

(7) expresses overtly the epistemic background that allows the speaker to draw the conclusion that someone is ill. In eastern dialects, sentences like (7) can be supplemented with the hearsay evidential:

- (8) Eri izan behar omen du (*C, E)
 sick be must evid aux
 “Reportedly, (s)he must be ill”

This is not possible in central varieties. In the spirit of Izvorski’s analysis of the Bulgarian inferential evidential, I suggest central *omen* is incompatible with the epistemic background required by *behar* “must”. In other words, central *omen* would be a modal particle with an evidential presupposition requiring the background information to be based on hearsay. Eastern *omen*, on the other hand, would be an independent evidential, whose meaning is calculated in a higher layer of structure.

A subset of eastern varieties, which I will designate as Eastern2, have developed a more flexible syntax for *omen*. In Eastern 2, the evidential occupies positions which are impossible in both central and most of eastern varieties. Consider first the following quotative clause (see Etxepare, 2008, 2010):

- (9) Jendea inguratu zitzaigun. Ezbehar bat gertatua zela.
 People approach aux(past) accident one happen aux(past)-Comp.
 “People approached us. They said that an accident had happened”

The second clause in the sequence is a main clause headed by a declarative complementizer. This root complementizer contributes the meaning that someone else, who is not the speaker, has said that p. In this case, the source of the saying is the people who approached us. *Omen* can merge with the quotative clause in Eastern2:

- (10) Jendea inguratu zaigu. Omen ezbehar bat gertatu dela.
 People approach aux. Evid accident one happen aux-Comp.
 “People approached us. Reportedly, someone said that an accident had happened”

As shown by the translation, the presence of *omen* forces a reading where the source of the saying clause is not the people approaching us, but rather an indeterminate saying. In Eastern2, *omen* can also occur following the auxiliary (without the typical pause associated to parentheticals):

- (11) Langonen zen (omen) bizi (omen)
 Langon-in aux evid live evid
 “Reportedly, she used to live in Langon”

The post-auxiliary cases have an intriguing restriction: they are incompatible with polarity operators *ba-* “yes” and *ez* “no”. Under the presence of those operators, only the pre-auxiliary position is available: (11) Ez (omen) zen (*omen) Langonen bizi

- Neg evid aux evid Langon-in live
 “Reportedly, he didn’t live in Langon”

Haddican (2004, 2008) has shown that polarity operators in Basque are generated in a low polarity head neighbouring the VP. From there, they raise to a higher polarity projection preceding the auxiliary. A natural conclusion is that the incompatibility of post-auxiliary *omen* with negation and affirmation results from their sharing the specifier of the same low polarity projection:

- (11) ...[Neg/aff/evid Pol [VP]]

Since *omen* in those varieties can also occupy a position immediately preceding the Auxiliary Phrase, the syntactic distribution of *omen* in eastern 2 can be summarized as follows:

- (12) a. ...[_{AUXP} Aux⁰ [_{PolP2} Neg/aff/**omen** Pol⁰ [_{VP} VP]]] (see 11)
 b. ...[_{PolP1} Pol⁰ [_{EvidP} **omen** Evid⁰ [_{AUXP} Aux⁰ ...]]] (see 1a)
 c. [_{CP} **Omen** [_{PolP1} Neg/aff Pol⁰ [_{AUXP} Aux...]]-Comp] (see 9)

The positions *omen* can occupy (Spec of CP, of PolP and EvidP) suggest the following generalization:

- (13) Merge *omen* with any functional head encoding a propositional operator

(13) is not unlike the kind of restriction that limits the distribution of adverbial phrases. Some of them being restricted to modify events, and some propositional entities. I suggest that the distribution of *omen* in eastern2 corresponds to an evidential strategy. Eastern 2 seems to be restricted to those areas where an independent noun *omen* exists, meaning “rumor”. Otherwise, *omen* exists as a noun meaning “reputation” in both central and eastern varieties, unrelated to the evidential meaning apparent in the particle. A reasonable conclusion is that Eastern2 represents those cases where an independent nominal merges with whatever head provides the right semantic entity for evidential modification, sayings, truth-operators and evidential sources being plausibly included. If so, the basque dialect continuum presents the full range of the possible structural instantiations for hearsay evidentiality.