

## **‘Omen’, a Basque evidential particle contributing to the truth-conditions of the utterance**

The aim of my proposal is to provide a brief account of the main semantic and, specially, pragmatic properties of the Basque *reportative* particle ‘omen’, in order to give a theoretical basis to what has been said up to now about it in linguistic literature, grammar and dictionaries of Basque language (from now on the ‘standard’ view on ‘omen’). For that purpose, I use some of the main concepts and theories of semantics and pragmatics: Grice’s (1967a, 1967b) theory of conversation, Searle’s (1969) speech act theory and Korta & Perry’s (2007, 2011) critical pragmatics. At the same time, I take advantage of experimental studies, combining them with speakers’ intuitions and corpora, in an attempt either to reinforce some hypothesis and claims or to change and improve them.

Three claims can be extracted from the ‘standard’ view on ‘omen’:

- a. ‘Omen’ signals that the proposition the speaker expresses is said by someone other than herself.
- b. The speaker expresses uncertainty on the truth (or falsity) of the proposition expressed.
- c. It is the equivalent of the Spanish ‘*se dice (que)*’, ‘*parece (que)*’, ‘*dicen (que)*’, and French ‘*on dit (que)*’, ‘*il parâit (que)*’, ‘*semble-t-il*’.

I think that (a), (b) and (c) point to some basic properties of the meaning and use of ‘omen’, but they are misleading in several respects. In this presentation, I will focus on the claim (a). It seems to claim that the proposition expressed by the speaker of an ‘omen’-utterance is just what the speaker of the reported utterance said: namely the same proposition *p*. In the framework of speech act theory (Searle 1969), this would suggest that ‘omen’ does not contribute to the propositional content of the utterance, but it is an illocutionary force indicator. Faller (2002), for example, adopts this stance for the analysis of the Cuzco Quechua reportative enclitic ‘-si’ (very similar to ‘omen’ in several aspects), following, among other things, the results of the assent/dissent test. The test says that if an element can be questioned, doubted, rejected or accepted, it contributes to the propositional content of the speech act; otherwise, it should be taken as an illocutionary force indicator. However, our intuitions about the application of the test, in the case of ‘omen’, give a different result: that is, that the challenge, rejection or acceptance can be either about *p* or about the ‘omen’-utterance (*p<sub>omen</sub>*).

Nevertheless, I have also run an experiment (restricted to the rejection response) to test those intuitions, based on that test. And the results show that the subjects tend to accept that the rejection can be both of *p* and *p<sub>omen</sub>* (the results are similar to those of the verb ‘*esan du(te) p*’ (‘He/she(they) said that *p*’, it is said that *p*’). So, following the results of this test, ‘omen’ contributes to the propositional content of the utterance. In addition, the results of the scope test (see, e.g., Recanati 1989) led me to the same conclusion. Applying it to sentential (external) negation, communicative predicates and knowledge predicates, it is clear that ‘omen’ gets narrow scope.

Thus, these results show that we do not have to make the distinction implied by the claim in (a) between the statement and the nuance ‘omen’ adds to it; rather, they are two different propositions: the proposition *p* expressed by an utterance without ‘omen’

and the proposition  $p_{omen}$  expressed by an ‘omen’-utterance. So, an ‘omen’-utterance reporting  $p$  does not state that  $p$ , but that someone else stated that  $p$ . But what kind of contribution does ‘omen’ make?

Regarding the context-invariant (semantic) meaning of ‘omen’-sentences, I propose that: given a sentence  $S$ , the proposition  $p$  expressed by  $S$ , and an utterance  $u_{omen}$  reporting  $p$ , the meaning can be rendered as

( $M$ - $S_{omen}$ )  $p$  IS STATED BY SOMEONE OTHER THAN THE SPEAKER OF ‘ $u_{omen}$ ’.

I say ‘stated’ for two reasons: (i) because ‘omen’ can only be attached to declarative sentences. It cannot appear in questions, exclamatives and imperatives; (ii) because the proposition  $p$  has to be *said* by the original speaker, in order to be able to be reported by ‘omen’. The results of another test (which we can call the *reportability test*) show that the subjects tend not to accept reporting of non-literal contents (particularized conversational implicatures and presuppositions, at least) by the use of ‘omen’. The results are, again, similar to those of the verb ‘*esan*’ (‘to say’).

The formulation given would be the minimal type content of any utterance of any ‘omen’-sentence. It says ‘someone other than the speaker of ‘ $u_{omen}$ ’’, making reference to the original speaker. In fact, ‘omen’ gathers any option between fully determined or specific original speaker and fully indeterminate or non-specific one. This can be explained by distinguishing between contents of the utterance, instead of just talking of THE content (in the singular) of the utterance (with Korta & Perry 2007, 2011). So, when the meaning of the ‘omen’-utterance (that is, its context-invariant meaning) interacts with context, we get a variety of truth-conditions, depending on the speaker’s and the original speaker’s nature.

## References

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