

REPORTATIVE EVIDENTIALS IN THE ROMANIAN WRITTEN MEDIA DISCOURSE

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This paper focuses on the Romanian written media discourse with a view to point out the evidential strategies used for showing that the knowledge conveyed by the assertion comes from a third (specified / unspecified) source, different from the speaker's own direct experience. Assuming that the written media discourse makes great use of reportative verbs, we aim at highlighting the opposition between the neutral reportative verbs (e.g. *say, state*) and the verbs which may point to the speaker's agreement, more likely his/her disagreement, regarding the reported opinions (e.g. *claim, pretend*). Special emphases are placed on the lexical elements frequently associated to the reportative verb (*news vs gossip*) as well as on the verbal form occurring after the reportative (*indicative mood vs conditional mood*).

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Key words: evidentiality, evidential marker, reportative verb, argumentative device

Introduction

The general framework of this analysis is provided by the study of evidentiality, seen as a linguistic category indicating the way the source of information is marked in discourse (traditional and recent studies such as: Jakobson 1957; Chafe & Nichols 1986; *Journal of Pragmatics*, vol. 33, March 2001; Aikhenvald 2004). One line of inquiry of our research project is directed towards validating the theory according to which evidential indicators have an argumentative function, i.e. they are meant to induce or increase the audience's commitment to the standpoint advanced and / or defended by the speaker. The examples under study are taken from items of news published by the Romanian news agency Mediafax, considered to be the largest independent Romanian news agency and therefore a trustworthy information source. We are dealing with a two-sided task: (1) identifying the evidential indicators specific to the informative written media; (2) highlighting their argumentative function. Our hypothesis is that evidential indicators may serve to support a specific argumentative strategy in which pointing to the source of information plays an important rhetorical function.

1. Conceptual approach of evidentiality

Generally speaking, evidentiality refers to the linguistic phenomenon specific to some non Indo-European languages, pointing to the way the source of knowledge is grammatically indicated in a given assertion. Evidentiality becomes manifest through the use of evidential markers, i.e. grammatical morphemes whose function is to refer to the nature of the evidence supporting a statement (Aikhenvald 2003).

All languages have their ways of pointing to the information source, but evidentiality as grammatical category exists in a limited range of languages, namely languages from north and south America. Having as criterion the existence of evidentiality as a grammatical category, Lazard (2001: 360) establishes three major classes of languages:

1) Languages (such as English) where evidentiality is lexically marked through items such as: *allegedly, people say that, it seems*, etc.

Apparently at the end of a paper she gave, she pulled out a giant hairbrush. (Chafe, 1986: 268)

2) Languages which are about to turn evidentiality into a grammatical category (we are talking about the languages where the evidential meaning isn't conveyed by a specific form,

but is rendered by a form which doesn't have the evidential value as a basic function). For instance, in Eastern Armenian, the perfect tense whose main value is to refer to a past situation whose consequence is felt in the present, may acquire, in particular contexts, evidential values.

3) Languages which have the grammatical category of evidentiality; it means that in these languages, the verbal form contains a morpheme meant to indicate the information source. However, when taking into account these languages, there is an important distinction to be made: there are, on the one hand, the languages where evidentials are necessarily included in any verbal form (Tuyuca) and, on the other hand, the languages that allow an opposition between an evidential register and a neutral register, unmarked in terms of evidentiality; in the latter case, the speaker can choose between the two registers:

Exemple 1: Tuyuca

díiga apé-**wi** (I saw him play)

díiga apé-**ti** (I heard the game and him, but I didn't see it or him)

díiga apé-**yi** (I have seen evidence that he played: his distinctive shoe print)

díiga apé-**yigi** (I obtained the information from someone else)

díiga apé-**hīyi** (It is reasonable to assume that he did)

(Guentchéva, 2004:15)

Exemple 2: Western Armenian

sir-ac en [love-PFT AUX 3PL] (they have loved) – an evidentially unmarked statement

sir-**er** en [love-EVID AUX3PL] (they have loved (EVID)) – an evidentially marked statement

(Donabédian, 2001: 422)

It seems that the notion of evidentiality has undergone in the literature an extension of meaning: originally associated to languages such as Tuyuca where the compulsory presence of verbal morphemes justifies the existence of evidentiality as grammatical category, evidentiality has subsequently been approached in other languages, such as Romanian, where evidentiality hasn't been grammaticalized and yet the specialists deal with evidential markers (Zafiu, 2008) of lexical or grammatical types.

2. On evidential indicators in Romanian

There is an overt distinction between Amerindian languages, which present in their structure evidential morphemes associated to the verb in order to point out the very source of knowledge, and most Indo-European languages which indicate how the speaker has got the information in different ways, including tense forms, modals, lexical items. Since the notion of *evidential* has been associated to those verbal morphemes necessarily included in the verb form, the need was felt to find a distinct concept meant to cover both grammatical and lexical devices specific to most Indo-European languages and pointing to the knowledge source.

According to Ganea & Gâță (2008: 266), *evidentiality* is a two-sided phenomenon:

- *restricted evidentiality* perceived as a grammatical category in languages whose morphosyntactic system overarches evidential particles / morphemes, called *evidential markers* or simply *evidentials*;

- *extended evidentiality* specific to most languages which comprise *evidential indicators* that can range from modals to lexical items.

According to the way the source of information is marked in discourse, we may deal with direct evidentiality (when the speaker himself has visually or auditorily witnessed the action) or with indirect evidentiality (when the speaker hasn't been a personal witness to the action). In the latter situation, the information in the statement may be either inferred (when the speaker deduces the action) or reported / quoted (when somebody else is the provider of information, in which case the polyphonic characteristic of the discourse becomes manifest).

The information which is not personally observed by the speaker (unlike the information derived from visual, auditory or even olfactory experience) may be presented in discourse as either resulting from an inference or as reported knowledge. For the latter category, Aikhenvald makes use of the term *reportative evidentials* which include both *hearsay evidentials* (in this case, the reported information may or may not be accurate) and *quotative evidentials* (the reported information is accurate and it is not open to any interpretation).

When approaching the linguistic domain of evidentiality in Romanian, Zafiu (2008: 715-718) adopts the terminology normally applied to non Indo-European languages, namely *inferential markers*, *quotative / reportative markers* and *perception markers*, which all fall under the concept of *evidentials*. According to Zafiu, *evidentiality* in Romanian is rendered by both lexical and grammatical markers (we argue that these *markers* should be referred to as *indicators*, see *supra*) including verb tenses, epistemic verbs, adverbs, verba dicendi, expressions:

- a) *Inferential markers* – they point to the fact that the speaker directly experiences a given situation S' which triggers an inferential process leading him/her to the initial situation S (Plungian 2001: 352); in this category Zafiu (2008: 715) places the presumptive mood (*Oți fi ostenite.*), epistemic modal verbs (*Trebuie să fie acasă, am văzut lumină*), epistemic verbs of thinking (*Presupun că aveți dreptate*), evidential adverbs (*Pesemne că este bolnav*);
- b) *Quotative / reportative markers* – they indicate that the speaker was given the information by a third instance. Reportative evidentials serve to “mitigate speaker’s responsibility for the truthfulness of the reported utterance” (Hill and Irvine, 1993, quoted by Michael, 2006: 2).
- c) *Perception markers* – their purpose is to show that the speaker has got the information from visual, auditory experience. In Romanian, these markers are considered as the least grammaticalized and overarch perception verbs (*a vedea, a auzi*), presentative expressions (*iată, uite*) which are usually accompanied by a mirative value (Scripnic, Gâță, 2008: 381).

3. Evidential strategies of the Romanian written media discourse

Our paper focuses on the disclosing and description of evidential strategies used in Romanian written media informative discourse. We mainly aim at identifying the recurrent reportative verbs used for showing that the knowledge conveyed by the assertion comes from a (specified / unspecified) source, different from the speaker’s own direct experience. Special emphasis is placed on reportative verbs used to confirm (C-type verbs) the propositional content placed in a reporting utterance and reportative verbs used to deny (D-type verbs) the propositional content placed in a reporting utterance. We also aim at highlighting the lexical elements frequently associated to the reportative act (*fapt vs știre*; FACT VS NEWS) as well as on the verbal form occurring after the reportative (Rom. *Indicative vs Conditional*). Furthermore, we attempt to provisionally answer the following question: are evidential strategies endowed with argumentative function, i.e. can we assume that reportative indicators help putting forward a standpoint that the speaker indirectly aims at imposing on the audience / readers?

3.1. Reportative verbs in the Romanian written media discourse

As a starting point, we take into account the distinction (Zafiu 2008: 717) between explicit reportative verbs (*X a declarat că* – X DECLARED THAT) and implicit structures meant to bring to the fore the information conveyed by the assertion and to minimally indicate the distance from the knowledge source (*Cică nu va participa la alegeri* – He will allegedly not take part in the elections). Therefore, we are operating a distinction between neutral reportative verbs (verbs which have as unique function to indicate that the discourse is derived from a(n) (un)specified source) and epistemically charged reportative verbs (besides revealing the knowledge source, they also disclose the journalist’s attitude towards the informational content conveyed to the readers).

3.1.1. *Neutral reportative verbs* - A first remark is that reportative verbs identified in the Mediafax excerpts belong more to the category of *X stated that* and less to the category of *X said that*. This can be explained by the fact that Mediafax is a respectable newsagency and such instances of discourse correspond in most respects to the formal register. Rom. *a declara* is used in the *perfect compus* (analytical perfect) tense and eventfully accompanied by a temporal adverbial and by the explicit mention of the knowledge source. Its use is meant to show that the speaker reached the information through a hearsay event and not through direct experience or through inference:

- (1) Guvernul intenționează să ajusteze în avans accizele la tutun și alcool, ca măsură de majorare a veniturilor bugetare, *a declarat, joi, ministrul Finanțelor, Gheorghe Pogea*.
(<http://www.mediafax.ro/economic/pogea-avem-in-vedere-devansarea-accizelor-la-tutun-si-alcool.html?1686;3824467>)

When the source of knowledge is not revealed as a particular familiar entity, the emphasis is placed on the (piece of) knowledge transmitted and not on the source (since unknown or meant to stay anonymous). In such contexts, the verb may be also used in the plural and the temporal adverbial may be absent:

- (2) Consilierul PDL Mircea Raicu va prelua funcția de viceprimar al Capitalei, în locul lui Răzvan Murgeanu, acesta fiind cotate în partid cu șansele cele mai mari de a fi numit în această funcție, *au declarat, pentru MEDIAFAX, surse din PDL*.
(<http://www.mediafax.ro/social/mircea-raicu-inlocuitorul-lui-murgeanu-in-functia-de-viceprimar.html?1688;3805806>)

Other verbs prone to function in the same position as the verb *a declara*, occurring in the *perfect compus* and keeping within the formal language register are: *a afirma* (AFFIRM / ASSERT), *a anunța* (ANNOUNCE), *a preciza* (DETAIL), *a menționa* (MENTION):

- (3) Un diplomat american a intentat o acțiune în justiție împotriva numirii în postul de secretar de Stat a lui Hillary Clinton, apreciind că această numire este neconstituțională, *a anunțat joi Judicial Watch, asociația de avocați care îl reprezintă*.
(<http://www.mediafax.ro/externe/numirea-lui-hillary-clinton-in-postul-de-secretar-de-stat-contestata-in-justitie.html?3614;3827822>)
- (4) În acest moment se așteaptă decizia finală a Comisiei, dat fiind faptul că, în prealabil, trebuie consultat Comitetul Fondurilor Agricole, *au afirmat reprezentanții APDRP*.
(<http://www.mediafax.ro/economic/romania-ar-putea-returna-ce-pana-la-13-9-milioane-euro.html?1686;3809971>)

Although the past tense of the reportative verb is justified by the moment when the discourse was produced, a moment prior to the reporting act, the use of the present tense is not entirely excluded. Verbs such as *a relata* (REPORT), *a informa* (INFORM) occur in the present tense when the knowledge source is not a person, but a newspaper, a web site whose activity is not limited to just one statement regarding a particular situation:

- (5) Oficiali ai administrației Barack Obama lucrează la redactarea unei scrisori către Iran, din partea președintelui, care are ca scop dezghețarea relațiilor diplomatice și posibilitatea demarării unor discuții directe, *relatează The Guardian*.
(<http://www.mediafax.ro/externe/echipa-lui-obama-lucreaza-din-noiembrie-la-redactarea-unei-scrisori-catre-iran.html?3614;3822860>)

(6) Cascadorul care îl dubla pe actorul Daniel Radcliffe în cel mai recent film al seriei "Harry Potter" s-a rănit foarte grav după ce a căzut în urma unei explozii, în timp ce filma o scenă, *informează telegraph.co.uk*.

(<http://www.mediafax.ro/life-inedit/cascadorul-care-il-dubla-pe-daniel-radcliffe-accidentat-grav-in-timpul-filmarilor.html?4728;3823153>)

The impersonal verbal structure *se arată* is mainly used whenever the knowledge source is an official document (surveys, legal papers, etc.) issued by a particular organisation, acting as an authority for the media agency:

(7) Dana Năstase s-a ocupat personal de materialele de campanie ale soțului său, Adrian Năstase, candidat în 2004 la alegerile prezidențiale, *se arată în rechizitoriul* dosarului "Trofeul calității în construcții", trimis de procurorii DNA instanței supreme.

(<http://www.mediafax.ro/social/dana-nastase-lua-deciziile-privind-materialele-de-campanie-ale-sotului-rechizitoriu.html?1688;3822821>)

3.1.2. *Epistemically charged reportative verbs* - Evidentiality and the epistemic modality are often linked together. "Evidentiality deals with the source of information for the speaker's utterance while epistemic modality concerns itself with the degree of commitment on the part of the speaker for his or her utterance" (de Haan 1999: 83). Zafiu (2008) argues that the linguistic phenomenon of evidentiality is a sub-domain of the epistemic modality. In Romanian, there is a series of reportative verbs which have a double function: they indicate reported knowledge (evidential value) while revealing the journalist's attitude towards the knowledge communicated (modal value).

A verb largely endowed with modal value is *a pretinde* (PRETEND). When using it, the journalist is fully aware that he / she does not only indicate reported knowledge, but he / she also reveals his/her commitment to the truthfulness of the knowledge transmitted:

(8) El (Josef Fritzl) *a pretins* că fiica sa a fugit de acasă după ce a intrat într-o sectă și că le-a cerut părinților săi să aibă grijă de cei trei copii, pe care i-a abandonat în fața ușii.

(<http://www.mediafax.ro/externe/josef-fritzl-ar-putea-fi-judecata-inainte-de-paste.html?3614;3654338>)

In the example above, the property of PRETEND of belonging to the category of *verba dicendi* is undermined by the epistemic distance imposed, since the journalist casts doubt on the truthfulness of the reported information.

Another verb that we consider as belonging to the same category is *a susține* (CLAIM). In our opinion, this verb has a particular behaviour: used in the present tense, it may be interpreted as *a pretinde*, i.e. it shows epistemic distance. However, in the past tense the verb becomes a synonym of *a declara*, introducing only reported knowledge:

(9) Fondul Național de Dezvoltare, *în care premierul Tăriceanu susține* că sunt 11 miliarde lei, este golit din punct de vedere financiar și conține doar bani fictivi, deoarece banii obținuți din vânzarea Băncii Comerciale Române și din alte privatizări au fost cheltuiți, a declarat premierul Emil Boc.

(<http://www.mediafax.ro/economic/boc-ce-spune-fostul-premier-e-o-gogoasa-fondul-de-dezvoltare-este-golit.html?1686;3826223>)

(10) *Ministrul Justiției, Cătălin Predoiu, a susținut, joi*, în cadrul ceremoniei de la Palatul Cotroceni de investire a unei noi promoții de magistrați, că o sentință dreaptă este una care conferă liniște.

(<http://www.mediafax.ro/social/predoiu-o-sentina-dreapta-este-una-care-conferaliniste.html?1688;3823374>)

We have distinguished between neutral reportative verbs and epistemically charged reportative verbs in the following way: verbs which only indicate reported knowledge (*a declara, a afirma, a anunța, a informa*) vs verbs introducing reported knowledge and epistemic distance. In what follows we will approach a distinctive category of reportative verbs, namely reportative verbs used in the written media discourse to point to the fact that a speaker confirms (C-type verbs) or denies (D-type verbs) some presumably reported fact, such as in *John confirmed / denied that ...* Our purpose is to point out what lexical element is prone to accompany such verbs and which verbal moods are likely to occur after them.

3.2. C(onfirm)- and D(eny)- types reportative verbs

These verbs together with a lexical element such as *fapt* (FACT) vs *știre* (NEWS) form explicit structures meant to show that the statement belongs to a third instance or is derived from hearsay; at the same time the speaker (not the journalist) openly asserts his / her standpoint regarding the statement presented: he/she either agrees to it or denies it.

There are two C-type reportative verbs recurrent in the written media discourse: *a confirma* (CONFIRM) and *a recunoaște* (ADMIT). The verb CONFIRM suggests someone's commitment to the propositional content corresponding to a reporting event:

(11) Liderul Sindicatului "Siderurgistul", Petru Vaidoș, *a confirmat că există probleme din cauza instalațiilor*: "Au înghețat instalațiile și asta a întârziat puțin reluarea producției".

(<http://www.mediafax.ro/social/productia-la-arcelormittal-hunedoara-ar-putea-fi-reluata-pana-marti.html?1688;3771633>)

The hearsay knowledge *există probleme din cauza instalațiilor* ("there are problems caused by plumbing") is confirmed by the speaker (Petru Vaidoș) who rejects any doubt that may have existed concerning the hearsay. The speaking event is reported by the media agency by means of the verb *to confirm* and of the Present Indicative (*there are problems*).

In order to indicate the speaker's straight position of agreement to the knowledge derived from hearsay, a lexical element (the noun *fact*) can be associated to the verb *to confirm*, the noun acting cataphorically with respect to the propositional content to be made explicit. What is confirmed is not a fact, but someone's assertion about a fact having taken place. The explicit structure obtained is: *X a confirmat faptul că* (X CONFIRMED THE FACT THAT), where *fapt* (FACT) is used metaphorically:

(12) Purtătorul de cuvânt al jucătorului, Chris Nathaniel, *a confirmat faptul că* Robinho a fost reținut, marți, în cadrul unei "anchete criminalistice", dar a subliniat că brazilianul este nevinovat.

(<http://www.mediafax.ro/sport/robinho-a-fost-retinut-de-politie-pentru-agresiune-sexuala.html?1689;3815281>)

Another C-type reportative verb used in written media discourse is *a recunoaște* (ADMIT):

(11) Fostul secretar de Stat *a recunoscut că* acum se bucură de viața personală fără o responsabilitate internațională.

(<http://www.mediafax.ro/life-inedit/condoleezza-rice-este-in-cautarea-dragostei-video.html?4728;3831544>)

When using *X a confirmat / recunoscut că* (X CONFIRMED / ADMITTED THAT), the polyphonic character of the statement becomes manifest. The hearsay, involving more or less X, is overtly confirmed as being true by X.

The D-type verbs (*a infirma, a nega, a respinge, a dezminți* - DENY / NEGATE / REJECT) may be followed by a subordinate clause representing the reported knowledge itself. Yet, they may be also accompanied by a lexical element such as *știre* (NEWS), *acuzatie*

(ACCUSATION, ALLEGATION), meant to emphasize that the hearsay is not a real fact, but merely a theory, an appearance, an unsustainable accusation that is mandatory to be rejected:

(12) "Transgaz *infirmă știrile* apărute în presă potrivit cărora s-ar fi discutat în cadrul acestei întâlniri despre o posibilă includere a României, în locul Bulgariei, în proiectul South Stream.

(<http://www.mediafax.ro/economic/transgaz-infirma-ca-a-discutat-cu-gazprom-includerea-romaniei-in-south-stream.html?1686;3345058>)

(13) Rusia *a respins* vineri *acuzările* organizației americane neguvernamentale Human Rights Watch (HRW), potrivit cărora ar fi recurs la bombe cu submuniție în zonele locuite din Georgia.

(<http://www.mediafax.ro/externe/rusia-infirma-folosirea-bombelor-cu-submunitie-in-georgia.html?3614;2928389>)

The opposition between C-type and D-type reportative verbs should be also approached in terms of the verbal forms occurring after them. The analysis leads us to the following observation: commitment to propositional content expressed in the reported utterance is explicitly expressed by means of a C-type verb followed by the Indicative, while a D-type verb introduces the explicit rejection or denial of the propositional content included in the reported utterance, where the Conditional is the rule. Looking back at the examples given under 3.2., we can argue that: 1) C-type verbs are followed by the Indicative, which represents something as a fact, being used for factual statements and positive beliefs; 2) D-type verbs are followed by the Conditional (present or past) which refers to a hypothetical state of affairs, or to an uncertain event that is contingent on another set of circumstances. This is obvious in the following excerpts:

(14) Hamas *neagă* că *ar accepta* în anumite condiții o propunere a UE pentru un armistițiu.

(<http://www.mediafax.ro/externe/hamas-neaga-ca-ar-accepta-in-anumite-conditii-o-propunere-a-ue-pentru-un-armistitiu.html?3614;3690421>)

(15) BEC *infirmă* că liderul PSD București *ar fi depus contestație* împotriva formațiunii conduse de Gigi Becali și anunță că îl va da în judecată pe primarul sectorului 5.

(<http://www.mediafax.ro/social/png-anunta-ca-il-da-in-judecata-pe-vanghelie.html?1688;3583418>)

In the excerpts above, the Conditional appears as more suitable to render someone's opinion, which the speaker is not committed to. The Conditional is used to indicate epistemic distance. Moreover, the action pointed to by means of the Conditional is perceived as referring to an unrealistic situation, so its rejection by the speaker appears as entirely justified.

3.3. Reportative indicators as argumentative devices

In dealing with reportative indicators in Romanian media written informative discourse, a question has arisen: besides their evidential value, can reportative indicators function as strategies meant to defend / attack a standpoint?

The epistemically charged reportative verbs may implicitly introduce a standpoint that the journalist attempts at imposing on the audience:

(16) În 2003, Cruise a supărat asociațiile bolnavilor de dislexie, când *a pretins* într-un interviu că *biserica scientologică l-a vindecat definitiv de această boală*, care este o tulburare nervoasă, constând în dificultatea de a citi și a înțelege ceea ce se citește.

(<http://www.mediafax.ro/life-inedit/tom-cruise-s-a-vindecat-de-dislexie-cu-ajutorul-bisericii-scientologice.html?4728;3706482>)

The verb PRETEND has an evidential value since it indicates that the knowledge comes from a third instance, namely Tom Cruise in an interview. But this verb conveys more than DECLARE, as it allows the journalist to express his attitude concerning the reported knowledge: he/she isn't committed to the truthfulness of the statement. He/she indirectly

introduces his/her standpoint by means of the verb PRETEND: Tom Cruise may have declared that the Church of Scientology cured him from the disease, but I (the journalist) may hardly believe this is true. The journalist allusively communicated his/her standpoint, but it is questionable whether it is successfully imposed on the readers.

Final remarks

Unlike Zafiu (2008), we have used the term *evidential indicator* and not *evidential marker*, since in Romanian there is not any verbal morpheme / suffix / particle (as it is the case with several non Indo-European languages) attached to the verb to indicate the knowledge source.

In this paper, we have identified and briefly described some evidential strategies used by journalists in order to convey reliability to their statements. Thus, in the written media discourse, the frequent use of reportative verbs points to the fact that the information transmitted comes neither from direct experience nor from inference, but it is taken from a third instance usually mentioned in the discourse. Furthermore, we have distinguished between neutral reportative verbs occurring in written articles (*a declara, a afirma, etc.*) and epistemically charged reportative verbs (*a pretinde, a susține*) in the following way: neutral verbs serve to indicate reported knowledge while epistemic reportative verbs, besides marking the information source, reveal the speaker's attitude regarding the information communicated. This attitude involves more often than not casting doubt on the truthfulness of the information and covertly introducing the speaker's point of view without having the certainty that it is adopted by the audience. We are aware that this issue of the argumentative function of evidential indicators requires further theoretical development.

In dealing with reportative verbs used to confirm (C-type) or to deny (D-type) a particular reported propositional content, we have argued that C-type verbs are generally followed by the Indicative mood, while D-type verbs employ the Conditional. We have come out with an explanation trying to figure out why the reportatives occur both in the past tense and in the present tense: when the knowledge source is a human being, the reportative occurs in the past tense; when the source is a newspaper or a web site, the reportative is likely to be used in the present. Nevertheless, this cannot be considered as a rule. The lexical elements accompanying the reportatives are also significant for the opposition *real vs unreal / likely: fact vs news, accusation*.

We may say that evidentiality applied to written media discourse needs further exploring. We have focused on evidential strategies used in articles provided by professional media monitoring services. In this context, we think that a parallel with the evidential strategies used in the periodicals of rumors, gossips could be a fruitful approach.

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