Illocutionary mirativity: the case of Yucatec Maya bakáan

Introduction: Since DeLancey (1997) first brought the term ‘mirative’ to popular light, its nature, grammatical encoding, and even existence as a category have been much debated. One reason these debates have raged on is because many mirative markers, including the most well-studied ones, also have other non-mirative uses, most notably as indirect evidentials. A second reason why the nature of mirativity has remained elusive is that different authors have described mirative markers across and within languages as encoding a variety of related, but in principle distinct notions. For example, Aikhenvald (2012) identifies 5 different meanings as fitting under the mirativity umbrella: ‘sudden discovery, revelation, or realization’; ‘surprise’; ‘unprepared mind’, ‘counterexpectation,’ and ‘new information’. Given the similarity and potential overlap between these categories, however, it remains unclear to what extent there is actual data distinguishing these various notions, and therefore unclear to what extent and in what ways there is actual cross-linguistic variation in the semantics of mirative markers and to what extent these descriptions reflect differences in the analyses proposed by linguists. In this paper, we examine a mirative marker undiscussed in previous literature on mirativity: Yucatec Maya (YM) bakáan, as in (1).

(1) **Context:** We are inside the library. I suddenly look out the window and notice it is raining, which it hadn’t been before, and say:

Táan bakáan u k’áaxal ja’

Prog Mir 3.Nom fall water

‘Oh, it’s raining.’

Beyond providing the first detailed description of bakáan, we argue that bakáan (I) consistently has a mirative meaning, having no evidential or other non-mirative uses and (II) semantically encodes a sudden revelation or realization on the part of the speaker, rather than surprise or counterexpectation. Finally, and perhaps most interestingly, we show that parallel to some ‘illocutionary’ evidentials (but unlike any mirative we are aware of from prior literature), (III) bakáan can occur ‘outside the speech act’ in interrogatives and imperatives indicating that the speaker has had a sudden revelation about the basis for performing those speech acts.

**Claim I. bakáan is uniformly mirative:** Elements conveying mirativity often have been claimed to also have indirect evidential uses, perhaps even as their primary or literal meaning. For YM bakáan, Hanks (1984, pp. 164-165) claims in passing – in a paper on the presentative evidential and a morphologically related epistemic modal construction in YM – that bakáan similarly has these two uses. However, he claims that while only the mirative meaning arises with the presentative, an indirect evidential meaning arises with the epistemic modal construction. While Hanks (1984)’s main focus is on these two constructions, when we look beyond these two to cases like (1), we consistently find only the mirative meaning and therefore conclude that the indirectness we find is due not to bakáan, but rather to the epistemic modal itself (not unlike English must).

**Claim II. bakáan marks ‘revelation’, not surprise:** Previous literature has used Aikhenvald’s 5 meanings in analyses, but has not systematically teased them apart in actual data. In particular, what is needed are felicity/appropriateness judgments of sentences containing miratives in contexts in which a proper subset of these definitions is plausibly met. In some cases, there are notional interrelationships that make this logically impossible (cf. Peterson (t.a.)). Nonetheless, we claim that (2) is a case in which surprise and counterexpectation are not present, but revelation and new information are not (we have not seen a clear enough definition of “unprepared mind” to understand which kinds of contexts instantiate it). Additionally, bakáan is felicitous in cases like (3), where the speaker already knew the information, but had forgotten it, even if only momentarily. Conversely,
in contexts with no plausible sudden realization or revelation, the use of bakán is infelicitous. We therefore conclude that revelation is the conventional meaning of bakán.

(2) **Context:** I am supposed to meet my friend Juan at the library at 3pm. It is almost exactly 3pm and I suddenly see him walking up to the meeting spot and I say:

Juan-TOPIC PFV-arrive-3SG.ABS MIR

‘Oh, Juan’s here (lit. Juan arrived).’

(3) **Context:** I hunted yesterday, but forgot for a second. I suddenly remember and say:

T-in TS’oon-aj bakán jun túul kej.

PFV-1.SG.ERG hunt-CMP MIR one Cl.Anim deer

‘Oh yeah, I hunted a deer yesterday.’

**Claim III. bakán is an illocutionary modifier:** Recent literature on evidentials has argued that some evidentials are illocutionary modifiers or operators (e.g., Faller (2002), Matthewson et al. (2007), Murray (2014), Thomas (2014)). One key piece of evidence for this has been uses of certain reportative evidentials to convey a third-party source for the speech act itself. To our knowledge, neither positive nor negative data of this sort has been reported in previous literature (though see Rett & Murray (2013) for brief discussion of the Cheyenne mirative in interrogatives). For bakán, however, we find that it can be used in both imperatives and interrogatives in order to convey that the speaker had a sudden revelation that the speech act in question be performed:

(4) **Context:** A mother is in the kitchen cooking and remembers that there are no beans in the house because she forgot to tell her son to go buy some and says:

Xeen bakán a maan bu’ul te’ tiiyenda-o’.

go.IMP MIR 2.ERG buy beans there store-DISTAL

‘Oh (I meant to tell you), go buy some beans.’

(5) **Context:** My dog was right beside me a moment ago while we were talking. I suddenly notice that he no longer where he was and say:

Tu’ux yaan bakán in peek’?

where exists MIR 1SG.GEN dog

‘Oh (yeah), where’s my dog?’

**Conclusions and comparisons:** We have argued that Yucatec Maya bakán is a mirative marker, encoding a sudden realization or revelation by the speaker that she should perform the speech act the rest of the sentence contributes (quite relatedly, bakán is extremely frequent in religious recitations). One large open question, then, is to what extent these findings hold of other mirative markers (with the exception of **Claim I**, for which we know languages differ) and to what extent they demonstrate new dimensions of cross-linguistic variation in mirative markers. Various analyses and descriptions make claims regarding **Claim II**, but few if any prior works consider scenarios which explicitly disentangle Aikhenvald’s 5 mirative notions, which of course frequently co-occur in natural use. While **Claim III** has clear parallels with evidentials, this to our knowledge is the first time such data have been discussed for miratives.

**Selected References:**