Evidentials and evidential strategies in Basque

Hearsay evidentials have been the object of various syntactic and semantic approaches in the recent literature. In the syntactic side, hearsay evidentials have been claimed to occupy a designated position in the clause structure, immediately above epistemic modality (Cinque, 1999). Other proposals, attending to the position of the evidential in closely related varieties, suggest a more flexible approach to their relative position. Blain and Dechaine (2007) show for the Cree dialect continuum that hearsay evidentials can be divided roughly into IP-external and IP-internal ones, with different epistemic overtones in each case. Semantically, evidentials have been argued to make a contribution at an illocutionary level (Faller, 2002, for the Quechua reportative), or a propositional one (Garrett, for Tibetan, 2000; Zubeldia, 2010, for Basque). Among those languages where the hearsay evidential makes a truth-conditional contribution, it is a matter of debate whether hearsay evidentiality is a subspecies of epistemic modality (Garrett, 2000; Izvorski, 1997; Mathewson et alia, 2008) or not (De Haan, 1999). The syntactic expression of evidentiality, on the other hand, must be kept apart from what Aikhenvald calls evidential strategies, or non-grammaticalized ways to convey notions related to source of information. The present paper has as its aim to put the Basque dialectal continuum to task in elucidating these questions. Basque possesses a hearsay evidential particle omen that, when combined with a proposition p, contributes the meaning that someone else has said p (see Zubeldia, 2010; Etxepare, 2010). The particle presents interesting syntactic microvariation in the Basque dialectal spectrum. I will argue that the Basque evidential provides support for a fine-grained subdivision of hearsay evidentiality in closely related subtypes, which range from epistemic modality to an independent category of evidentiality. In this sense, the data support a pluralistic approach to (hearsay) evidentiality, as advocated a.o. by McCready (2008). Consider first the following differences between central (C) and eastern (E) dialects. Omen must merge with the finite auxiliary in central varieties (1a). In eastern ones, the evidential can also show up in non-finite clauses (1b):

(1) a. Etorri omen da (C/E) b. Gazte batzuek omen gauza bera eginik (*C, E)

come evid is

young some-erg evid thing same done-partc

"Reportedly, (S)he arrived" "Some young people reportedly having done the same thing" The finite form is a phonological clitic (Ortiz de Urbina, 94) that can't occur in first position. *Omen* behaves as part of the clitic cluster in central varieties, but can support the auxiliary in eastern ones: (2) Omen da paper, eta bertzerik (*C, E)

evid is paper, and other things

"Reportedly there are papers, and other things"

Unlike in central dialects, in eastern ones omen can be a parenthetical: (3) Etorri da, omen (*C, E)

arrived is evid

"(S)he arrived, they say"

Properties (1)-(3) suggest that the central evidential, unlike the eastern one, is a head. The fact that it is obligatorily related to the presence of a finite auxiliary suggests it is part of its extended projection. None of those properties apply to the eastern evidential. The status of central *omen* as part of the finite morphology is related to another property of central dialects: there, unlike in eastern dialects, *omen* is in complementary distribution with epistemic modality. Two cases will serve to illustrate this. Basque possesses an evidential strategy akin to the epistemic conditionals of Spanish, French or Italian (Squartini, 2004, a.o). Only the eastern evidential is compatible with it:

(4) Ba (omen) litaizke 200 bat lagun desagertuak (*C, E)

Aff evid be-conditional 200 one people disappeared

"Reportedly, there are said to be around 200 people missing"

The complementary distribution of *omen* and epistemic modality in central varieties allows the conclusion that the evidential occupies the same syntactic position of the epistemic modal itself:

(5) Central [MoodP omen [AuxP ...]]

(5) implies that eastern *omen* must be outside the domain of the epistemic modal. A possibility is that *omen* in those cases occupies an independent evidential position, as Cinque wants. (5) should be connected to another difference between central and eastern varieties: only eastern *omen* is compatible with epistemic *must* in Basque. Consider the following clause expressing epistemic modality:

(7) Ikusita zein nekatuta dagoen, bere apetitu falta etabar; gaiso egon behar du seeing how tired she-is her lack of appetite, etc, she must be sick

(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:

- Eri izan behar omen du (*C, E) (8)
 - 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:

Jendea inguratu zaigu. Omen ezbehar bat gertatu dela. (10)

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 saving 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):

Langonen zen (omen) bizi (omen) (11)

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:

- a. ... [$_{AuxP}$ Aux⁰ [$_{PolP2}$ Neg/aff/omen Pol⁰ [$_{VP}$ VP]] (12)(see 11)
 - b. \dots [Pol⁰ [EvidP **omen** Evid⁰ [AuxP Aux⁰...]]] (see 1a)

c. [_{CP} **Omen** [_{PollP1} Neg/aff Pol⁰ [_{AuxP} Aux...]]-Comp] (see 9)

The positions *omen* can occupy (Spec of CP, of PolP and EvidP) suggest the following generalization: Merge *omen* with any functional head encoding a propositional operator (13)

(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.