

## **Evidentiality in Proto-Indo-European? Building a Case**

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### Abstract:

Many languages show systematic marking for evidentiality, indicating the source of a speaker's information, the modality by which that information was gained, and the speaker's stance towards the veracity of the information. Among the meanings expressed through such markings are quotativity, distance, reportedness, surprise, eye- vs. ear-witness, and in general any sort of "mediation" by the speaker of the information conveyed. Although such markings are found in several branches of Indo-European, the relevant evidence is generally restricted to relatively recent language stages; moreover, language contact often seems responsible for the emergence of evidentiality in these languages. Thus, earlier stages of Indo-European are usually considered of no particular importance in the study of evidentiality, and the later manifestations of evidentiality in the family are not typically taken to warrant such categories for the proto-language. Still, presumably, all languages have *some* way of expressing the notions embodied in evidentiality systems, so one can wonder if there are any relevant indications for how PIE expressed them. This paper explores some suggestive facts concerning evidentiality for PIE that taken together legitimize asking if PIE indeed – contrary to the usual thinking – was an evidentiality-marking language.\*

### 1. Introduction

Sometimes in linguistics — as in science in general — we gain new knowledge simply by approaching old topics from new perspectives. These new perspectives are often (though not

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always) new theoretical frameworks, and while changes in theory can lead to excesses, to be sure, at the same time, new theories often provide a "liberating" effect on viewing well-known issues. In the realm of syntax, for instance, some viewed Transformational Grammar in the 1950s and 1960s, Relational Grammar in the 1970s, Minimalism in the 1990s, and so on, in that way, as each theoretical framework offered new insights even into constructions such as the passive or the causative that had been the subject of intense scrutiny previously.

In this paper, I approach a topic that is not generally discussed within Indo-European studies and especially not with regard to Proto-Indo-European,<sup>1</sup> largely because of an absence of a strong foundation of data to work from. The topic in question is *evidentiality*, and my intent here is to piece together, hopefully in a suggestive fashion, some scattered indications from around the Indo-European family that make it possible to consider this category as being relevant within the proto-language.

## 2. On Evidentiality in General

Before examining evidentiality with regard to PIE, it is necessary to establish what this notion refers to. Following the discussion in Aikhenvald 2003a, evidentiality can be defined as the indication of the source of a speaker's information, of the modality by which that information was gained, and/or of the speaker's stance (i.e., attitude) towards the truth of the information. Often, evidentiality is incorporated into the grammatical structure of a language, thus giving an evidential system, though alternatively it can just be indicated lexically, thus giving an evidential strategy.

The range of distinctions marked within such sets of indicators can be quite complex; in the Papuan language Fasu, according to Foley 1986, there are some six evidential distinctions, as shown by the six ways of translating the English sentence 'It is coming':<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Gren-Eklund 2000 is a notable exception, though her interests are mainly with the older stages of the attested Indo-European languages and not the proto-language per se, and also with the expression of evidentiality through the use of various discourse particles.

<sup>2</sup> It is not necessarily the case that not all of these distinctions are fully grammatical in nature. Thus, Fasu need not have a six-way evidential system even with all these distinctions expressible.

(1)	apere	‘It is coming and I know since I see it’
	perarakae	‘It is coming and I know since I hear it’
	pesareapo	‘It is coming and I know since I infer it from other evidence’
	pesapakae	‘It is coming; somebody says so, but I don’t know who’
	pesaripo	‘It is coming; somebody says so, and I know who’
	pesapi	‘It is coming, I suppose’

The most typical system, in languages that have grammatical evidentiality, is a two-way system, generally marking witnessed events (typically, eye-witness) versus those that are only inferred and not directly observed; Turkish is such a language, with its (roughly) witnessed past (marked with *-di*) as opposed to its unwitnessed/inferred past (marked with *-mih*). Complicating matters is the assumption that presumably, all languages can indicate these distinctions somehow; this is where the system versus strategy distinction comes into play. The fact that the Fasu sentences in (1) can be translated into English indicates that these notions are not alien to the language, but rather that they are expressed through lexically-based evidential strategies.<sup>3</sup>

The range of meanings covered by the term "evidential" is quite broad. Among those categories typically included here are quotativity, distance (temporal, spatial, or even figurative), reportedness, surprise, eye- vs. ear-witness, and in general any sort of “mediation” by the speaker of the information conveyed (cf. Lazard 1957 re term “*médiatif*” for this phenomenon).

### 3. Evidentiality within the Indo-European Family

Evidentiality is not generally a key issue — indeed, often not an issue at all — in discussions of the Indo-European family, to the extent that it is, for instance, in Turkic, by way of contrast. Still, it is not absent entirely from the languages of the family. The IE branches for which grammatical evidentiality has been discussed in the literature or is generally held to be present include Albanian, Armenian, Baltic, Indo-Iranian, Italic, and Slavic. Given such a distribution for this feature, being

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<sup>3</sup> Thus the use in English of words such as *supposedly*, *alleged*, and the like are lexical strategies employed in English for marking evidential notions.

found in five of the ten main branches in the family,<sup>4</sup> and cutting across other possible major dialect divisions, a natural question is what the status of evidentiality was in the proto-language; that is, was PIE an evidential language?

This question can be asked even though the actual morphemes that mark evidentiality in the IE languages that show it do not match up in any meaningful way. That is, one can wonder if the situation with evidentiality in PIE might be like that with the passive voice. That is, passive is realized in different ways across the family, e.g. via middle voice forms being pressed into service in Latin, via periphrastic constructions in Germanic, via special derived or tense-restricted morphological formations in Greek and Indo-Iranian,<sup>4</sup> etc., so that no one form for the marking of passive is readily reconstructible; nonetheless it can be taken, as in the account of Hock 1991: 347ff., to be reconstructible as a *category* for the proto-language<sup>5</sup> though with no particular marker associated with it. As Hock puts it, variability in realization of passive in attested languages shows loss of whole categories in some, but "the categories lost are not syntactic but *morphosyntactic* ... they do not involve the syntax of passive, but its morphological encoding". Applying such an approach to evidentiality, one might be able to argue that the category of evidentiality was present in PIE even though no single reconstructible marking emerges from the various languages.

Nonetheless, and importantly, however, from the point of view of the proto-language and evidentiality, there are various reasons for being suspicious of projecting evidentiality back into PIE. In particular, there are serious chronological problems with taking the appearance of evidentiality in these languages to reveal anything about PIE, since the relevant evidence is generally restricted to relatively recent stages or languages, e.g. Aromanian (Vlach) within Italic, but not Latin; Macedonian and Bulgarian within Slavic, but not Old Church Slavonic; Lithuanian within Baltic, a language attested only from 16<sup>th</sup> century, but not for instance, Old Prussian; Albanian, a language attested only from 16<sup>th</sup> century; (Modern) Western Armenian, but not Classical Armenian; Tadjik within Iranian but not Avestan or Old Persian; etc.

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<sup>4</sup> Or six of eleven, depending on the position one takes on Balto-Slavic.

<sup>5</sup> This is leaving aside the issue of whether PIE showed "active" structures at all in its syntax, as opposed to other syntactic organizing principles such as ergativity.

Moreover, the formations found in some of these languages for the marking of evidentiality are quite transparent in nature, clearly built from, based on, or utilizing other formations and thus suggesting a recent innovation. For instance, Western Armenian uses a perfect formation, the participle in *-er* with an auxiliary, in the expression of evidentiality, while the Albanian "admirative" (*menyre habitore*) is formed with a truncated participle and a suffixed 'have' auxiliary, e.g. *qen-kam* 'oh is it!?!', consisting of *qen-*, from the participle of 'be' (*qenë*), with *kam* 'I-have'. It would thus appear that evidentiality in these languages is an innovation, and further, language contact can be seen to have played a key role in the emergence of these categories in these languages; Turkish, for instance, with its well-developed evidential system, was crucial to the development of evidentiality in East South Slavic and Albanian, as argued by Friedman 2003. Finally, there is the geographical aspect to consider, in that it is suspicious that a good many of the evidential IE languages — Albanian, Bulgarian, Macedonian, and Aromanian — cluster within the Balkans, making one think of language contact (in an area noted for contact-induced changes) as a causal factor in the emergence of this category in these languages.

Nonetheless, despite these negative indications, I contend that the question posed above about the status of evidentiality in PIE is not settled. Moreover, in the hopes of bringing a fresh perspective to some fairly well-known facts about Indo-European, approaching them with an eye focused by insights gained from a consideration of evidentials in other languages, I attempt to determine the extent to which we might be justified in adding PIE to the roster of evidential-marking languages. I conclude ultimately that it is a hard sell: while there is suggestive evidence that can be interpreted as giving a positive indication regarding evidentiality, it is not overly robust.

The indicators involve both grammatically-based evidence and lexically-based evidence. Grammatical evidence in general is more telling with regard to whether there was an evidential system, but here it turns out to be on the weak side; the lexical evidence, while more robust, is weak from the point of view of demonstrating an evidential system, but it turns out to possibly be more revealing of important attitudes or cultural notions to be attributed to PIE, on the assumption that the lexicon indicates how speakers carve up and classify their world.

#### 4. Potentially Relevant IE evidence regarding PIE Evidentiality

#### 4.1. Grammatical Evidence

The most intriguing evidence is that offered by the so-called "injunctive" mood, a special verbal mood found particularly robustly in Vedic Sanskrit and in Avestan but with parallels elsewhere, e.g. Homeric Greek, and generally posited for the proto-language. From a formal standpoint, the injunctive consists of a present or aorist verbal stem plus secondary ("past") endings, with no prefixal augment marking it as overtly temporal in reference, as shown by third person singular forms such as Skt. *kar* (< \*kar-t) from the root  $\sqrt{kr\geq}$ - 'do', Av. *mrao-t* from  $\sqrt{mrau}$ - 'speak', Homeric Gk. *bh~* from 'go'.

From a functional standpoint, the injunctive has several uses, but among them, according to the analysis of Hoffman 1967 (and others before him) is the injunctive in reference to atemporal situations, events that are "out of time" in some respect, such as timeless truths (e.g. proverbial statements, recurring natural events, etc.) or the mythic past; Hoffmann (1967: 114) characterizes situations in which the injunctive is used as encompassing "Sachverhalte, die nicht auf eine bestimmte Zeitstufe, wie Gegenwart, Vergangenheit und Zukunft, beschränkt sind". Some examples from the Rig Veda are given in (2), where (2a) describes a (timeless) characteristic of the god Agni and (2b) describes a (timeless) truth from nature:

(2) a. *kuma:ró ná vi:rúdhah $\geq$  sarpad urví:h* (X.79.3)

*lad/NOM.SG like plants crawl/3SG.INJ broad*  
'like a young man he crawls towards the broad plants'

b. *divé-dive sú:ryo darsvató bhu:t* (VI.30.2)

*day.day /LOC.SG sun/NOM.SG visible become/3SG.INJ*  
'day by day the sun becomes visible'

Moreover, this Vedic function for the injunctive is matched by the Greek gnomic aorist, a use of the regular aorist (marked formally to show past time through the augment) to designate atemporal, timeless truths – the augment here is anomalous historically but appears in this use since the augmentless injunctive, it seems, was interpreted in Homeric Greek as nothing more than a variant of the truly temporal aorist, thus allowing the augmented aorist to assume a function of the augmentless injunctive, at a time when the original value of the injunctive had been lost. An

example from Greek of such an aorist with "out-of-time/timeless" function is given in (3), from Euripides *frag.*, 424:

(3) mivæhJmevrato;n            me;nkaqeï`len            uJyovqen,    to;n            dæ            h`ræ  
a]nw

one-day    one-man PRT bring-down/AOR.3SG from-high another PRT raise/AOR.3SG up

'Generally, one day (will) bring down a man from a height and (will) raise another high',

It is important to note that even though gnomic aorists seem to be somewhat parallel to the timeless use of the Vedic injunctive, it has been argued, by Bakker 2001, that they instead are characterized not by timelessness and proverbial wisdom but by relevance and nearness to the speaker. For Homeric Greek, in Bakker's view, the augmented aorists are part of the "language of immediacy" and are connected with "the speaker's present and immediate situation". By inference, then, unaugmented aorists in Homeric Greek would be somewhat distanced from the speaker's present state, consistent with the semantics of the Vedic injunctive.<sup>6</sup>

From the perspective of evidentiality, the usage in (2) and (3), even if the gnomic aorist is not what it has traditionally been taken to be, is particularly striking, since the timeless aspect of the injunctive effects a clear distancing on the part of the speaker towards a given statement; in a sense, it involves a reporting by the speaker of events or material not directly seen or witnessed by him or her, and thus is consistent with an interpretation that sees this a sort of eye-witness vs. non-witnessed distinction within the verbal system, thus an evidential-like function.

Moreover, from a typological standpoint, this timelessness usage has parallels in other languages outside of Indo-European that are clear evidential-marking languages; the Amazonian languages Jarawara (Dixon 2003) and Tariana (Aikhenvald 2003b), for instance, both have extensive evidentiality systems, and within those systems there is regular marking for the expression of timeless statements.

Still, some caveats are appropriate concerning the probative value of the injunctive for positing evidentiality as part of the PIE verbal system. A potential problem for this interpretation is that the injunctive has been taken as the building block for the more familiar tense/mood-marked

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<sup>6</sup> I am indebted to Brent Vine for bringing Bakker's work to my attention.

verb of PIE, in that those marked forms can be seen as built from the injunctive. In particular, as suggested at least as early as Thurneysen 1883, and developed by Watkins 1963, third person singular injunctive \*bhere-t appears to have been the basis for the present tense form (3SG) \*bhere-t-i via the addition of a "hic-et-nunc" marker \*-i, for the imperfect past \*e-bhere-t (3SG) via the addition of the temporal marker (perhaps originally an adverbial or sentence connective), the "augment", and for the imperative (3SG) \*bhere-t-u via the addition of a marker \*-u. Under that view, the injunctive would indeed indicate timelessness, but it would not be a *special* verb form for just that purpose, and thus might only incidentally be consistent with what an evidential language might offer here.

In addition, there are other uses for the injunctive; based on the evidence of Vedic where the primary function of the injunctive is in the prohibitive construction with *ma:* (from PIE \*me:), it is generally assumed that \*me: plus the injunctive is a PIE syntagm. Thus timelessness is not even the primary function of the injunctive in the language, Vedic, in which it is most clearly seen as a separate category. And further, other verb forms can fill the 'out-of-time' function, e.g. the present tense in Greek, and it may even be the case that nominal sentences without a copula expressed general, timeless statements, as argued most recently by Praust 2002 (drawing on insights from Benveniste 1950). All of these considerations taken together limit the extent to which the timeless injunctive is at all significant for revealing anything about systematic evidentiality as a system within the PIE verb.

Nonetheless, there are some further potentially relevant considerations with the injunctive to take account of in this regard. In particular, the injunctive has a reflex in Old Irish, in, among other things, the special use of the 1<sup>st</sup> person prototonic verb forms in replies, noted by Thurneysen (1946: 29) and discussed by Draak 1952, and dubbed the "responsive" by Watkins 1963 (see also Watkins 1969). The "responsive" form is the way of saying 'yes' in Irish, achieved by repeating in the first person form the verb which in the question or statement provoking the response is in the 2<sup>nd</sup> person, e.g. *Ní-chumci són* 'Thou canst not (do) that' ... *Cumcin écin* '(Yes), I can indeed!',



where *cumcin* echoes/(co)responds-to *chumcí* – importantly, as Watkins shows, this "responsive" form can be taken to derive from the PIE injunctive.<sup>7</sup>

It may well be that the responsive reflects an old strategy within IE for answering yes/no questions, since the repeating of a verb in a response situation is found in other languages in the family, including, for instance, Modern Greek, where, as shown in (4), the response to a yes-no question with a second-person verb is typically just the verb in the first person:

- (4) *éxis singenís stin Kalifornia? éxo.*  
have/2SG relatives in-the California? I-have (= 'Yes')

'Do you have relatives in California? Yes.' (literally: "...in California? I have.")

This answering pattern is found elsewhere in the Balkans, e.g. in Bulgarian, and also in other parts of Europe, including, however, non-Indo-European languages such as Finnish (Holmberg 2001<sup>8</sup>). Given such a distribution and given the fact as well that the form involved in examples such as (4) is not in any way connected with the old injunctive, this general repetition pattern may simply reflect a typologically natural answering strategy, and thus may not be at all connected to any potentially older pattern within Indo-European.

Still, returning to the injunctive and the Old Irish responsive, importantly for the issues under consideration here, in terms of function and in the light of evidential systems, this use of a continuation of the injunctive in answers in Old Irish is reminiscent of so-called "locutor" systems in which, as described by Woodbury (1986: 192) "second person forms in questions anticipate the use of first person in the answer" and in which, as discussed by Aikhenvald 2003a, verbal forms "can indicate speaker's surprise ... [coding] the degrees of congruence of the information with a speaker's general knowledge, and thus [are] indirectly connected with the way of obtaining information". Relevant in this regard is Draak's labeling of these Irish uses as "emotional reflexes" (though Watkins disputes this characterization), so that they may well reflect some "mediation" by the speaker, indicating a particular stance taken on the truth of the content of the utterance.

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<sup>7</sup> There are other views of the origins of the responsive; see, e.g., Cowgill 1975.

<sup>8</sup> I thank Sasha Aikhenvald for providing me with this reference.

The Old Irish responsive therefore makes the situation more interesting regarding evidentiality in PIE, assuming that the usage really is old and the injunctive reflects the original form of this syntagm. With this construction, there are now two typical evidential-type uses of the PIE injunctive, making it more plausible to talk of it in terms of a specialized evidential form.

Another potentially telling piece of evidence has to do with the presence of quotative elements in some of the older stages of IE languages. Inasmuch as quotativity is often linked to evidentiality, and moreover certain possible origins of quotative markers would suggest that they reflect a distancing by the speaker with respect to the content of quote or a mitigating/approximative value to the words quoted, these quotative markers are of interest here for the evaluation of the extent of evidentiality in PIE. The most important fact here is the presence in Anatolian, especially Hittite, of an overt quotative marker, indicating direct speech; the Hittite form is *war* (before vowels, versus *-wa* before consonants). The presence of such a grammatical marker, admittedly residing in a single lexical item and thus on the borderline of grammar and lexicon, in one of the oldest attested IE languages in itself makes one think of reconstructing it for PIE, but under either of the leading competing etymologies for it, some possible insight into PIE usage emerges.

Of various proposed and competing etymologies for *-war*, two stand out as being of interest regarding evidentiality. Fortson 1999 and many others take *-war* from *\*werH-* 'say', whereas Joseph 1981, following others, derive it from an equivocating (i.e., mediating) use of 'like; thus'. The 'say' etymology could be indicative of a distancing by the speaker from the words found in the quote, as if to say "these are not my words; someone else said them", whereas the 'like, thus' etymology recalls an approximative function of Sanskrit *iva*, which has the equivocating value of roughly "as it were" in some Vedic examples. Interestingly, a quotative marker is also found in Indo-Iranian: Skt. *iti* 'so, thus' is paralleled by the (non-cognate, however) Av. *úiti*, both marking directly quoted words. Thus it seems that two old traditions within IE overtly mark quotativity though with different elements, so the situation with quotativity may be like the situation with passive in PIE mentioned above.

Here too, though, some caveats are in order. For one thing, the use of *iti* / *úiti* for direct quotes in Indo-Iranian seems to be a late development in both Sanskrit and Avestan. In fact, the oldest marking for quotes in Sanskrit seems simply to be zero, that is, the absence of an overt

marker altogether, as argued by Thompson 2002. In that case, markers found in Indo-Iranian are not really relevant to PIE situation. Moreover, each of the two possible sources of the Anatolian quotative presents a fairly "natural" (or at least unsurprising) development to a quotative (with either SAY or THUS as the basis), so that *wa(r)* could easily be an independent innovation in Anatolian.

The upshot of all this with regard to quotativity is thus the somewhat negative conclusion that there are no strong indications for a special marking for quotativity for PIE; the evidence necessitating a projection back into the proto-language is just not there. These facts may reveal something about quotativity in these branches of the IE family, but not (necessarily) about the proto-language.

#### 4.2. Lexical Evidence

Besides these grammatical indications – or lack thereof – there is some evidence of a more purely lexical nature bearing on evidentiality in PIE. In particular, there are several instances of verbs that seem to mean 'know' or 'perceive' in some way. To the extent that they are just a matter of lexis, they do not reveal anything about evidentiality as a grammatical element, but they do, it can be argued, provide some insights into a cultural milieu in which some aspects of evidentiality, e.g. the truth of a statement or the modality by which knowledge is gained, were critically important to speakers, even if not encoded grammatically.

The first thing to note here is that two different roots for 'know' are present in most of the languages and each can be reconstructed for the proto-language – these are the roots \*g'neH- and \*weyd- ('erkennen' vs. 'erblicken', in the definitions given in Rix 2001), as seen in, for example, Skt.  $\sqrt{j\tilde{n}a}$ - vs.  $\sqrt{vid}$ -; Gk. (gi)gnwvskw vs. (Ī)oi`d-a; English *know* vs. *wit*; OCS *znati* vs. *viděti*, etc. For most of the languages, the derivatives show some differentiation in meaning/use pertaining to *type* of knowledge (e.g. knowing/being-familiar-with people versus knowing facts, as with German *kennen* vs. *wissen*), but in some of the languages, there seems to be little or no significant semantic difference especially as to modality; such is the case for Sanskrit (e.g., Monier-Williams 1899: s.v. gives the meanings for both as 'know, have knowledge, become acquainted, perceive, apprehend').

In Greek, the ranges of meaning for each of the cognates overlap considerably, yet the main source for Greek lexical information (Liddell et al. 1968) gives the following intriguing distinction:

(*Ī*)oi`d-a = 'know by reflection' whereas (gi)gnwvskw = 'know by observation'. These definitions suggest a lexically encoded distinction of witnessed knowledge vs. inferred knowledge. If this is not merely a matter of a secondary differentiation within Greek (as can happen with near-synonyms), this distinction might point to a preservation of a PIE difference between the two roots. The fact that (*Ī*)oi`d-a originated in the perfect-system (thus functioning like a preterito-present) and that its aorist and a (synchronic) perfect are usually supplied by (gi)gnwvskw is reminiscent of tense restrictions on evidentiality marking found in some languages (e.g. Finno-Ugric). One might well ask also why PIE would have two essentially synonymous roots, so that some differentiation in usage or some nuance of meaning, possibly somewhat subtle in nature, would not be unexpected in such a case, and mode of knowledge acquisition is as reasonable a distinction as any. Nonetheless, a caveat is in order: the root \*weyd- that (*Ī*)oi`d-a comes from means 'see' in other tenses (cf. Lat. *vide:ere*, for instance) and the usual account of its semantics is simply 'I have seen' → 'I know'. Given an association with 'see', one might expect (*Ī*)oi`d-a to have the nuance of 'know by observation' not 'know by reflection'. Thus the distinction reported in the Greek sources may well be just a secondary differentiation within Greek; a more definitive answer awaits a more in-depth consideration of the relevant textual attestations of these verbs that goes beyond the dictionary evidence.

What makes these facts somewhat tantalizing is that at least one other root within IE shows some convergence in meaning between 'know' and 'see', based on the meaning of their reflexes in the various languages. In particular, Rix 2001 notes a root \*k<sup>w</sup>eyt- 'bemerken, erkennen', and this has given the meanings 'recognize, realize' (as in Av. *cit-*), 'count, honor, read' (as in Sl. *cit-*), and 'see' (as in the Skt. derivative *citana-* 'coming into appearance'). One can speculate, therefore, that this root was originally 'know' through visual evidence, and indeed, the Slavic semantic innovation of 'read' can be taken as the endpoint of a natural path of development, since sight is generally involved in reading.

Still, a cautionary note must be sounded here, since other metaphors apparently were involved in the development of 'know' meanings within Indo-European. Especially noteworthy in this regard is the cognate pair of Lat. *scio* and Hitt. *sekk-/sakk-* 'know', since they seem to derive

from a root \*sekH- (Rix 2001: 524), originally meaning 'cut; distinguish' and seen in Lat. *seco*: 'cut; mow'. If 'cut' is the source for these verbs for 'know', then it is hard to see how any considerations of evidentiality could have figured in that derivation, suggesting that evidentiality, while possibly relevant for some lexical derivation, was not pervasive throughout all verbs of 'knowing' in PIE.

Finally, there is other lexical evidence that is even more closely tied to a cultural milieu and suggests a cultural concern for knowledge-source and veracity. In particular, derivatives of \*Hes- 'be' occur within the context of IE legal language (cf. Watkins 1967, 1970, 1987), and have meanings that are tied to matters of evidence (in a legal sense). Especially relevant here are Skt. *satya*- 'true; truth', Lat. *sons* 'guilty', OIc. *sannr* 'true; guilty', Hitt. *asan* '(it) is (so)' (in public confession). One can speculate that such derivatives might indicate that 'be', at least in a legal context, could mean 'must be' or 'be evident', with 'truth' as one side of what the evidence shows things to be and 'guilty' as the other (cf. Benveniste 1960 on PIE 'be' as originally 'really, actually be, exist'). Moreover, this modal value could further be interpreted as an indication about the information-source for or the likely veracity of an assertion. In any case, one might infer from an evidence-related meaning for 'be' that the system – or the cultural milieu – in which it was embedded was one in which speakers had to make some statement about the information-source or the likely truth of an assertion, so that an evidentiality system (or at least a pervasive set of evidential strategies) becomes easier to accept. In this regard, the discussion by Watkins 1967: 407 on \*Hes- in "ritual public profession of guilt or innocence" in PIE society takes on an added significance.

Further, as a final suggestion that is considerably more speculative in nature, it is fair to wonder, within the scope of a concern for evidentiality and knowledge source, if the Indic distinction between *svruti*- 'authoritative knowledge that has been heard' and *smr̥ti*- 'authoritative knowledge handed down (in other ways)' is at all relevant here,<sup>9</sup> as a further indication that the source of knowledge was culturally significant for at least some group of ancient Indo-Europeans.

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<sup>9</sup> Monier-Williams (1899: s.v.) defines *svruti*- as 'sacred knowledge orally [and thus aurally/BDJ] transmitted by the Bráhmans from generation to generation ... and so differing from *smr̥ti*- or what is remembered and handed down in writing by human authors'.

And, if so for ancient Indo-Aryans, why not also for PIE speakers? Possibly relevant here as well is the fact that the Albanian idiom for 'understand', *marr vesh*, is a combination of *marr* 'take' and *vesh*, the word for 'ear' (so that this is literally 'take ear'), suggesting that heard knowledge in this cultural context is the key to (true) understanding.<sup>10</sup>

## 5. Conclusion

The material presented here is almost of necessity speculative, as the extent of the relevant evidence is actually rather limited. Nonetheless, there is some evidence, and taken cumulatively, it perhaps cannot be dismissed out of hand. Thus it seems that at least a weak case can be made for evidentiality as a relevant construct in PIE, both in grammar and in society. Still, what emerges from this discussion for the proto-language is not in any way comparable to the elaborate system seen in some of the later stages of the daughter languages, in particular Macedonian or Bulgarian, or that found in a language with thorough-going evidentiality, such as Turkish. That observation alone may place the characterization of PIE as a (quasi-)evidential language on somewhat shaky ground, however suggestive the evidence might be. One can hope that the last word has not yet been said on this matter and that these observations are an appropriate challenge to Indo-Europeanists, as it were.

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<sup>10</sup> See Evans and Wilkins 2000 for an interesting discussion of the development of 'know' meanings from 'hear' meanings, all quite relevant to the cases under consideration here.

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