

Mirativity in Bulgarian and Turkish: a semantic account (poster)
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The goal of this paper is to offer a semantics of the phenomenon of MIRATIVITY, the phenomenon of linguistically marking unexpected information (DeLancey, 1997).

The proposal is based on intonational focus. The idea that mirativity is related to focus has been suggested by Zeevat (2013) for particles like *only*, *even* in English. More generally, the idea that expectations and focus are related is found in Beaver and Clark (2009). In the current proposal, a focus-sensitive mirative operator acts as a comparative between the various salient alternatives generated by focus. I propose that being surprised at the true alternative is derived from the idea that some other, more favored (expected to a higher degree) alternative, i.e. higher on a contextually determined scale of expectations, is false:

$$(1) \quad \llbracket \text{MIR} \rrbracket_s^c = \lambda f_{\langle s,t \rangle} . \lambda w . [f(w) = 1 \wedge \exists g_{\langle s,t \rangle} \text{ s.t. } E_s^c(g) > E_s^c(f) \wedge g(w) = 0]$$

A related proposal is Zanuttini and Portner (2003) on exclamatives, which also involves alternatives, but they are generated by a Wh-operator. The current paper regards Wh-phrases as intensifiers and not as part of the basic semantics of mirativity. This contrast between intensified and non-intensified mirative cannot be achieved in a Wh-based account. Rett (2011) also considers exclamatives containing Wh-phrases to be qualitatively different from so-called ‘sentence exclamations’ (declarative-like syntax).

The current proposal focuses on Bulgarian and Turkish specifically, because of the controversial status of mirativity with respect to evidentiality: some proposals consider mirativity to be part of evidentiality (Rett and Murray, 2013), while others claim that the two are not related (DeLancey, 1997; Aikhenvald, 2012). I present novel data showing that the use of [atypical] evidential markers is only optional in mirative sentences and propose that it has a function similar to that of the use of Wh-phrases: intensification.

References

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