Marking the unexpected: Evidence from Navajo to Support a Meta-discourse Domain
Kayla Palakurthy (Eisman)¹
kaylaeisman@umail.ucsb.edu

GOAL: To demonstrate a semantic link between mirativity and contrastive focus as metadiscourse markers of counter-expectation.

Mirativity
• Marks a proposition as new and surprising irrespective of information source (DeLancey 1997, 2001; Peterson 2010)

Contrastive focus
• Marks a constituent that contradicts the presupposed alternatives of the conversation participants (Lambrecht 1994; Givón 2001).

Mirativity and Focus
• Relevance of expectation marking (Behrens 2012)
  – Contrastive focus marks part or all of a proposition as contrasting with other expected options
  – Miratives mark a proposition as surprising with regard to general unmarked expectation (Chafe pc)

Navajo lá

• Navajo lá has two documented functions (Young & Morgan 1987)

1. Mirative

_Díí_ tsé ‘át’ée _lá._
díí tsé ‘-t’é lá
DEM rock thus-it.is MIR
‘This (I find) is a rock.’ (Young & Morgan 2000:306)

2. Interrogative

_Háájí lá iiyá niíín_  
 háá=ji lá íi-yá ni-ji-ní  
 where=to Q 3-PFV.go 3.PFV.say-3a-PFV.say  
 ‘She says, “I wonder where he has gone,” it is said.’ (Silentman Nav 014)

• Different pragmatic overtones arise in usage

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Function</th>
<th>Narrative</th>
<th>Conversation</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Tokens</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>511</td>
<td>n=547</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Percentage</td>
<td>7%</td>
<td>93%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 1. Frequency of lá by genre

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Function</th>
<th>Tokens</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Interrogative</td>
<td>169</td>
<td>40%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mirative</td>
<td>114</td>
<td>27%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reported Speech</td>
<td>61</td>
<td>14%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Focus</td>
<td>54</td>
<td>13%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lexicalization</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td>n=421</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 2. Functions of lá in the Navajo Conversation Corpus²

Interrogative lá

3. _Parker lá ‘éí haahoolyé?_
Parker lá ‘éí haa=hooh-l-yé?
Parker Q DEM what=3s -CLF-IPFV.call  
‘How was it you say Parker?’ (Chee Nav 001)

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² I am very grateful to Marianne Mithun who created and generously shared these narrative data and this extensive corpus of Navajo. I also really appreciate the hard work of the other transcribers and translators who worked on the corpus.
Mirative lá: Discovery

4. ‘Ákośjiįį hałlaajii’éé’ shíį náázdlaad lá.
   ‘Áko=shíįį ha-tlaajii’éé’ shíį náá-z-dláad lá.
   so=perhaps 3-pants perhaps up-3-PFV.tear MIR
   ‘So his pants were torn.’ (Silentman Nav 014)

Mirative lá: Realization

5. ‘Áko ayóó nantla lá.
   ‘áko ‘ayóó nantl’á lá.
   so very it.is.difficult MIR
   ‘So it turns out that it’s very challenging.’ (Chee Nav 002)

Mirative lá: Counter-expectation

6. H: Ní/zhóní láj!
   nízhóní lá
   it.is.good MIR
   ‘It is great!’

   M: [‘Áko ‘aoo’],
   ‘áko ‘aoo’,
   so yes,
   ‘So yes’,

   M: [‘áko ‘éí],
   ‘áko ‘éí,
   so that’,
   ‘so that’,

   H: [Doo ‘aná]hóót’i’ da lá ‘áko.
   doo ‘anáhóót’i’ da lá ‘áko.
   NEG challenges NEG MIR so
   ‘So there are no challenges then.’ (Chee Nav 021)

Mirative lá: Lack of control

   naa’ayí-lzá lá ji-ní.
   over.3-PFV.pass.out MIR 3a-IPFV.say
   ‘He passed out drunk, it is said’ (Silentman Nav 014)

Reported Speech

8. Nit’éé’ X ‘á-níi lá,
   nit’ée’ X ‘á-níi lá,
   then thus-3.IPV.say
   ‘Then X thus said,’ (Chee Nav 016)

Contrastive Focus

   neeznáá lá shi-má ní ji-ní.
   ten FOC my-mother 3.IPV.say 3a-IPV.say
   ‘He says, “Ten, my mother.”’ (Silentman Nav 014)

Multiple functions of lá

10. Díkwíí lá um,
    how.much Q
    ‘How much?’

    Díí lá bëeso doo da oh,
    DEM FOC money NEG NEG oh
    ‘This money no oh.’

    Köół dabíkáá’ó át’éé lá.
    here on it.is MIR
    ‘It is on here.’ (Chee Nav 016)
Comparative Athabaskan data

- Likely cognates
  - W. Apache láā (de Reuse 2003)
  - Hare lò (DeLancey 1997)
  - Slave lòp (Rice 1989)
  - Sarcee –là (de Haan 2008)
  - Dena’ina lu (Holton & Lovick 2009)
- Possible source is an earlier inferential form (de Haan 2008)

Conclusions

- Two polysemous Navajo lá enclitics:
  1. Interrogative and contrastive focus (Schauber 1975)
  2. Mirative

- Expectation marking is a salient domain in Navajo
- Results add to growing literature on mirative markers and their relationship to information structure
- Contrastive focus and mirativity should be considered within the domain of expectation marking.

Selected References


Mithun, Marianne ed. 2015. Navajo Conversational Corpus, compiled with support from National Science Foundation DEL grant BCS-0853598.


