

**Marking the unexpected:  
Evidence from Navajo to Support a Meta-discourse Domain**

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**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

<i>Díí</i>	<i>tsé</i>	<i>‘át’éeé</i>	<b><i>lá.</i></b>
díí	tsé	‘á-t’é	lá
DEM	rock	thus-it.is	MIR

‘This (I find) is a rock.’ (Young & Morgan 2000:306)

2. Interrogative

<i>Háájí</i>	<b><i>lá</i></b>	<i>íyá</i>	<i>ńjín</i>
háá=jí	lá	íy-yá	ní-ji-ní
where=to	Q	3-PFV.go	3.IPFV.say-3a-IPFV.say

‘She says, “I wonder where he has gone,” it is said.’ (Silentman Nav 014)

- Different pragmatic overtones arise in usage

	<b>Narrative</b>	<b>Conversation</b>	<b>Total</b>
<b>Tokens</b>	36 7%	511 93%	n=547

**Table 1. Frequency of *lá* by genre**

<b>Function</b>	<b>Tokens</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
Interrogative	169	40%
Mirative	114	27%
Reported Speech	61	14%
Focus	54	13%
Lexicalization	23	5%
<b>Total</b>	n=421	100%

**Table 2. Functions of *lá* in the Navajo Conversation Corpus<sup>2</sup>**

(Mithun ed 2015 NSF-DEL project 0853598)

**Interrogative *lá***

3.	<i>Parker</i>	<b><i>lá</i></b>	<i>‘éi</i>	<i>haahoolyé?</i>
	Parker	lá	‘éi	haa=hoo-l-yé?
	Parker	Q	DEM	what=3s -CLF-IPFV.call

‘How was it you say Parker?’ (Chee Nav 001)

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Mirative *lá*: Discovery

4. *‘Ákoshíí hatt’ aaji’ éé’ shíí náázdlaád lá.*  
*‘Áko=shíí ha-tf’ aaji’ éé’ shíí náá-z-dlaád lá.*  
 so=perhaps 3-pants perhaps up-3-PFV.tear MIR  
 ‘So his pants were torn.’ (Silentman Nav 014)

Mirative *lá*: Realization

5. *‘Áko ‘ayóo nantl’ a lá.*  
*‘áko ‘ayóo nanitl’ a 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: *Ni[zhóni lá]!*  
*nizhóni lá*  
 it.is.good MIR  
 ‘It is great!’

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

M: *[‘áko ‘éi],*  
*‘áko ‘éi,*  
 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

7. *Naa’ ayíí láá lá jín.*  
*naa’ ayíí-lá 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. *Nít’ éé’ X ‘á-níí lá,*  
*nít’ éé’ X ‘á-ní lá,*  
 then thus-3-IPFV.say  
 ‘Then X thus said,’ (Chee Nav 016)

Contrastive Focus

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

Multiple functions of *lá*

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

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

*Kóó dabikáá’ó át’ éé lá.*  
 here on it.is MIR  
 ‘It is on here.’

(Chee Nav 016)

## Comparative Athabaskan data

- Likely cognates
  - W. Apache *lāq̄* (de Reuse 2003)
    - surprise
  - Hare *l̥* (DeLancey 1997)
    - inferential
  - Slave *l̥* (Rice 1989)
    - uncertainty
  - Sarcee *-l̥* (de Haan 2008)
    - inferential
  - Dena'ina *tu* (Holton & Lovick 2009)
    - hearsay
- 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.

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