

# Hare *lõ*: the touchstone of mirativity<sup>1</sup>

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*DeLancey (2012: 539) draws attention to the morpheme lõ in Hare as the touchstone of a putative 'mirative' grammatical category. An examination of his examples of lõ reveals very weak evidence for establishing 'mirative' as a category in this language let alone promoting Hare lõ as the touchstone for this category cross-linguistically. The case for lõ as a mirative marker has yet to be made convincingly. In the meantime, it is more prudent to understand lõ as either a direct evidential marker or a mediative marker.*

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Only rarely are new cross-linguistic verbal categories brought to light. Person, tense, mood, and voice were already known to the ancients (Schenkeveld 1982-1990, Breunis 1998). Much more recently Carl Philipp Reiff coined 'aspect' (1860) to capture the difference between pairs such as *smotret* and *posmotret* in Russian; the meaning of this term has wandered somewhat in the meantime (cf. Breunis 1998, van Driem 2001: 648–661). Aikhenvald (2004: 12-13) posits the origins of evidentiality to Boas (1911) and Jakobson (1957), but the linguistic encoding of information source was already observed in Sanskrit centuries before the Christian era: “It is taught by Pāṇini in express terms, that the perfect (*lit*) is restricted to such facts as have not been witnessed by the speaker, and the practice of good authors is generally in accordance with this statement” (Speyer 1886: 247, §330, also cf. Hock 2012: 93-101). One of the most recent grammatical categories to gain attention in linguistics is 'mirativity' as proposed by DeLancey (1997, 2001, 2012).

Although DeLancey “first became aware of the phenomenon of mirativity” while “trying to untangle the marking of evidentiality and volition in the Lhasa Tibetan verb paradigm” (DeLancey 2001: 371), he subsequently came to agree with the present author that “the immediate evidence category in Tibetic languages is, strictly speaking, an evidential category, and thus by definition not a pure mirative” (2012: 554).<sup>2</sup> Rather than Tibetan, if “there is a 'touchstone' to my

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<sup>1</sup> DeLancey uses different glossing conventions in each of his contributions that makes use of Hare examples. I have made an effort to standardize the glossing in keeping with the Leipzig glossing rules. Because DeLancey does not break morphologically complex forms into distinct morphemes it is not possible to do so here. Although the identification of DeLancey's glossing abbreviations cannot be certain, the abbreviations used here can safely be assumed to have the following meanings: 1 'first person', 2 'second person', 3 'third person', IMPERF 'imperfect', MIR 'mirative', PERF 'perfect', SG 'singular', SU 'subject', UNSPEC 'unspecified'. However, DeLancey's 2012 use of PFV in place of PERF casts into doubt whether he originally intended PERF as 'perfect' or 'perfective'.

<sup>2</sup> DeLancey prefers 'immediate' to 'direct', because “no Tibetan could ever say” the sentence *bod-la g.yag ḥdug* 'in Tibet there are yaks' (2012: 551). If “simply that the speaker has direct perceptual evidence for the statement” were what the morpheme *ḥdug* indicated, then “anyone who has seen a yak in Tibet – which would include a great many Tibetans – could, and, one would expect, normally would, use this construction to report this fact” (2012: 551). Unfortunately, DeLancey is mistaken in his factual claim, Tibetans can and do utter the sentence that he forbids them (cf. N. Hill 2013: 48-49). If one remembers that DeLancey (1997: 37) equates Nichols (1986) 'immediate'

conception of the mirative, it is the mirative particle *lō* in the Athabaskan language Hare” (DeLancey 2012: 539). In DeLancey's historiography of the mirative, the “foundation of my concept of mirativity was laid ... when I encountered my first pure mirative while doing fieldwork on Hare” (DeLancey 2012: 539).<sup>3</sup> The pivotal place that DeLancey posits for Hare in the establishment of mirativity as a linguistic category inspires a fresh look at the underlying data that led to DeLancey's elaboration of mirativity in Hare.

In 1990 DeLancey was less certain about the touchstone quality of the pure Hare mirative, writing of *lō* in Hare that “precisely this semantic category occurs in the evidential systems of at least three other unrelated languages”, namely Turkish, Tibetan, and “the Dardic languages Kalasha and Khowar”<sup>4</sup> (DeLancey 1990: 157). In 2012, DeLancey no longer believes that Turkish and Tibetan exhibit miratives; instead Turkish has a 'mediative' (2012: 540, 546) and Tibetan an 'immediate evidential' (2012: 554). Thus, it is a contradiction for Hare both to exhibit a pure mirative and to have precisely the same semantic category as Turkish and Tibetan. One may presume that DeLancey no longer thinks precisely the semantic category exhibited by Hare's pure mirative is also found in Turkish and Tibetan, but this is a mere inference, DeLancey has nowhere distanced himself from his 1990 article on Hare *lō*.

In 1990 it was Tibetan that was a touchstone for the analysis of Hare, rather than the other way around.

I have argued on the basis of more extensive data from the more elaborate evidential system in Tibetan that the inferential/hearsay and "new knowledge" senses, for all that they may strike us as almost contradictory, are in fact at least in some languages very compatible, and even susceptible of reduction to a single category (DeLancey 1990: 157).

Because DeLancey 2012 posits Hare *lō* as the touchstone of mirativity, citing DeLancey 1990, but DeLancey 1990 cites Tibetan *hdug* as the touchstone of mirativity, the net result is that mirativity has no touchstone and DeLancey's conception of mirativity remains hazy. Over time diverse phenomena in a diverse array of languages are described as 'mirative'; the list of languages with a mirative grows, shrinks, and grows again. Without mooring the term consistently to any one phenomenon it becomes a hollow rubric under which anything that does not fit into a more traditional category may easily fall.

On the basis of examples of Hare *lō* published in DeLancey 1997 and Rice 1989, I suggested that this morpheme marks sensory evidence (N. Hill 2012: 409-413). Because DeLancey (2012) in no way denies that these examples reflect direct evidence, there is no need to reconsider

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with his 'mirative', his current choice of 'immediate evidential' for Tibetan *hdug* allows DeLancey to have his cake and eat it too. It would be helpful if he explicitly said how he now distinguishes 'mirative', 'direct evidence', and 'immediate evidence', tying each term to a specific phenomenon in a specific language.

<sup>3</sup> In his first contribution treating the semantics of Tibetan *hdug* DeLancey (correctly) presents *hdug* as 'direct knowledge' (1985: 70). In 1986 he associates 'new knowledge' with this morpheme. In 1990 he also describes Hare *lō* in terms of 'new knowledge'. As a term 'mirative' makes its debut in DeLancey's writings in 1992 as a description of Tibetan *hdug* (DeLancey 1992: 44 et passim). In that paper however he mentions a conference presentation on 'mirativity' from 1989. Thus, in as far as the question can be explored using publicly accessible documents DeLancey's 2012 presentation of the historiography of the mirative is in error. Tibetan, not Hare, gave birth to mirativity.

<sup>4</sup> For Kalasha and Khowar DeLancey cites Bashir (1988a and 1988b).

them here. Of the examples in DeLancey's earlier 1990 paper, my earlier paper (2012) fails to discuss seven examples (3, 4, 6, 10, 12, 13, 16).<sup>5</sup> Four of the omitted examples (6, 12, 13 and 16) confirm the analysis of *lõ* as a marker of sensory evidence.

- (1) ... *be-'elá' 'ariyúné' táets'enila* *lõ*  
 his-boat all take.apart-UNSPEC:SU:PERF MIR  
 '[Egadekini awoke and] ... his boat was all taken apart.' (DeLancey 1990: 154, ex. 6)

This example is used to describe “an event which the speaker (or in this case the protagonist) knows of IT (?) only by its physical results” (DeLancey 1990: 154). Some might analyze this utterance as a case of inference rather than direct evidence, but in languages including 'Lhasa' Tibetan, English, Kham, and Matses inference is a pragmatic effect of direct evidence in certain constructions.<sup>6</sup> Since the speaker sees the pieces of the boat, following the normal sense of the relevant English words 'his boat was all taken apart' is an observation and not an inference. To say 'he awoke and saw his boat was all taken apart' is more felicitous than to say 'he awoke and inferred his boat was all taken apart'; the latter suggests the cool and labored deductions of a private investigator.

- (2) *shõ dele lõ*  
 rain fall MIR  
 'Oh, it's raining!' (DeLancey 1990: 156, ex. 12)

DeLancey's comment that example (2) is “most appropriate in a context where the speaker did not realize that it was raining until she looked out and saw it” (1990: 156), ties the semantics of *lõ* directly to visual perception.

- (3) *ĩdõ* *lõ*  
 drink-2SG:SU:IMPERF MI  
 R  
 'You're drinking!' (DeLancey 1990: 157, ex. 16)

According to DeLancey “typical contexts for (16) [=3] would be if the speaker smells liquor on the addressee's breath or finds him at a drinking party” (1990: 157). Both smelling liquor on someone's breath and finding someone at a drinking party are instances of direct sense perception.

In contrast to these four examples in which *lõ* is easily understood as marking sense evidence, DeLancey hopes that example (4) “should help lay to rest the idea of a sensory

<sup>5</sup> Here follows a concordance of the examples from DeLancey 1990 and the examples discussed in N. Hill 2012: 2=38, 5=39, 7=42, 8=43, 14=44, 15=45. N. Hill 2012 does not discuss DeLancey's examples 3, 4, 6, 10, 12, 13, or 16. Of these DeLancey 2012 draws particular attention to 3 (in DeLancey 1990) =12 (in DeLancey 2012) = 7 (in the current article) and 4 =13 (referred to but not repeated on p. 6 below).

<sup>6</sup> I intend to treat this construction in a future publication.

evidential interpretation of *lō* in Hare.

- (4) *gōshó yedarehyie lō*  
really be.smart.1SG:SU:IMPERF MIR  
'I'm really smart!'<sup>7</sup>

He offers the following explanation:

This is something you would say when you have surprised yourself with how well and quickly you accomplished a formidable task. It doesn't matter if the task is one that results in "sensory evidence", the point is simply that you didn't think you could do it, or at least not do it so skillfully, but found that you could (DeLancey 2012: 542).

Perhaps so, but in English the verb 'see' can be used in the reciprocal situation of disappointment with oneself. In example (5) and (6) from the British National Corpus, just like in Hare, direct physical evidence perceivable by the senses is not the actual information source, and yet the sentiment is nonetheless linguistically encoded with a verb of direct visual experience.

- (5) *I see that I may have acted rashly.*

- (6) *I see that I know very little.*

If such metaphorical uses of 'direct evidence' are permissible in English why should they be impossible in Hare?

Only two examples from DeLancey 1990 remain to discuss.

- (7) *John deshīta déya lō*  
John bush SG.go.3SG:SU:PERF MIR  
'John went to the bush.'

DeLancey's consultant offers the explanation that this sentence could be said if you "go to John's house and see he's gone. You ask where he went, and they tell you he went to the bush. Then you can say it" (DeLancey 1990: 153-154 example 3, 2012: 539 example 12). With this explanation DeLancey's consultant draws attention to hearsay as the information source. This explanation is inconsistent with the proposal that *lō* marks sense evidence, but it is also inconsistent with DeLancey's proposal that *lō* marks the speaker's surprise. The speaker has the time between her hearing that John has gone to the bush and her telling someone else that John has gone to the bush to incorporate John's whereabouts into her understanding of the world. Even if this span of time is quite short, at the time she utters (7) it cannot be said that the speaker herself is surprised by the sentence's content.

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<sup>7</sup> DeLancey (2012: 542) cites this examples as coming from his earlier 1990 paper, but I am unable to locate it there.

(8) *John deshīta raweya*

*lō*

John bush SG.go.and.return.3SG:SU:PERF MIR

‘John made a trip to the bush.’ (DeLancey 1990: 154 example 4, 2012: 540 example 13)

DeLancey reports that his consultant explained that example (8) could be used “if I was not aware that John was gone, or knew he was gone but didn’t know where, but I see him returning with a load of meat, or if he told me after his return where he had been” (1990: 154). In this case the consultant isolates visual evidence and hearsay as the two possible sources of evidence. For DeLancey’s explanation in terms of ‘mirativity’ the component ‘I was not aware that John was gone’ is important as it shows that John’s trip to the bush comes as ‘new information’. All information that comes from the external world (including sense evidence and hearsay) by definition was new at the moment one came to know of it. If the mere existence of new information suffices to posit ‘mirativity’ it is difficult to see why sense information and hearsay as evidential categories are not automatically subcategories of ‘mirativity’. DeLancey appears unaware of this logic and has always articulated ‘mirativity’ as distinct from ‘evidentiality’ (1997, 2001, 2012).

Of the 13 examples that DeLancey provides for the morpheme *lō* in Hare, eleven or twelve are consistent with an explanation in terms of marking direct evidence<sup>8</sup>; two examples also permit hearsay as information source. It is noteworthy that examples of direct sense experience occur both in elicited and in corpus data, whereas the two examples of hearsay occur only in elicitation. This distribution could be a meaningless accidental gap in the data, but it is also possible that the process of elicitation itself somehow induced the hearsay examples. Elicited data is notoriously unreliable. No less a linguist than Noam Chomsky falsely claimed that in English “the verb *perform* cannot be used with mass word objects” (A. Hill 1962: 29), overlooking the counter example ‘perform magic’ which is amply attested in the British National Corpus (McEnery & Wilson 2001: 11). Aikhenvald warns of the danger of relying on elicited data particularly in the study of evidential systems (2004: 18). As his approving paraphrase of Donabédian (2001) witnesses, DeLancey himself appears to have arrived at a similar conclusion regarding the danger of elicited data in the description of miratives and mediatives.

Donabédian (2001: 432), trying to reconcile both categorial profiles [mediative and mirative] under a single definition, suggests that the strong association in the literature between the mediative category and the particular values of hearsay and inference may be an artifact of the elicitation process. A speaker asked to evaluate an example sentence without context must, consciously or otherwise, imagine a context, and the “indirect” contexts are the simplest and thus the easiest to imagine (DeLancey 2012: 546).

These two elicited examples in Hare are a very weak evidence base for establishing ‘mirative’ as a category in this language let alone promoting Hare *lō* as the touchstone for this category cross-linguistically. When one keeps in mind that Tibetan *hdug*, which DeLancey now

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<sup>8</sup> N. Hill (2012: 409-413) discusses six of DeLancey’s examples and examples from Rice 1989. This article discusses the remaining five or six examples (depending on whether example is understood as direct evidence).

describes as an ‘immediate evidential’ and not a ‘mirative’ (2012: 550-555), can also be used in hearsay contexts (N. Hill 2012: 399-400), even the apparent import of the counter-evidence of these two elicited examples wanes. If an ‘immediate evidential’ can be used in certain hearsay contexts in Tibetan, why should this be forbidden in Hare?

In 1990 DeLancey found a close match between Hare *lō* and Tibetan *hdug* (an immediate or sensory evidential) on the one hand and between Hare *lō* and Turkish *-mİş* (a mediative) on the other hand. If we take this observation at face value it suggests that Hare *lō* is not a mirative marker, but rather either a marker of immediate/sensory evidence or a mediative marker.

DeLancey believes that it is impossible for a language to have a direct evidential that does not contrast with an indirect evidential.

What we do not, and could not, find is a system where the single marked category in an A2 system expresses direct evidence and nothing more. A form which explicitly indicates direct evidence can only exist in opposition to one or more which expresses indirect evidence. One cannot coherently describe a hypothetical language in which there was a marked construction indicating “direct sensory evidence” contrasting only with an unmarked construction with no evidential value at all (2012: 544-545).

DeLancey’s primary reason for positing this constraint on the set of possible languages, is that Aikhenvald does not posit A2 of this type in her typological classification system (Aikhenvald 2004). He has misunderstood the goals and scope of Aikhenvald’s work. Aikhenvald sets her task to empirically classify the evidential systems she finds in the literature: “All generalizations in this book are inductively based” (2004: xi). She does not forbid other systems from existing: “This book is far from being the last word on evidentiality systems” (2004: v). The three term evidential system of ‘Lhasa’ Tibetan showing personal, factual, and testimonial evidentials (personal, generic, and immediate knowledge in DeLancey’s [2012: 550] terminology) is also not sanctioned by Aikhenvald’s classification (cf. N. Hill 2013: 52), but this does not stop the native speakers of this language from continuing to use it. DeLancey does not object to systems where a positive category contrasts with no opposite. He has never proposed an ‘anti-mirative’ to mark old information. He allows for ‘indirect’ evidentials contrasting with forms which are evidentially unspecified. Linguistics should be an inductive science; if one fails to imagine a possibility and then this possibility is attested, one must expand one’s conception of the world rather than reject the evidence.

To test whether *lō* is a marker of the mirative should be easy (N. Hill 2012: 412). Writing about the use of Hare *lō*, I claimed that “DeLancey would predict that *lō* would not be grammatical” when complimenting a renowned musician (2012: 412). DeLancey rightly rejects Hill’s use of ‘grammatical’ (2012: 541), but essentially assents to the paraphrase writing that “the sentence would not be so polite in a context where the speaker ought to have known already” (2012: 541). If DeLancey is correct, then Hare *lō* is very different than Turkish *-mİş*, which is felicitous in non-ironic compliments (cf. N. Hill 2012: 417). Since DeLancey “can’t exactly perform Hill’s experiment” (2012: 541), his description of Hare *lō* in this context remains conjecture.

Aikhenvald is convinced that some languages have miratives, but does not concur with DeLancey about the touchstone quality of the pure mirative in Hare, writing that “the exact structure and meanings of evidentiality and mirative meanings in Hare remains open until more research is done” (2012: 478). If DeLancey and Aikhenvald, the proponents of mirativity as a cross linguistic

category, cannot agree on how one knows a mirative when one comes across one, there is little hope that others will be able to employ the concept profitably.

In sum, the case for *lō* as a mirative marker has yet to be made convincingly. In the meantime, it is more prudent to understand *lō* as either a direct evidential marker or a mediative marker.

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