Reasoning and Evidence: Sources and Direction

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Natural languages have constructions that indicate that a claim is based on reasoning from evidence. Some of these constructions encode a particular directionality of evidence (e.g., Davis and Hara 2014, Winans 2016). The phenomenon can be illustrated with the examples in (1) and (2) (after Davis and Hara 2014). While epistemic "must" expresses conclusions that follow from a piece of evidence (1) as well as conclusions about what might have caused the evidence (2), "seem"-reports are only possible if the embedded claim is assumed to be cause of the available evidence (a "Reasoning Back" (RB) effect, as in (2)). Other constructions that have been shown to convey a RB effect are (i) a sub-class of evidential inferential elements (see Krawczyk 2012 and references therein), and (ii) the presentational "this" construction (Winans 2016).

(1) Reasoning Forward from Evidence.

We see, from the 20th floor, rain pouring down but we cannot see the street.
a. The sidewalks must be soaked.
b. #The sidewalks seem to be soaked / It seems that the sidewalks are soaked.

(2) Reasoning Back from Evidence.

We see, on a security camera that shows only the sidewalks, that they are soaking wet.
a. It must be pouring rain.
b. It seems that it's pouring rain.

In this talk, which reports on work in progress, we tentatively suggest that there are two possible sources for the RB back effect: (i) evidential and epistemic items might contribute RB lexically (as Davis and Hara 2014 argued for the Japanese evidential particle "youda"); (ii) in other constructions the RB effect might come about via a default predication relation that holds between propositions and topic situations (building on Winan's (2016) proposal for presentational "this" constructions). In support of this second possibility, we present initial data that suggest that bare assertions and some canonical doxastic alternatives ("think" and "believe") can encode a RB effect.

References

Davis, C. and Y. Hara. 2014. Evidentiality as a Causal Relation: A Case Study from Japanese youda. Empirical Issues in Syntax and Semantics 10, ed. Christopher Piñón, 179–196.

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