

# A semantic description of French lexical evidential markers and the classification of evidentials

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The phenomenon of evidentiality has predominantly been considered, especially by authors working within a typological framework, as a primarily grammatical matter. In this research tradition a conscious decision is made in restricting the object of study to *grammatical* evidentials, thereby disregarding *lexical* evidentials. This is no different with Aikhenvald (2004), for whom the semantic study of lexical means expressing source of information is considered a separate task.

In our contribution, we will be concerned precisely with that separate task: the description of evidentiality expressed by lexical means. Our perspective will be different from the one taken by, amongst others, Aikhenvald. Instead of a typological study, we propose an in-depth analysis of a few markers in one language, French. Starting from an analysis of a selection of lexical markers (*trouver, avoir l'impression, penser, croire, paraître* and *sembler*) and two more grammatical markers (*devoir* and the conjectural future), we show first of all that the semantic differences between these constructions can be grasped in terms of 'source of information', and secondly that the classical distinctions on which the common classifications of evidentials are based, however useful they may be, are not fine-grained enough to cover all the fine distinctions between semantically similar lexical expressions.

## 1. Introduction

In the study of evidentiality, some authors, most of them working from a typological perspective, clearly state that the phenomenon of evidentiality is primarily a grammatical one (e.g. Lazard 2000, 2001; De Haan 1997; Jacobsen 1986, etc.). They explicitly limit their work to the description of *grammatical* evidentials, consciously discarding *lexical* evidentials from their research domain. This is also the case with Alexandra Aikhenvald, who states in her recent monograph *Evidentiality* (2004) that she will be "concerned with just grammatical coding of evidentiality [...] which can be realized through bound morphemes, clitics, and words which belong to full grammatical word classes, such as prepositions, preverbs, or particles" (2004:11), all of which are elements belonging to the closed grammatical system. As evidentiality is a category which is defined by its semantics, viz. information source (2004:1), Aikhenvald of course recognizes that evidentiality can be expressed by lexical (and other) means, but considers the

study of lexical means expressing source of information a “separate task” (2004:11).

This thematic issue on *lexical* evidentiality has as its goal this separate task. In this article we will focus on a few lexical<sup>1</sup> items in French that can be considered evidential markers or at least evidential strategies / extensions in Aikhenvald’s (2004:105-151) (and also Willett’s 1988) terminology. Before the evidentiality era, some of the markers studied here were most often described in modal terms or in non-technical evidential-like terms, comprising such notions as conclusion, reasoning, calculus, deduction, supposition, assumption, etc., some of which are now included as semantic subcategories or parameters in the category of evidentiality (see Aikhenvald 2004:63). Our perspective will be necessarily different from the one taken by Aikhenvald. This is not a typological study, aimed to “achieve cross-linguistically valid generalisations” (2004:9), but a semantic in-depth analysis of a few markers in French, a language which Lazard (2001:360) says lacks morphological evidentials and which Aikhenvald (2004:17) says lacks grammatical evidentiality.

The lexical items we will focus on are: *je trouve que* ‘I think, I judge, lit. I find (out)’, *j’ai l’impression que* ‘I have the impression’, *je pense que* ‘I think’, *je crois que* ‘I think, I believe’ in section 2; *paraître* ‘appear’ and *sembler* ‘seem’ in section 3. They will be compared in section 4 with two more grammatical markers: epistemic and alethic *devoir* and conjectural future.

The analysis is meant to show, first, that French has lexical expressions that have some uses that are specialized in expressing the way the speaker acquired the information he is communicating. These uses enter in paradigmatic relationships with other expressions – grammatical or at least more grammaticalized ones – forming one big semantic or conceptual class of expressions used to indicate different kinds of sources of information. Secondly, that the classical distinctions on which the common classifications of evidentials are based (like those by Willett (1988)), or the list of semantic parameters proposed by Aikhenvald (2004:63), do not always cover some of the fine-grained distinctions that a semantic comparison of lexical items with evidential uses can bring to the surface.

## 2. *Trouver* vs. *penser*

In comparison with “more prototypical” evidential markers, like the French conditional mood in its quotative use or the so-called

epistemic use of *devoir* (in the indicative or conditional mood), opinion verbs like *penser* ‘to think’, *croire* ‘to think, to believe’, *trouver* ‘to think, to judge, lit. to find (out)’, *avoir l'impression* ‘to have the impression’, etc. have rarely been studied from an ‘evidential perspective’. In sentences like

- (1) *Je pense / Je crois qu'il est dans son bureau.*  
‘I think he is in his office.’

it is indeed difficult at first glance to decide whether *je pense que / je crois que* ‘I think’ should be considered epistemic modal markers (expressing a certain degree of uncertainty about the truth of a proposition) or as evidential markers (expressing a type of source of information, inference or assumption, for instance). As a consequence, they are rarely accounted for in studies on evidential markers. But if one compares the semantics of *je pense / je crois* ‘I think’ with the semantics of other opinion verbs like *je trouve que* ‘I think, I judge, lit. I find (out)’ or *j'ai l'impression que* ‘I have the impression’, one sees that the difference between those verbal expressions can be described using the “semantic parameters” Aikhenvald (2004:63) proposes for the classification of grammatical evidential markers. That is what we would like to show in this section.

Our starting point is a semantic study on opinion verbs published by Oswald Ducrot more than thirty years ago (Ducrot 1975<sup>2</sup>), which was years before the notion of evidentiality was introduced and studies on the subject became widespread. We will show that certain elements of his description are highly amenable to present-day theories of evidentiality. One could even consider it legitimate to dub Ducrot’s study a work on evidentiality ‘avant la lettre’.

### *2.1. Two uses of trouver and their syntactic constraints*

Ducrot distinguishes between two uses of *trouver*. The type of *trouver* on which he focuses is the one meaning ‘to think, to judge, to have an opinion’. Ducrot refers to this type of *trouver*, illustrated in (2), as *trouver*<sub>1</sub>.

- (2) *Je trouve que Guernica est la plus belle peinture de Picasso.*  
‘I think Guernica is the most beautiful painting by Picasso.’

However, *trouver* can also be used with a different meaning. In (3) the verb means ‘to discover, to find out’. Ducrot designates it as *trouver*<sub>2</sub>.

- (3) Les historiens ont *trouvé que* les Gaulois étaient petits. (Ducrot 1980:62)  
'The historians have found that the Gauls were short.'

When used as *trouver*<sub>2</sub>, the verb indicates that somebody (X) has found evidence (without specifying of what kind) which allows him/her to make the claim p. The discovery is presented as something objective – a fact – which has a truth value. When used as *trouver*<sub>1</sub>, the verb does not present that which X has found out as a fact, but rather gives a personal evaluation, a value judgment by X of the described reality. Ducrot explains the difference between the two as that between a reality judgment (“jugement de réalité”) and a value judgment (“jugement de valeur”) (1980:67).

The semantic distinction between the two instances of *je trouve que* has its corollaries in the syntactic behaviour of the two verbs, as described by Ducrot. For instance *trouver*<sub>1</sub> cannot be modified by an adverbial adjunct of manner like *sans peine* ‘without difficulty, without trouble’ and is excluded from the progressive construction with *être en train de* ‘be -ing’. Thus, it is impossible to say, for example, \**Je trouve*<sub>1</sub> *sans peine que tu es bête de faire ça*, ‘\*I think without trouble that it is stupid of you to do that.’ or \**Je suis en train de trouver*<sub>1</sub> *ce film intéressant*, ‘\*I am finding this film interesting’.

## 2.2. Trouver versus other opinion verbs

In Ducrot’s analysis, *trouver*<sub>1</sub> is compared with a series of other opinion verbs: not only *trouver*<sub>2</sub> ‘to think, to judge, lit. to find (out)’, but also *penser* ‘to think’, *croire* ‘to think, to believe’, *estimer* ‘to estimate’, *juger* ‘to judge’, *considérer* ‘to consider’, *avoir l'impression* ‘to have the impression’ and *être sûr* ‘to be sure’. The author thinks up imaginary situations in which *trouver*<sub>1</sub> may or may not be used, which allows him to determine the verb’s specificity in comparison with the other opinion verbs he studies.

2.2.1. The first of such situations is that of a film the speaker has not seen but about which he has come across some praising reviews. When asked for his opinion about the film, he could say (4),<sup>3</sup> but he would deceive his interlocutor about the “reasons he has for thinking what he thinks” (1980:73) if he used *trouver*<sub>1</sub> and said (5).

- (4) *Je pense que / Je crois que* ce film est intéressant.  
'I think this film is interesting.'  
(5) *Je trouve que* ce film est intéressant.  
'I think (lit. I find) this film is interesting.'

The reason, Ducrot explains (1980:73), is that *je trouve<sub>1</sub> que* (like *j'estime que, je considère que* and *j'ai l'impression que*) signals that the opinion expressed reflects a personal judgment based upon the speaker's own experience with the film.

In the case of (5), where the predicate of the proposition is *est intéressant*,<sup>4</sup> Ducrot states that the experience can be direct (if the speaker has seen the film) or indirect or "mediated" (if the speaker has been extensively told about the film (1980:73)).

*Je pense que* and *je crois que* function differently<sup>5</sup> from *je trouve que*. They can be used if the speaker has not seen the film but relies on reviews or comments on the film, or on other peripheral elements like the cast, the director, the marketing of the film, etc.

For similar reasons as those explaining the use of *trouver* in declarative utterances, a speaker will use *trouver* in (6), instead of *croire / penser* in (7), if he assumes that his interlocutor has personally seen the film:

- (6) *Trouves-tu que ce film est intéressant?*  
'Do you find this film interesting?'
- (7) *Penses-tu / Crois-tu que ce film est intéressant?*  
'Do you think this film is interesting?'

In other words, *trouver, penser, croire* can also be used in questions, where they anticipate the way in which the speaker expects the hearer to have access to the information which allows him/her to express an opinion on a certain object (in this case a film), which confirms what Floyd (1999) said about Wanka Quechua evidentials in questions (see also Aikhenvald 2004:245-248).

2.2.2. A second situation, adapted from Ducrot, illustrates the semantic differences between *je pense que / je crois que* on the one hand and *j'ai l'impression que* on the other hand. Suppose a friend has told you, with the authority of an expert, that the MP3-players of brand X are of a rather bad quality and that you had better buy an MP3-player of another brand. Without any additional knowledge, you can pass on the advice to another friend by saying:

- (8) *Je crois que<sup>6</sup> ces appareils ne sont pas solides.*  
'I think that those players are not reliable.'

In the same situation, the use of *j'ai l'impression que* would be inappropriate; this verbal expression would, however, be perfectly suited for expressing an opinion based on a series of complaints

that the speaker has heard about the quality of the MP3-player and which he regards as empirical evidence from which he draws his own conclusion (without, however, personally having tested the player):

- (9) *J'ai l'impression que ces appareils ne sont pas solides.*  
'I have the impression that those players are not reliable.'

Applied to the examples about the film, (4) and (5), *j'ai l'impression que* could be used if the opinion that the speaker expresses about the film was based, for instance, on a series of reviews he read about it, or on his own observation of the reactions of the viewers of the previous screening (Ducrot 1980:74):

- (10) *J'ai l'impression que ce film est intéressant.*  
'I have the impression that this film is interesting.'

In Ducrot's analysis of those markers, *je crois que* can be used as a marker of NON-PERSONAL experience by the speaker; *j'ai l'impression que*, by contrast, is necessarily a marker of PERSONAL experience by the speaker. The comparison of (8) with (9) and (4) with (10) shows, according to Ducrot, that we have to distinguish between "two different ways of founding one's opinion on another's opinion" (1980:74). The first way is to consider the other's opinion as "an authority, which counts as a substitute for the personal judgment of the speaker" (1980:74). In that case *je crois que* is appropriate. *Je crois que* is not a marker of personal experience by the speaker. The second way is to take the other's opinion as "a clue, a sign, and, therefore, a basis for a personal judgment" (1980:74). In that case *j'ai l'impression que* can be used. It is a marker of personal experience of the speaker. In Ducrot's example comments by reviewers and observation of viewers' reactions are to be considered as clues or signs, as "an experience from which conclusions are drawn by the speaker following an inductive process" (1980:74-75) rather than as authorities.

2.2.3. Let us now turn to the similarities and differences between *je trouve que* and *j'ai l'impression que*, as illustrated by (5) and (10). What they have in common, according to Ducrot, is that they both imply the speaker's personal experience with the described object or fact on which a personal judgment is based. This feature, as we have seen before, is what distinguishes these two expressions from *je crois que / je pense que*, which are appropriate when the speaker has no personal experience on which to base his judgment.

What sets apart *je trouve que* from *j'ai l'impression que* is the fact that the personal judgment in the case of *je trouve que* is founded on an experience "of the thing itself"<sup>7</sup> (1980:75-76), whereas the judgment in the case of *j'ai l'impression que* is based on circumstantial, tangential elements which are linked in one way or another to the thing (e.g. its causes and effects), but which are in fact external to it (e.g. the success of a film, its cast, its plotline, etc.). This distinction is described by Ducrot in terms of a contrast between 'intrinsic judgment' and 'extrinsic judgment' (Ducrot 1980:75ff). Ducrot contends that a verb like *trouver*<sub>1</sub> requires such an intrinsic judgment. An extrinsic judgment does not entail such a direct experience with the thing itself, but rather experience with something tangential to it (a restriction to this last point will be presented below in 2.3.1.).

2.2.4. Now a final word on the difference between *croire* and *penser*, which is not really discussed in full length in Ducrot (1980). In the overview of opinion verbs at the end of the article the author just uses the feature [+/- product of a reflection] to differentiate between them. Some elements of their difference however can be found in Martin (1988), for whom *penser* is a verb of judgment, always implying a construction of the mind, a conclusion formed on the basis of evidence, incompatible with direct perception. If I notice that John is back, I cannot say, without being insincere or ironic:<sup>8</sup>

- (11) \**Je pense que* / \**Je crois que* Jean est de retour.  
'I think John is back.'

*Croire*, on the other hand, is a verb of (uncertain) knowledge for Martin (1988:548) signalling that the speaker has some information that can make him take responsibility for p as a plausible proposition. *Croire* is used instead of *penser* when only the reliability of p is at stake. This is illustrated by the contrast between the following two sentences (Martin 1988:548):

- (12) a. *Je pense que* c'était en 1978.  
'I think it was in 1978.'  
b. *Je crois que* c'était en 1978.  
'I think (lit. 'I believe') it was in 1978.'

*Je pense que* will be used when the speaker tries to reconstruct the moment when the event occurred on the basis of certain clues. *Je crois que* merely expresses that the speaker has wavering knowl-

edge about the time the event took place and hazards a guess at what seems plausible to him.

### 2.3. Evidential markers?

Although Ducrot's analysis dates from before the development of the theoretical apparatus for the study of evidentiality, it shows an awareness of the importance of different types of evidence for the choice of an opinion verb and it contains elements (see in particular 1980:72-75) that can be rather easily 'translated' into what we now call evidentiality. The question is thus: to what extent can the opinion markers under investigation be considered lexical evidential markers?

2.3.1. Amongst the different opinion verbs described by Ducrot *je trouve que* (*trouver*<sub>1</sub>) seems to be the best candidate for the status of evidential marker. We have seen that constraints apply as to the type of evidence on which an utterance with *je trouve que* can be founded. In the example of the film, *je trouve<sub>1</sub> que* signals that the speaker has (or has had) a direct (or an indirect) experience of the film. We have seen that by indirect experience in the case of *je trouve que* in (5) Ducrot understands for instance a detailed description of the film, which can be considered a viable substitute for personal experience with the film itself. What Ducrot probably means is that we can say (13) not only in case we have seen or we see John, but also in case we have for instance seen a picture of him:

- (13) *Je trouve que* Jean est grand.  
'I think John is tall.'

If we modify Ducrot's example (5) and replace *est intéressant* by a predicate that describes a more visual or visible aspect of an object, like *est beau* 'is beautiful' (14), *je trouve que* is only compatible with direct experience and there seems to be no good substitute for example (14) (the way an extensive description of the film is in example (5)) that would allow Ducrot to talk of indirect personal experience. That would also be the case with a predicate like *bon* 'good' in (15):

- (14) *Je trouve que* c'est un beau film / un film très bien fait / un film très drôle.  
'I think it is a beautiful film / a very well made film / a very funny film.'
- (15) *Je trouve que* c'est un bon film.  
'I think it is a good film.'

The use of *je crois que* or *je pense que* in comparable contexts shows that the contrast between *je trouve que* and *je crois que / je pense que* can indeed be ascribed, in a first analysis, to a contrast of direct evidence versus non-direct evidence.<sup>9</sup>

- (16) *Je crois que / Je pense que c'est un beau film / un film très bien fait / très drôle.*  
'I think it is a beautiful film / a very well made film / a very funny film.'  
(17) *Je crois que / Je pense que c'est un bon film.*  
'I think it is a good film.'

The following examples show that there seems to be no restriction on the type of direct evidence that the verbal expression *je trouve que* refers to. Depending on the situation, it may be visual, auditory or otherwise sensory (tasting, smelling, feeling). *Je trouve que* is compatible with all of these types of direct evidence without in fact specifically indicating any one of them:

- (18) *Je trouve que cette petite robe à pois te va très bien.* (Victor Hugo 1866, in *Frantext*)  
'I think this dotted dress suits you very well.'  
(19) *Je trouve que cette chanson est pleine de sensibilité, de mélodie et de rythme.* ([www.bide-et-musique.com/song/715.html](http://www.bide-et-musique.com/song/715.html), 19/10/2006)  
'I think this song is full of sensibility, melody and rhythm.'  
(20) *Je trouve que le vin est pauvre malgré tout. La finale est correcte, un peu sèche mais pas forcément désagréable.* (<http://www.lapassionduvin.com/phorum/11/06/2006>)  
'I think in spite of everything the wine is of poor quality. The after-taste is right, a bit dry but not necessarily disagreeable.'  
(21) *Eh bien, mes amis, je trouve que vous puez drôlement l'eau bénite.* (Eric Rohmer 1969 in *Frantext*)  
'Well, my friends, I think you strangely smell of holy water.'  
(22) *J'ai conservé une très grande tendresse pour les croissants. Je trouve que leur forme, leur croustillance, leur bonne chaleur, ont quelque chose de sympathique et d'amical.* (Romain Gary 1960, in *Frantext*)  
'I have retained a strong predilection for croissants. I think there is something sympathetic and friendly to their shape, their crustiness, their pleasant warmth.'

The conclusion we can draw from all this is that *je trouve que* (*trouver<sub>r</sub>*) can be considered an evidential marker of direct evidence, unmarked as for the specific type of direct evidence. This is further confirmed by the acceptability contrast between the sentences in (23) and (24):

- (23) Ayant vu ce film, *je le trouve* très beau.  
'Having seen the film, I think it is very beautiful.'
- (24) a. N'ayant pas vu ce film, *\*?je le trouve* (toutefois) très beau.  
'Not having seen the film, I find it very beautiful (nevertheless).'
- b. *Je trouve que* c'est un beau film, *\*?bien que* je ne l'aie pas vu.  
'I think it is a beautiful film, although I haven't seen it.'

Another indication in support of an analysis of *je trouve que* as direct evidence marker is the difficulty or impossibility of using it when direct evidence of the described situation is chronologically impossible, as in the (a) version of the following example, where *je pense que* is the normal alternative:

- (25) a. *\*Je trouve qu'il fera* beau demain. (Ducrot 1980:57)  
'\*I think (lit. I find) the weather will be nice tomorrow.'
- b. *Je pense qu'il fera* beau demain.  
'I think the weather will be nice tomorrow.'

*Je trouve que* is however a direct evidence marker of a special kind because of the additional feature [+ evaluative], which, in contrast to a lexical marker like *J'ai vu que / je vois*, restricts its use to predicates that can be interpreted in a scalar way and makes its use very difficult in cases like (26), where there is hardly any possibility of scalar interpretation:

- (26) a. *?\*Je trouve qu'il est* à l'université.  
'?\*I think (lit. 'I find') he is at the university.'
- b. *J'ai vu / Je vois qu'il est* à l'université.  
'I have seen / I see that he is at the university.'
- (27) a. *?\*Je trouve qu'il est* mort.  
'?\*I think (lit. 'I find') he is dead.'
- b. Il est mort, *j'ai vu / je vois*  
'He is dead, I have seen / I see.'

2.3.2. The evidential status of *je crois que / je pense que* is less straightforward. One interpretation of (16) and (17), as we have seen, is that the speaker did not see the film himself/herself, but bases his/her claims on peripheral elements related to the film (the star-studded cast, comments on the film, a description of the making of the film, reactions to it, etc.). Such tangential evidence may take the shape of results from which one can infer the cause, i.e. the thing itself. If you see hordes of people queuing up for a particular film, you may consider this as the result of the fact that it is a very good film.

In such a situation *je crois que* / *je pense que* would be interpreted, evidentially, as non-direct evidence markers (probably inference). If we combine this conclusion with Martin's conclusion (1988) on those two markers (see above), we have to say that the judgment marker *je pense que* would be a better example of evidential inference marker, than *je crois que*, because it expresses a construction of the mind (see the feature [personal reflexion] in Ducrot's overview).

Nevertheless, both sentences are not impossible when the speaker has indeed seen the film personally. And even (20) and (21) can get a natural interpretation when they are used while the speaker is tasting or smelling something. We can say that in that case both *je crois que* and *je pense que* function as epistemic modal markers, signalling the hesitation or uncertainty of the speaker in deciding whether something tastes or smells such and such, the main difference between them being that with *je pense que* it seems to take more intellectual processing than with *je crois que*.<sup>10</sup> With that interpretation, (28) is acceptable despite the marking of direct evidence in the first part of the sentence:

- (28) *J'ai goûté ce vin. Je crois qu'il n'est plus bon.*  
'I have tasted this wine. *I think* it is not good any more.'

2.3.3. When it comes to the evidential status of *j'ai l'impression que* there is a problem. On the one hand its use is based on personal experience of the speaker; on the other hand the experience does not concern the thing itself but experience of peripheral elements of the thing and thus in a certain sense indirect evidence, comparable to the one implied by *je crois que*.

Do the existing evidential categories or parameters suffice to unequivocally classify *j'ai l'impression que*? At first sight it seems to fall in between direct evidence (impressions) and inference. In our view however it is closer to *je crois que* / *je pense que* than to *je trouve que*. It is difficult to say (29), parallel to (18) with *je trouve que*, if the lady is wearing the dress, but the same expression could be used with future reference and creates a meaning comparable with the one that could be expressed with inferential *devoir* (see below in section 4):

- (29) \**J'ai l'impression que cette petite robe à pois te va très bien.*  
'I have the impression that this dotted dress suits you very well.'  
(30) *J'ai l'impression que cette petite robe à pois t'ira très bien.*  
'I have the impression that this dotted dress will suit you very well.'  
(31) *Cette petite robe à pois doit t'aller très bien.*  
'This dotted dress must suit you very well.'

Therefore we would consider *j'ai l'impression que* a non-direct evidence marker rather than a direct evidence marker. What the semantics of this expression teaches us is that when there is mention of 'direct evidence' in evidentiality studies, one has to understand 'personal evidence of the thing itself' rather than 'personal evidence of the thing itself or of peripheral elements linked to the thing'. Staying with the film example, these peripheral elements can be reports on the film that the speaker has personally read or reactions to it he has personally observed, but in both cases they count as clues on which the speaker bases his personal conclusion or inference leading to the expressed judgment. This distinction is paralleled in a certain sense by the one made by Willett (1988:61) between an assertion based on the perception of the actual occurrence of an event (direct evidence) and an assertion about its supposed occurrence based on the perception of its end result (indirect evidence).

### 3. *Paraître versus sembler*

3.1. In French linguistics *paraître* 'appear' and *sembler* 'seem' are often treated as a pair (see Nølke 1994; Bourdin 1986; Thuillier 2004a, 2004b), because in certain contexts they can both be used with semantic values that seem very similar, meaning roughly something like 'seem' (appearance):

- (32) a. Il *paraît* plus jeune que sa voisine.  
'He appears younger than his neighbour.'  
b. Il *semble* plus jeune que sa voisine.  
'He seems younger than his neighbour.'

But as we will see, this context is only one of the possible contexts in which the two verbs can appear, and even in those contexts the two verbs do not function semantically in the same way.

3.2. Let us first take *paraître*. It is generally known that *il paraît que* (or its parenthetical variants *paraît-il*, *à ce qui paraît*) can be used as a marker indicating that the speaker has acquired the information through a report by somebody else or has picked it up from rumours (e.g. Ducrot 1984:154; Bourdin 1986:55; Thuillier 2004a:30). *Il paraît que*, with the impersonal pronoun *il*, clearly functions as an evidential marker of the type 'reported'. It does not specify the source from which the information was taken. By default, it is thus to be

interpreted as a marker of hearsay information, akin to the parenthetical use of *dit-on* 'it is said' in (34) (cf. Bourdin 1986:55):<sup>11</sup>

- (33) a. *Il paraît qu'il a un enfant illégitime.*  
b. *Il a, paraît-il, un enfant illégitime.*  
'He allegedly has an illegitimate child.'  
c. *Alors, tu vas nous quitter, à ce qui paraît.* (Joseph Zobel, 1950 in *Frantext*)  
'So, you are going to leave us, it seems.'
- (34) *Fils, dit-on, d'un père païen et d'une mère chrétienne, il ne fut baptisé que tardivement.* (Jean-Bertrand Ontalis, 1998, in *Frantext*)  
'Being the son, as they say, of a pagan father and a Christian mother, he was baptized rather late.'

In the French literature on reported speech there is no clear position as to whether to consider such parentheticals with communication verbs (*dit-il*, 'he says/said' and *dit-on*, 'it is said') as markers of reported speech or as markers of "modalisation en discours second" ('modalization by reference to another discourse'), as Authier-Revuz calls them. The latter she considers as evidentials (Authier-Revuz 2004:42).

In this use, *il paraît que* and its variants are often equated to the reported use of the conditional mood in French (see Bourdin 1986:55; Ducrot 1984:154; Authier-Revuz 1992:39, amongst others), which has also been characterized as an evidential marker by Dendale (1993) (see also Guentchéva 1994) or a 'mixed' marker (i.e. an evidential and non-commitment marker) by Kronning (2002; 2005).<sup>12</sup>

3.3. According to Bourdin (1986:55-56), *sembler* can also be used in a similar context as a marker of "jugement à base extra-subjective" ('judgment on an extra-subjective basis'), i.e. a reported value, having then the same sense as *il paraît que*:

- (35) *Il paraît que / Il semble que les combats ont été violents.*  
'Allegedly the battles were fierce.'

In contrast with *il paraît que*, impersonal *il semble que* can also express "un jugement à base subjective" ('a judgment on a subjective basis'). According to Bourdin, in COPULAR constructions the subjective basis can be direct and immediate perception, giving rise to an evaluative judgment (36); in infinitive and impersonal constructions the subjective basis is reasoning and the judgment appears as a conjecture or supposition (37) and (38).

- (36) Sur cette photo, Tom *semble* âgé  
'In this photograph, Tom seems old.'
- (37) D'après les documents trouvés sur elle, la victime *semble* être danoise  
'Judging by the documents found on her, the victim seems to be Danish.'
- (38) D'après les documents trouvés sur elle, il *semble* que la victime soit/  
est danoise  
'Judging by the documents found on her, it seems that the victim is Danish.'

3.4. *Paraître* can also be used with a personal subject, like *sembler* in the three last examples (see also (32a)). According to Thuillier (2004a), the verb is used to explicitate the impressions or sensations a certain state of affairs gives to a subject (by default the speaker). When saying *Jean paraît fatigué* 'John appears tired', the speaker does not describe the tired person directly, but he describes the impression of tiredness the person makes on him (and possibly on others).

*Sembler* in similar contexts with a personal subject merely expresses, according to Thuillier, conjecture or hypothesis (this is perfectly compatible with the analysis of Bourdin). In an assertion it poses p but leaves open the possibility of non-p, because the speaker is not sure of p (2004a:28; 2004b). When using *sembler* in (36) the speaker formulates a judgment on the age of Tom, which he signals may be wrong (true *versus* untrue); when using *paraître* he would signal the impression of age Tom makes on him (appearance *versus* reality).

The described semantic difference between the two verbs explains amongst other things the awkwardness of replacing *paraître* by *sembler* in a sentence like (39), where impressions can be at stake but not conjecture:

- (39) Il *paraissait* / *\*semblait* plus jeune encore que la première fois que l'avait rencontré Julius. (Gide, cited by Thuillier 2004a:28)  
'He appeared / seemed younger than the first time that Julius met him.'

It is indeed difficult to formulate the HYPOTHESIS that the person in (39) is younger at a certain moment than he was before, but it is perfectly possible to claim that the person makes the IMPRESSION on the speaker of being younger at a certain moment in time than he did before.

3.5 Are *paraître* and *sembler* evidential markers? The answer depends upon the construction. For the impersonal *il paraît que* the evidential value reported is beyond doubt. The impersonal construc-

tion with *sembler*, as we have seen, does not have a clear reported value on its own; it is contextually perfectly compatible with a reported interpretation but it can nevertheless have another interpretation, expressing a personal hypothesis or analysis of the speaker based on reasoning. In that sense it is close to inferential evidentials, but clearly different from the type of inferential evidential that *devoir* is (see below in section 4). All things considered it seems to be an Indirect evidence evidential.

As for the personal copular construction, illustrated by (32), (36) and (39), the question is how to classify an evaluative judgment based on direct and immediate perception. It is difficult to consider it a prototypical visual (or other sensory) marker: *Il paraît / semble jeune* 'He appears / seems young' is semantically not equivalent to *Il est jeune, à ce que je vois* 'He is young, as I see', the difference being the one explained above as that between a speaker as an observer and a speaker as a recipient of impressions. As Thuillier (2004a:20) puts it in his unitary semantics of the verb, *paraître* fundamentally implies that an entity or state of affairs X is not perceived itself, but is apprehended (seen, known, ...) by the perceiving subject through another entity Y that serves as intermediary (e.g. impressions or a verbal report). This definitional distance between what a certain entity is and the impression it evokes is responsible, according to Thuillier, for the modal value or overtone of uncertainty that *paraître* creates, but does not make it, in our view, necessarily an inferential marker.

*Ssembler* in personal constructions, finally, also has a clear modal component, but the semantic mechanism underlying it is different from the one for *paraître*. It is more directly a modal marker, expressing a certain degree of uncertainty, without being an evidential or evidential-like marker first. In this use it is semantically comparable with *je crois que*:

- (40) a. Ce vin *semble* bon.  
'That wine seems good.'  
(41) b. *Je crois que* ce vin est bon.  
'I think that wine is good.'

#### *4. Epistemic devoir and conjectural future*

4.1. *Devoir* in French, like *must* in English, has traditionally been considered a modal verb. It has been attributed deontic uses, expressing obligation or necessity of action, and epistemic uses, expressing

the probability of a state of affairs. Besides those two traditionally distinguished types of use (see e.g. Huot 1974; Sueur 1979, 1983), Kronning (1996, 2001), quite originally, distinguishes a third type of use of *devoir*, which he calls the *alethic use*. Here are a few examples of alethic uses of *devoir*<sub>A</sub> he gives (1996:115-116):

- (42) Un nombre premier *doit*<sub>A</sub> être impair.  
'A prime number must be uneven.'
- (43) Les candidats *doivent*<sub>A</sub> avoir moins de 52 ans au moment de la nomination.  
'Candidates must be under 52 years of age at the time of nomination.'
- (44) Est-ce de la Galilée que le Christ *doit*<sub>A</sub> venir?  
'Is it from Galilee that Christ must come?'

Kronning also considers the use of *devoir* as an auxiliary verb expressing future tense to be an alethic use, be it one of alethic necessity "latu senso" (2001:74). It expresses a planned future, a necessity within a restricted "modal universe". Squartini (2004) has shown that this use of *devoir* can be considered a reported evidential marker:<sup>13</sup>

- (45) Shimon Peres est arrivé hier à Paris. Il *doit*<sub>A</sub> s'entretenir ce matin à l'Elysée avec le président François Mitterrand, quelques heures avant l'intervention télévisée de ce dernier. (Kronning 2001:74)  
'Shimon Peres arrived in Paris yesterday. He is due to meet president François Mitterrand this morning at the Elysée, some hours before the latter's televised speech.'

In Kronning's description, alethic and epistemic *devoir* are described as both expressing 'necessity of being' (*nécessité d'être*) as their inherent semantic meaning. In the case of the epistemic use, this necessity is then pragmatically weakened into a probability because of the fact that the necessity is not "expressed" – not asserted (like in the alethic use) – but only "shown" (2001:71). Furthermore alethic *devoir* differs from epistemic *devoir* in syntactic respects<sup>14</sup>: it can appear in presuppositions and in subordinate sentences with *puisque*, whereas epistemic *devoir* cannot:

- (46) a. \*Paul n'a pas pu venir puisqu'il *doit*<sub>E</sub> être malade.  
'\*Paul was not able to come, because he must be ill.'
- b. Et je doute que le tome cinq, *puisque* il *doit*<sub>A</sub> être la suite directe du tome quatre, parvienne à rétablir la situation. (Based on an example on the Internet<sup>15</sup>)

‘And I doubt that volume five, as it must immediately follow volume four, will succeed in establishing the situation.’

- (47) a. \*Quand est-ce que Paul *doit<sub>E</sub>* travailler?  
 ‘\*When must Paul be working?’  
 b. Que *doivent<sub>A</sub>* être l’homme et le monde pour que le rapport soit possible entre eux? (Cited in Kronning 1996:18)  
 ‘What must mankind and the world be like in order for a relationship of understanding between the two to be possible?’

Some sentences with *devoir* seem ambiguous between an epistemic and an alethic use. This is the case with (48), which Dendale (1994:34) had analyzed as an example of *epistemic* use, but which is interpreted by Kronning (2001:70) as an analytically true *alethic* use:

- (48) Cette figure *doit* être un cercle puisque la distance de chaque point de la circonférence au centre est identique.  
 ‘That figure must be a circle as the distance to the centre is the same for every point on the circumference.’

(48) can indeed be used to formulate the hypothesis that a certain figure is a circle (*epistemic*) or to assert the analytic necessity of it being a circle (*alethic*). Compare for instance the two occurrences of *doit* in:

- (49) – Où est l’échelle?  
 – Elle *doit<sub>E</sub>* être au garage. C’est là que le jardinier la range normalement.  
 – Eh ben non, elle n’y est pas, j’ai vérifié.  
 – Mais, enfin, elle *doit<sub>A</sub>* être là, puisque je l’y ai vue ce matin. Cherche mieux!  
 ‘–Where is the ladder?  
 – It must be in the garage. That is where the gardener normally stores it.  
 – Actually no, it is not there. I checked.  
 – For heaven’s sake, it must be there, because I saw it there this morning. Take a better look!’

The second occurrence of *doit* is most probably an example of its *alethic* use. It seems to display the syntactic properties that Kronning formulated for alethic *devoir*: *doit<sub>A</sub>* in this sense can appear in a clause introduced by the connector *puisque* and within the presuppositional scope of a wh-question:

- (50) Ce matin, j'ai mis l'échelle dans le garage. Elle doit (donc) y être. Et *puisqu'elle doit* être là, tu vas la trouver!  
'This morning, I put the ladder in the garage. (So) it must still be there. And since the ladder must be there, you will find it.'
- (51) *Pourquoi* selon toi *doit-elle* être là  
'Why, according to you, should it be there?'

The meaning of alethic *devoir* in (42)-(44), (48) and (49) (2<sup>nd</sup> occurrence)<sup>16</sup>, can be paraphrased as 'it is not possible that non-p / it is excluded that non-p'. Unlike epistemic *devoir*, alethic *devoir* is not only to be considered an integral part of the content or dictum of the sentence (Kronning 2001:72), but it can also be the main predication of the sentence (rather than a peripheral or parenthetical element), in the same way that *c'est impossible* 'it is impossible' can, e.g. in (52). In that case it carries the primary stress of the sentence, as is the case in (49)(2<sup>nd</sup> occurrence) (see Kronning 1996:69).

- (52) Qu'elle ne soit pas là *est impossible!*  
'That it is not there is impossible!'

4.2. All these elements seem to suggest themselves as arguments in favour of considering alethic *devoir* as a modal marker rather than an evidential marker.

This conclusion does not hold however for epistemic *doit* in (49). When using the verb epistemically, the speaker neither asserts nor presupposes the necessity of p (or the impossibility of non-p); he uses *devoir* as a marker that signals that the available information compels his mind<sup>17</sup> to draw the conclusion p (see Sweetser 1982:493; cf. also Kronning 1996:102). If epistemic *devoir* signals that p has the status of a conclusion someone was compelled to draw, we understand why it is systematically interpreted as a marker of inference or reasoning and considered a true evidential (see Dendale 1994), expressing inference, "based on visible or tangible evidence, or result" (Aikhenvald 2004:63, example (53)) or assumption, "based on evidence other than visible or results, which may include logical reasoning, assumption, or simply general knowledge" (Aikhenvald 2004:63, example (54)):

- (53) Les commandos de l'île Pebble *n'ont pas dû détruire* tous les bombardiers Pucara, car ce seront les premiers avions argentins à fondre sur la flotte de débarquement (*Le Point*, cited in Dendale 1994:24)  
'The Pebble Island commandos cannot (lit. must not) have eliminated all Pucara bombers, as the latter will be the first Argentinian aircraft to attack the landing fleet.'

- (54) *J'ai dû* quitter ma maison à 8 heures, comme je fais toujours.  
'I must have left my house at eight, because I always do' (Abba, *The day before you came*)

4.2. Let us briefly mention here that in most of the sentences above, including the two in footnote 13, epistemic (inferential) *devoir* can be replaced by adverbial markers like *sûrement* or *certainement* 'surely', which are derived from the adjectives 'sure' and 'certain', but which do not simply express certainty, as do the impersonal constructions *il est sûr que* / *il est certain que*, but rather probability plus inference by the speaker (see Downing 2001).

- (55) – Où est l'échelle? – Elle est *sûrement* / *certainement* au garage.  
'– Where is the ladder? – lit. It is surely in the garage.'

4.3. Inferential *devoir* has often been semantically paired to the conjectural future, which can indeed have the same global effect of expressing inference or assumption, as is shown in:

- (56) a. Il n'est toujours pas là. Il *aura* oublié le rendez-vous.  
'He is still not here. He has probably forgotten (lit. will have forgotten) the appointment.'  
b. Il n'est toujours pas là. Il *a dû* oublier le rendez-vous.  
'He is still not here. He must have forgotten the appointment.'

The semantic mechanism underlying the use of the conjectural future is, however, completely different from the one underlying epistemic *devoir*, as are the pragmatic effects and the pragmatic potential of the two markers. As was shown in Tasmowski & Dendale (1998) and in Dendale (2001), the conjectural future is a marker of future commitment to the proposition or of future confirmation or verification of the described state of affairs (as was shown by, amongst others, Vet 1983:202; Martin 1983:129; Schrott 1997:294). In the conjectural future, the future tense is not used *de re* to designate future states of affairs, but *de dicto*, i.e. at the level of the speech act of assertion (Martin 1987:117). The inferential or purely speculative reading it generally gives rise to stems from the fact that any information created by the speaker but which he cannot verify at the moment of speaking, must be inferred information.

For us, contrarily to Squartini's position (2001; 2005), the conjectural future is not an evidential marker. It is a more a kind of assertion marker or alethic marker (saying something about the truth value of the proposition), but one that can be used in an evidential strategy.

## 5. Conclusion

In this article we presented and described a set of lexical items expressing in one way or another the kind of source of information on which the speaker is basing his assertion. These items in French range from verbs of perception (*je vois (que)*, ‘I see’), parenthetical constructions with verbs of perception, with verbs of saying (*dit-on*, ‘it is said’) or with verbs of appearance (*à ce que je vois*, ‘as far as I can see’, *à ce qu’il paraît*, ‘it seems’), to personal constructions with ‘auxiliary’ verbs (*X paraît*, *X semble* ‘X appears, X seems’, epistemic *devoir*, ‘must’, to fixed impersonal verbal expressions (*il paraît que* ‘it is said’ (lit. ‘it appears’), *il semble que* ‘it seems’), certain adverbs (*certainement*, *sûrement* ‘surely’ indicating an inferential process accomplished by the speaker rather than a degree of certainty, and prepositional phrases (*selon*, *d’après*, *pour* + NP or pronoun).

Across the boundaries set up by linguists between grammatical items and lexical items (or even pragmatic devices) these expressions enter into paradigmatic relations within the semantic field of evidentiality of which speakers avail to meet their communicative goals.

Talking about John’s tallness for instance (*John est très grand* ‘John is very tall’) we can find a whole range of evidential expressions, some of them studied above: *Je trouve que John est très grand* ‘I think (lit. I find) John is very tall’, *John est très grand, à ce que je vois* ‘John is very tall, as I see’, *John paraît très grand* ‘John appears very tall’, *John (me) semble très grand* ‘John seems very tall (to me)’, *Il paraît que John est très grand* ‘Allegedly John is very tall’, *Il semble que John est très grand* ‘It seems that John is very tall’, *John est très grand, dit-on* ‘John is very tall, they say’, *John serait très grand* ‘John is said to be very tall’, *John doit être très grand* ‘John must be very tall’, *John est sûrement très grand* ‘John is certainly very tall’, *Je pense / Je crois que John est très grand* ‘I think / I believe John is very tall’, *J’ai l’impression que John est très grand* ‘I have the impression that John is very tall’.

We focused on a few expressions in French that were seldom or never analysed in terms of evidentiality. We saw that some of those markers can be classified rather easily within the existing evidential categories: *je trouve que* can be considered a direct evidence marker – albeit appearing only with an evaluative content – epistemic *devoir* an inference marker, *il paraît que* and the conditional reported markers.

For some other markers classification within the existing evidential categories is less straightforward. This is the case with the copular constructions *X paraît* + adjective (and to a lesser extent with *X semble que* + adjective). Impressions cannot simply be considered

circumstantial evidence from which the speaker draws inferences giving rise to an inferential evidential like *devoir*, but neither can they be simply considered pure direct evidence markers like *I see, I hear, I smell, ...*. As we saw before, in the case of *paraître* the speaker is not presented as an observer but as a recipient of impressions. The expression *j'ai l'impression que* that we studied above also has to do with impressions, but differently, because the impressions do not concern the described object or state of affairs itself, but peripheral elements. Therefore in the final analysis it would be better classified as an inference marker than as a direct perception marker. As for the distinction between *je pense que* and *je crois que*, two expressions that can both be considered inferential markers in certain contexts (namely when the speaking subject does not himself experience the situation he is describing), it seems to be linked to the feature [+ reflexive] or [+ reasoning]. Because of the presence of that feature, *Je pense que* appears to be more properly an inferential evidential than *je crois que*.

What was also confirmed here is that lexical evidentiality has in common with grammatical evidentiality the fact that often a mainly evidential marker has modal overtones. So-called epistemic *devoir* for instance systematically signals high certainty, the conditional by default low certainty. Some markers, like *je crois que*, have purely modal uses besides evidential ones, as we showed with example (28). The same holds true, as we have seen, for *sembler* in copular constructions (see example (40)).

Other markers studied here were shown to be basically modal markers: alethic *devoir* for instance, the conjectural future, which we showed had better be considered an alethic or (future) commitment marker (and thus a marker that certain scholars would include in the class of modal markers) than a real inferential marker.

A last point we would like to stress is that this study showed that lexical evidential markers sometimes have extra semantic features that cannot be placed within the existing classifications based on grammatical evidentiality. This was the case, as we saw, with *trouver*, which was shown to be a direct evidence marker, but a marker that also has the necessary feature [+ evaluative].

If, from a certain perspective, one can indeed consider the study of lexical evidentiality a “separate task”, as Alexandra Aikhenvald put it, it is a task that we think should not be neglected. Descriptions of lexical evidentials can offer inspiring insights into the description parameters of both grammatical evidentiality and lexical modality, because of the semantic complexity and polysemous character of lexical items.

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## Notes

<sup>1</sup> Where is the boundary between lexical elements and grammatical elements? There is no clear answer to this question in Aikhenvald's book. Apparently the fact that auxiliary verbs like *devoir* are highly grammaticalized (see Kronning 1996) is not an argument for Aikhenvald to treat them as grammatical markers.

<sup>2</sup> Ducrot's study first appeared in *Semantikos* in 1975 and was later republished as a chapter in his 1980 book *Les mots du discours*. In the current article, our references are to the more easily accessible 1980 version of the study.

<sup>3</sup> In English, the use of *I believe* would suit this situation; Van Bogaert (2006) characterizes (a specific type of) *I believe* as a reportive evidential which can be paraphrased as *I am told / I have read / people say*. The following example illustrates the 'common lore' character that *I believe* can have:

- (i) I suppose, I said, that he had formed an attachment to some young woman in London – what is termed, *I believe*, a popsie. (ICE-GB:W2F-011: 81)

The speaker has picked up on the slang word *popsie*, the meaning of which is intersubjectively shared in a speech community and as such belongs to the 'common lore' and by implication to the evidential category of reported evidence.

<sup>4</sup> We will see further that Ducrot's analysis can be formulated even more strictly with other predicates, like *is beautiful*, *is tasty*, etc.

<sup>5</sup> Further down we will see how the two verbs can be more finely differentiated.

<sup>6</sup> In contrast to the previous example, where both *je pense que* and *je crois que* were compared to *je trouve que*, Ducrot only discusses the use of *je crois que* for this example. According to Martin (1988:549) *croire* can be founded on three types of "reasons to believe": objectively perceivable evidence (which he calls "pragmatic *croire*"), testimony by somebody else ("authority *croire*") and subjective conviction due to faith ("dogmatic *croire*"). No such distinction is made by Martin for *penser*.

<sup>7</sup> An extensive verbal description of the film can be considered an experience of the film itself for Ducrot (see above 2.2.1.; In this case he talks of indirect or "mediated" experience of the thing itself.)

<sup>8</sup> If one sees that it is raining and says *Je crois qu'il pleut* 'I think it is raining', one is using *je crois que* ironically.

<sup>9</sup> We will see below that a second interpretation is possible, where both markers are used with direct evidence, triggering some modal effects.

<sup>10</sup> It is along similar lines that a distinction is made in Dendale (2001) between epistemic *devoir*, which marks a complete process of inference and conclusion, and the conjectural future, which marks a quick jump to a conclusion.

<sup>11</sup> In certain (very rare) contexts, *paraît-il* can refer to a verb of communication with a personal subject. *Il paraît que* is then (re)interpreted as a quotative marker. That seems to be the case in the following example:

(i) Tu me cachais des choses Alexie, mais maintenant, je sais qu'il t'a allongée.  
'You were hiding things from me, Alexie, but now I know he slept with you.'

(ii) Il a dit ça?

'Did he say that?'

(iii) Oui, et il paraît que tu ne te défends pas mal, ma cochonne! (C. Aventin 1988 in *Frantext*)

'Yes, and it appears you're not bad, my little slut.'

<sup>12</sup> Kronning argues that the French conditional is a grammatical evidential, despite the claims by both Lazard and Aikhenvald, who say that French has no grammatical evidentials.

Furthermore, if Kronning is right in claiming that the conditional has two meaning components that are on the same level, an evidential one and a modal (or alethic) one, there would be no reason to consider the French conditional an evidential strategy (Aikhenvald 2004:106) rather than a true evidential.

<sup>13</sup> This analysis, although possible in the case of (45), seems less straightforward for an example like (i) when pronounced by a scientist specialized in hurricanes:

(i) Le typhon Arthur *doit* atteindre la Réunion dans les heures qui viennent (Kronning 1996:64)

'Typhoon Arthur is due to reach Réunion in the next few hours.'

It seems to us easier to interpret it as the personal conclusion of the scientist obtained by inference rather than as a report by the scientist of what someone else has told, or as rumours. Report does not seem to be the most obvious interpretation in the following sentence either, probably due to the presence of the conditional sentence with *si*:

(ii) Si tout se passe bien et si les vents ne sont pas contraires, la flotte anglaise, forte d'une quarantaine de bâtiments, *devrait* s'approcher des îles Falkland aux alentours des 20 et 21 avril. (Nouvel Observateur)

'All going well and the winds not being unfavourable, the forty-vessel English fleet *should* approach the Falkland Islands around the 20th and 21st of April.'

<sup>14</sup> And in discursive respects: certain sequences of sentences are possible with epistemic *devoir* but not with alethic *devoir* (Kronning 2001:75-76).

<sup>15</sup> <http://www.coinbd.com/bd/albums/avis/840/le-tueur/tome-4-les-liens-de-sang.html>

<sup>16</sup> This is less easy for *devoir* with future meaning (45), probably because in that case the necessity is limited to a very specific modal universe.

<sup>17</sup> In this sense *devoir* is already a marker of indirect evidence.

