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To cite this article: Erika Berglind Söderqvist (2020) Informational and relational functions of evidentiality in interaction, Studia Neophilologica, 92:1, 56-73, DOI: 10.1080/00393274.2020.1724823

To link to this article: https://doi.org/10.1080/00393274.2020.1724823

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Published online: 03 Apr 2020.

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Informational and relational functions of evidentiality in interaction

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ABSTRACT
Using conversation data from the British National Corpus, this paper investigates the role played by relational functions in the use of evidentiality in interaction, and how such functions interact with the ‘core’ function of evidentiality: to signal access to a source of evidence for or against a proposition. Further, this study looks into the themes authority, cooperation, and negotiation, which have been discussed in previous studies of evidentiality in interaction, and at how these themes manifest and, crucially, intersect with one another in the use of evidential markers. The qualitative analysis of the data finds relational functions to be a highly salient effect of evidential marking in conversation; while evidential markers appear to place focus on the informational content of a proposition, the effect achieved by their presence in the data of this study is found to be allowing the speaker to negotiate and manifest authority in a cooperative manner.

1. Introduction: General aims and evidentiality scope
This paper presents an investigation of the role played by relational functions in the use of evidentiality in interaction, and how such relational functions interact with the ‘core’ function of evidentiality: to signal access to a source of evidence for or against a proposition. Further, this study looks into the themes authority, cooperation, and negotiation, which have been discussed in previous studies of evidentiality in interaction, and at how these themes manifest and, crucially, intersect with one another in the use of evidential markers. A qualitative approach is taken to conversation data from the British National Corpus (BNC) in order to achieve a fine-grained description of relational functions performed by means of evidentiality. Interaction, for the purpose of the present paper, refers to communication that is carried out in the form of synchronous dialogue.

Evidentiality is ‘the linguistic expression of the kind, source and/or evaluation of the evidence for or against the truth of the proposition that the sp/wr has at his/her disposal’ (Carretero & Zamorano-Mansilla 2013: 319). More precisely, evidentiality is studied in the present paper as manifesting in the form of evidential markers: words or phrases that allude to the existence or acquisition of evidence for or against the truth of a proposition. The following examples, from the spoken part of the British National Corpus, illustrate...
sensory (1), hearsay (2), and inferential (3) evidentiality, which are often treated as the main evidentiality categories (cf. e.g. Willett 1988).

(1) They do, we watched them shove an engine in, you know, it comes along the belt and stick it in (KCS 69)
(2) Sian was saying there’s a coffee morning on today (KD1 531)
(3) Yeah, it seems to me that erm <pause> they are <pause> it’s er going to be a comparative thing <cough> from <pause> nineteen ninety two, and then in, we’ll say nineteen ninety seven for argument’s sake. (KC3 29)

In Example (1), the speaker refers to first-hand experience – here through his eyesight – as the source of the information that engines come along a belt before they are installed into cars. In Example (2), the speaker refers to hearsay as the source of the information that there is going to be a ‘coffee morning’. Finally, in Example (3), the use of SEEM in this context signals that the information that follows constitutes an inference based on some kind of evidence rather than an unquestionable fact. The evidence that an inference is based on may or may not be explicated by the speaker; in this case it is not, but we learn from previous utterances by this speaker that he has talked to someone with first-hand knowledge on the matter in question, which means it is likely that the inference is based on hearsay. Inferences may also be based on sensory evidence, or on logical reasoning.

In my description of Examples (1) through (3), the informational functions of evidentiality are in focus. The informational function of evidentiality could be said to be its core function, and concerns the kind of relationship the speaker/writer has to the information s/he communicates. Evidential markers add information about what source the speaker has for a proposition, and about the kind of access the speaker has with respect to the evidence – is it direct (as with sensory evidentiality) or indirect (as with hearsay and inferential evidentiality) (Willett 1988: 57). Further, the addition of said information by using an evidential marker in some cases also signals the speaker’s evaluation of the proposition, in terms of how reliable the evidence is assessed as being. This is where my conceptualization of evidentiality overlaps with epistemic modality: expressions of how certain or uncertain the speaker/writer is of a state of affairs. Using Dendale & Tasmowski’s (2001) discussion of the relationship of evidentiality and epistemic modality as a point of reference, the present study is positioned most closely to the relation type they term overlap. Adopting the said scope and definition of evidentiality, this study seeks to describe the potential of evidential markers to perform relational functions in addition to signaling the speaker’s access to evidence. Specifically, the present study focuses on evidentiality as used in spoken-language interaction.

In contrast to informational functions, relational functions in language concern the relationship between interlocutors rather than between a speaker and the information of her/his proposition. Previous research of evidentiality (and related linguistic categories) in English-language interaction shows, among other things, that evidentiality markers are indicators of a speaker’s self-perceived authority and responsibility, not only in relation to the information of a statement, but in relation to the addressee(s) as well (Fox 2001; Heritage & Raymond 2005). Evidentials and related expressions of knowledge are found to play carefully choreographed parts in speakers’ negotiations regarding who knows what about a given topic (Drew 2018), and using some evidential and epistemic markers is
argued to facilitate information processing on the part of the addressee (Cappelli 2007). Generally, then, authority is a recurring theme in descriptions of the functions of evidentiality in interaction, but negotiation and cooperation are also discussed as relevant to when speakers opt to use evidentiality. As Sidnell (2012) argues, in order to adequately describe the functions of evidentiality in interaction, they must be studied holistically; it must be recognized that evidentials are not isolated entities but exist in a context where several functions or acts that have a bearing on one another are carried out simultaneously. The aim of the present qualitative study is to study the potential for and mechanisms of evidentiality being used for relational functions in an interactional context, focusing on the possible interaction of three themes that have previously been used in descriptions of evidentiality functions: authority, negotiation, and cooperation; additionally, the interaction of informational (speaker’s relationship to the information in an utterance) and relational (speaker’s relationship to addressee(s)) function types of evidentiality will be studied.

The research question guiding this study is: what is the role of relational functions in the use of evidentials in casual conversation in spoken British English? Specifically, the contribution of the present study will be to explain in what ways evidential markers may be used to perform relational functions (cf. Section 2), and how they interact with the informational functions of evidentiality.

The paper is structured as follows. In Section 2, the scholarly background of this study is elaborated on; in particular, previous findings on the functions of evidentiality in interaction will be discussed. It will also be explained in more detail in which ways the study aims to contribute to the body of research on evidentiality in interaction. In Section 3, the sampling procedure of the British National Corpus (BNC) is detailed, and the approach taken during the qualitative analysis of the material is described. In Section 4, the results are presented and illustrated using examples from the material, and Section 5 offers a critical discussion of the results.

2. Evidentiality in interaction

The present section offers a summary and discussion of some past findings on the pragmatics of evidentiality in English. I will elaborate on the term relational practice and how the concept inspired the notion of relational functions being performed by evidential marking. Further, the themes authority, cooperation, and negotiation which are found to be prominent in previous studies of evidentiality in interaction will be discussed in relation to how the present study means to expand our current understanding of evidentiality in English.

First, the terms that are important in analyses and discussions of this study include epistemic status versus epistemic stance, and epistemic primacy. Epistemic status refers to a person’s ‘rights, responsibilities and obligations to know’ (Mondada 2013: 599) regarding a given topic or piece of information. Epistemic stance, in contrast, refers to the way interlocutors’ relative epistemic statuses are manifested in conversation, for example by using evidential markers signaling different degrees of reliability. Epistemic primacy, finally, refers to having a claim to the highest epistemic status in the context of the participants of the interaction concerning a specific topic or piece of information – to know the most about something. These terms will be used, primarily in Section 4 and
onward, while describing and discussing the interactional functions of evidentiality relating to knowledge.

Fox (2001), who can be regarded as one of the first to investigate evidentiality in interaction in English conversation, argues that overt evidential marking serves to distance a speaker from her/his claim, and thus from taking full responsibility for its reliability. In other words, zero evidential marking signals a claim to greater authority and responsibility about the reliability of the utterance in question than overt evidential marking. Alonso-Almeida & González-Cruz (2012) suggest that their finding that women use evidentiality more extensively indicates that women have a greater need to express authority and professional attitude. While at first glance this appears to contradict Fox’s analysis, I would argue that they align; needing to express authority suggests that one does not trust that the addressee will otherwise perceive one’s proposition as reliable enough.

While Fox and Alonso-Almeida & González-Cruz focus on authority regarding a topic as the primary explanation for using evidentiality, Heritage & Raymond (2005) also bring forward the potential of evidentiality to be used as part of strategies toward reaching agreement during a negotiation. They argue that evidentials ‘focus on the authoritative-ness of the assessment, or on the access claimed by it’ (34), but they also discuss strategies for establishing who has primary access to information as part of a process toward agreement and affiliation. Similarly, Drew (2018: 178) finds that interlocutors, during interaction, fine-tune their epistemic stance so that it correlates with their epistemic status as relative to that of other participants, negotiating in order to achieve consensus.

Cappelli (2007) explores the properties of cognitive verbs (know, think, suppose, etc.), which often carry evidential meaning. Cappelli argues that by marking evidential-epistemic attitude, the speaker signals that she/he is not certain of the information in the proposition, or that she/he is aware that the listener might have a reason to doubt the reliability of the speaker. To this extent, Cappelli’s analysis is in line with that of Fox. Cappelli, however, moves in a different direction by proposing that evidentiality might be used to cooperative effects. She argues that cognitive verbs carrying evidential-epistemic meaning activate in the hearer a search in memory for old information that can validate or refute the speaker’s conclusion and force the hearer to search for new evidence and to carry out a verification process by comparing contextual information and the speaker’s viewpoint. They function as indicators of relevance, forcing the hearer to evaluate $p$ as a conclusion drawn by the speaker which does not have an objective validity. (Cappelli 2007: 304)

This function of indication of relevance, Cappelli proposes, implies that the choice to mark evidentiality (or epistemicity) is made in order to facilitate the process of correctly interpreting the information on the part of a hearer. Thus, as was suggested in Section 1, the primary themes in studies of evidentiality in interaction appear to be authority, cooperation, and negotiation. Drawing on what the above-named researchers found, the present study investigates the ways in which authority, cooperation, and negotiation intersect in the functions carried out by evidential marking in interaction.

In addition to authority, cooperation, and negotiation, the present study will investigate the way the informational (speaker’s relationship to the information in an utterance) and relational (speaker’s relationship to addressee(s)) functions of evidentiality relate to one another. The latter function type is inspired by the term relational practice, which has
been defined as involving interactional strategies aimed at maintaining positive relationships and avoiding conflicts (Holmes & Marra 2004). Some previous findings on the functions of evidentiality suggest that relational practice might be an important ‘side-effect’ of evidentiality, such as the findings that evidentiality is used in negotiations toward consensus (Heritage & Raymond 2005; Drew 2018), and that evidential markers may have the effect of facilitating information processing for the addressee (Cappelli 2007). Further, the interpretation that evidential marking produces a less overt display of authority and assertiveness than a lack of evidential marking (Fox 2001) implies that evidentiality would constitute an apt strategy for averting and preempting face threats (cf. Brown & Levinson 1987). Taking a qualitative approach to conversation data from the BNC, the present study intends to test the interpretation that relational practice is a prominent effect of marking evidentiality in English-language interaction; it also investigates the component parts of how evidentiality may be used to perform relational functions. The qualitative approach is chosen following Sidnell (2012), who emphasizes the importance of considering evidentiality and its functions as co-existing with all other strategies that are simultaneously being used in the same interaction, as they all have a bearing on one another, when attempting to describe the functions of evidentiality. Such an endeavor would not be possible using a quantitative method.

In sum, this study investigates the role of relational functions in evidential marking as per the research question stated in Section 1, how these relational functions interact with the informational functions of evidentiality, and with authority, negotiation, and cooperation, which are recurrent themes in studies of evidentiality in interaction. The purpose of doing this is to add to our understanding of what evidential markers are used for in English, and what effect the marking of evidentiality has in a conversation.

3. Material and method

The data used for this study were retrieved from the demographically governed portion of the spoken section of the British National Corpus (BNC). This portion of the corpus was collected in the early 1990s, and the informants were selected with the goal of achieving an even distribution of genders, ages, places of residence, and socio-economic classes. The informants were given recording equipment and instructed to record as many of their conversations as possible during the ensuing days.\(^1\) Due to the nature of how these recordings were collected, most of them consist of spontaneous conversations between family members or close friends.

During an initial scan of the text files belonging to the relevant BNC section, each of which tend to be compiled of several conversations, it was decided to aim for extracts of as close as possible to 1,000 words. The reasons for this are that in conversations that are too brief, it can be difficult to get a clear picture of the topic of the conversation, and of the roles and stances of the interlocutors; and because some of the recorded conversations are much longer than that, some were cut off at the end to make sure that the extracts in the material roughly correspond to equal length. The material used in this study thus consists of extracts with an average length of 1,150 words from 29 different conversations; ten of these feature only female interlocutors, nine of them have only

\(^1\)http://www.natcorp.ox.ac.uk/corpus/creating.xml, 4 October 2019.
male interlocutors, and the remaining ten have female as well as male interlocutors (see Table A1 in appendix for distribution of genders and word counts). The reason why there are fewer extracts with only male interlocutors is that such conversations proved harder to find in the BNC. The gender of the interlocutors was controlled for in order to avoid bias in the results, as female and male speakers of British English have been found to have differing preferences for evidential markers (Berglind Söderqvist 2017a, 2017b). The ages of the 70 speakers represented in the study range from 18 to 84 years old; their mean age is 46.4. The text files and their meta-information were also manually scanned (in the order in which they appear in the BNC index) to check for a number of criteria: conversations taking place in the informant’s workplace, with the informant’s colleagues, or in a situation where at least one interlocutor was acting in a professional capacity (such as a cashier or a receptionist) were excluded. Further, only conversations between adult interlocutors were included.

The analytical approach taken in this study is based on mixed methods. It takes inspiration from certain aspects of Conversation Analysis (CA) (e.g. Goodwin & Heritage 1990) in that the analysis takes as its starting point what one interlocutor’s behavior reveals about their interpretation of their co-interlocutors’ behavior. However, since the focus of this study is to investigate the interactional functions of evidential markers, and to pay special attention to a number of specified themes (the operationalization of which is further discussed below), the analysis is less text driven than CA studies tend to be. Further, the speech transcripts of the BNC were not prepared according to CA conventions; the latter are more detailed regarding pronunciation, prosody, and pauses than the conventions adhered to during work with the BNC. Even so, an advantage with the selection of the BNC as the data source is that its size and amount of speaker information enabled the compilation of a reasonably large data set where speech situation and the genders and relations of the speakers could be controlled for.

For two thirds of the transcripts included in the material, I was able to locate the corresponding audio files. While the focus during the analysis of evidentiality functions was on the transcripts as they appear in the BNC, because audio files could not be used for the entire material, the audio files were occasionally helpful in clarifying parts of the conversations. Due to the nature of the conversation extracts used, parts of them are difficult to follow. For example, repeated overlapping speech or offhand remarks about something that a speaker may have observed in their immediate surrounding, but that is unrelated to the topic of conversation, in some cases make it ambiguous what speakers are referring to, or which utterance is a response to what. In such cases, prosodic information gleaned from the audio files sometimes helped clarify the conversation for the analyst.

All instances of evidential marking were manually searched for in the material. The scope and definition of evidentiality described in Section 1 were adhered to; see Berglind Söderqvist (2017b) for a more detailed discussion of inclusion criteria. Each evidential marker was subsequently analyzed in its context to find out what kind of function it was used for, and how it (and the proposition it modified) was received by the listeners. As was discussed in Section 2 of the present paper, the analysis focused on three themes that have previously been discussed by scholars as relevant to how evidentiality is used in interaction: authority, cooperation, and negation. More specifically, I looked at the way authority was manifested in the conversations in terms of
epistemic status and epistemic stance; such manifestations include expressing the degree and nature of knowledge of the interlocutors, as well as whether interlocutors appear to downplay or exaggerate their epistemic status. For cooperation I looked at interlocutors’ tendencies to engage in relational practice such as face maintenance and using strategies with supportive or collaborative effects, and at the role of evidential markers in such strategies. With respect to the concepts of face and face maintenance strategies, I took an approach similar to the one taken by Cornillie and Gras (2015: 148). In other words, I paid attention to whether evidential markers modify utterances that potentially threaten the face of the speaker, a co-interlocutor, or even someone who is not an interlocutor. The theme negotiation included analyzing the involvement of evidentials in the management of negotiations and/or disagreements in general, and negotiations and/or disagreements regarding the interlocutors’ relative epistemic statuses in particular. While manifestations of authority, cooperation, and negotiation anywhere in the entirety of each conversation extract were held relevant to the findings of the analysis, it was the role of evidential markers in such manifestations that was targeted, and the interplay of those themes in the use of evidentials. In addition, the analysis focused on the interaction of the informational and relational effects of marking evidentiality, meaning in which ways evidentiality marking is used in expressions of the speaker’s relationship to the information provided in propositions (informational) and in expressions of the speaker’s relationship to other interlocutors (relational), and the way these aspects relate to one another.

4. Examples and analyses

This section will present evidence in the form of examples from the data in order to answer the question of what role relational functions have in evidential marking in conversation. Targeting the themes and functions introduced in Section 2 and detailed in Section 3, various types of usage were identified in the data. The examples that are used for illustration in the present section are consistently identified using their BNC text IDs; the line numbers provided here are the original s-unit numbers from the BNC. An s-unit is a stretch of speech ‘which the transcribers have identified as sentence-like’\(^2\) – a turn may consist of several s-units. Further, pertaining to transcription conventions, <...> marks metatextual information; <-|-> marks overlapping speech. Evidential markers that are the focus of an analysis are underlined.

While the present study is a qualitative one and does not aim to put forth any quantitative evidence, some facts should be noted with regard to the frequency of evidentiality in spoken English. Berglind Söderqvist (2017b), who mainly used data drawn from the demographically governed spoken portion of the BNC, and searched for evidentiality by conducting computerized corpus searches based on a pre-defined list of search terms, found evidentiality to be marked about 4.2 times per 1,000 words. In the present study, which uses a smaller material but approaches evidentiality by searching manually for all and any instances of it, evidentiality is found to occur 4.4 times per 1,000 words; just over 4 times ptw thus seems like a reliable approximation of how frequent evidentiality is in casual conversation. Concerning individual markings, the findings of this

\(^{2}\text{http://rdues.bcu.ac.uk/bncweb/manual/bncwebman-glossary.htm. 23 October 2018.}\)
study\textsuperscript{3} reflect those of Berglind Söderqvist (2017b) in showing that THINK and SAY as evidential markers are very frequent in comparison to other markers. For the purpose of this study, however, the frequencies of individual markers are of little significance; the focus of the present study is on investigating functions and strategies in which evidentiality is used, and not on investigating correlations between markers and functions.

The present section offers analyses of five examples that represent different ways in which the themes authority, cooperation, and negotiation as well as the informational and relational aspects of evidentiality overlap and interact in the uses of evidential markers in the material of this study. This paper does not aspire to make generalizations regarding the typical use of individual evidential markers; the markers that are represented in the examples of this section tend to be found in other functions as well (for frequencies of evidential markers, see Table A2 in the appendix). Examples (4) and (5) illustrate uses where informational functions appear to take prominence over relational functions; Example (6) displays a type of use where both function types are prominent; and Examples (7) and (8) represent uses where the relational aspect of evidentiality seems more important than the informational aspect. The interplay of the themes authority, cooperation, and negotiation is discussed in the analysis of each example.

The first two examples to be presented show, as mentioned, uses where the informational aspect of evidentiality – signaling the relationship of the speaker to the information in a proposition – appears to be the primary motivation for using evidentiality markers. In Example (4), friends Nina and Katriane are discussing mutual acquaintances. While they both have access to information on this topic, as they both know the people they are talking about, each has also had one-to-one conversations with the people in question and are thus able to make their unique contributions to this interaction.

Example (4): Nina and Katriane (transcript KPJ)

\begin{verbatim}
107 Nina:  But <pause> he didnae tell me that he, he has \textcolor{red}{telled} me in a way.
108 Kat:   Aye.
109 Nina:  I just want to know \textcolor{red}{<-|->} what why \textcolor{red}{<-|->}
110 Kat:   \textcolor{red}{<-|->} Is Ben, is \textcolor{red}{<-|->}
111 Nina:  why, why he done that, you know.
112       But he \textcolor{red}{said} that Alec denied it, whatever it was.
113       <pause dur='6'> But Margaret \textcolor{red}{told} me \textcolor{red}{<pause>} well it was years ago \textcolor{red}{<pause>} up at the Germany \textcolor{red}{<unclear>}, \textcolor{red}{says} his wife left him.
114 Kat:  Mm.
115 Nina:  He went up, and it’s first time he’d seen her for a while and she said something about, oh he was supposed to have something
\end{verbatim}

\textsuperscript{3}See Table A2 in the Appendix.
Cos Alec said something to me about Maggie.

I says, well what?

Ah, I don’t understand it because Margaret, Alec got on well with Margaret.

Maybe they both knew that is, I don’t know.

In line 107 in Example (4), Nina prefaces what she is about to talk about by saying ‘he has telled me in a way’, signaling to Katriane that she has information directly from the source. Katriane backchannels, and after Nina begins speaking again, Katriane interrupts her (line 110) but is ignored by Nina. Nina proceeds to relate that ‘he’ said that Alec denied it, but Margaret had told her Alec’s wife had left him; Katriane backchannels again. Having established her access to reliable sources in lines 112 and 113, Nina goes on to talk about an event in Alec’s life in line 115 without using any evidentiality markers. In the lines following this excerpt from the text file, Katriane ‘takes over’ and tells Nina about the facts that she knows about Alec and Margaret.

The extensive use of hearsay evidentiality in this conversation has two major functions: it adds transparency regarding the source of evidence, allowing the addressee to make a well-informed interpretation of what she hears; and it emphasizes that the speaker has information that the addressee does not have and thus establishes their relative epistemic statuses. There is no overt conflict over primacy in this conversation; however, both interlocutors repeatedly use hearsay evidential markers to establish who has epistemic primacy regarding the events being recollected. The informational aspect of evidential is prominent in this extract; the primary effect of evidential markers is to signal the relationship of the speaker to the information in the utterance. Yet, the transparency resulting from the use of evidential markers has a cooperative effect, which is a manifestation of relational practice; mainly in that it aids the addressee, but also in that it moves the responsibility of the assertions from the speaker to the evidence source. When Nina says Margaret told her that Alec’s wife left him (113), the responsibility burden for the reliability of that information falls on Nina’s source rather than Nina herself, making the negotiation of relative epistemic statuses less personal and less threatening to her addressee’s face than it might have been without the evidential marker. As Fox (2001: 179) argues, evidential marking has the potential of signaling lesser responsibility on the part of the speaker, as it enables the speaker to make assertions without appropriating them as her/his own.

Example (5) demonstrates sensory evidentiality being used to negotiate for epistemic primacy in a situation where there is disagreement as to who has the most reliable knowledge. Mary and John are a married couple, discussing which route to take between two towns.

Example (5): Mary and John (transcript KCL)

70 Mary: And I think it’s longer coming back that way.

71 Over the bridge.
72 John: No it isn’t.
73 <-|-> It isn’t. <pause>
74 Mary: You sure?
75 John: I’d be positive.
76 Shorter. <pause>
77 Mary: Cos <pause> th – I remember the first time I went down that way over the bridge.
78 It was about a hundred and eighty miles I clocked up.
79 <pause> Er but coming back I only clocked up about a hundred and twenty. <pause>
80 John: What was the mileage when we got there?
81 A hundred and eleven?
82 Mary: Something like that, yeah.
83 So it was three hundred coming back or <pause> total three hundred. <pause>
84 John: I can’t remember now exactly. <pause>
85 Mary: I think it does make a difference, going over the bridge.
86 <pause> I found it when I was driving the last time.
87 <pause> But I couldn’t remember where the turn off was <pause> to come up the scenic route.
88 Cos I was reading, and you’d passed it.
89 John: Yeah well you could erm <pause> go up, go down the M 50 <pause> into Ross <-|-> and then go from there.
90 Mary: Yeah but th – <-|-> there was a turn off <pause> and I didn’t know whether the turn off was at Cardiff <pause> and we went past it.
91 John: Yeah, there is a <pause> oh to go back that way?
92 Yeah.
93 Mary: Yeah. <pause dur='8'>

In line 70, Mary uses THINK to modify her comment that it takes longer going over the bridge. When John says it does not, she does not contradict him directly, but asks whether he is sure. John responds that he is ‘positive’. In line 77, Mary persists and uses REMEMBER, marking that despite her inferential marker in line 70, she bases her claim on first-hand experience and gives John a detailed account of how many miles each route is. John asks
about the total mileage clocked up by the car and tells her he cannot remember (lines 80 and 84). After a slight pause, Mary continues in line 85, emphasizing her conviction by putting stress on does; in line 86, she uses FIND, highlighting her first-hand experience and the fact that she was the person driving the car. They discuss specific roads and turn-offs until line 91, where John interrupts his own utterance and finally appears to realize that he may have been misunderstanding what routes Mary was referring to. He then says ‘yeah’, seemingly by way of agreement, which Mary echoes. After the pause in line 93, they change the topic completely.

Berglind Söderqvist (2017a, 2017b) finds THINK to be one of the most frequently used evidentiality marker in spoken British English. Cappelli (2007), investigating the epistemic and evidential dimensions of THINK, considers it an epistemic marker rather than an evidential one. However, it is within the scope of evidentiality adopted for the present study; Cappelli describes THINK as expressing a ‘computational process over available evidence’ (185), which means that it points to what kind of evidence a speaker has for a proposition. Cappelli further argues that semantically, epistemic/evidential THINK ‘seems to signal the tentativeness of the evaluation, to fine-tune the subject’s assertion by making clear how it is to be interpreted’ (185). Mary’s use of increasingly ‘strong’ evidentiality markers seems to reflect her escalating willingness to indicate her own access to information, justifying her claim to epistemic primacy. Also, it suggests that she is trying to avoid using unnecessarily forceful language, likely in order to limit the risk of threatening her addressee’s face with her persistence in contradicting John’s account. Further, the way that she uses a question form in line 74 and continuously provides John with as much information as possible suggests that she is looking out for John’s face wants and is trying to convince him by helping him see her perspective – which, in the end, appears to work. By contrast, John uses no evidentiality in this extract – provides no information as to why he is initially so certain that Mary is wrong. In effect, Example (5) is an example of negotiating rather forcefully for authority and one’s right to epistemic primacy, while also being cooperative and considerate of the addressee’s potential needs. The informational aspect of evidentiality, again, appears to be the primary motivation for using evidential markers here, as the negotiation for epistemic primacy is so salient in Example (5), though the markers are used in functions that are simultaneously relational.

In the next type of use exemplified below, the informational aspect still seems a prominent motivation for marking evidentiality, though the negotiation of relative epistemic statuses takes on a more cooperative character. Terence and Richard of Example (6) are a father and his grown-up son, discussing the travel plans of some mutual acquaintances.

Example (6): Richard and Terence (transcript KE2)

4416 Terence: I suppose he’ll be sort of
4417 Richard: Yeah I should think so.
4418 Terence: on his way to Germany now <-|-> I <-|->
4419 Richard: <-|-> Yeah.
4420 Terence: suppose?
4421 Richard: I think so, yeah.

4422 They were gonna breakast in Germany so, I don’t know whether they stop overnight or what, I <unclear> <->

4423 Terence: <-> No they <-> don’t, they <-> travel.

4424 Richard: <-> <unclear> <-> Do they?

4425 Terence: Yep!

Richard and Terence each seem to have some information regarding their topic; in line 4421, Richard responds to Terence’s question. Richard, in line 4422, proceeds to add some information of the trip to Germany, but when he ends his utterance with stating what he does not know, Terence fills him in. Unlike Nina and Katriane in Example (4), who use hearsay evidentiality to demonstrate in which cases each of them has epistemic primacy, Richard and Terence use inferential evidentiality (THINK and SUPPOSE) to signal which of their statements are based on inference and are thus possibly not true. They also repeatedly use question intonation; they appear to be focused on prompting their addressee to fill them in where they lack information, rather than negotiating for epistemic primacy. Their use of evidentiality has the effect of yielding the floor to the other participant, signaling humility about the speaker’s epistemic status as relative to that of the addressee. In a sense, the exchange in Example (6) demonstrates that Richard and Terence are negotiating their relative epistemic statuses – their claims to authority – yet, the effect of using evidentials appears to be primarily cooperative. Using evidential markers and intonation, the interlocutors appear to collaborate to paint as full a picture as possible of the travels of their acquaintances, rather than competing over who has the best access to evidence. Thus, while the informational aspect of evidentiality still appears important in that the evidential markers are means to the end of mutually finding out as much as possible about a certain topic, the relational aspect is equally important as the evidential markers appear to function as prompts for the addressee to add her/his assessment to that of the speaker.

The final two examples of the present section illustrate uses where the relational aspect of evidentiality appears to be the primary motivation for using evidential marking, with the informational aspect being more peripheral. Example (7) demonstrates an inferential evidentiality marker being used as a face maintenance strategy. Gordon and Debbie of text file KCA are a married couple, Hayley is Gordon’s cousin, and they are talking about the interior of a house, which Hayley seems to have seen more recently than the others.

Example (7): Hayley, Debbie, and Gordon (transcript KCA)

7 Debbie: Well is it all decorated in there now <-> or <->

8 Hayley: <-> No <-> it’s all done in there but it’s just gotta be decorated and like <-> <unclear> clean and <->

9 Gordon: <-> <unclear> <-> extension or kitchen or <-> pause

10 Hayley: I’ve never seen, do you know the bathroom, right?

11 <-> pause> Well it’s the tiniest toilet I’ve ever seen in my life.
12 It’s no – it’s not a, it’s not a normal <-|-> like, it’s not a <-|->
13 Debbie: <-|-> I don’t think I’ve ever seen <-|-> the bathroom there.
14 Hayley: an average size er well <pause> it was all there right and it was
all tiled right, very plain, yellow and black wasn’t it?
15 I couldn’t handle it, I thought no he’s <-|-> gonna make me <-|->
Gordon <-|-> <unclear> <-|->
16 Hayley: make do with this I thought, and then he’s <-|-> <unclear> and
I did didn’t I? <unclear> he’d gone along and <laugh> <-|->

In lines 7 and 9, Debbie and Gordon ask questions about the state of the house. In
line 10, after interrupting her own utterance, Hayley asks if Debbie and Gordon know
about the bathroom. Her use of the tag ‘right?’ implies that she presumes that they
know something about the bathroom. After a pause, Hayley goes on to tell them about
how small it is. Debbie interrupts her and uses THINK to modify her response that she
has not seen the bathroom in question. While the marker implies that there is a chance
that Debbie’s memory betrays her and she has, in fact, seen the bathroom, it also
diminishes the potential of the utterance to threaten the addressee’s face. First,
Debbie interrupts Hayley, which threatens her face. Second, the way Hayley asks the
question in line 10 suggests that ‘no’ is a dispreferred response, which might also
prompt the use of a face-saving strategy. The interpretation that Debbie gives
dispreferred response to Hayley’s question is reinforced by the fact that Hayley
breaks off her story about how tiny the bathroom is when she understands that
Debbie has not seen it; instead, by the way she describes the bathroom to Debbie
and uses another tag, it appears that Hayley is trying to rock Debbie’s memory in case
she might have seen it, after all.

In the case of Example (7), the primary motivation for using the evidential marker in
line 13 is most likely relational; the subjectivizing effect of THINK makes Debbie’s dis-
preferred response less forceful, and functions as a face-saver. Debbie’s epistemic status
on the matter – whether or not she has seen the bathroom – is not subject to negotiation
at this point, which makes it likely that marking epistemic stance or negotiating the right
to claim authority is not the primary purpose of using an evidential marker in Example (7).

While Example (7) shows an example of relational practice performed to maintain the
face of the addressee, Example (8) shows what might be an attempt to save the face of
someone who is not an interlocutor but the object of a conversation. Keith and Terence of
text file KCY are brothers-in-law talking about bricklaying; Keith is already a bricklayer, and
Terence is about to begin training to become one.

Example (8): Keith and Terence (transcript KCY)
128 Terence: Mm <pause> what’s Russell like any good?
129: Keith: Yeah, he’s quicker than I am, but he don’t seem to be as accurate
130 Terence: Yeah
131 Keith: you know, by the time I’ve got about three bricks down, he’s two
he’s not as accurate as I am, no, but what I do, I point mine up as well

Terence: Yeah

Keith: cos that way it gives me a bit more incentive, it gives me an idea of how it’s looking

Terence: Yeah

Keith: whereas Russ just throws it together and don’t bother pointing it, and to me that is incentive, I mean you don’t do it when you build it I know you don’t, when you’re earning, it’s a bit of er, a mark, a guide to how you do it.

On the topic of Keith’s colleague named Russell, Terence asks whether he is ‘any good’. Keith’s response in line 129 is not very emphatic, beginning by an affirming ‘yeah’, stating that Russell is quicker than Keith and using evidential marker SEEM to modify the comment that Russell is less accurate than Keith. The addition of SEEM has the effect of signaling subjectivity and the possibility that Keith is wrong in this assessment; Aijmer (2009) finds that SEEM as an evidential marker has the function of downplaying the reliability of an assertion, or of the evidence behind an assertion. Then, however, Keith describes how he points his bricks up when he works because it gives him ‘an idea of how it’s looking’, whereas Russ just throws it together and don’t bother pointing it’. Starting at line 136, Keith proceeds to tell Terence about how Russell is also bad at cutting bricks. Considering that Keith’s view on Russell’s lacking skills as a bricklayer appears to be strongly held, his initial use of seem is likely there in order to protect someone’s face; possibly Russell’s, as Keith might want to hold off on voicing negative opinions about a colleague to someone starting out in the same business. There could also be an element of Keith protecting himself from looking like someone who says negative things about others.

Similar to Example (7), negotiating the relative epistemic statuses of the interlocutors is not primarily at issue in Example (8); Terence’s question in line 128 makes it clear that he assumes that Keith knows more than Terence does. Hence, Keith’s use of an evidential marker could be intended to add transparency as to his assessment of the reliability of his assertion that Russell’s bricklaying is less accurate than his own, which would be relational in that it would assist Terence in processing that information, but also informational in that it signals Keith’s relationship to the information in his proposition. However, since later on (line 136) it becomes clear that Keith views it as highly reliable that Russell is not very accurate as a bricklayer, the relational aspect of evidentiality appears to be the primary motivation for marking it in Example (8). In both of Examples (7) and (8), cooperation is a more salient theme than authority and negotiation, which represent means to an end rather than being the reason for using evidentiality.

5. Discussion and conclusion

The present study asks the question: what is the role of relational functions in the use of evidentials in casual conversation in spoken British English? This investigation has
explored the relational functions of evidential markers and how they interact with the informational functions, as well as studied in what ways the themes authority, cooperation, and negotiation coexist in the use of evidentiality in interaction. This section offers a summary and discussion of the findings presented in Section 4, leading up to an answer to the research question and a statement of the implications of the study.

My analysis finds relational practice to be a highly salient effect of, and sometimes a likely motivation for, using evidential markers in interaction. Even in uses such as those shown in Examples (4) and (5), where the effect of the utterances featuring evidential markers seems to be to argue for the speaker’s epistemic primacy and to emphasize the speaker’s access to evidence and knowledge, the use of evidential markers enables the speakers to soften their assertions by distancing themselves from responsibility (Example (4)) or by downplaying the reliability of their assessment (Example (5)). As Fox (2001) argues, overt marking of evidentiality seems to diminish the assertiveness of utterances. Paradoxically, placing focus on the informational content of an utterance by marking evidentiality appears to be a primarily relational strategy, as it allows the speaker to negotiate simultaneously to performing relational practice. Further, the salience of the themes negotiation and authority – that is, whether or not there is overt negotiation as to the relative epistemic statuses of the interlocutors – seems to be correlated with the degree to which the informational aspect of evidential marking appears to motivate its use. For instance, in Examples (7) and (8), where the informational function of evidentiality is peripheral, negotiation for the authority of epistemic primacy is irrelevant as it is clear from the context that the speakers who use evidentiality unequivocally hold epistemic primacy regarding the topics in question. Instead, inferential evidentiality markers seem to be used for their effect of suggesting that the speaker views her/his proposition as somewhat subjective, thus softening its assertive and potentially face-threatening force. Thus, this study finds the function of evidential markers in interaction to allow the speaker to articulate their own claim to authority in a way that is minimally face threatening, or to downplay how reliable she/he finds a proposition to be in order to maintain someone’s face. Additionally, as is particularly clear in Examples (4) and (5), the transparency added by evidential markers allows the addressee more information to base her/his own assessment on than if evidentiality had not been marked; just as Cappelli (2007) finds, this has a cooperative effect as well. Hence, opting to mark evidentiality is likely often to be relationally motivated, to be a strategy that orients to the relationship between the speaker and the addressee at least as strongly as it orients to the relationship between the speaker and the informational content of her/his utterance.

I do not claim that this analysis of the relational functions of evidentiality in interaction is an exhaustive account by any means; rather, it provides further evidence of the complexity and pragmatic potential of evidentiality in English. The material of this study consists of casual conversation between friends or family members; it is likely that evidentiality is used to different effects in other types of discourse. For example, Mondada (2013) finds asymmetry in the way epistemic expressions are used by the guide and the guided during guided visits; and the use of evidentiality and related linguistic features in various types of political discourse has been extensively studied (e.g. Ådel & Garretson 2008; Marin Arrese 2009). The findings of the present study support those of several other scholars; for example, this study confirms Fox’s (2001) finding that overt evidential marking diminishes the speaker’s claim to authority and responsibility, Cappelli’s (2007) finding that evidentiality
enhances the transparency of a proposition, and Drew’s (2018) finding that evidentials can be part of a negotiation toward consensus regarding the relative epistemic statuses of the interlocutors.

An interesting implication of the present study relates to previous findings that women mark evidentiality more frequently than men (Alonzo-Almeida & González-Cruz 2012; Berglind Söderqvist 2017a, 2017b). As noted in Section 2 of this paper, Alonso-Almeida & González-Cruz (2012) suggest that women use evidentiality more frequently than men because they experience a greater need to express authority. Considering also Fox’s (2001) finding that zero evidential marking implies a stronger claim to authority and responsibility, we might extrapolate that men’s less frequent use of evidentials suggests that male speakers perceive their claim to authority to be strong enough without having to express it using evidentials. My interpretation, given the results of the present paper, is that such an analysis might be part but not all of the explanation to why women use more evidential markers than men. As Kendall (2003) discusses, opting to manifest authority less than overtly, for example by marking evidentiality, is not necessarily a sign of a tentative style; more likely, it signifies a style where establishing common ground and a positive relationship with other interlocutors are used as part of a strategy toward well-functioning, purposive communication. The present study confirms that relational practice is highly relevant in the use of evidentials in conversation. Features of relational practice, such as producing supportive and affiliative utterances during conversation, have been found more frequent with female speakers (Holmes & Stubbe 1997; Merrill et al. 2015); women have also been found more likely to produce various linguistic features that might indicate greater attention to the relational aspect of communication, such as pronouns and references to thoughts and emotions (Newman et al. 2008). While the qualitative findings of the present study cannot directly corroborate previous quantitative findings on gender differences, it is possible that they are relevant to one another. Since evidential markers are, evidently (!), well suited for relational strategies, it might be that they show up in women’s speech more often because women are more likely to perform relational practice. This interpretation of my results as relating to the findings of previous research would be interesting to explore through future studies of the role of evidentials in gendered performances, for example.

Regarding the significance of this study, it adds to our understanding of the way the ‘core’ function of evidentiality – to signal the speaker’s relationship to and access to evidence for the information in a proposition – relates to the highly salient relational functions of evidentiality, which are often used to maintain someone’s face. Further, the present study not only confirms the findings of others, but also shows, for example, how evidential marking can be used to soften the assertiveness of an utterance, making it possible for a speaker to negotiate and manifest authority in a cooperative manner; the findings of the present study contribute a detailed description of the interplay of themes previously associated with evidentiality in interaction.

Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author.
References


Appendix A

**Table A1. Frequencies and word counts of speakers.**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Number of speakers</th>
<th>Word count</th>
<th>Average word count/speaker</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>FEMALE</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>19,379</td>
<td>523.76</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MALE</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>13,954</td>
<td>422.85</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Table A2. Frequencies of evidential markers in the material.**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Marker</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Marker</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>THINK</td>
<td>55</td>
<td>FIND</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SAY</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>IMAGINE</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>OBVIOUSLY</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>REMEMBER</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SEEM</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>APPARENTLY</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MUST</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>GOTTA BE</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SUPPOSE</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>HEAR</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TELL</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>MIGHT</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td>RECKON</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td>3</td>
<td>SHOULD</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>LOOK</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>TOTAL</td>
<td>149</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Only including the markers that were possible to analyze with regard to relational functions; some markers were not, mainly due to problems with recording quality.*