

# Targets of Surprise: A Cross-Linguistic Account of Mirativity

Brooke Hanson

## 1 Introduction

First coined by Delancey (1997) less than 25 years ago, 'mirativity' stands as a newfound revelation in the field of linguistic typology. The category refers to the grammatical marking of information, which is new or surprising for a speaker and not yet integrated into their overall knowledge system (DeLancey, 2001; Delancey, 1997). Its emergence as a feature independent of other related epistemic categories, such as evidentiality (Aikhenvald, 2012; DeLancey, 2012), has seen mirativity rapidly evolve since its inception.

One development that has been key in extending the notion of mirativity concerns who the fundamental meaning of surprise relates to. In their seminal paper, Hengeveld and Olbertz (2012) argue that, contra (Delancey, 1997), mirative marking can apply where a proposition represents newsworthiness or unexpectedness solely for the addressee, and not simply the speaker. This has been further expanded upon by Fang (2018), who claims that mirativity can be targeted towards both speaker and addressee at once.

In its present state, mirativity may hence be directed towards either the speaker, the addressee, or both simultaneously. Despite acknowledging this variation, the literature fails to clarify whether all languages with a mirative marker are capable of expressing all three interpretations. Through a cross-linguistic comparison of Magar, Tarma Quechua and Mandarin, this paper aims to address this question. It will be argued that not all languages can target the full range of discourse participants, and that the types of participants targeted are influenced by the temporal domains that a language's mirative can occur in.

The paper begins by providing a brief introduction to Magar, Tarma Quechua and Mandarin. Following will be a comparison of the discourse participants that these languages' mirative can target. Differences in the languages' discourse participants will then be analysed according to the temporal environments that the languages' mirative can exist in. The final section will offer a conclusion.

## 2 An Introduction to Magar, Tarma Quechua and Mandarin

### 2.1 Magar

Magar is a Central Himalayish language spoken in Nepal that belongs to the Tibeto-Burman language family. As in (1), its mirative takes the form of a complex verb construction, where

the verb stem *das* 'leave' attaches to the nominaliser *-o* and is followed by the grammaticalised copula *le* (Grunow-Hårsta, 2007). This copula also has the function of an imperfective marker and auxiliary (Grunow-Hårsta, 2007).

- (1) *hose-ko das-o le*  
 D.DEM-PL leave-NOM IMPF  
 '(I realise to my surprise that) They are leaving!'  
 (Grunow-Hårsta, 2007, p. 176)

The verb complex in Magar expresses surprise at a fact that was not anticipated for (Grunow-Hårsta, 2007). This can be observed in (1), where the speaker was not mentally prepared for the relevant persons' departure.

## 2.2 Tarma Quechua

Tarma Quechua belongs to the Quechua language family and is spoken in the province of Tarma in Peru. Unlike Magar, Tarma Quechua uses the verbal affix *-na-* to encode the mirative (Adelaar, 2013). Cross-referential person marking affixes are suffixed to *-na-*, with the most common affix being *-q* (Adelaar, 2013). This affix indicates a 3rd person agent/subject, and is cross-referential with *turumanya* 'rainbow' in the case of (2). The *-naq-* form will be used throughout the paper.

- (2) *turumanya inti-ta-m muyu-ra-ya:-naq*  
 rainbow sun-ACC-CERT turn-CONT-PROG-3A/S.MIR  
 'a rainbow was surrounding the sun'  
 (Adelaar, 2013, p. 102)

Although the *-na-* mirative marker is used in circumstances of sudden discovery, as in Magar, it is reserved for objective statements only (Adelaar, 2013). The observation about the rainbow in (2) is hence uttered without the same emotion that accompanies (1) in Magar.

## 2.3 Mandarin

Mandarin is a Sino-Tibetan language spoken worldwide. Unlike Magar or Tarma Quechua, Mandarin uses the sentence-final particle *le* to encode mirativity, as per (3) (Fang, 2018). Its form is generally homophonous with the post-verbal perfective marker, though exceptions are possible (Fang, 2018).

- (3) *ta tong-yi wo qu le.*  
 3SG agree 1sg go MIR  
 'He allowed me to go!'  
 (as cited in Fang (2018, p. 591))

Similar to Magar and Tarma Quechua, the mirative marker is used to react to unknown and surprising information (Fang, 2018). However, unlike Tarma Quechua, Mandarin miratives, like Magar miratives, express speaker emotion, as indicated by the exclamation in (3).

### 3 Discourse Participants

Delancey (1997) first characterised mirativity as the “status of [a] proposition with respect to the speaker’s overall knowledge system” (p.33). While it is often the speaker’s relation to a novel or unexpected happening that warrants mirative marking, marking has also been found to occur where the belief system of an addressee or both addressee and speaker is challenged (Fang, 2018; Hengeveld & Olbertz, 2012). However, as will be shown below, not all languages are capable of targeting this full range of discourse participants with their mirative construction.

#### 3.1 Magar

As is the case in a number of Tibeto-Burman languages, the primary discourse participant targeted by the Magar mirative is the speaker (Aikhenvald, 2012). This is seen in (4), where the speaker expresses surprise over the moving spirit.

- (4) *bhūt wɦa-o le*  
 spirit move-NOM IMPF  
 ‘(I realise to my surprise that) The spirit is moving!’  
 (Grunow-Hårsta, 2007, p. 177)

This use of the mirative is so common in Magar that the first-person speaker in (4) is omitted from the sentence and is understood from context to be the entity experiencing new knowledge (Grunow-Hårsta, 2007).

A less common application of the mirative can be seen in (5), where mirativity is targeted towards the addressee, not the speaker. In Magar, this occurs in narrative and is used when an omniscient narrator states a fact that is contrary to the audience’s expectations (Grunow-Hårsta, 2007). The narrator thus employs the mirative in (5) not because they were surprised by the girl living with the frog, but because it is anticipated that this information will be unexpected for the audience, who is the ultimate addressee.

- (5) *ɦatai rokotyak kathai mu-o le-a ta*  
 then frog with sit-NOM IMPF-PST REP  
 ‘They say that (the girl), surprisingly, went to live with the frog.’  
 (Grunow-Hårsta, 2007, p. 185)

#### 3.2 Tarma Quechua

Unlike in Magar, the mirative in Tarma Quechua almost never exclusively targets the speaker (Adelaar, 2013). A far more common use is seen in (6), where a proposition provokes a sudden realisation on behalf of the addressee. As in Magar, this operation of the mirative is used in the narrative genre (Adelaar, 2013). The activity of the toads in (6) is hence not a discovery of the narrator, but an expected one of the audience.

- (6) *rachak-shi kinra-n kinra-n çura-naka-ra-ri-naq*  
 toad-REP side-3POSS side-3POSS place-RECIP-PERV-PL-3A/S.MIR  
*çaski-yubay-si*  
 relay\_runner-COMPAR-ADD  
 ‘The toads had [placed] each other on different spots along the track as in a relay-race.’  
 (as cited in Adelaar (2013, p. 103))

Mirative meaning in Tarma Quechua may also be targeted at both speaker and addressee together (Adelaar, 2013), which is not possible in Magar. This occurs in (7), where neither the speaker nor addressee know whether the object moves, and so are both unprepared for the potential outcome.

- (7) *ma: tupa-yu-y kuyu-ri-naq-chu-sh*  
 let\_us\_see bump\_into-DIR-2A/S.IMP move-INCEP-3A/S.MIR-INTER-REP  
 ‘why do not you [sic] give it a push to see if it moves or not!’  
 (Adelaar, 2013, p. 105)

### 3.3 Mandarin

Like in Magar, the Mandarin mirative frequently targets the speaker (Fang, 2018). This is seen in (8), where the mirative indicates that the speaker did not anticipate the movie to provoke such high emotion.

- (8) *zhe bu dian-ying tai gan ren le!*  
 this CL movie too touching people MIR  
 ‘This movie is so touching!’  
 (Fang, 2018, p. 597)

As in Magar and Tarma Quechua, the Mandarin mirative may also be directed towards the addressee (Fang, 2018). In (9), the mirative is hence not used to express the speaker’s surprise at all the food being eaten. Rather, it seeks to encode the foreseeable shock of the addressee, who has not yet integrated this new knowledge into their mental system.

- (9) *neng chi de dou chi le*  
 can eat ATTR all eat PFV.MIR  
 ‘All edible things were eaten.’  
 (Fang, 2018, p. 598)

Like in Tarma Quechua, mirativity in Mandarin may also be targeted towards both the addressee and speaker at once (Fang, 2018). Thus, in (10), the upcoming departure of the train is not only surprising for the speaker, but also for the surrounding passengers.

- (10) *huo-che kuai yao kai le.*  
 train fast will operate MIR  
 ‘The train is about to leave!’  
 (Fang, 2018, p. 601)

### 3.4 Summary

As summarised in Table 1, only the Mandarin mirative is able to target all three possible discourse participant options. Magar and Tarma Quechua are limited to only two combinations. This suggests that the preliminary definition of mirativity that concerns only the speaker (DeLancey, 1997), and the extended definition that includes the addressee and both speaker and addressee (Fang, 2018; Hengeveld & Olbertz, 2012), do not apply to all languages with a mirative marker. Rather, the discourse participants covered by these definitions act only as a set of possibilities, which a language’s mirative may or may not target.

There are, however, underlying temporal trends that influence the type of discourse participants that a language’s mirative may pick out. This will be discussed in the next section.

	Speaker	Addressee	Speaker and Addressee
Magar	X	X	
Tarma Quechua		X	X
Mandarin	X	X	X

Table 1: Targeted Discourse Participants

## 4 Temporal Domain

Due to its connection with newly attained knowledge, mirativity has long been associated with temporal reference (Bustamante, 2012; DeLancey, 2001; Delancey, 1997; Fang, 2018). As noted by Delancey (1997), a speaker can only be in contact with unknown information for a limited time before it ceases to retain its surprising value when uttered. The issue of time lapse thus means that, where a speaker is targeted, mirative marking most naturally occurs in the present tense and imperfective aspect (DeLancey, 2001; Delancey, 1997; Ko, 1989).

Despite this relationship being established between temporality and mirative marking, it is framed only in terms of the speaker. Indeed, this relationship has yet to be formally expanded to the discourse participants of addressee or both speaker and addressee (Fang, 2018; Hengeveld & Olbertz, 2012). Building on the theory of Delancey (1997), it will hence be argued that the temporal domain of a mirative construction is not only influential in determining whether a speaker is targeted, but also whether an addressee or both a speaker and addressee are targeted.

### 4.1 Magar

In Magar, the mirative may only be expressed in the non-past imperfective aspect when the knowledge system of the speaker is concerned (Grunow-Hårsta, 2007). This is seen in (1), where the grammaticalised copula *le* functions as an imperfective marker in the unmarked present tense. As stated by Delancey (1997) and Ko (1989), this is only logical, since the ongoing and immediate movement of the spirit coincides with the direct perception of the speaker, and must therefore mean that it was hitherto unknown knowledge.

- (11) *bhut wħa-o le*  
 spirit move-NOM IMPF

‘(I realise to my surprise that) The spirit is moving!’  
(Grunow-Hårsta, 2007, p. 177)

In (12), however, the imperfective marker *le* is now marked with the past tense suffix *-a*. This reflects the fact that the narrator is already aware that the girl lives with the frog and is no longer unprepared for this information. The only possible explanation for mirative marking, then, is that this knowledge will be surprising for the audience at the moment of utterance.

- (12) *hatai rokotyak kathai mu-o le-a ta*  
then frog with sit-NOM IMPF-PST REP  
‘They say that (the girl), surprisingly, went to live with the frog.’  
(Grunow-Hårsta, 2007, p. 185)

## 4.2 Tarma Quechua

The Tarma Quechua mirative *-naq-* is in a paradigmatic relationship with tense in the verb complex (Adelaar, 2013). However, the mirative clause may continue to refer to past and future events, as well as combine with progressive, customary and perfective aspects (Hengeveld & Olbertz, 2012). No examples of the mirative referencing a present event have been documented (Adelaar, 2013).

As indicated by *-ra-*, the mirative in (13) is set in the perfective aspect and refers to a past event. This indicates that the activities of the toads are completed in the mind of the narrator and have been integrated into their knowledge at some point in the past. Like in Magar, this past reference means that the mirative must only represent novelty for an audience.

- (13) *rachak-shi kinra-n kinra-n çura-naka-ra-ri-naq*  
toad-REP side-3POSS side-3POSS place-RECIP-PERV-PL-3A/S.MIR  
*çaski-yubay-si*  
relay\_runner-COMPAR-ADD  
‘The toads had [placed] each other on different spots along the track as in a relay-race.’  
(As cited in Adelaar (2013, p. 103))

Reference to a future event is made in (14) (Adelaar, 2013), where the object has not yet moved. Since the outcome of the experimental push has not been realised in either the past or present, neither the speaker nor addressee have had the opportunity to integrate this knowledge. The mirative hence extends to both participants.

- (14) *ma: tupa-yu-y kuyu-ri-naq-chu-sh*  
let\_us\_see bump\_into-DIR-2A/S.IMP move-INCEP-3A/S.MIR-INTER-REP  
‘why do not you [sic] give it a push to see if it moves or not!’  
(Adelaar, 2013, p. 105)

### 4.3 Mandarin

The Mandarin mirative can exist in past, present and future temporal domains (Li & Thompson, 1981). It may also combine with the perfective aspect (Fang, 2018).

Like in Magar, mirative marking in Mandarin targets the speaker if it occurs in a present time frame. This is seen in (15), where the speaker's unexpected fondness of the movie is perceived directly as they are watching it. This knowledge is hence still new to the speaker.

- (15) *zhe bu dian-ying tai gan ren le!*  
 this CL movie too touching people MIR  
 'This movie is so touching!'  
 (Fang, 2018, p. 597)

As in Magar and Tarma Quechua, an addressee is targeted in Mandarin where mirative marking relates to a past event. Similar to Magar, this use of the mirative is also expressed in the perfective aspect through the multifunctional use of *le*. This is observed in (16), where the absence of any food has previously been acknowledged by the speaker and represents a completed state of affairs in their mind. The information may therefore only be newsworthy to an uninformed addressee.

- (16) *neng chi de dou chi le*  
 can eat ATTR all eat PFV.MIR  
 'All edible things were eaten.'  
 (Fang, 2018, p. 598)

Like in Tarma Quechua, mirativity extends to both speaker and addressee in (17) due to there being a future time reference. In (17), neither the speaker nor their fellow passengers have experienced the forthcoming and unexpected departure of the train. Both are hence waiting to integrate this upcoming moment into their present knowledge (Fang, 2018).

- (17) *huo-che kuai yao kai le.*  
 train fast will operate MIR  
 'The train is about to leave!'  
 (Fang, 2018, p. 601)

### 4.4 Summary

As summarised by Table 2, there is a consistent, cross-linguistic pattern concerning which discourse participants a language's mirative may target. The knowledge system of the speaker is most frequently targeted where the mirative occurs in a present temporal domain. If aspect is involved, it is usually imperfective in this case. A different temporal environment is required for addressees, who are targeted in the context of a past event. If aspect is involved, it is typically perfective, though the imperfective may also be used in this instance. Finally, an association between mirativity and both speaker and addressee is formed if the relevant event has a future reference.

A mirative's failure to target certain discourse participants may hence be linked to its inability to occur in the relevant temporal environment.

	Past (+ Perfective / Imperfective)	Present (+ Imperfective)	Future
Speaker		X	
Addressee	X		
Speaker and Addressee			X

Table 2: Temporal Reference and Targeted Discourse Participants

## 5 Conclusion

Mirativity's status as a newly defined typological category has seen it become the subject of numerous studies, which have since advanced its preliminary application. Rather than merely expressing surprise on behalf of the speaker (Delancey, 1997), mirative marking has also been found to pertain to the knowledge system of addressees and both speaker and addressee at once (Fang, 2018; Hengeveld & Olbertz, 2012). The unanswered question of whether every language with a mirative marker can target this full range of discourse participants has been the focus of this paper. Through a cross-linguistic comparison of Magar, Tarma Quechua and Mandarin, it has been argued that this is not the case and that the types of participants targeted are influenced by the permissible temporal domains of a language's mirative construction. While this latter point in particular would benefit from further examples to test its validity, this paper has at least provided a starting point for future studies that examine the relationship between mirativity and its targeted discourse participants.

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