught is a permanent feature of life in Iran”. In Example (9), “some intelligence services” can be related to several intelligence services in Iran, which have enormous power including the powers to persecute, arrest, and imprison. Hence, the author might not directly mention their names.

As regards repression and silence in discourse, speaking subjects (in this case, authors) should avoid speaking about particular topics, directly and everywhere, since power defines them as inexistent. Such repression is associated with censorship and continues until power defines those topics are not banned any longer. As power is “permanent, repetitious, inert, and self-reproducing” (Foucault 1978, 93), it monitors all the “movements” by speaking subjects in terms of what they say. This does not mean that censorship is a state through which power is exercised, but to regulate silences in discourse, power wants speaking subjects to talk about certain topics indirectly or use authorised vocabulary, metaphors, and so on. Proliferation of discourses, as can be associated with words and vocabulary, might occur at this stage so that certain words or vocabulary (i.e., unsourced evidentiality) emerge to the surface and appear in texts. In this study, authors ostensibly used unsourced evidentials as legitimate vocabulary or acceptable language to avoid questioning certain people or organisations (e.g., the Supreme Leader)

directly. They aimed to criticise high-ranking authorities, military officials, and clerics, whose power come from political discourses (Fairclough 2013), but they are not supposed to do it explicitly as they could face punishment.

A second possibility is the abundance and repetition of silences in discourses, which may lead to normalisation (Foucault 1975). Normalisation is a process through which subjects learn to behave normally based on specified normal behaviour. In such a process, discourses and power relations within discourses set some norms, and subjects need to adapt to these norms. In fact, “normalisation imposes homogeneity” (Foucault 1975, 184), which means that one of the workings of normalisation is spreading ideas, attitudes, and even language that should be used uniformly by the subjects. In the texts above, some unsourced evidentials have been used as a result of normalisation which have historical roots. Shokouhi and Latifi (2019) discussed that the use of indirect language in Persian is a historical phenomenon. Poets and authors have used indirectness as a device to avoid being punished by despotic rulers. They mentioned that the same is true in a student-teacher situation or possibly any situation where individuals are expected to follow rules of reverence which are socio-culturally defined. In Example (1), the author seems to avoid mentioning the names of some famous scholars. In Example (3), the author does not want to mention the name of some Persian feminists who have the support of a large group of people. Similarly, in Example (4), if the author had revealed the names of some ministers, that would have been considered disrespectful. Hence, historically and in association with power relations and punishment, authors are demonstrating their normalised behaviour by using instances of unsourced evidentials.

However, normalisation can be subsequently associated with the genealogy of racism (Foucault 2003). Racism, as Foucault discusses, is a discursive construction which circulates knowledge and truth in two ways. First, racism can be associated with struggles between different races, otherwise called “discourse of race struggle” (Foucault 2003, 81). Second, when the “discourse of race struggle” takes a revolutionary form, it turns into state racism based on which states are responsible for the purity and protection of whole races. Iran is a country with different ethnic groups (e.g., Persians, Kurds, Turks, Arabs, etc.) who have ruled the country at different stages of its history and have competed over political power (Katouzian 2010). This competition over political power has impacted different aspects of social life including language domination. In Example (2), the author uses the words “Persian” and “Turkic” in a way such that they can be associated with “discourse of race struggle”. While the text does not mention the name of “some Persian poets”, the Turkish-speaking author labels Persian poets as eulogisers of Turkic kings and inferior to them.

Such a tone and the use of unsourced evidentials are associated with racialisation and normalisation, linked with resistance. Foucault (2003, 69) discusses that “confrontation between races, about the race struggle that goes on within the nations and laws” can create aspects of social normalisation due to “internal racism” which is promoted by the states, otherwise, the revolutionary form of discourse of race struggle. In modern Iran, internal racism is created for the purpose of social normalisation by the government declaring Persian as the official language and banning non-Persian languages at schools, universities, and in official affairs (see Zaini and Ollerhead 2019) while there are instances of resistance through objecting to the dominance of the Persian language in non-Persian regions (Asgharzadeh 2007). However, the Persian people and the Persian language can be the subject to racism specifically by Azari people who speak Turkish in Iran. Informed by pan-Turkic identities and Turkish nationalism, some Azari people argue that the Persian empire has been ruled by Turkic dynasties and Persians are inferior to Turks (Souleimanov 2011). In Examples (1) and (2), and thorough the text against Ferdowsi, the Turkish-speaking author’s stance against the Persian poets seems to be a reaction to the dominance of the Persian language in modern Iran. The author tries to attack Persian poetry through devaluing Persian literature while he supports his ideas through the use of unsourced evidentials. This reaction against the state-supported normalisation can have roots in being deprived of receiving education in one’s mother tongue, using another language for one’s official affairs (i.e., Persian), and considering one’s race (i.e., Azari and Turkic) unprivileged.

A third possibility is related to the authors’ deliberate intention to take advantage of employing unsourced evidentials. This can be related to truth obfuscation called “bullshit” or “humbug” (Frankfurt 2005, 9). Frankfurt (2005) clarifies there is a difference between someone who tells lies and someone who tells bullshit. Liars know that they tell lies and they deliberately do so. However, a bullshitter does not feel a concern whether something said is true or false. They want to win an argument or prove themselves right to reach their goals. Although it is practically very hard to discuss whether an instance of unsourced evidential is an example of lie or humbug, one can suggest that unsourced evidentiality can work as a linguistic device to obfuscate the truth. It can be an instance of bullshit or humbug since the author is uncertain of the accuracy of their statement. Text authors, as a result of inadequate information, may use unsourced evidentials to achieve their goals (e.g., winning an argument). As related to the notions of normalisation and racism discussed above, the text against Ferdowsi, penned by a Turkish-speaking Iranian author, has numerous instances of unsourced evidentials specifically when it comes to Turkish and Persian languages, Persian poets, and “discourse of race struggle”. While this paper does not claim that the text

features examples of humbug or bullshit, the instances of unsourced evidentials employed by the author can be categorised within the range of bullshit or humbug.

6.2 The pragmatics of consumption

Drawing on Shokouhi and Latifi (2019), we argued that the appearance of unsourced evidentials in modern Persian texts has historical reasons. Firstly, Iran has been governed by autocratic rulers for at least three millennia and Iranian poets and prosaists have used an indirect language as a technique, to criticise kings who did not accept even the lightest criticism. Unsourced evidentials were a device for censoring certain information while authors could still be critical of the rulers. Sa'di was a Persian poet and prosaist in the 13th century who used this technique. In his book, *Golestan*, Sa'di tells some tales about people whose identities cannot be revealed. Not enough information about the whereabouts of the events and the time of their occurrence is given. In other words, they seem to be his own creation, such as expressions like *paadeshaahi boud* 'there was once a king' or *haakemi boud* 'there was once a ruler', or they could be based on analogies of the events in different lands in Asia that he visited in his long journeys. Primary and secondary school students are exposed to Sa'di's poems and prose and are often asked to memorise the poems. The habitual engagement with this kind of discourse which contains instances of unsourced evidentials can be a potential reason for taking them as granted.

This can be further related to governmentality as Foucault (1994a) and Ball (2013) mention. Governmentality, an umbrella term, can be applied to a set of techniques which institutions implement to modify and shape the behaviour and attitudes of their subjects. Governmentality, as Collier (2009, 99) discusses, can appear in various ways which can inform "conditions of possibilities", ways of thinking and acting. Tightly tied to disciplinary power, governmentality techniques circulate within the society and across its members to produce and intensify knowledge, shape the conditions of possibility, and form ways of thinking. Collier (2009, 89), drawing on Foucault, discusses the principle of "topology of power", through which several heterogenous elements, "techniques, institutional arrangements, material forms, and other technologies of power", are combined in response to new situations and problems. This means that principles of power through governmentality can take new forms and be exercised in new situations.

Our participants' consumption of materials is associated with the principles of hierarchical structures in three ways: first, as related to institutional arrangements, Iranian students are meant to follow their teachers and not question them. Teachers are always regarded as sources of knowledge and pass their knowledge

onto students. Ball (2013, 142) believes that education systems act like a “normalising and excluding machine”. In schools, students’ behaviour, performance, and subjectivities are shaped due to conditions of possibilities and disciplinary power, which want them to act in certain ways. Students learn how to behave, practice certain activities and avoid others. These behaviours include both disciplinary practices and dealing with learning materials. Our participants who lived the majority of their lives in Iran have been formed in this way. This is related to the second point: material forms, as students in association with disciplinary power and practices are exposed to certain materials (i.e., pre-designed textbooks). Iran follows a centralised curriculum meaning that the content and textbooks are designed by the Department of Education and used in the whole country. Such imposed curriculum contributes to governmentality as it reinforces power relations through dispersing certain knowledge (e.g., politico-religious ideologies, unsourced evidentiality) and avoiding others (e.g., promoting critical thinking). Teachers and students should implement the same materials in their classes. Third, techniques of power are imposed on Iranian students as they have to memorise the content of the centralised curriculum. As mentioned above, the desired learning behaviour in school subjects (e.g., Persian literature) is memorisation prescribed by educators, where students are exposed to instances of unsourced evidentials.

An effect related to governing students which can account for taking instances of unsourced evidentials for granted is “exomologesis” (Foucault 1994a, 81). The workings of exomologesis in a given discourse amount to governing the subjects based on what they should accept as truth and repeat to affirm it. This is done for authenticating certain objects of discourse for themselves and others. “Exomologesis is an emphatic affirmation whose emphasis relates above all to the fact that the subject binds himself to that affirmation” (Foucault 1994a, 82). On the one hand, memorisation of verses or verbatim repetition of literary works, as well as ideological content about the IRI, which are related to governmentality, promote (new) materials and conditions of possibility. The textbooks students read in Iranian schools contain instances of unsourced evidentiality and, as a desired action, students are required to accept whatever appears in textbooks as true and reproduce them through memorisation, which subsequently reinforces the power-knowledge axis. Accordingly, the way they are governed in schools furthers the consumption of unsourced evidentials. On the other hand, affirmation to literary figures can be related to exomologesis since in Iran this is seen as pride, and pride shows a great bondage to the community. As literary figures such as Sa’di are respected and regarded as national figures, people affirm and support their ideas (Shokouhi and Zaini 2022). This seems to contribute to the overall understanding

that students should accept unsourced evidentials in texts; hence, they become habituated.

A second possibility can be related to the narratives in compulsory religious education that students receive through their school subjects. These religious subjects are associated with and advocate narrative stories in Shiism. Drawing on Amanat (2012), in the Safavid dynasty (1501–1736) religious narratives became very popular and this was done with the purpose of building a state which has claimed the political power based on Shiism. To build a Shiite identity, narratives around religion and specifically Shiism were created. It is natural that story creation can involve instances of unsourced evidentials. The current richness of unsourced evidentials in the Persian language can be associated with the historization of language. Hanks (2018, 181) believes that historization happens when language is layered with contexts over contexts: “At any point in its history, a language is the sedimented product of myriad acts in relation to the value horizons of speakers, addresses, and other receivers”. The history of any given language is a sequence of concretisations: meaning categories are embedded in language in association with the social world. Accordingly, we can suggest that the prevalence of unsourced evidentials has roots in the historization of language as they are linked with categories of meaning and have social functions for language users, as discussed at the level of production.

However, participants’ consumption of unsourced evidentials is further associated with Hanks’ conceptualisation of social and cognition use of referents in everyday discourses. Hanks (2018, 181) discusses that the “referential function” of language helps language users distinguish different objects they refer to or describe. The referential function has social aspects based on which language users socially and culturally learn what referent to single out when they communicate with others and what referent to ignore. As speakers have used such terms or referential practices continually, they are “habituated to certain ways of occupying context” (Hanks 2018, 183). Due to the constant use of these features, language users share knowledge which forms the “habitual responses to situations” (Hanks 2018, 67) and realise that communicative practices “sediment routine ways of perceiving and acting” (Hanks 2018, 176). Habitual referents dominantly (not strictly or ubiquitously) inform and ameliorate how we routinely think, act or perceive ideas. As related to the participants of this study, they criticised texts for sexism, racism, and politics (Examples [3], [5], and [6]). The sedimentation of politics, dictatorship, and sexism are very common among Iranians (Boroumand 2020) and signify how participants perceive these ideas in texts and routinely react to them while ignoring the use of unsourced evidentials.

The final possibility concerns the prevalence of unsourced information in daily conversations (Pirzadeh 2016), or the speech of politicians as related to

power relations and listening or reading genres (Hanks 2018). The abundance of unsourced evidentials in daily conversations, media, and politicians' speech can lead text consumers to accept them unquestionably. While previously we addressed the role of normalisation, this effect can also be investigated through "will to knowledge" (Foucault 1994b, 11), which is a binary system of selection. Foucault (1994b) argues that discourses form a system of inclusion and exclusion, which specifies what objects, truth(s), concepts, etc. appear or not in a certain field. This system of selection works as a binary system of selection in that whatever appears in a given discourse is an effect of truth. This means that "will to knowledge" falsifies between true and untrue so that the appeared knowledge is regarded as acceptable and true. For example, Rouhani used an unsourced evidential to make people believe that Iran had a better performance in terms of supplying groceries in comparison with other countries during the Covid-19 crisis. He did so by never mentioning the name of another country, but comparing it with Iran and suggesting that Iran's supply of food was more efficient. Once individuals are exposed to objects of discourse (i.e., unsourced evidentials), they might gradually accept them as true which can be a reason why our participants did not raise objections to their use in texts. This can also be further linked with pragmatic and ethnographic prospects.

Hanks (2012) maintains that evidentials are sources of knowledge, statements, and expressive/interactional forces that appear in different genres and play functional roles in conversational contexts. Marsilli-Vargas (2014, 44) considers genres as related to "kinds of discourse" and believes that genres, which are historically formed and are associated with power relations, through forming contexts and "framework of relevance shape listeners' orientations". As listeners are submerged in the "habitus of a particular genre" (Marsilli-Vargas 2014, 49), they listen to different genres with various purposes which are pragmatically significant: on the one hand, different listeners as social actors listen differently to a same genre and interpret messages differently. On the other hand, listeners who belong to a certain genre (e.g., psychoanalysis in Argentina) not only will have similar interpretations of the same genre but are also expected to follow the norms of that genre (e.g., analyse the vocabulary). This is associated with our participants' attention to text messages and their disregard for unsourced evidentials. While unsourced evidentials emerged in examples above, our participants' habitus of political and national genres (e.g., Examples [5], [6], and [9]) directed their attention to messages concerning immorality, corruption, and surveillance in the IRI or Ferdowsi's reverence as a national figure (e.g., Examples [1] and [2]). Drawing on Marsilli-Vargas, such habitus shaping their orientations led them to focus on certain aspects of texts (e.g., surveillance) and avoid others (unsourced evidentials).

7. Summary, limitations, and suggestions

This study examined participants' reactions to instances of unsourced evidentials in the Persian language. We addressed the possible reasons for the manifestation of them in texts. We also suggested possible reasons why individuals consume them without questioning them. Accordingly, this study answered its research question asking how unsourced evidentials might inform participants' interpretations of texts. The findings suggest that unsourced evidentials appear in modern Persian texts because of historical, cultural, and religious reasons, which could have their educational roots in the discourses of Iranian society. Moreover, participants, as the subjects to the discourses of Iranian society, accept their use in texts as they have been exposed to them for several decades. Persian literature, religious education, and the speech of Iranian politicians, as driving sources where unsourced evidentials appear, seem to be the potential reasons shaping participants' acceptance of them.

We also discussed that despite our participants' disregard for the use of unsourced evidentials in texts, they critically reflected on texts by paying attention to sexism, politics, bigotry, racism, and so on. This is associated with their agenda, habitus, and orientations, which socially, not accidentally, informed what they noticed. Although at the level of production we argued that unsourced evidentials are associated with silences in discourses, at the level of consumption, the participants' reactions to texts are associated with their agenda, which is subsequently linked with referential practices as well as the habitus of particular genres. In this research, we noted how political genres in Iran promote the use of unsourced evidentiality and subsequently convey their ideologies through readers' subjugation. We could argue that the participants' different ways of immersion in everyday discourses have shaped their viewpoints accordingly. Promoting readers' attention to the use of unsourced evidentials in texts is important for the authors of this paper in that we believe it can foster critical reading. While the education system of Iran is designed overall to concentrate on matters in general terms rather than digging for deep analysis (Shokouhi et al. 2015), enhancing students' awareness of the use of some common linguistic features such as unsourced evidentials and highlighting their roles as referential practices can be significant in reading texts critically.

We concede that writing their Masters' theses and PhD dissertations will probably have impacted our participants' cognisance of the use of (un)sourced information since academic writing does not tolerate unsourced information to a great extent. Second, we involved four participants in this study and we acknowledge that there is no claim to generalisability. Third, we suggest that future studies can be conducted among participants at different academic levels. The same study might have had different findings with late-phase PhD students as they might deal

with unsourced evidentials differently. Finally, future research can be conducted with an emphasis on controlled groups as in a psycholinguistic study attending to unsourced evidentiality while reading texts. This would present a different picture of how ideology is represented linguistically.

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