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Corpus Linguistics

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Applications for the Study of English



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The Verbal Expression of Belief and Hearsay in English and Spanish: Evidence from Newspaper Discourse¹

1. Introduction

Evidentiality is a semantic notion related to the kind of evidence a person has for making factual claims and how this is expressed in language (Anderson 1986: 273). The strength of a speaker's commitment to an assumption depends not only on the amount of evidence s/he has for his/her truth, but also on the type of evidence (Blakemore 1994: 1183). Chafe (1986: 263) distinguishes four modes of knowing or ways in which knowledge is acquired: belief, induction, hearsay and deduction. My aim here is to investigate the verbal expression of evidentiality focusing on the modes of belief and hearsay in English and Spanish newspaper discourse.

English and other West European languages seem to primarily mark evidential contrasts *lexically*, usually as extended meanings or secondary usages (Willett 1988: 64). Evidential markers (and other epistemic stance markers, Biber *et al.* 1999: 972) are represented in English by various syntactic categories among which we find adverbs (*probably, perhaps*), adjectives (*it is probable/certain*), nouns (*it is a possibility/certainty*), verbs (*I think/believe, it is said, it seems*), modal

1 The research for this study is part of a project on the expression of evidentiality in English and Spanish argumentative texts (ref. no. BFF2000-0699-C02-02) financed by the Spanish Ministry of Education and Culture (MECD) and directed by Dr. Juana Marín Arrese. This is a shorter version of a paper included in the volume *Perspectives on Evidentiality and Modality in English and Spanish* (J. Marín Arrese, ed.) published in 2004.

auxiliaries (*might, must, could*) and parenthetical clauses or comment clauses such as *I think*.

In this study I concentrate on the category of verbs expressing evidentiality in English and Spanish.² These verbs occur as matrix predicates of complement clauses (as in “The CIA **thinks** that *this will get worse*”) or as parenthetical clauses (as in “This will, *the CIA thinks*, get worse”, sometimes preceded by *as* or *como*).

All the examples considered in this paper come from a comparable corpus of news reports and press editorials reporting political events and various social issues. The texts were collected from liberal and conservative newspapers in English and Spanish, each group of texts in each language (e.g. editorials in English) amounting to a volume of *circa* 60,000 words. The examples contain information, in brackets, about the subcorpus to which they belong, the number given to the text and the initials of the text analyser.³

2. The verbal expression of belief or opinion

In this section I consider verbs showing that the writer’s knowledge is based on belief or opinion. These are verbs such as *think, believe, suppose* in English, and their counterparts *pensar, creer, suponer, considerar*⁴ in Spanish. See the following examples:

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- 2 I have concentrated on a restricted number of verbs per category in each language, bearing in mind that there could be other verbs expressing these two evidential meanings, although with an apparently lower occurrence.
- 3 The abbreviations used are: for language, E (English) and S (Spanish); for text type, N (news reports) and E (editorials); for newspaper, t (*The Times*), g (*Guardian*), a (*Abc*) and p (*El País*).
- 4 *Considerar* has been here included with the sense of *creer* (*believe* or *think*), occurring as a matrix predicate of a nominal subordinate clause as direct object expressing an assertion (Delbecque and Lamiroy 1999: 1997, 2008), as in example (2d). *Consider* in English, in contrast, cannot be used with this sense as an assertive verb taking a complement clause (Aijmer 1980: ch. 5). Examples of *considerar* occurring with a NP direct object and an object

- (1) a. Phil Willis, the Liberal Democrat education spokesman, told the *Guardian*: “I *think* there is a real danger here of educational apartheid. [...]” (ENg05jn)
 b. no one really *believes* that his views on homosexuality or, for that matter, on race and immigration have really changed. (EEg10sm)
 c. But it is a quite different matter to *suppose* that the British, or anyone else, can create a united Ireland. (EEg08sm)
- (2) a. Hoy somos muchos los que *pensamos* que, por mal que estén las cosas, un enderezamiento es posible. (SEp11jm)
 b. José Luis Rodríguez Zapatero *cree* que la debacle de los socialistas en Francia es “coyuntural” y que “recuperarán mucho terreno” en las elecciones legislativas del próximo junio. (SNa02jn)
 c. El censo aprobado el viernes por el Comité Federal del PSOE reduce la militancia real a 210.000, casi la mitad de lo que *se suponía*. (SNp09jn)
 d. Hay quien *considera* que estos problemas justifican la rebelión antiglobalizadora; muchos *han considerado* que las manifestaciones eran más democráticas que los gobernantes contra los que se rebelaban. (SEp31sm)

The verbs of belief and knowledge considered in this section can be seen as included within a scale of *certainty of knowledge*. Following this scale or continuum, two further verbs have been considered: *know* (*saber* in Spanish) in one of the extremes of the continuum, implying absolute certainty, and *doubt* (*dudar* in Spanish) closer to the other end (expressing very little certainty). Interestingly, however, the examples with *doubt* in English and *dudar* in Spanish are often affected by negation so that the evidential meaning is then similar to the one we get with *know* (as in (4a)):

- (3) a. It *is well known* that we have far more divorcees and far more teenage mothers than any other country in western Europe, but I am still puzzled why this is so. (EEg06jm)
 b. En este país todos *sabemos* qué es lo que tenemos que hacer para librarnos de la amenaza de ETA. (SNp02jm)
- (4) a. And when the fears of radiation leaks do finally sail off into the Atlantic sunset, no one here *doubts* that Madrid, having also taken this episode on the chin for London, will also be exacting some price from Tony Blair. (ENg04spa)

predicative complement have been disregarded (as in ‘Consideran de vital importancia la entrega temporal de terroristas’ (SNp06jn)).

b. la mayoría de las explotaciones ganaderas son mixtas – vacas junto a otros animales destinados al consumo – y la Administración *duda* si los ganaderos han separado el pienso correctamente. (SNp01jm)

With the predicates of belief and opinion shown in examples (1) and (2), there is always some degree of uncertainty involved, with *suppose* (*suponer*) ranking lower (i.e. implying “less certainty”) than *think* or *believe* (*creer/pensar*). All the verbs mentioned can be grouped as predicates expressing epistemic attitudes (as in e.g. Aijmer 1980: 37-38 and Biber *et al.* 1999: 972-974), comprising in turn two subfields: one corresponding to knowledge and another to belief.

Verbs such as *think*, *believe*, *suppose*, etc., in which the writer is less than “wholeheartedly committed to the truth of the proposition ([thus implying] that his grounds are not strong for him to use the unqualified assertion)” (Aijmer 1980: 25), make it possible for the writer to use them as hedges or mitigating devices:

Because the mental-state predicates are inherently subjective, they are frequently used as mitigating or hedging devices. [...] In such uses, it is quite obvious that speakers are absolutely certain about or convinced of what they are saying, but by using the mental state predicate they suggest that they are voicing a tentative and personal opinion which may be wrong, thus ‘officially’ leaving room for another opinion or for a reaction on the part of the hearer. (Nuyts 2001: 391)

In the examples of mental-state verbs expressing belief and knowledge, several grammatical forms have been found in relation to the subject accompanying the verb (or its omission in Spanish) and the choice of active/passive voice. These different grammatical forms can be related to the extent to which the attitudinal stance expressed is attributed to the speaker/writer. Following Biber *et al.* (1999: 976), three degrees can be distinguished within evidential forms: explicit attribution of attitude/evidentiality to speaker/writer, implicit attribution (i.e. attitude/evidentiality may be expressed without overtly identifying the speaker/writer) and, finally, ambiguous (or impersonal) attribution of attitude/evidentiality. In the first group we can include instances with a first-person (both singular and plural) pronoun as subject (or its omission and the explicit verbal inflection in Spanish):

- (5) a. Mr Blair said: “*I do believe* that people can be persuaded that they have to pay for good public services [...]” (ENt06jm)
 b. “*We know* that more than 250 reserve soldiers actually refused,” he said. He added: “*I think* now it is more serious than ever before [...]” (ENgspa)
- (6) a. Lo decisivo, *creo yo*, el ámbito en el que España sigue manteniéndose a cierta distancia del resto de Europa, es el de la educación y el conocimiento.
 b. *Uno creía* que los españoles éramos grandes bebedores, pero la OMS, Organización Mundial de la Salud, nos ha demostrado lo contrario. (SEa30sm)⁵

Other examples with third-person pronouns or full noun phrases can also be included in this group, showing that the attitude is attributed to a third person rather than to the writer:

- (7) a. *Mr Arafat* may not give these men of violence express orders; he has, at long last, had the grace (or sense of self-preservation) to condemn this particular attack. But *he knows* who they are. (EEt04sm)
 b. *Afghan delegates*, who will submit an alternative needs estimate, *believe* the Tokyo conference is their best chance of securing funds before the attention of the world moves elsewhere. (ENg16mb)
- (8) a. *La presidencia española*, según *supo ABC*, sigue *pensando* que la Unión Europea no puede dejar pasar su responsabilidad en relación con Oriente Medio y quedarse de brazos cruzados mientras la situación sigue deteriorándose. (SNa09mb)
 b. *Teo Uriarte cree* que la presión terrorista de ETA ha hecho regresar la pesada atmósfera de los estados de excepción. (SNp02jm)
 c. *Daniel Ben Simón*, politólogo y editorialista del diario “Haaretz”, *considera*, en efecto, que la sociedad israelí es “una sociedad tribal, en la que cada sector, cada tribu, lucha por sus intereses y prioridades particulares en detrimento de la colectividad nacional”. (SNa02emc)

With non-finite forms of these verbs, the attribution of attitude is often not overt but may be implicitly attributed to the writer with a possible implication of the reader as well (9a-b, 10b-c), thus showing some degree of impersonality, or to what a third party thinks (10a):

5 In (6b) the writer uses the indefinite pronoun *uno* as a substitute for *yo*, giving the sentence a more impersonal tone.

- (9) a. It is time *to think* about what we want in Afghanistan as the outcome of this war. (EEg08lh)
 b. It is barely possible *to believe* that less than three months ago, the main preoccupation of the then chief executive and his finance director, John Mayo, was to persuade shareholders to allow staff share options to be rebased as reason began to return to investors and the share price tumbled. (EEt12sm)
- (10) a. Sin embargo, se excluye de la prohibición el rabo, al *creer* que no existe riesgo por la ausencia de ganglios. (SNa02spa)
 b. Desde una nueva demarcación judicial con la colaboración activa de las autonomías hasta un sistema más estricto de responsabilidad de los jueces y del Estado por errores y negligencias, pasando por el reconocimiento expreso de 'una carta de derechos' de los usuarios de la justicia, todo hace *pensar* que el protagonista de la reforma es el ciudadano, como subrayó el representante del PSOE en la presentación del acuerdo. (SEp03lh)
 c. Con el cúmulo de oficiosidades perpetradas desde el entorno de La Moncloa (es lógico *suponer* que a impulsos del actual inquilino) para ningunear a González en sus presencias públicas dentro y fuera de España, se podrían escribir varios tomos de letra apretada. (SEp03sm)

Finally, Biber *et al.* (1999: 977-978) mention examples with "short passives" as ambiguous as to whether they mark the writer's attitude or that of some other party. In my view, however, they are best regarded as having an impersonal generic interpretation, potentially representing all humanity (Kitagawa and Lehrer 1990: 742) and not overtly attributing the proposition to a specific person. See the following examples from our data:

- (11) a. It is well *known* that we have far more divorcees and far more teenage mothers than any other country in western Europe, but I am still puzzled why this is so. (EEg06jm)
 b. As for the mass of teenage pregnancies, we are generally *thought* to be shyer and more inhibited about sex than our fellow Europeans. (EEg06jm)
 c. Iraq, a likely focus of future US action, is *believed* to have built a series of deep bunkers to house biological and chemical weapons as well as command centres. (ENt14jm)
- (12) a. El censo aprobado el viernes por el Comité Federal del PSOE reduce la militancia real a 210.000, casi la mitad de lo que *se suponía*. (SNp09jn)

- b. Los dos finalistas que salgan hoy del voto emitido por los parlamentarios conservadores deberán someterse al sufragio de las bases. *Es bien sabido* que entre ellas, Clarke es con mucho el más popular de los posibles candidatos. (SEa06sm)
 c. Dicho esto, *se considera*, no obstante, que es mejor no precipitarse a la hora de tomar una posición y reflexionar más sobre las aportaciones hechas por distintos países como Francia, Italia y Alemania. (SNa09mb)

The use of this agentless passive avoids the need to mention the subject or agent of the evidential verb. "In news, this seems a deliberate strategy to avoid direct responsibility for the reported stance" (Biber *et al.* 1999: 977). Some of these examples can also be considered to belong to the category of "knowledge derived from tradition or common knowledge" (Plungian 2001: 352; Lazard 2001: 365).

2.1. The expression of belief in English newspaper discourse

Table 1 below shows the number of occurrences of mental-state predicates expressing belief or knowledge found in the English texts. Within each type of text, differences between conservative (*The Times*) and liberal (*Guardian*) newspapers are shown:

| | NEWS REPORTS (62,766 w.) | | | EDITORIALS (61,399 w.) | | | TOTAL |
|---------|--------------------------|------------------|-------|------------------------|------------------|-------|-------|
| | <i>Guardian</i> | <i>The Times</i> | Total | <i>Guardian</i> | <i>The Times</i> | Total | |
| KNOW | 15 | 19 | 34 | 15 | 19 | 34 | 68 |
| THINK | 13 | 13 | 26 | 18 | 17 | 35 | 61 |
| BELIEVE | 14 | 17 | 31 | 9 | 17 | 26 | 57 |
| SUPPOSE | 0 | 2 | 2 | 2 | 4 | 6 | 8 |
| DOUBT | 3 | 0 | 3 | 1 | 0 | 1 | 4 |
| TOTAL | 45 | 51 | 96 | 45 | 57 | 102 | 198 |

Table 1: The expression of BELIEF in English newspaper discourse.

As can be observed, there is a clear difference between the verbs *know*, *think* and *believe* and the other two verbs considered (*suppose* and *doubt*). Whereas the first group of verbs shows occurrences of

around 30% of the total number of verbs found in English (198), *suppose* and *doubt* represent only around 4% and 2%, respectively. The two text types considered, one expressing facts (news reports) and the other opinion (editorials), show no obvious difference in their use of these verbs, following the pattern described. The total number of mental-state predicates expressing belief or knowledge found in the English texts (198) represent 1.6 occurrences per thousand words.

Considering the three most common verbs used and the types of subjects occurring with them, third person pronoun subjects show the highest frequency in all three of them, followed by first person ones. Among the latter, the use of a first person singular pronoun subject is particularly common with the verb *think* (*I think*). In the case of *know*, *I know* shows a similar frequency of occurrence to *we know*, and with *believe*, the instances of first person (singular and plural) pronoun subjects show much lower figures compared to *X believe(s)*.

As for the use of the passive voice in all the verbs considered, 23 instances of passives were found, representing 11.56% of the total figure of belief and knowledge verbs. The higher proportion was found in news reports and, among the verbs, *know*, *suppose* and *think* occurred more frequently with the passive.

2.2. The expression of belief in Spanish newspaper discourse

Table 2 shows the results related to the mental-state predicates expressing belief and knowledge found in the Spanish texts, both in the liberal (*El País*) and conservative (*Abc*) newspapers:

| | NEWS REPORTS (63,901 w.) | | | EDITORIALS (61,196 w.) | | | TOTAL |
|------------|--------------------------|------------|-------|------------------------|------------|-------|-------|
| | <i>El País</i> | <i>Abc</i> | Total | <i>El País</i> | <i>Abc</i> | Total | |
| SABER | 7 | 15 | 22 | 10 | 15 | 25 | 47 |
| PENSAR | 11 | 1 | 12 | 10 | 4 | 14 | 26 |
| CREER | 15 | 16 | 31 | 9 | 5 | 14 | 45 |
| SUPONER | 5 | 8 | 13 | 6 | 2 | 8 | 21 |
| CONSIDERAR | 5 | 7 | 12 | 4 | 2 | 6 | 18 |
| DUDAR | 2 | 1 | 3 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 3 |
| TOTAL | 45 | 48 | 93 | 39 | 28 | 67 | 160 |

Table 2: The expression of BELIEF in Spanish newspaper discourse

The figures in Spanish differ in a number of aspects from the ones observed in English. First, whereas the number of verbs considered is similar in news reports to the figure in English in the same text type, the frequency in editorials is somewhat lower. Consequently, the total number of instances in the two text types in Spanish is also lower (160), representing 1.3 occurrences per thousand words.

Second, in terms of the frequencies the specific verbs show, *saber* and *creer* occur most frequently in both text types, representing 29.4% and 28.1% of the total number of verbs found in Spanish, respectively, followed by *pensar* (16.3%), *suponer* (13.1%) and *considerar* (11.3%). *Dudar* is very infrequent, used with an occurrence of only 1.9%.

As for the grammatical person these verbs agree with (reflected in the type of explicit subject and/or the verbal inflexion), the most common is the third person (both singular and plural, 40.6%), as in the English data. This mainly occurs with *creer*, *saber* and *considerar*, and more often in news reports. Verbs referring to a third person singular have the highest frequency of all (as in *X cree/sabe/considera que...*). Next in frequency (23.8%) we have the first person, either singular or plural, mainly occurring with *creer* and *saber*. The first person singular is used almost two times more and a great number of these instances appear in the expression (*yo*) *creo que...*

The rest of the examples are verbs in a non-finite form (infinitive, or present or past participle) and passives. Non-finite verbs

are either ambiguous in their attribution (having an impersonal interpretation) or they may implicitly identify the speaker/writer. Particularly common is the use of the past participle with *suponer*: *supuesto/a/os/as*. The passive represents 8.1% and it is mainly a passive with *se* (*Se sabe/cree/supone/considera que...*).

3. The verbal expression of hearsay

In this section I consider examples which express knowledge having been acquired through language rather than direct experience. The verbs considered in this section include basic verbal processes such as *say*, *tell*, *claim* and *report* in English, and their counterparts *decir*, *relatar* and *declarar* in Spanish. Others were added like *allege* in English (and its Spanish counterpart *alegar*), with a clear evidential meaning, or *indicar* and *asegurar* in Spanish, which also appeared frequently in our texts. Some examples are the following:

- (13) a. "All history shows that if you allow disorder to take over from democracy then fascism can win," he *said* at the weekend. (EEg04jm)
 b. Terje Roed-Larsen, the UN's special coordinator for the Middle East peace process, *told* the Paris conference: "The situation was so bad that any incident could have triggered the violence. It was a crisis in waiting." (EEg01lh)
 c. Some have tried to play down the significance of the abstentions, by *claiming* that people did not vote because the result was a foregone conclusion. (EEt05jm)
 d. *Time* magazine *reported* that intelligence officials believed bin Laden's taped broadcast on the first day of the airstrikes contained a coded warning to start more attacks. (ENt09spa)
 e. Conservatives were last night tabling parliamentary questions demanding to know the identity of the civil servants who *are alleged* to have given hostile press briefings against Ms Filkin during her turbulent three years as Standards Commissioner. (ENt05jn)
- (14) a. Tras los atentados del 11 de septiembre *se dijo* que entre las personas detenidas en Estados Unidos relacionadas con aquellos acontecimientos había tres españoles. (SNa08jm)

- b. Mario Onaindia *relata* la extorsión que representa la escolta para la familia y las relaciones sociales del protegido. (SNp02jm)
 c. "La crisis de las vacas locas ha dado al traste con los cálculos previstos", *declaró* ayer la comisaria de Presupuestos, Michaela Schreyer. (SNp03spa)
 d. No está consolidado, *se alega*. (SEp02sm)
 e. Fuentes del CGPJ *indicaron* que previsiblemente el puesto de Jefe de Sección de la Escuela será para Ignacio Sancho Gargallo, magistrado del Juzgado de Primera Instancia 31 de Barcelona. (SNa10jn)
 f. "La tropa es un bien escaso", *asegura* el jefe del Estado Mayor de la Defensa, almirante Antonio Moreno Barberá, en la entrevista que hoy publicamos en páginas de Nacional. (SEa01sm)

Whereas "ordinary, non-evidential forms state the facts purely and simply, [e]vidential forms, on the other hand, point to the speaker's *becoming aware* of the facts" (Lazard 2001: 362, my italics). In the case of hearsay, for example, the evidential implies "as I have heard". The operation may be seen to create a *distance* "between the speaker and his/her own discourse, or between the speaker as the person acquiring evidence and the person expressing it" (Lazard 2001: 362) and has been thus characterised as "mediative" evidence.

Examples based on hearsay evidence can be grouped in two categories: the information may come from reported speech from an author that may be more or less known or specific; or it may be based on common knowledge or tradition (Plungian 2001: 352). In the first case, examples occur with subjects of the reporting verbs which range from identifiable, known authors, to less specific or identifiable and more "impersonal" ones. A selection of these is shown in (15) and (16):

- (15) a. Daniel Serwer, a former US diplomat and now a member of the US Institute of Peace in Washington, *says* the financing "poses as much a risk to US soldiers in Kosovo as the Albanian gunmen crossing over the border into Macedonia". (ENg02--)
 b. *Time* magazine *reported* that intelligence officials believed bin Laden's taped broadcast on the first day of the airstrikes contained a coded warning to start more attacks. (ENt09spa)
 c. "Our people are being very cautious," one palace official *told* the Guardian. (ENg01jn)
 d. "Since the petrol crisis, the Dome and other similar issues, there has been a loss of trust in both Tony Blair and Gordon Brown. Forty nine per cent *say*

they find the Prime Minister untrustworthy and 48 per cent *say* they find the Chancellor untrustworthy.”

- (16) a. Un año después de verse bajo sospecha, vejada y abandonada por sus socios, Viena *dice* haber dado sopas con onda a sus críticos y cambiado para mejor. (SNa04emc)
 b. Fuentes del CGPJ *indicaron* que previsiblemente el puesto de Jefe de Sección de la Escuela será para Ignacio Sancho Gargallo, magistrado del Juzgado de Primera Instancia 31 de Barcelona. (SNa10jn)

In this connection, a correlation can be pointed out between the strength of an assumption based on reported speech and the degree of confidence one has in the person having reported it (Blakemore 1994: 1183) and, also, to a certain extent, on the degree of knowledge the writer has about the ‘reporter’.

Hearsay predicates which do not make explicit reference to the attribution of the reported information may be classified within the category of knowledge derived from tradition or common knowledge, as with predicates of belief and opinion. These are mainly examples with passives and subjectless non-finite clauses, or containing an impersonal third person plural pronoun (or its omission in Spanish, (18a)):

- (17) a. Displaced fishermen and farmers will, it *is* always *claimed*, find new and lucrative jobs through tourist development, but it is rare for anybody to ask them whether they would actually rather be waiters or cleaners, or carry on as they were. (EEt01jm)
 b. In the same article in *The Times*, the author wrote: “It *is* often *said* that having children is a personal choice and it is a decision for which, as parents, we are expected to take sole responsibility [...]” (EEt08sm)
- (18) a. *Dicen* que quien dejó de ser tu amigo es que en realidad no lo fue nunca. Ha venido a mi memoria ese viejo dicho lleno de sabiduría popular [...] (SEa10jm)
 b. No obstante, no salgo de mi asombro, porque España es el país con más bares, tabernas y ventas del mundo. *Se dice* que sólo con el nombre de “Bar Las Vegas” hay más de mil distribuidos en nuestro territorio nacional. (SEa30sm)

In other examples without overt attribution, the writer of the newspaper text may obscure the attribution to a specific entity, directing the assertion to a third party or simply leaving the subject responsible for reporting the information unspecified, thus avoiding responsibility for the assertion:

- (19) a. Defence counsel *are said* to be scratching around to find any legal grounds for appeal. (EEg02jm)
 b. A further 845 people *have been reported* missing by their families in the UK, raising fears that the final British death toll could rise further. (ENt12mb)
 c. My conversations *tell* me that the commitment to build and deploy is likely to be made: much more likely, at any rate, than not. (ENg05spa)
 d. There *are reported* to be a number of other Britons at the base, but US officials did not confirm this. (ENG15mb)
 e. Los rabinos ultraortodoxos han vendido su voto a Sharon por un apoyo temporal a la política de exención del servicio militar para los estudiantes de los seminarios talmúdicos, así como por ayudas económicas a sus redes de escuelas y hospitales, según *se asegura* en círculos políticos. (SNp07emc)

3.1. The expression of hearsay in English newspaper discourse

Table 3 shows the results related to the predicates expressing hearsay in the English data, in the liberal and conservative newspapers:

| | NEWS REPORTS (62,766 w.) | | | EDITORIALS (61,399 w.) | | | TOTAL |
|--------|--------------------------|------------------|-------|------------------------|------------------|-------|-------|
| | <i>Guardian</i> | <i>The Times</i> | Total | <i>Guardian</i> | <i>The Times</i> | Total | |
| SAY | 181 | 275 | 456 | 63 | 49 | 112 | 568 |
| TELL | 23 | 30 | 53 | 12 | 9 | 21 | 74 |
| CLAIM | 11 | 14 | 25 | 10 | 10 | 20 | 45 |
| ALLEGE | 2 | 4 | 6 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 6 |
| REPORT | 7 | 9 | 16 | 4 | 1 | 5 | 21 |
| TOTAL | 224 | 332 | 556 | 89 | 69 | 158 | 714 |

Table 3: The expression of HEARSAY in English newspaper discourse.

If we compare these figures with the ones shown in Table 1, related to the predicates expressing belief and opinion in English, the first striking difference is the much higher number of occurrences,

especially in news reports where the figure is more than five times higher. Over the total number of words analysed in this language (124,165 words), we found 5.8 English hearsay predicates per thousand words.

The figures also differ considerably if we compare the two text types analysed, where the use of evidential verbal markers of hearsay in news reports is 3.5 higher than their use in editorials. This same tendency was also attested for Spanish (3.2). This may be motivated by the fact that in news reports the writer intends to distance himself somehow from what he is saying, often relying on what others have reported, in order to present his/her information as objective. Quotations are, therefore, extremely frequent in this type of texts (compared to editorials which are more personal).

Among the set of verbs, *say* is extremely frequent with a percentage of almost 80% over the total, followed by *tell* (10.4%), *claim* (6.3%) and *report* (2.9%). Comparing news reports and editorials, *say* occurs somehow higher in news reports, whereas *tell* and, especially, *claim* show higher relative figures in editorials. *Allege* is infrequent in news reports and not used at all in editorials, occurring only in 0.8% of the total number of instances.

Looking at the kind of attribution associated with these verbs, an overwhelming number of predicates attributes the proposition to a third person, especially singular with *say* (*X says/said...*) in news reports (in 90.8% of the total). Third person plural subjects also occur, although much less frequently in comparison (13.6%). We have also found a few instances of first person subjects but often associated with a third party as well, when they occur in quotations of what a third person reports. Further, the attribution may be left unspecified when a passive or non-finite form of the verb is used. The passive is used 4.1% of the total and, comparing the different verbs and their frequency, it occurs more frequently with *report* (as in *it is reported, X was reported*), *allege* (*X are alleged*) which also occurs as an *-ed* participle, *claim* (as in *it is claimed*) and *tell* (*it/X was told*).

3.2. The expression of hearsay in Spanish newspaper discourse

Finally, Table 4 shows the results regarding the verbal expression of hearsay in Spanish newspaper discourse:

| | NEWS REPORTS (63,901 w.) | | | EDITORIALS (61,196 w.) | | | TOTAL |
|----------|--------------------------|------------|-------|------------------------|------------|-------|-------|
| | <i>El País</i> | <i>Abc</i> | Total | <i>El País</i> | <i>Abc</i> | Total | |
| DECIR | 42 | 43 | 85 | 7 | 12 | 19 | 104 |
| RELATAR | 2 | 1 | 3 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 3 |
| DECLARAR | 19 | 19 | 38 | 3 | 4 | 7 | 45 |
| ALEGAR | 5 | 3 | 8 | 2 | 1 | 3 | 11 |
| INDICAR | 9 | 15 | 24 | 1 | 0 | 1 | 25 |
| ASEGURAR | 33 | 24 | 57 | 0 | 2 | 2 | 59 |
| TOTAL | 110 | 105 | 215 | 13 | 19 | 32 | 247 |

Table 4: The expression of HEARSAY in Spanish newspaper discourse.

Comparing the figures with the ones shown for English in Table 3, we can notice the comparable lower frequency of the Spanish figures, especially in editorials. Over the total number of words analysed in this language (125,097 words), we have found 2 evidential markers expressing hearsay in Spanish per thousand words, the great majority in news reports (1.7 per thousand words) vs. editorials.

Among the specific predicates found, *decir* – as *say* in English and considered the most neutral or basic communicative predicate in Spanish – occurs most often (39.5% of the total figure), followed by *asegurar* (23.9%), comparatively much more frequent in news reports than in editorials, *declarar* (18.2%) and *indicar* (10.1%). *Alegar* and *relatar* show the lowest figures.

In terms of attribution, the evidential predicates expressing hearsay in Spanish attribute the reported proposition to a third party almost exclusively, especially to a third person singular subject (77.7%), although third person plural subjects also occur (18.2%). A few occurrences of these verbs in the passive have also been found (3.6%), with *decir*, *asegurar* and *alegar*, all of them instances of *se*-passive: *se dice/se ha dicho/se dijo/se decía, se asegura, se alega*.

4. Conclusion

In this paper, I have discussed verbal markers of evidentiality in English and Spanish looking at two types of evidence, belief and hearsay, within the discourse of fact and opinion in newspaper discourse. Blakemore (1994: 1185) (following Blass and Itani-Kaufman) sees a point in common in the two types of evidence discussed here. In some uses, constructions such as *It is said that* often mean *it is generally believed that*. Aijmer (1980) points to the same similarity of function of the two expressions, when the meaning is of common knowledge: "The fact that something is said by many or by an institution is evidence for believing it to be true" (Aijmer 1980: 119).⁶

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⁶ In a study on the correlation between impersonalisation and the use of impersonal pronouns and other non-specific NPs in English and Spanish news reports (Martínez Caro 2002: 85), the use of a verb denoting a process typically associated with human beings, such as a verb of thinking or saying, especially in examples containing a first-person plural or third-person plural pronoun (or their omission in Spanish) was also reported as a common feature of a considerable number of the non-specific agent constructions discussed.

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