

Mirativity within the typology of surprise-expressions

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Natural language employs different means to express speaker's surprise. While English has exclamations (1) and exclamatives (2), Spanish has in addition to these (3a-b) a mirative construction (4). As reported in the literature (Elliott 1974, Gutiérrez-Rexach 1996, Zanuttini and Portner 2003, Rett 2011, among others), exclamations have the form of declarative sentences but carry exclamatory force via rising intonation contour, while exclamatives have specific syntactic properties such as the use of *wh*-expressions. Miratives have special morphology. In some languages, as in Spanish, mirativity makes use of 'fake' past: the verbal tense is in the past, but has a present interpretation.

(1) (Wow) You're tall!

(2) How tall you are!

(3) a. ¡Eres alto!
be.PR.2s tall
'You're tall!'

b. ¡Qué alto eres!
what tall be.PR.2s
'How tall you are!'

(4) ¡Eras alto!
be.PAST IMPF.2s tall
'You're tall!' (I was not expecting that)

In this poster, I look at these three ways of expressing surprise. By examining first, properties that help to identify each of them such as intonation pattern, embeddability and degree restriction, and second, contexts in which an exclamation, but not a mirative can be felicitous, I claim that the mirative is a type of assertion rather than a type of exclamation, and thus, cannot be analyzed in terms of exclamations. In a nutshell, I propose that while exclamatives and exclamations express emotive meanings (among them, surprise due to violation of speaker's expectations), miratives are assertions that include a modal component. This modal part encodes that the proposition is new information that clashes with the speaker's previous beliefs. This triggers surprise in miratives as a pragmatic consequence. I follow Gutiérrez-Rexach (1996) analysis for exclamations, and my own work (Torres 2012) for mirativity. My view on exclamations and miratives predicts that it is possible to combine a mirative with an exclamation/exclamative. For instance, we can add exclamation force to a mirative (via intonational means), or we can combine the grammar of an exclamative (*wh*-clause) with the grammar of a mirative ('fake' past). This is supported by data, as we see in (5). In (5) the speaker is exclaiming surprise at the hearer's height, which exceeds a certain degree, something that contradicts what the speaker had earlier believed.

(5) ¡Qué alto eras!
what tall be.PAST IMPF.3s
'How tall you are!'