

A Brief Report on the Nl̓eʔkepmxcín Reportative*

Cayla Smith
University of Alberta

Abstract: This paper adds to current knowledge of the Nl̓eʔkepmxcín evidential system (Littell & Mackie 2011; Hannon & Smith 2023; Hannon 2024) by examining the reportative evidential *ekʷu*. The primary goal of the paper is to describe where *ekʷu* is felicitous and compile the relevant facts for reference while engaging briefly in current discussions on the analysis of reportative evidentials. The paper expands upon the current documentation of *ekʷu* while raising questions that provide a pathway for future investigation and analysis.

Keywords: Nl̓eʔkepmxcín, evidentiality, reportative evidentials, Salish

1 Introduction

This paper will discuss the Nl̓eʔkepmxcín reportative evidential, *ekʷu*. Evidentials, broadly, are grammatical morphemes which encode the source of evidence a speaker has for a proposition (Aikhenvald 2004). Nl̓eʔkepmxcín has an evidential system comprising of three evidentials: the inferential evidential *nke*, the sensory evidential *nukʷ*, and the reportative evidential *ekʷu* (Thompson & Thompson 1992). While previous work has covered the various properties of the inferential and sensory evidentials (Littell & Mackie 2011; Smith 2022; Hannon & Smith 2023; Hannon 2024), the reportative evidential has not yet received recent documentary attention. This paper seeks to outline the properties of the reportative evidential *ekʷu* to contribute to a more complete picture of the Nl̓eʔkepmxcín evidential system and aid revitalization efforts and teaching of the language.

2 Background

2.1 Language background

Nl̓eʔkepmxcín is a Northern Interior Salish language, spoken as an L1 by approximately 100 people, although the number of L2 speakers is growing (Gessner et al. 2023). Nl̓eʔkepmxcín is spoken in communities along the Thompson River Valley in British Columbia, in approximately 15 or so communities. There is a dictionary (1996) and a grammar (1992) by Thompson and Thompson based primarily on the Spuzzum dialect, which are currently the most comprehensive documentary texts. Community revitalization efforts include language fluency certificates through

* My sincere thanks to my consultants, whose hard work, dedication, and laughter made this paper possible. To Cúʔsinek (Marty Aspinall) [CMA], Kʷəlt̓əzetkʷu (Bernice Garcia) [KBG], Gene Moses [GM], and Bev Phillips [BP]: *nem kʷukʷstéyp!* Bernice would like it to be stated that she is a Kamloops Indian Residential School survivor who is relearning her language. She introduces herself thus: *ʔes ʔúməcms kʷəlt̓əzetkʷuʔ təw le čəlétkʷu wéʔe nciɬʷ. ʔuʔ wéʔec ʔex netíyxs scwew' xmx, ʔuʔ tékm xéʔe ne nl̓eʔkepmx e tmixʷs*. I would also like to thank Marianne Huijsmans, Brent Hall, Lisa Matthewson, Ella Hannon, and my colleagues in the Nl̓ab for all of the guidance and feedback offered both on this paper and along the way. I would also like to thank the editors for their excellent comments. Funding for this research was provided by the Jacobs Fund. All errors, including in transcription or glossing, are my own. VF = Volunteered Form (volunteered by the consultant), SF = Supplied Form (offered by the author).

Contact info: cayla3@ualberta.ca

British Columbian universities and colleges, an online language database (FirstVoices), and language-oriented gatherings. To support the language and this growing population of L2 learners, further documentation is required.

2.2 Evidentiality

Evidentials are grammatical morphemes that encode the source of evidence for a proposition (Aikhenvald 2004). Cross-linguistically, evidentials can be either optional or obligatory, and evidential systems vary in size. Some evidential systems comprise of just two or three evidentials, others have as many as five or six (Aikhenvald 2004). Some evidentials can act as modals, which quantify over possible worlds. It has been hypothesized that the sensory evidential in Nl̥eʔkepmxcín is an epistemic modal (Hannon & Smith 2023), and it has been shown that the inferential is indeed modal (Hannon 2024). However, the question of whether or not the reportative *ekʷu* is also modal is outside of the scope of the present paper, and I leave this investigation for future research, although some findings may relate to the question.

2.3 Evidentiality in Nl̥eʔkepmxcín

There are three evidentials in the Nl̥eʔkepmxcín system. Previous work has discussed the inferential evidential *nke* (Hannon & Smith 2023; Hannon 2024) as well as the sensory evidential *nukʷ* (Littell & Mackie 2011; Smith 2022; Hannon & Smith 2023). The focus of the present paper is to outline the properties of the third evidential, the reportative *ekʷu*. Nl̥eʔkepmxcín evidentials are optional, i.e., they are not present in every utterance, even when the relevant evidence is present. Syntactically, evidentials in Nl̥eʔkepmxcín are second-position clitics, meaning they occur in the position immediately after the first non-clitic word. While the inferential evidential encodes that the speaker is inferring their proposition from some relevant facts and the sensory evidential encodes that the speaker knows their proposition via some internal sensation, the reportative evidential encodes that the speaker's evidence for their proposition comes from hearsay. In the case of Nl̥eʔkepmxcín, this is typically a hearsay report from another speaker; however, the source of the report can also be written text, as discussed in Section 4.1. Littell and Mackie (2011) found that the report can also be common knowledge or folktales. Beyond these facts, there is little documentation of the relevant use conditions of the reportative evidential in Nl̥eʔkepmxcín.

3 Methodology

The data in this paper come from four native speakers of Nl̥eʔkepmxcín, representing three dialect areas: One speaker is from ʔəq̄mcín (Lytton), two are from çələtkʷu (Coldwater), and one is from sulús (Shulus). While some potential dialectal variation has been noted in past work on evidentials (Hannon & Smith 2023), the judgements of the speakers in this case aligned, except where noted in one instance. Due to time constraints, however, not all examples were tested with all four consultants, although each example was checked with at least two consultants. Elicitation sessions were conducted over Zoom following best practices for semantic fieldwork (Matthewson 2004). All tasks involved a contrived discourse context and accompanying sentence, either in English to be translated into Nl̥eʔkepmxcín or in Nl̥eʔkepmxcín to be judged as felicitous or infelicitous. All examples in this paper are from the author's own fieldwork.

4 Findings and discussion

4.1 Report type

As noted in earlier work by Littell and Mackie (2011), both hearsay reports from other speakers and written reports are felicitous as reports in N̄eʔkepmxcín. In the following examples, (1) represents a report that was heard from another speaker (verbally), whereas (2) is a textual report obtained by reading a weather report off of a smartphone application.¹

- (1) *Context: Your friend heard from Jane’s mom that Jane got married and is now reporting the news to you.*

meli ek^wu ł Jane.

meli=ek^wu ł=Jane

marry=RPRT DET=Jane

‘Jane got married.’

[BP|VF]

- (2) *Context: Ella and Anna are wondering what the weather is like in Edmonton, where Cayla lives. Ella checks the weather app on her phone and reads that it is -50°C in Edmonton right now. Ella tells Anna:*

ném ek^wu cəl-cín wéʔe wə ł Edmonton.

ném=ek^wu cəl-cín wéʔe wə=ł(e)=Edmonton

very=RPRT cold-mouth there to=DET=Edmonton

‘It’s really cold in Edmonton.’

[KBG|SF]

The report also does not have to be immediately second-hand, more distant evidence including third-hand or even further removed from the speaker is also allowable and does not change the felicity of the evidential. In (2) above, the source is second-hand where it was read directly off of a weather app; below in (3), third-hand; in (4), even further removed; and below in (5), far removed from the speaker.

- (3) *Context: Your friend heard from Jane’s mom that Jane got married and is now reporting the news to you.*

meli ek^wu ł Jane.

meli=ek^wu ł=Jane

marry=RPRT DET=Jane

‘Jane got married.’

[BP|VF]

¹ Glossing follows the Leipzig Glossing Conventions for the most part; non-Leipzig glosses used are as follows: D/C = determiner/complementizer; DIEC = deictic; EMPH = emphatic; IMM = immediate; PROSP = prospective; RLT = relational; RPRT = reportative evidential; SENSE = sensory evidential; STRI = stressed increment; T = transitivizer. Stress is marked following conventions in Thompson & Thompson (1996).

- (4) *Context: Your friend heard from a friend of Jane’s mom who heard from Jane’s mom that Jane got married and is now reporting the news to you.*

meli ek^{wu} † Jane.

meli=**ek^{wu}** †=Jane
 marry=RPRT DET=Jane
 ‘Jane got married.’

BP Comment: “[You say it] The same way.”

[BP|VF]

- (5) *Context: [Storyboard used]. The news is flying all around town, from person to person to person and so on and so forth, that Jane got married.*

cút ek^{wu} ʔe x^wʔít tséytknmx smelis ek^{wu} † Jane.

cú-t=**ek^{wu}** ʔe=x^wʔít t=séytknmx s=melis=s=**ek^{wu}** †=Jane
 say-IMM=RPRT DET=many OBL=people NMLZ=marry=3POSS=RPT DET=Jane
 ‘Many people say that Jane got married.’

[BP|VF]

4.2 Proposition type

The evidential *ek^{wu}* is felicitous in declaratives and interrogatives based on the present investigation. However, its contribution to the sentences changes slightly based on proposition type, as outlined in the following section. While work on imperatives was conducted, it is not clear at this time if *ek^{wu}* is felicitous in them. It was not found to be as of writing, but more data are needed before it can be claimed that it is always infelicitous in imperatives.

4.2.1 Declaratives

The most basic contribution a reportative makes to a declarative sentence is that the speaker has obtained evidence for their proposition through second-hand hearsay evidence, as commented on by a consultant when she volunteered (3), commenting: “It’s not my news, so I said *ek^{wu}*.”

As pointed out by Littell and Mackie (2011), when accompanying a verb of saying, *ek^{wu}* undergoes what is referred to as evidential doubling. In evidential doubling, *ek^{wu}* reinforces the fact that there is a report of the embedded proposition by the matrix subject. In (6), the utterance does not mean that the speaker has a report that Sander said the proposition, but rather, the evidential reinforces the verb of saying.

- (6) *Context: Sander is a known liar, so you never believe him. It is currently 10pm. He calls and tells you that Cayla is not home right now. It’s quite late at night, and Cayla rarely stays out late. You don’t think he’s telling the truth. You report the news to your friend.*

cú-t=**ek^{wu}**=wiʔ †=Sander k=s=témə=s=teʔ
 say-IMM=RPRT=EMPH DET=Sander D/C=NMLZ=NEG=3POSS=DEM
 k=s=ʔéx=s †=Cayla n=cítx^w-s
 D/C=NMLZ=be=3POSS DET in=house-3POSS

‘Sander said that Cayla is not at home.’

BP Comment: “It’s kind of like saying ‘Sander said...’, it’s not me saying it.”

[BP|VF]

Cross-linguistically, reportative evidentials have been noted for their ability to undergo perspective shift in declaratives, wherein the truth of the proposition is assigned to the reporter rather than to

the speaker, unlike other types of evidentials (Anderbois 2014). This allows a speaker to utter a declarative sentence with the prejacent proposition *P* while knowing *P* is not true, without contradicting oneself. Anderbois proposes that the reason for this is because reportative evidentials have two baseline properties:

1. Speaker asserts (in some sense that) *P*.
2. Speaker conveys that their evidence for *P* is what someone else has told them.

(Anderbois 2014:243)

Due to the second property, reportative evidentials have a salient second perspective, that of the reporter. Anderbois (2014) asserts that this second salient perspective facilitates perspective shift with reportative evidentials. Previous Salish and related literature has argued that the reportative evidential cannot shift in St’át’imcets (Matthewson et al. 2007), Gitksan (Peterson 2010), and Nuuchah-nulth (Waldie et al. 2009). Others still have found that the reportative evidential can undergo perspective shift, such as in ʔayʔajuθəm (Huijsmans 2022). At any rate, the reportative evidential in Nl̥eʔkepmxcín does seem to be able to undergo perspective shift in declaratives. In the example in (7), the speaker knows the proposition that Ella is at the store is false at the time of saying. However, perhaps because the perspective of the reporter is also salient, the sentence is still felicitous.

- (7) *Context: You are looking for Ella. Danica tells you that she is at the store. However, almost immediately after she tells you that, you see her at her house.*

nés ek^wu ł Ella wə ł ntéwmn, ʔuʔ te nuk^w téʔe ks nésc.

nés=ek^wu ł=Ella wə =ł(e)=n-téwmn ʔuʔ te=nuk^w=téʔe k=s=nés=s
 go=RPRT DET=Ella to=DET=LOC-store but NEG=SENSE=NEG D/C=NMLZ=go=3POSS
 ‘Reportedly, Ella went to the store, but she didn’t go.’ [BP, KBG|SF]

In this case, the consultants commented that you would likely need to add something after this sentence to say *why* you know this to be the case, such as saying something like “I saw her at home” afterwards. As Anderbois (2014) points out, perspective shift is a risky strategy as your interlocutor may not follow the shift. It is possible that the tendency to add more context could be to clarify that the shift took place, or also because your interlocutor will want to know what your stronger evidence is for denying the report.

4.2.2 Interrogatives

As Littell and Mackie (2011) note, when some evidentials are used in interrogatives that are directed at an interlocutor (i.e., not a rhetorical question, or in Nl̥eʔkepmxcín, a conjectural question using the inferential evidential), it is often because you are expecting your interlocutor to have the relevant type of evidence. So, in the case of the reportative evidential, if you ask a question using the reportative, you are expecting that the person that you are asking has hearsay evidence to answer your question with. This seems to be the contribution *ek^wu* makes to interrogatives, as seen in example (8).

- (8) *Context: You and Sander are at the grocery store, when you see Reed. You know Reed got a new dog, and you wonder what her name is. Sander decides to go ask. He comes back and you ask Sander:*

sté? ek^wu ?e sk^wéstes ?e sqáqxe??
sté?=ek^wu ?e=sk^wést-es ?e=sqáqxe?
 what=RPRT DET=name-3SBJ DET=dog
 ‘What is the dog’s name?’

BP Comment: “Maybe Reed told, Sander but you were too far away, so yes.” [BP, KBG|SF]

As the consultant comments, the question in (8) means that you are expecting or that you know that the person you are asking will have a report as their response. Another example can be seen in (9).²

- (9) *Context: Ella is on the phone with Cayla, catching up with her. You hear Ella ask Cayla what time Cayla plans to come over tomorrow but can’t hear the answer. When Ella hangs up, you ask:*

a. *pi?sté? ek^wu k sx^wuy[’]s míltms ?e Cayla tək spí?xəwt?*
pi?-sté?=ek^wu k=s=x^wuy[’]=s mílt-m-[t]-[Ø]-s
 point.in.time-what=RPRT D/C=NMLZ=PROSP=3POSS. visit-RLT-T-3OBJ-3ERG
 ?e=Cayla tə=k=s=pi?x-əwt
 DET=Cayla OBL=DET=NMLZ=day.removed-isolated.time
 ‘When is Cayla going to visit tomorrow?’
BP Comment: “Maybe you told me, and I forgot, so I’m asking you.” [BP|SF]

b. *pi?sté? ek^wu x^wuy[’] us míltms ?e Cayla tək spí?xəwt?*
pi?-sté?=ek^wu x^wuy[’]=us mílt-m-[t]-[Ø]-s ?e=Cayla
 point.in.time-what=RPRT PROSP=3SBJV visit-RLT-T-3OBJ-3ERG DET=Cayla
 tə=k=s=pi?x-əwt
 OBL=DET=nmlz=day.removed-isolated.time
 ‘When is Cayla going to visit tomorrow?’ [KBG|SF]

In this context, the asker knows that the answerer has obtained hearsay evidence from the person on the phone, and the asker is looking for the answerer to give them that hearsay evidence. Therefore, the reportative in question in Nlɛʔkepmxcín does indeed seem to follow the generalization that you expect your interlocutor to respond with the evidence encoded by the evidential in question.

4.3 Other findings

This section details other findings about *ek^wu* that are not strictly related to its contribution to the utterance based on proposition type but do concern its felicitous use.

² The difference between these two sentences is that (9a) has a nominalized clause and (9b) uses a subjunctive, which reflects the preferences of different consultants. The consultant who volunteered (9a) speaks the Lytton dialect, and the consultant who volunteered (9b) speaks the Coldwater dialect. Both are equivalent in meaning.

4.3.1 Presence of direct evidence

Evidentials are often judged to be infelicitous when a speaker has very strong evidence for their claim (Matthewson et al. 2007). Doing so violates Grice’s pragmatic maxim of quantity, as it is weaker to say that “reportedly” the proposition is true rather than simply asserting it as such (Matthewson et al. 2007). In the case of the reportative evidential, more direct evidence than hearsay evidence would be actually witnessing the event in question. This generalization — that direct evidence precludes the use of the reportative — holds for some speakers of Nl̥eʔkepmxcín, but not all. In (10), the author volunteered the following sentence, and received the following comment, which makes it clear this consultant views the sentence as infelicitous due to the presence of stronger evidence:

- (10) *Context: You read the weather report on your phone, and it says it is raining. You open your blinds and look out the window to see that it is, indeed, raining. You report the news to your friend.*

#*ném ekʷu ʔe stékl̥ néʔe.*

ném=ekʷu ʔe=s=tékl̥=s néʔe

very=RPRT D/C=NMLZ=rain=3POSS DIEC

Intended: ‘It’s really raining out.’

*BP Comment: “You already know for a fact that it’s raining, so you can’t say *nem ekʷu*.”*

[BP, KBG, CMA|SF]

In the same context, however, another speaker volunteered the following sentence when asked how they would tell a friend that it is raining out:

- (11) *ném ekʷu tékl̥ wə ʔéyčqeʔ.*

ném=ekʷu tékl̥ wə=l̥(e)=ʔéyčqeʔ

very=RPRT rain to=DET=outside

‘It’s really raining outside.’

[GM|VF]

Therefore, the question of whether or not direct evidence precludes the use of *ekʷu* will require further investigation and may be speaker variable.

4.3.2 Passing on information

In some languages, the reportative evidential can be used to transmit a message even when the original reporter is in the conversational situation. In these situations, there is usually a reason the intended recipient cannot understand the message, such as when they are hard of hearing. An example of a language that allows this use is Cusco Quechua, as reported by Faller (2007). In Nl̥eʔkepmxcín, it seems as though *ekʷu* may be felicitous in these situations, as one speaker volunteered such a use in the following situation:

- (12) *Context: We are enjoying tea at Ella’s house. Gene asks Ella for tea, but she doesn’t hear him. Cayla repeats his request.*

Ella, sɣʷóst ekʷu ʔ Gene tək ti.

Ella s=ɣʷóst-t=ekʷu ʔ=Gene tək=ti

Ella NMLZ=want-T=RPRT DET=Gene OBL=DET=tea

‘Ella, Gene wants some tea.’

[GM|VF]

However, in some contexts, *ekʷu* cannot be used to pass on information. Two consultants commented that sentence (13) does not work, while one corrected it to include a verb of saying with the subject.

(13) *Context: My mother has told me to tell my brother “Clean your house!”*

#cáxtete *ekʷu* ʔe eʔcítxʷ!

çáx-t-[Ø]-et-e=*ekʷu*

clean-T-[3OBJ]-STRI-IMP=RPRT

Intended: ‘Clean your house!’

ʔe=eʔ-cítxʷ

DET=2SG.POSS-house³

[KBG, BP, CMA|SF]

Passing on information in this manner may only make sense if all three interlocutors are part of the conversation simultaneously. Another possibility is that passing on an imperative is infelicitous, as found by Huijsmans (2022) for ʔayʔajuθəm. Further investigation is required to determine if it is the temporal aspect or proposition type that makes (12) felicitous but (13) infelicitous.

5 Conclusion

In this paper, I have presented preliminary evidence on the Nl̥eʔkepmxcín reportative evidential *ekʷu* and its use conditions. I have shown that the reportative can be used in declaratives to indicate a report of oral or text origin from any degree of distance, that it makes the perspective of the reporter salient, and that its use in interrogatives indicates that the hearer is expected to answer based on report. Preliminary evidence was presented showing that the presence of direct evidence may or may not preclude the use of *ekʷu*, and that it may be able to be used to pass information from a reporter participating in the discourse onto an interlocutor. However, this paper does not begin to answer questions necessary for analysis of *ekʷu*, including whether or not it can be considered a modal or an illocutionary operator, which are analyses of evidentials that have been previously proposed (Faller 2007; Matthewson et al. 2007). While this paper begins to sketch the evidential system of Nl̥eʔkepmxcín more completely, much more work is necessary to truly understand the function of *ekʷu*. Future work could focus on specific testing of the epistemic modal versus illocutionary operator analyses of evidentials, to see how Nl̥eʔkepmxcín patterns, as well as further investigate some of the questions this paper’s preliminary look at the evidential raises.

References

- Aikhenvald, Alexandra Y. 2004. *Evidentiality*. New York, NY: Oxford University Press.
- Anderbois, Scott. 2014. On the exceptional status of reportative evidentials. *Proceedings of SALT* 24:234–254.
- Faller, Martina. 2007. The Cusco Quechua Reportative evidential and rhetorical relations. In Andrew Simpson and Peter Austin (eds.), *Endangered Languages*. Hamburg, Germany: Helmut Buske Verlag, 223–252.
- Gessner, Suzanne, Tracey Herbert, & Aliana Parker. 2023. *Report on the Status of B.C. First Nations Languages*. First Peoples’ Cultural Council.

³ Thompson and Thompson (1992:79) gloss *-et-* as a “stressed increment”.

- Hannon, Ella. 2024. A Modal Evidential in Nl̥əʔkepmxcín. Ms. University of British Columbia, Vancouver, BC.
- Hannon, Ella & Cayla Smith. 2023. A Brief Comparison of Two Nl̥əʔkepmxcín Evidentials. *Papers for ICSNL* 58:94–116.
- Huijsmans, Marianne. 2022. *Second-position clitics, from morphosyntax to semantics: the ʔayʔajuθəm (Comox-Sliammon) perspective*. Doctoral dissertation. University of British Columbia, Vancouver, BC.
- Littell, Patrick & Scott Mackie. 2011. Reconsidering Sensory Evidence in Nl̥əʔkepmxcín. *Papers for ICSNL* 46:164–183.
- Matthewson, Lisa, Henry Davis, & Hotze Rullmann. 2007. Evidentials as epistemic modals: Evidence from St’át’imcets. In Jeroen van Craenenbroeck & Johan Rooryck (eds.), *Linguistic Variation Yearbook 7*. Amsterdam, Netherlands: John Benjamins, 203–256.
- Peterson, Tyler. 2010. *Epistemic modality and evidentiality in Gitksan at the semantics-pragmatics interface*. Doctoral dissertation. University of British Columbia, Vancouver, BC.
- Smith, Cayla. 2022. *My feeling is that nuk^w is more than it seems: nuk^w’s status as an evidential*. Ms. University of British Columbia, Vancouver, BC.
- Thompson, Lawrence C. & Terry M. Thompson. 1992. *The Thompson language*. Missoula, MT: UMOPL.
- Thompson, Laurence C. & Terry M. Thompson. 1996. *Thompson River Salish dictionary: nl̥əʔkepmxcín*. Missoula, MT: UMOPL.
- Waldie, Ryan, Tyler Peterson, Hotze Rullmann, & Scott Mackie. 2009. Evidentials as epistemic modals or speech act operators: testing the test. Handout from *WSCLA 14*.