(Dis-) Embodiment, Palpability, and Cognitive State

Marking Sensory Evidence in English

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My case study: a peripheral set

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sense-related adverbs</th>
<th>Feelings</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>visibly</td>
<td>see</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>olfactorily</td>
<td>smell</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>gustatorily</td>
<td>taste</td>
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<tr>
<td>audibly</td>
<td>hear</td>
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<tr>
<td>tangibly</td>
<td>touch</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>palpably</td>
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Illustrations
We sat over an array of Indian food - unnamable sauces and unidentifiable solid pieces, sixty-four combinations of sauce and solid, all subtle and strong, alternately *gustatorily* delicate and fire-up-the-nose overwhelming.

... whatever was for breakfast, lunch or dinner was *olfactorily* announced as soon as you stepped into the bedroom.
...*visibly and audibly*

• They are *visibly* black because of their darkened shading, *audibly* black because of their voice coding ...

• Then came a long and awkward pause. Canoe sighed, *audibly*. “Come on, ladies,” she said. “We've gotten off on the wrong foot.”

• His fingers were also scarred and misshapen. The contrast between his face and his body was so great it was shocking. That angel’s face and the twisted, ridged arms and hands. Tara shuddered *visibly* and flung herself into Jessica’s arms.
He frantically shuffled through papers on his desk until he found the memo -- the memo he had never seen, that could not possibly have been there the day before, but was, none the less, dated the day before. It was in his hands now, **tangibly real**, announcing to all members of the company that today would be Cause Day.
palpably

• If there is any single moment in the history of warfare at which an authentic sense of awe at the exponential power of gunpowder could be palpably felt, it is here in the accounts of those firing these great guns in 1453.
All relate to concrete sensory on-line evidence
Their site in Talmy’s framework:

Cognitive State

Architectonic Systems:
• Configurational Structure
• Perspective
• Attention

Force Dynamics:
the forces exerted by and the causal interactions among entities marked out by the first three systems

Cognitive State
Cognitive State

Talmy (2006)

**subsystems:**
volition, intention, expectation, affect
... and ...

episemtics: a
sentient entity’s
state of knowledge

divided into
factivity and
evidentiality

correlated with
knowing and
inferring

with factuality and
likelihood
Epistemics and Evidentiality

**evidentiality**: asserts and/or names evidence

**epistemics**: evaluates the evidence (in terms of degrees of certainty of an event’s occurrence or non-occurrence or a proposition’s being the case or not)

specifying the **mode** (direct, inferred, mediated) or the **source** (external or internal to the speaker)

syncretism in markers: **epistentials** (Faller 2002)
Evidential markers in English

- Prototypical adverbial markers in English: obviously, evidently, apparently

- Specify only the fact **that** there is some evidence, not *which* evidence

- The evidence itself is found in the context

- Markers used as triggers directing hearers’ attention outside themselves (treated in the C-Factors of Attention System)

- Not so in mediated evidentials: according to, it is said, is said to ... specify the mode and source of evidence
Specifying the **mode** of evidence

**sense-related adverbs**

- visibly
- olfactorily
- gustatorily
- audibly
- tangibly
- palpably

<table>
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Two groups may be distinguished by recruiting the notion of palpability.
Introducing palpability

from “Fictive Motion” (1996): a gradient parameter pertaining to degrees “with which some entity is experienced in consciousness, from the fully concrete to the fully abstract” (Talmy 2000, 1: 141).

To serve as reference points, four levels of palpability are designated along the gradient:

- the fully concrete
- the semi-concrete
- the semi-abstract
- the fully abstract
The concrete level of palpability

- Entities experienced as fully manifest and palpable
- As clear and vivid
- Ostensive characteristics of precise form, texture, coloration, and movement
- Entity is experienced as having real, physical, autonomous existence
- Not as dependent on one's own cognizing of it
- Experienced as being "out there"
- Not as a construct in one's mind
- Entity can be experienced with full consciousness
- A sense of certainty about the existence and attributes of the entity
- (Talmy 1996/2000)
The semi-abstract level of palpability

- Entity has little or no ostension with no reality of visibility
- One’s experience is that one does not “see” such an entity explicitly but rather “senses” its implicit presence

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### The abstract level of palpability

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Details</th>
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<tr>
<td>Evocation of an object does no longer require “on-line” sensory stimulation</td>
<td>Is the criterial feature of cognitive representations instantiated in linguistic schematizations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Impalpable, abstract, vague, and perhaps faint</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lacking in ostensive characteristics</td>
<td>Experienced as subjective</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“In oneself rather than ‘out there’”</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Invoked in the formation of inferences</td>
<td>In the assessment of veridicality</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>and in propositional attitudes such as wish and intention</td>
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Associating the abstract level of palpability implies disembodiment

in English epistemic modals

there is no palpable sensing of force

I suggest: core evidentials: obviously, apparently, evidently
The sense-related adverbs and palpability

very infrequent apart from *visibly* in comparison to the core evidentials

*gustatorily, olfactorily, audibly, visibly*: the ceived entities are clearly sensed at the **fully concrete** level of palpability

objects can literally be tasted, smelled, heard, and seen

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... less concrete levels of palpability ...

• ... painful memories of the five-day search and rescue hang over the crew *tangibly*, like the feeling one has upon waking up disoriented from a nightmare ...

• I must confess that I found the unnatural quiet and apparent motionlessness *palpably disturbing*, almost to the point of vertigo; it was as though the whole planet had stopped moving, and now waited in hushed anticipation for some great and climactic event.
What about ‘touch’ in *tangibly* and *palpably*?

• clearly touchable objects are associated, but also objects that have no ostension, are not tied to the here-and-now: oscillating between the concrete and the abstract level of palpability

• cannot be used as framing adverbs (*tangibly/*palpably speaking), but visibly/audibly/gustatorily/olfactorily speaking is possible
tangibly as evidential or epistemic marker

• The second determining characteristic of postnational novels that they have often been translated into a whole array of languages and published elsewhere than the nation-state in which they were set, sometimes even before they appear in the original language, is also tangibly evident in this case.
palpably

• When he sent the troops into Basra, you know what many of them were? They weren't Shiite as he is -- tens of thousands of them were Sunni troops. And the reconciliation has been incredible. At some point Democrats are going to have to be seen as people who are totally out of touch with reality on Iraq, because what they're saying is the case there // is palpably not the case.

• All through the Hebrew Bible, the prophets perpetually proclaim that the Jewish people, that Israel, has failed to keep the covenant with Yahweh. Nowhere do they say what is palpably true on the basis of Jewish history and of human history in general, which is that Yahweh has failed to keep his covenant with the people.
**palpably** as evidential (or epistemic?) marker

- When T.S. Eliot writes near the end of "Tradition and the Individual Talent" that he "proposes to halt at the frontiers of metaphysics or mysticism and confine himself to such practical conclusions as can be applied by the responsible person interested in poetry" it is too late: **palpably** [= ‘obviously/clearly’], he has been drawing on metaphysics all through the essay.
Can these observations be cognitively motivated?

Maybe by the fact that the impression of touch, unlike that of the other senses, is very difficult to isolate, since tactile sensory information enters the nervous systems from every single part of the body.

As a consequence, evoking such kind of perception as evidence may easily lend itself to being reanalyzed in terms of a more general or abstract kind of evidence.
The adverbs are not alone, though …

- It may be pointed out that the concrete level of palpability is likewise salient for constructions containing the perception verbs *smell, taste, feel, sound, look* plus the comparative particle *like*.
- These verbal constructions are indeed far more frequent than the corresponding adverbs discussed above.
- Following from what has been said before, it is now perhaps less amazing that the verb *touch* does not occur in this construction type, but instead the general verb *feel* is used.
- It has the same bifurcation of meaning as *palpable* and *tangible*, rendered by the *OED Online* as ‘to examine or explore by touch’ and ‘to perceive, or be affected with sensation by (an object) through those senses which (like that of touch) are not referred to any special ‘organ’”.
Some conclusions
Criteria of use for *tangibly* and *palpably*

**Conceptual Meaning**
- relates to any sensory evidence, but also used as general inferential

**Domain of Application**
- variable, but often propositional

**‘Lexicalization’**
- from touch to any sense, ‘easily perceivable’

**Stance**
- used as positive support in an argument
- **epistemic stance** = ‘clearly’
A functional cline

from **concrete and direct evidence**
- gustatorily, olfactorily, audibly, visibly, tangibly, palpably

to **domain-schematizer**
- gustatorily, olfactorily, audibly, visibly speaking

to **metaphorical pressure**
- tangibly, palpably

to **that-evidential**
- tangibly, palpably

to **epistemic stance**
- tangibly, palpably

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Examples

• It is **palpably false** in depicting what death is and in depicting how normal people behave and feel.
• What Geraldine Ferraro said is **palpably true**, and everyone knows it.
• And yet the story is too unbelievable for the realism to work, and something in it seems **tangibly false**.
• the idea that holiness is the fulness of humanity appears, in this case, quite **tangibly true**.
From embodiment of all senses to verbal disembodiment

disembodiment in reasoning processes correlates with abstract level of palpability
Some remarks about (dis-) embodiment
(Dis-)Embodiment

- Talmy (2011: 636) explicitly warns cognitive linguistics not to indulge too much in a kind of pretheoretically conceived and insufficiently defined notion of embodiment
- conceptualized as “concreteness as basic idea”
- should not submit to the unqualified presumption “that experience with the tangible world is developmentally earlier and provides the basis for later conceptions of intangible phenomena”
A cognitive system for objectivity and reason

• Alternatively, it may rather be legitimate to assume the existence of an “actual cognitive system for objectivity and reason” (which, in turn can be seen as housing the categories of epistemics and evidentiality)

• whether or not the assessed components themselves arose through otherwise embodied processes

• that might be the source of the very conception of an objective domain (Talmy 2011: 637)
A preliminary and subjective general assessment: Talmy’s differentiated stances

- Domain-general vs. domain-specific
  - Cognitive conceptions of language

- The system vs. use issue

- A modular vs. non-modular architecture of cognition

- Morpheme- vs. construction-based conceptions and explanations of grammar

- The potential relation between cognition and neural structuring

- Consciousness, introspection and analytical thought as empirical methods
All this, and much more, I think, has contributed to Talmy’s ‘palpably’ unique status in cognitive linguistics.
Thank you for attending!
References

- Lampert, Günther (forthcoming), “(Dis-)Embodiment, Palpability, and Cognitive State”.