

Why ‘First/Non-First Person’ is Not Grammaticalized Mirativity

TIMOTHY JOWAN CURNOW
 RCLT, La Trobe University
 T.Curnow@latrobe.edu.au/tjcurnow@ozemail.com.au

1. Introduction

Conjunct/disjunct systems of marking, which appear at first glance to be first versus non-first person-marking systems, have sometimes been compared with mirativity systems.¹ Indeed, DeLancey (1997) suggests that conjunct/disjunct systems are a grammaticalization of mirative systems. However there are clear differences between these two systems of marking, and there are a number of facts which do not fit together well with this hypothesis. Following definitions and exemplification of mirativity and conjunct/disjunct, various of these facts will be discussed: the different restrictions on person and tense in the two systems, the different formal markedness of the systems and the additional complexities found in some conjunct/disjunct systems. All of these issues suggest that, while there may be some similarities between the two systems, conjunct/disjunct has not arisen cross-linguistically as a result of grammaticalization of mirativity.

2. Mirativity and mediativity

DeLancey (1997) gives a definition of a category he calls mirativity:

The operational definition of the category is that it marks both statements based on inference and statements based on direct experience for which the speaker had no psychological preparation, and in some languages hearsay data as well. What these apparently disparate data sources have in common ... is that the proposition is one which is new to the speaker, not yet integrated into his overall picture of the world.

(DeLancey 1997: 35-36)

His initial exemplification of this category is a famous pair of examples from Turkish, introduced by Slobin and Aksu (1982: 187):

- (1) *gel-di*
 come-PAST OF DIRECT EXPERIENCE[N]²
 ‘he/she/it came’

¹ I would like to thank Sasha Aikhenvald and Eva Lindström for commenting on an earlier version of this paper, as well as two anonymous ALS referees who provided valuable comments. I would also like to thank the Australian Research Council for providing me with an ARC Postdoctoral Fellowship which has supported me during the research for this paper.

² Because a profusion of terms are used for mirative/non-mirative and conjunct/disjunct in the various sources from which examples have been taken, to aid comparison throughout this paper each relevant morpheme gloss will be followed by one of four bracketed letters: [M] mirative, [N] non-mirative, [C] conjunct or [D] disjunct.

- (2) *gel-miṣ*
 come-PAST OF INDIRECT EXPERIENCE[M]
 ‘he/she/it came (apparently, reportedly)’

The first of these two sentences is used as an unmarked form, while the latter is used in contexts of inference, hearsay and surprise. This constellation of contexts is found identically marked in a range of languages, and morphemes covering these contexts have been referred to for some decades in French-language literature as the *médiatif* (Lazard 1999); the terms ‘mediative’ and ‘mirative’ are thus essentially equivalent, although the choice of one term over the other may imply a particular belief in the underlying motivation for the marking pattern.³

3. Conjunct/disjunct systems

The terms ‘conjunct’ and ‘disjunct’ were introduced by Austin Hale (1980) to describe the two terms in a grammatical system found in Kathmandu Newari, a Tibeto-Burman language. While a variety of descriptions and explanations have been given for this system, and many names have been used, the system is defined here as follows:

A language contains a conjunct/disjunct system if, given an agentive, intentional, volitional context (or a relatively neutral context with a verb which is most commonly interpreted as an intentional, volitional action performed by an agentive subject), statements containing a 1st person are distinct from those which do not contain 1st person reference, while questions containing 2nd person are distinct from those which do not contain 2nd person reference. The marking used to distinguish 1st person in statements and 2nd person in questions is the ‘conjunct’; the other form is the ‘disjunct’.

As an example, consider the following pairs of examples from Kathmandu Newari (from Genetti 1994: 105). In these sentences, the past conjunct form is used for the 1st person statement and the 2nd person question, while the past disjunct forms are used otherwise.

- | | |
|---|--|
| <p>(3) <i>ji wan-ā.</i>
 I go-PC[C]
 ‘I went.’</p> | <p><i>ji wan-a lā?</i>
 I go-PD[D] Q
 ‘Did I go?’</p> |
| <p>(4) <i>cha wan-a.</i>
 you go-PD[D]
 ‘You went.’</p> | <p><i>cha wan-ā lā?</i>
 you go-PC[C] Q
 ‘Did you go?’</p> |
| <p>(5) <i>wa wan-a.</i>
 he go-PD[D]
 ‘He went.’</p> | <p><i>wa wan-a lā?</i>
 he go-PD[D] Q
 ‘Did he go?’</p> |

³ In fact, the French term *médiatif* has been used in two ways in the literature. Throughout this paper and in those referred to here, *médiatif*/mediative is used for what Lazard (1999: 107) calls *médiatif proprement dit* (‘mediative truly speaking’), that is, essentially equivalent to DeLancey’s mirative. In other work, *médiatif* is used more broadly as the French equivalent of the English term ‘evidential’.

The situation is often much more complex. In Kathmandu Newari, for example, conjunct is only found with something like controlled verbs or situations; in cases where someone has no control, disjunct will be used even with a 1st person subject (Hargreaves 1990: 186, orthography altered):

- (6) *jĩ: Lāksmi nāpa-lān-ā*
 I Laksmi with-meet-PST/SET1[C]
 ‘I met Laksmi’
- (7) *jĩ: Lāksmi nāpa-lāt-a*
 I Laksmi with-meet-PERF/SET2[D]
 ‘I ran into Laksmi’

In some languages, the conjunct may also occur in subordinate clauses in logophoric contexts (where a subordinate clause has the same subject as the matrix clause), regardless of person. However in all languages with a conjunct/disjunct system, regardless of the potentially language-specific complexities, the above definition holds.

4. Conjunct/disjunct as grammaticalized mirativity

Discussing the conjunct/disjunct pattern of Lhasa Tibetan and some other Tibeto-Burman languages, DeLancey (1997: 44) suggests that it is a grammaticalization of the non-mirative/mirative distinction. He hypothesizes that the marking of the distinction has been restricted to statements with 1st person and questions with 2nd person, as only in these cases is there a choice between conjunct and disjunct — with 2nd or 3rd person in statements, or 1st or 3rd person in questions, only one form can occur (disjunct). Or, as he puts in an earlier publication (DeLancey 1992: 57), what has occurred is “a grammaticalization of what would be the natural tendency, once the mirativity contrast has come to be explicitly marked, for statements about 1st person to represent old, and about non-1st persons to represent new, knowledge”. That is, he hypothesizes a grammaticalization as in Table 1, with mirative coming to be disjunct, and non-mirative coming to be conjunct.

Table 1. DeLancey’s hypothesized grammaticalization

Mirative (‘new knowledge’)	>	Disjunct (‘non-first person’)
Non-mirative (‘old knowledge’)	>	Conjunct (‘first person’)

5. Problems

There are a variety of problems with DeLancey’s hypothesized grammaticalization, only some of which will be discussed here. One issue which will not be discussed is the precise status of the ‘grammaticalization’, although this is somewhat unclear.

For convenience, in what follows the discussion will be restricted to the marking of main clause statements, simply to allow the use of phrases such as ‘1st person’ rather than cumbersome expressions such as ‘1st person in statements and 2nd person in questions (and possibly logophoric contexts in subordinate clauses)’.

5.1 Person correlations

DeLancey’s hypothesis relies on what he considers the “natural tendency” for statements about 1st person to be old information, while statements about non-1st persons would represent new knowledge. That is, the hypothesis relies on the distribution of person to be similar between mirative/non-mirative and conjunct/disjunct systems. However the distribution of person between the two systems appears to be very distinct.

The only explicit work which has been done on the correlation of mirativity and person appears to be Guentchéva, Donabédian, Meydan and Camus (1994), who looked at the interaction of person and mirativity (in their terms, mediativity), based primarily on data from Turkish, Bulgarian, Armenian and Albanian. The exact correlations between mirative and person depend on the meaning to be expressed, and are given in Table 2.

Table 2. Interaction between person and mirative marking

	Hearsay	Inference	Surprise
mirative + 1st person	restricted	rare	never
mirative + 2nd person	OK	OK	unusual
mirative + 3rd person	common	common	common

In summary, the mirative is very rare with 1st person, but mirative or non-mirative can be used with 3rd person, and to some extent with 2nd person; in all cases non-mirative is much more common.

On the other hand, in languages with a conjunct/disjunct system, such as Kathmandu Newari or Tibetan,⁴ 1st person is normally conjunct but may be disjunct, while 2nd and 3rd person are obligatorily disjunct (remembering that we have restricted ourselves to main clause statements). For example in Tsafiki, a Barbacoan language spoken in Ecuador, sentences (8) and (9) show the use of conjunct and disjunct with 1st person (data from Dickinson 1999: 32):

(8) *la ya=ka machite=chi pore-yo-e*
 1M 3=ACC machete=INSTR cut-CONGR[C]-DCL
 ‘I cut him (intentionally) with the machete’

(9) *la ya=ka machite=chi pore-i-e*
 1M 3=ACC machete=INSTR cut-NCONGR[D]-DCL
 ‘I cut him (unintentionally) with the machete’

In Tsafiki, while 1st person is normally coded with conjunct marking, disjunct marking may be used if the action was unintended, uncontrolled, or somehow out of the ordinary (see Dickinson 1999, 2000 for details). As noted in section 3, in other languages such as Kathmandu Newari, this use of disjunct is even more extensive, in that some Newari verbs may be conjunct or disjunct with 1st person, depending on the agent’s control over the activity; some Newari verbs can never be conjunct, even when 1st person (see Hargreaves 1990 for details). In appropriate contexts, then, disjunct can be used with 1st person.

⁴ Excluding the Tibetan copulas, which express different distinctions (Tournadre 1996: 208).

The reverse marking, conjunct with non-1st person, does not truly occur. For example, sentence (10) shows the only sort of context in which a ‘3rd person’ subject co-occurs with conjunct marking in Tsafiki; this statement was uttered by a Tsachi woman, and thus clearly the speaker was included in the group and the context is 1st person, although there is an explicit subject noun phrase:⁵

- (10) *amana tsachi=la fi-tu-min=la jo-yo-e*
 now Tsachi=PL eat-NEG-NOM=PL be-CONGR[C]-DCL
 ‘Nowadays (we) Tsachila don’t eat (snakes)’ (Dickinson 1999: 31)

Table 3 gives a summary of the correlations of person with non-mirative and conjunct, and mirative and disjunct.

Table 3. Required changes in person correlations under DeLancey’s hypothesis

	non-mirative	>	conjunct	mirative	>	disjunct
1 st person	OK		OK	rare		OK (non-agentive)
2 nd person	OK		no	sometimes		OK
3 rd person	OK		no	common		OK

If conjunct had grammaticalized from non-mirative and disjunct from mirative on the basis of a “natural tendency” of certain correlations of mirativity and person, as DeLancey suggests, one would expect the terms to have similar distributions of person. In fact, however, it is clear that the distribution of person between the two systems is very different — non-mirative is common with all persons, while conjunct is only possible with 1st person; mirative is rare with 1st person, occurs with 2nd person, and is most frequent with 3rd person, while disjunct is used in some circumstances with 1st person, and must be used with 2nd and 3rd person. This evidence runs counter to DeLancey’s hypothesis.

5.2 Tense

There are two tense or time-related problems with DeLancey’s hypothesized grammaticalization from non-mirative/mirative to conjunct/disjunct, one relating to past time and one to future time reference.

DeLancey’s hypothesis relies on the “natural tendency” for statements about 1st person to be old knowledge and statements about non-1st person to be new knowledge. In fact, however, to the extent that this correlation holds, it is clearly more likely to be true for recent past events (and in many languages the mirative marker is historically a perfect marker). Once an event happened long ago, it is more likely to be old knowledge, regardless of who it happened to. This is not an absolute, of course, in that speakers may only just find out about events that happened long ago. The important point is that the “natural tendency” for statements about non-1st person to be new knowledge, if it is true at all, grows less strong the further in the past an event has occurred. However the conjunct/disjunct system operates for any past time event, whether recent past or not.

⁵ Compare the use of 1st person plural verbs with explicit subjects in languages such as Spanish: *los trabajadores somos ...* ‘the workers we-are ...’.

The second problem occurs with future time reference. In at least some the languages, the conjunct/disjunct system operates in utterances with future time reference, as in Awa Pit, a Barbacoan language of Colombia and Ecuador (examples from Curnow 1997: 223):

- (11) *kaztɨla* *kayl-nɨ-zi*
 day:after:tomorrow return-FUT-NONLOCUT[D]
 ‘He will come back the day after tomorrow’
- (12) *Demetrio=ta* *namna-nɨ-s*
 Demetrio=ACC follow/catch:up:to-FUT-LOCUT[C]
 ‘I will catch up to Demetrio’

On the other hand, mirative marking is often restricted to realis contexts, and usually to past time reference — an event which has not happened cannot be treated as new knowledge or old knowledge.⁶

Thus there are differences in the distribution of non-mirative/mirative and conjunct/disjunct systems in terms of their time reference possibilities. Mirativity distinctions tend only to be used in reference to the recent past, and not the remote past or the future; conjunct/disjunct systems, on the other hand, tend to span all utterances, regardless of time reference.

5.3 Markedness

There are strong differences in the markedness of conjunct versus disjunct morphemes and mirative versus non-mirative morphemes. The differences in formal markedness create problems for DeLancey’s hypothesized grammaticalization.

It is clear that in mirative/non-mirative systems, mirative morphemes are functionally the marked member — non-mirative is “neutral, unmarked discourse” (Lazard 1999: 98), as opposed to the marked mirative which speakers may choose to use. Conjunct/disjunct is not so easily categorized, since the conjunct is functionally unmarked for (at least some) 1st person statements while disjunct is functionally unmarked for non-1st person statements.

Formally speaking, however, things are clearer. In some languages, both mirative and non-mirative are equally formally marked. For example, in Turkish, there is no distinction in formal markedness between the (non-mirative) past tense *-di* and the mirative *-miş* in examples (1) and (2) above.⁷ However in those languages with a distinction in formal markedness, the mirative is always the marked term, as in the following pairs of examples from the Athabascan language Hare (DeLancey 1990: 153) and the Tibeto-Burman language Tshangla (Andvik 1993: 98) respectively:

- (13) *júhye* *sa* *k’ínayeda*
 hereabout bear SG.go.around/3SG SUBJ/PERF[N]
 ‘There was a bear walking around here’

⁶ In some cases, the mirative marker can be used in non-past contexts; for example, the Turkish mirative can be used with future time reference to indicate that a future event is based on (past) hearsay (Slobin & Aksu 1982: 193).

⁷ In other contexts in Turkish, however, the (formally marked) mirative can contrast with an unmarked non-mirative.

- (14) *júhye sa k'ínayeda lō*
 hereabout bear SG.go.around/3SG SUBJ/PERF MIRATIVE[M]
 'I see there was a bear walking around here'
- (15) *Dorji Tashigang-ga di-wa*
 Dorji Tashigang-DAT go-PAS[N]
 'Dorji went to Tashigang'
- (16) *Dorji Tashigang-ga di-wa-la*
 Dorji Tashigang-DAT go-PAS-MIR[M]
 'Apparently Dorji went to Tashigang'

Just as with the non-mirative/mirative distinction, there are languages with a conjunct/disjunct system where neither term is formally marked with respect to the other; in Kathmandu Newari the distinction in the past tense is *ā* [a] for conjunct and *a* [ɔ] for disjunct (see examples (6) and (7) above). On the other hand, in some languages one of these terms is formally unmarked, and in this case it is always the disjunct term, as in the Tsafiki examples (Dickinson 1999: 30):

- (17) *tse Tsachi jo-yo-e*
 1F Tsachi be-CONGR[C]-DCL
 'I am a Tsachi'
- (18) *ya/nu Tsachi jo-e*
 3/2 Tsachi be-DCL[D]
 'He/you are a Tsachi'

While patterns of functional markedness can easily change during a process of grammaticalization, patterns of formal markedness cannot. Yet the grammaticalization pattern hypothesized by DeLancey requires the potentially unmarked non-mirative to become the always-marked conjunct, while the always-marked mirative becomes the potentially unmarked disjunct, as in Table 4.

Table 4. Required changes in formal markedness under DeLancey's hypothesis

Non-mirative (may be zero)	>	Conjunct (formally marked)
Mirative (formally marked)	>	Disjunct (may be zero)

The changes required in formal markedness between the non-mirative/mirative and the conjunct/disjunct systems under DeLancey's hypothesis are simply not possible.

5.4 Agentivity and grammatical relations

In some languages with conjunct/disjunct systems, such as Kathmandu Newari and Tsafiki, the argument which 'controls' the system is always the subject argument. However in others, such as Tibetan and Awa Pit, the system is more complex. In the non-past or imperfective, any mention of a 1st person participant in a clause, whether as agent/subject or patient/object, leads to the use of the conjunct marker (with complications for evidentiality and volitionality in Tibetan); and there are two different conjunct forms in the

past or perfective — one is used for a 1st person subject/agent, the other for a 1st person object/patient (simplifying somewhat). These contrast with a single disjunct form in each language (plus evidentials in Tibetan).

For example, in Lhasa Tibetan, there is a distinction in the verb form between a sentence with a 1st person agent in an intentional past activity, and a sentence with a 1st person patient in an intentional past activity (examples from DeLancey 1985: 52):

(19) *na-s yi=ge bri-ba-yin*
 I-ERG letter write-PERF/VOL[C, AGENT]
 ‘I wrote a letter’

(20) *T’ub=bstan-gyis na-la nes byun*
 Thubten-ERG I-DAT hit PERF/INVOL[C, PATIENT]
 ‘Thubten hit me’

Both the 1st person agent and the 1st person patient forms contrast with forms found in sentences which contain no reference to 1st person (example from DeLancey 1992: 45):

(21) *khos byas-pa red*
 he.ERG did-PERF/DISJUNCT[D]
 ‘He did it’

Likewise in Awa Pit, there are three forms, one used with 1st person subjects, one with 1st person objects (also used as an option with some undergoer-subjects), and another with sentences involving no 1st person referents (Curnow 1997: 194, 199):

(22) *Libardo=ta pyan-ta-w*
 Libardo=ACC hit-PAST-LOCUT.SUBJ[C, SUBJECT]
 ‘I hit Libardo’

(23) *Libardo pyan-ti-s*
 Libardo hit-PAST-LOCUT.UNDER[C, OBJECT]
 ‘Libardo hit me’

(24) *nu=na Juan=ta pyan-ti-zi*
 you=TOP Juan=ACC hit-PAST-NONLOCUT[D]
 ‘You hit Juan’

The similarities between Tibetan and Awa Pit imply a common development of these two systems, but it is not clear how such a split could develop if the underlying basis of the system is a distinction between ‘old knowledge’ (conjunct, both subject and object) and ‘new knowledge’ (disjunct). For a past event, regardless of whether the speaker performed the action or was the undergoer of an action, the speaker’s knowledge of the event (in terms of ‘old’ or ‘new’) is identical. Equally, of course, in conjunct/disjunct systems such as in Kathmandu Newari or Tsafiki, it is unclear why the marking should be ‘controlled’ by the subject, since an event in which the speaker participated as an undergoer should have the same marking (‘old’ knowledge non-mirative > conjunct) as one in which the speaker participated as an actor. Thus once again there is a strong distinction between the

possibilities of a mirative system and the possibilities of a conjunct/disjunct system, suggesting that one is not a grammaticalization of the other.

6. Conclusion

It is clear that there are languages which encode mirativity or mediativity; equally, it is clear that there are languages with conjunct/disjunct marking systems; and in both cases, the essential nature of the system is a binary distinction. However, suggestions that the conjunct/disjunct system developed from an earlier non-mirative/mirative distinction appear unlikely given the data presented here.

Thus DeLancey's (1997) hypothesis of the grammaticalization of conjunct/disjunct from mirativity must be rejected, at least as a universal path of grammaticalization. The existence of conjunct/disjunct systems in various non-contiguous Tibeto-Burman languages and in the Barbacoan languages of Colombia and Ecuador does suggest that there is some underlying rationale behind the system — however it is not found in a grammaticalization of mirativity.

References

- Andvik, Erik (1993). Tshangla verb inflections: A preliminary sketch. *Linguistics of the Tibeto-Burman Area* 16(1):75-136.
- Curnow, Timothy Jowan (1997). A grammar of Awa Pit (Cuaiquer): An indigenous language of south-western Colombia. PhD thesis, Australian National University.
- DeLancey, Scott (1985). On active typology and the nature of agentivity. In Frans Plank (ed), *Relational typology*. Berlin: Mouton. pp 47-60.
- DeLancey, Scott (1990). Notes on evidentiality in Hare. *International Journal of American Linguistics* 56(1):152-158.
- DeLancey, Scott (1992). The historical status of the conjunct/disjunct pattern in Tibeto-Burman. *Acta Linguistica Hafniensia* 25:39-62.
- DeLancey, Scott (1997). Mirativity: The grammatical marking of unexpected information. *Linguistic Typology* 1:33-52.
- Dickinson, Connie (1999). Semantic and pragmatic dimensions of Tsafiki evidential and mirative markers. *Chicago Linguistic Society* 35(The Panels):29-44.
- Dickinson, Connie (2000). Mirativity in Tsafiki. *Studies in Language* 24(2):379-421.
- Genetti, Carol (1994). *A descriptive and historical account of the Dolakha Newari dialect* (Monumenta Serindica 24). Tokyo: Institute for the Study of Languages and Cultures of Asia and Africa, Tokyo University of Foreign Studies.
- Guentchéva, Zlatka, Anaïd Donabédian, Metiye Meydan & René Camus (1994). Interactions entre le médiatif et la personne. *Faits de langues* 3:139-148.
- Hale, Austin (1980). Person markers: Finite conjunct and disjunct verb forms in Newari. In Ronald Trail (ed), *Papers in South-East Asian linguistics* 7 (Pacific Linguistics Series A-53). Canberra: Pacific Linguistics, Australian National University. pp 95-106.
- Hargreaves, David (1990). Indexical functions and grammatical sub-systems in Kathmandu Newari. *Chicago Linguistic Society* 26:179-193.
- Lazard, Gilbert (1999). Mirativity, evidentiality, mediativity, or other? *Linguistic Typology* 3(1):91-109.

- Slobin, Dan I. & Ayhan A. Aksu (1982). Tense, aspect, and modality in the use of the Turkish evidential. In Paul J. Hopper (ed), *Tense-aspect: Between semantics and pragmatics* (Typological Studies in Language 1). Amsterdam: John Benjamins. pp 185-200.
- Tournadre, Nicolas (1996). Comparaison des systèmes médiatifs de quatre dialectes tibétains (tibétain central, ladakhi, dzongkha et amdo). In Zlatka Guentchéva (ed), *L'énonciation médiatisée* (Bibliothèque de l'Information Grammaticale 35). Louvain: Peeters. pp 195-213.