Still mirative after all these years

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Abstract

This article re-presents the case, first presented in DeLancey (1997), for the mirative as a crosslinguistic category, and responds to critiques of that work by Gilbert Lazard and Nathan Hill. The nature of the mirative, a category which marks a statement as representing information which is new or unexpected, is exemplified with data from Kham (Tibeto-Burman) and Hare (Athabaskan). The mirative category is shown to be distinct from the well-known mediative or indirective evidential category. Finally, the role of mirativity in the complex verbal systems of Tibetan languages is briefly outlined.

Keywords: evidential, Hare, indirective, inferential, inflection, information structure, Kham, mediative, mirative, syntax, Tibetan

1. Backdrop

I cannot claim authorship of the term **mirative**. Neither can I claim to have been the first to propose it as a crosslinguistic category; I believe that credit goes to Akatsuka (1985). Fifteen years ago, in the first issue of this journal, I was the first to link the term to the semantic category, and pointed out its prevalence as a grammatical category. Over the intervening decade and a half, a considerable body of research has described constructions of this kind in languages from Finno-Ugrian (Leimonen 2000) to Tsimshianic (Peterson 2010), from the Himalayas (D. Watters 2002) to Amazonia (Queixalos 2007), and on around the world (Dixon 2003, LaPolla 2003, Bashir 2010, Kwon 2010, forthcoming, inter alia). The category has been recognized in general work on evidentiality (Aikhenvald 2004) and in morphosyntactic surveys of various kinds (Heine & Kuteva 2002, Creissels 2006, Mel’čuk 1994, Chelliah & de Reuse 2011). Whatever the theoretical status of mirativity, it is clear that a great many linguists have found the category as I described it useful in the description and analysis of a range of languages from around the world.

Over the same time there have been less enthusiastic reactions, express-
ing doubts about whether such a new category was necessary – either on the grounds that my formulation was not sufficiently precise to be convincing, or that the category I described was simply a different perspective on some other phenomenon that was already familiar. Indeed the formulation presented in DeLancey (1997) was vague and noncommittal on some points, and inconsistent (if not incoherent) in at least one crucial respect, and my subsequent article (DeLancey 2001) did not resolve all of these issues. Thus a response to this line of criticism, and particularly to the very reasonable concerns expressed by Gilbert Lazard, is long overdue.

Now in this issue of *Linguistic Typology* we also have a rather more ambitious, if less cautious, critique from Nathan Hill which argues that everything that I have said on the subject is simply wrong (Hill 2012b). While Lazard and others have questioned the place of mirativity in an overall scheme of verbal categories, Hill argues that there is no such thing in the first place. Frankly, as far as I can see most of Hill’s critique has so little substantive content as to hardly be worth replying to. Nevertheless I am happy to take this opportunity to restate the case for the mirative in (I hope) somewhat clearer and more explicit terms.

In Section 2 I will restate the argument for mirativity as a crosslinguistic category; in the course of this exposition I will address Hill’s criticisms of substance. Section 3 will address the status of mirative as a distinct category, especially with respect to the mediative; here I will also deal with the plausibility of Hill’s counterproposal. Section 4 will provide a very brief discussion of the relevance of mirativity to the analysis of the complex Tibetan egophoric/evidential systems.

2. Mirativity is real after all

The first, and most energetic, part of Hill’s article is devoted to arguing that the Lhasa Tibetan form ‘dug (h dug) is not mirative, as I have described it, and that since this is the “cornerstone of DeLancey’s analysis of mirativity”, the entire edifice of mirativity thus tumbles to the ground. It is perhaps not surprising that Hill, a Tibetanist, takes a special interest in the Tibetan data in my article. But to describe the interpretation of one Tibetan form as “the cornerstone” of my proposal is quite a stretch, and the suggestion that “the typological literature on ‘mirativity’ depends on DeLancey’s description of the Tibetan morpheme h dug” can most charitably be interpreted as reflecting a limited familiarity with the literature in question. It is true that I “first became aware of the phenomenon of mirativity when I was trying to untangle the marking of evidentiality and volition in the Lhasa Tibetan verb paradigm” (DeLancey 2001: 371), but to be aware of a problem is not to have solved it – that was back in my postgraduate days, and it was not until hearing Aksu-Koç & Slobin’s presentation a few
years later (1981) of what was published as their 1986 article that I began to think in terms other than simple evidentiality. The foundation of my concept of mirativity was laid the following summer when I encountered my first pure mirative while doing fieldwork on Hare.

Hill’s critique of the concept of mirativity can be summarized as: (i) DeLancey’s proposal that mirative be recognized as a crosslinguistic category is fundamentally based on his analysis of a particular morpheme, Tibetan ‘dug, (ii) he completely misunderstood the nature of ‘dug, which expresses direct sensory evidence, not “mirativity”, (iii) therefore everything else that he has ever said about mirativity or evidentiality is wrong, (iv) and therefore every other author who has identified a mirative construction in a language which they study is also wrong. (Since these authors, then, must have failed to properly understand their own data, Hill goes on to explain what is really going on in these languages.) Hill’s entire case against the mirative as a crosslinguistic category rests on point (i), which is simply asserted, rather than argued for, and thus literally irrefutable. But it could hardly be argued for. The case for the mirative category in DeLancey (1997) is based on three two-term systems, Turkish, Hare (DeLancey 1990b), and Sunwar (DeLancey 1992a); Lhasa Tibetan and Korean are presented as examples of more complex systems where mirativity can be recognized as a component, not as primary evidence for the category. Later in this article we will see that the emphasis on two-term systems in that article is at the root of the confusion of mediative and mirative systems in my proposal. In Section 3 I will try and resolve this confusion, as Lazard and others have demanded.

2.1. Hill’s critique

Hill’s substantial claim is that the true sense of ‘dug is not mirative, but direct sensory evidence, and since my interpretation of ‘dug is the foundation of my interpretation of everything which I call mirative, all of those constructions in other languages must logically also express direct evidence. Then it follows that every construction which has been called mirative must also in fact be an exponent of the category of direct sensory evidence. The second half of Hill’s article consists of discussing examples which have been presented in the literature as mirative constructions and saying that he doesn’t think they are. Sometimes he says that all the authors’ examples could conceivably be interpreted as “sensory evidence”, in other cases he can’t say much more than that he suspects if he knew more about the language he could show that the author of the primary source is wrong and he is right. There is no articulated critique of most of the work which he treats with such contempt.
2.2. Meet the mirative

As Hill notes, a number of authors have described mirative constructions in a wide range of languages, sometimes in terms obviously inspired by my work. A typical example is Bashir’s description of the Dardic language Kalasha (Bashir 2007: 3):

Past tense verb forms are obligatorily coded for the distinction between direct [...] and inferential (indirect) meaning. Direct subsumes such meanings as personally witnessed, or having long standing in one’s conceptual repertoire, while inferential includes inference, new information, and hearsay. Present-tense forms do not have morphologically expressed inferential forms, but inferential counterparts are supplied by the addition of hula, the past participle of hik ‘to become’. When hula appears in narration of directly experienced events, the meaning is mirative, i.e. that the speaker has just found out about (i.e. was not aware of before) the content of the assertion.

Hill runs through an assortment of such descriptions in the literature, mostly examples cited by me or Aikhenvald, and simply asserts, over and over, that they are not what the authors say they are. If it is inconvenient for the point which Hill wants to make that such constructions normally are used in both direct and hearsay contexts, as Bashir, and I, and author after author, state, then he simply insists that they aren’t, regardless of how the facts are described in the source.

An elementary principle of linguistic description is that one analyzes one’s data directly, not by translating it into one’s own or some other language and analyzing that. So good descriptions include sufficient discussion of the examples to allow the reader to understand them properly. Hill’s approach is to ignore or dismiss the author’s discussion, and reanalyze the data to fit his notions based on the English gloss or his own rephrasing of it, or sometimes on his rough translation of the English gloss into Tibetan. His reinterpretations are for the most part not convincing, or even plausible; often they are directly contradicted by data presented in the source.

In his discussion of my, Watters’s, and other authors’ examples of mirativity, Hill repeatedly calls into question our interpretation of the data, and argues that our account cannot stand without further crucial data, which we fail to provide. In the case of my work this is because he did not read the articles where the data which he deems crucial were published. In the case of Watters’s work the kindest interpretation of Hill’s treatment is to suppose that he simply quit reading before he got to the sections which are relevant to his claims, although he also seems to have skipped over some crucial examples and discussion in the pages which he does directly refer to. His handling of other sources is similarly careless (to put it as charitably as possible). In the interests of space I will leave most of the authors whom Hill misrepresents to defend themselves, and limit
myself here to correcting Hill’s omissions and outright falsehoods about the work of David Watters, and going over some of my own examples which Hill has misunderstood or missed altogether.¹

2.3. Mirativity and the mirative

As Lazard reminds us, the question of whether there is such a phenomenon as mirativity or the mirative is in fact two separate questions: whether there is a semantic category of new or unassimilated information, which can manifest itself in one way or another in linguistic expression, and, if so, whether this semantic category is one which regularly finds expression in languages as a grammatical category. I will use the term mirativity to refer to the semantic category in the first question, and mirative to refer to the crosslinguistic grammatical phenomenon addressed in the second. (And mirative construction or form will refer to a form or construction in the particular language under discussion.) It is the second question which has been emphasized by Lazard and other critics, and which I must primarily deal with in this article. I find it a bit odd to imagine serious disagreement on the first question, but if I read Hill right he may not be convinced even of this, so let us begin at the beginning.

The notion of mirativity depends on the concept of a “typical” utterance, where (as Donabédian 2001: 430–431 puts it)

[t]he speaker has at his/her disposal a propositional content that already obtains prior to the utterance [. . .] what is being communicated is old information that has already been integrated into the speaker’s background knowledge, or is stable in the sense that its contents and truth have already been established.

Mirative marking indicates that the proposition being related is not of this kind.

Mirativity is widely expressed by lexicalized adverbials, conventionalized constructions (English (It) turns out (that) S), intonation, sentence final “evaluative” particles, and other devices which are often not considered part of the grammatical structure of a language. We also see it manifested in certain uses of other grammatical constructions. Akatsuka (1985) examines an interesting parallelism between conditional constructions in Japanese and English. In both languages, we find a construction in which an if-clause is used to assert the truth of a proposition, rather than to express conditional meaning. To take one of her Japanese examples, consider the following:

¹ But, since Hill takes it upon himself not only to take Tatevosov & Maisak (1999) to task for having the temerity to actually use the term “admirative” in a title, but also to correct their interpretation of their own data, let me especially recommend to the reader Tatevosov (2007) and Maisak & Tatevosov (2007), where the authors have more space to present their analyses, for their clear and explicit evidence and argument. (No one reading Tatevosov’s paper will be able to take seriously the idea that he is simply uncritically swallowing my proposals, as Hill implies.)
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(1) *konna ni yorokonde kureru no nara, motto hayaku*
    thus LOC happy give NMZ if more early
    *kite ager-eba yokatta*
    coming give-if good.pst

    [Visiting his friend in the hospital, the speaker says to himself:] ‘If he’s so happy to see me, I should have come earlier.’ (Akatsuka 1985: 630)

As Akatsuka notes, “What the speaker connotes in using this type of antecedent is not ‘I know S1’, but rather ‘I didn’t know S1 until now!’.” I have not collected natural examples of this in English, but my intuitive sense is that it most easily occurs in response to new information obtained from someone else:

(2) a. [Coming in from outdoors:] *The rain’s stopped, it’s beautiful out!*
    *Let’s go work in the garden!*

 b. *Oh, if it’s not raining, I’m gonna go for a run.*

 c. *Since it’s not raining, I’m gonna go for a run.*

Of course, (2b) would be perfectly possible without the context of (2a), but then it would express the speaker’s lack of knowledge about the current state of the weather. In the context of (2a), it is consistent only with a reading in which the speaker believes that it is not raining, and has only just learned that. Contrast it with (2c), which has no mirative force and can be used whether the proposition is old or new information.

Mirativity, then, is a robust and familiar phenomenon. The question for typologists is, to what extent do we find this semantic category expressed in languages by dedicated grammatical constructions? As we have already noted, mirativity (whether or not by that name) shows up in many grammatical descriptions, such as Bashir (2010: 3):

> In Kalasha and Khowar, the forms called “inferential” in Bashir (1988) report non-witnessed events or actions learned of by hearsay, inference from observation of resultant states, or narrated in traditional tales; however, these forms also encode meanings which are uniquely mirative.

This point is illustrated by (3), “a Khowar sentence which [Bashir has] had addressed to [her] as a foreigner not expected to know Khowar, on a first meeting with someone” (Bashir 2010: 3):

(3) *tu khowár kor-áık bir-áu*
    you Khowar do-AG.N become(pst.1)-2SG
    *(Oh), you speak Khowar.* (registering surprise)

She then goes on to characterize (3) as
[...] a surprised reaction to an immediate, first-hand observation of an unexpected ongoing action, and clearly not reporting hearsay, inference from a resultant state, or non-witnessed action. Nor can its primary purpose be to inform the addressee (me, in this case) of a fact, since I can be presumed to already know that I speak Khowar. Its function is to communicate the fact that the speaker has learned something new and is surprised by it. The mirative meaning of this utterance is clear and distinct, regardless of the fact that the Khowar “inferential form” is also used for other indirective/mediative meanings.

But Hill is ready to tell us that Bashir is wrong about Kalasha, just as everyone else who has described a mirative construction is wrong about their data. In the next two sections I will go over some examples where I am in a position to demonstrate just who is wrong about what.

2.4. The mirative in Kham

D. Watters (2002) provides a detailed description of a mirative construction in Kham, a Tibeto-Burman language of the Central Himalayan group, which has been used as an example by Aikhenvald (2004: 211–213), and thus attracted Hill’s attention. Hill’s discussion of the Kham data is a good example of his style of argument and his attitude toward evidence. Watters (2002: 288–296) provides a thorough discussion of the various uses of the mirative, expressed by a nominalized verb form in construction with o-le-o, a formally nominalized but effectively finite copula inflected for 3rd person singular (3sg-cop-nmz).

In examples I will simply gloss oleo as mir (for mirative), and ignore its internal structure:

(4) a. ba-duh-ke-r\(2\)
go-PRIOR-PFV-3
‘They already went.’

b. ya-ba-duh-wo oleo
3PL-go-PRIOR-NMZ mir
‘They already went!’ (unanticipated information)

This construction can be used when the information being related is perceived at first hand, as in (5), said when the speaker had just seen a leopard which he and the addressee were looking for:

(5) nə-ko ə ci syā:-d̪o u-li-zya-o oleo sani
there-at EMPH CEP sleep-NF 3-be-CONT-NMZ mir CONF
‘He’s right there sleeping, see!’

2. As in many Tibeto-Burman languages, several morphologically nominalized constructions in Kham function as finite.
It can also be used with statements based on inference, as in (6), which precedes (5) in the same text, said when the speaker first discovered traces showing that the leopard had eaten his dog:

(6) a-ko zɔ o-kɔi-wɔ oleo
    here-at EMPH 3SG-eat-NMZ MIR
    ‘He ate [him] right here!’

Note that it is not the case that oleo here expresses the inferential category per se. It is clear from the discourse context that the statement was based on inference from secondary evidence; the contribution of the mirative here is to express the speaker’s attitude (at the moment being described) toward the information.

2.4.1. *Could oleo mark direct evidence?* Hill asserts that the oleo construction cannot be considered a mirative because “Watters does not present examples inexplicable in terms of sensory evidence”. He discusses example (5), but not (6), but I take it from his treatment of other data that he would still consider this “sensory evidence”, because, after all, the speaker did see SOMETHING. But in a true evidential language, these two statements, in the context in which they were made, could not be in the same grammatical form. Since the speaker is a direct witness to the proposition he states in (5), and is explicitly not in (6), (5) would be in the unmarked or the direct evidential form, and (6) marked as inferential. (As we will see in Section 4, this is the case in Tibetan.)

In any case, Watters presents many examples inexplicable in terms of sensory evidence. The second and third sentences from the text from which (5–6) are taken are (Watters 2002: 418):

(7) nahm-ni ge-hu-zya-kɔ te, khạ:bya ekhɔ
    lowland-from 1PL-come-CONT-foc pillar mountain
    ya-do-zya-o-kɔ ge-busi-kɔ te ri:-lɔ te
    3PL-say-CONT-NMZ-LOC 1PL-stay-when FOC night-INESSIVE FOC
    ge-kạ: hu-lɔ oya-si-u oleo
    1PL-dog leopard-ERG take-NF 3SG-give-1PL-NMZ MIR
    ‘As we were coming from the lowlands, at a place called Pillar Mountain, our dog was taken away on us by a leopard!’

(8) ge: te chɔkalanɔ te kà:-rɔ zya-da ˈkạ:h-rɔ kà:
    we FOC morning FOC meal-PL eat-NF dog-PL meal
    ya-nya’ le-do ge-ra-kih-kɔ te ma-l-e
    give-INF say-NF 1PL-3PL-call-when FOC NEG-be-IMPF
    ‘We, in the morning, having eaten our food, and thinking to give food to the dogs, when we called them they weren’t there.’
The mirative *oleo* at the end of (7) tells us that the loss of the dog was an unanticipated event, not that there was or wasn’t some kind of evidence for it. The actual evidence is simply the absence of evidence of dogs, as stated in the next sentence: what sparked the realization of the mirative-marked event is the failure of the dogs to appear for breakfast – not direct perception of anything, but, precisely, the absence of anything to perceive. (In any case, even if one wanted to insist that (8) is a report of a dogless situation known by direct evidence, note that it is not that sentence which is marked as mirative, but the previous one, describing an event which the speaker at the time had no actual knowledge of at all, direct or otherwise.)

2.4.2. *The language of dreams.* Hill makes much of the use of mirative constructions in reporting dreams, and seems to consider it evidence that a construction is mirative (even though there is no such thing), to the point of including it in his checklist of typical features of mirative constructions (or, maybe, what would be typical features if mirative constructions existed). On his checklist he lists Kham with a question mark in the “Dreams” column, but Watters does explicitly discuss the use of the mirative in relating a dream. He presents (9) “from the narration of a dream in which the speaker, Jaman Sing, is captured by a group of women and stuffed into a burlap bag. Later, he makes a startling discovery:”

(9) “*ao-rə te * *zha:h-rə ci* *oleo,*” *həi li-də te,* *ya: te* this-PL FOC witch-PL CEP MIR thus say-NF FOC I FOC

*bənxə* *ya-che:-ke*

very 1SG-frighten-PFV

‘These are witches!’ saying to myself, I was greatly frightened.’ (D. Watters 2002: 292; I have added morpheme glosses from 2002: 428)

Watters (2002: 292) then goes on:

Jaman Sing’s words/thoughts, though reported to no-one at the time, are marked by the mirative. He conveys to his audience now, perhaps weeks after the event, that his discovery of his captor’s identity was new, unassimilated knowledge at the time.

In context (see Watters 2002: 428) this realization does not appear to be the result of direct perception, even within the dream, but of suddenly realizing the significance of the previous course of events. Another example from the same text is even clearer. After the narrator wakes from his dream, he realizes its meaning:
This is the speaker’s conclusion as he considers the meaning of his dream, not something that he has seen or otherwise directly perceived, either in the dream or out of it. The import of the mirative here is that at this point in the narrative the speaker, who has been sick in bed, suddenly realizes that he has the internal resources to fight his illness, and from that point begins to recover his health.

2.4.3. Hearsay. Hill further asserts that:

Watters (2002: 296) claims that the mirative is also used when the source of knowledge is hearsay; he does not however provide examples of such a usage and the language does have a separate morpheme for reported speech.

Hill seems to feel entitled to explicitly doubt a direct statement about a language by someone who actually knows something about it (Watters was in fact a fluent speaker of Kham). It is hard not to read this as a direct assertion that Watters is wrong about, if not actually misrepresenting, his data. The first and last clauses of Hill’s sentence are true; the middle one is an outright falsehood. It seems extraordinarily careless even for such an enthusiast to have simply missed the section on “Third person narratives” (D. Watters 2002: 295–296, also referred to by Aikhenvald), where Watters explains that, while usually in 3rd person narratives which the narrator is not reporting as an eyewitness, events are marked with the reported speech particle (RSP) di (D. Watters 2002: 295, emphasis added):

An exception to RSP marking in third person narratives occurs with recent events. INTERESTINGLY THE REPORT OF SUCH EVENTS IS MARKED WITH THE MIRATIVE OLEO. This occurrence accords with Aksu-Koç and Slobin’s account of a similar phenomenon in Turkish – there, over time, as the once-new information becomes a part of general world knowledge the mirative is dropped.

He then presents a 13-line text illustrating the point, where the speaker is relating events which had happened to someone else, and ends each sentence with the mirative oleo. So, not only does the language use the mirative construction to mark a statement as based on hearsay, it does so in a very systematic way, which is described and carefully exemplified in the very grammar which Hill insists provides no such examples.
2.5. The Athabaskan mirative

If there is a “touchstone” to my conception of the mirative, it is the mirative particle lõ in the Athabaskan language Hare (Fort Good Hope Dene), which I encountered during fieldwork in 1981. Hill has many complaints about the Hare data and the argument from it presented in DeLancey (1997). There is some validity to some of his questions; if I had anticipated his particular line of disagreement, I could have included data which might have preemptively addressed some of his concerns, although the relevant examples and discussion are all available in DeLancey (1990b), which Hill does not seem to have consulted. Subsequent work has shown that similar categories are to be found in many Athabaskan languages (de Haan 2008), see de Reuse (2003) for the strikingly similar use in Western Apache of a form cognate to Hare lõ.

I discovered the Hare particle lõ while looking for evidential constructions, and at first fastened on the inferential sense which I was able to elicit for constructed examples like (11) as the essential meaning of the form:

(11) júhye  sa  k’ínayeda  lõ
    hereabout  bear  walk.around.IMPF  MIR
    ‘There was a bear walking around here!’ (inferred from discovery of bear tracks)

But a significant problem for this analysis was that I was unable to elicit examples like this simply by constructing an inferential context — sentence (11) without the mirative lõ is perfectly possible regardless of the nature or source of evidence. So the contribution of lõ to the sentence must be something else.

When I discussed the question with my consultants, they were quite clear about what the something else was. As one speaker put it, “lõ is there because you didn’t know” (DeLancey 2001: 377). In trying to explain to me how to use lõ, one speaker suggested this example:

(12)  John  deshîta  déya  lõ
      John  bush  SG.go.3SG.SU.PFV  MIR
      ‘John went to the bush.’

And he explained it thus: “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”. On further discussion the speaker agreed that the sentence could also be used if the speaker simply notices that John’s snowmobile and trapping equipment are gone and infers his destination, since he would not have taken his equipment unless he were going out to the bush to set traps. I expect that for Hill, seeing

3. Nowhere in his article does Hill address explicit statements from native speakers cited by me and other authors about how they understand the forms and examples in question.
that John is gone is visual evidence for (12), but this reduces the notion of direct evidence to vacuity. Seeing that someone is not present is visual evidence that he is not present; it is not visual evidence of where he is instead. But it is unnecessary to debate the point; the first context my consultant gave me, the one which seemed the most obvious and natural to him, is the one where the only way I know where John went is that someone who knew the information told me.

Since Hill wants to insist that lõ, like all putative miratives, really expresses direct sensory evidence, it is vital to his argument that it not be usable in a context where the speaker’s only evidence for the proposition is hearsay. In DeLancey (1997) I was concerned with exemplifying the mirative force of the form, but its use in hearsay contexts is described elsewhere. Consider (13):

\[(13) \quad \text{John} \quad \text{deshita} \quad \text{raweya} \quad \text{lõ} \]
\[\text{John} \quad \text{bush} \quad \text{sg.go.and.return.3sg.su.pfv} \quad \text{mir} \]
\[\text{‘John made a trip to the bush.’ (DeLancey 1990b: 154)}\]

Of which the author states that it 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” (DeLancey 1990b: 154, emphasis added).

I suppose Hill may still want to say that I am just wrong about this, but the fact is, this sentence, and many others with lõ, can indeed be used in a context where the information was obtained from someone else, with no sensory perception on the part of the speaker except hearing the words of his source of information.

In DeLancey (1997, 2001) I portrayed inference and hearsay as functions of the mirative construction, which was obviously problematic. I was taken by the parallels between the Hare construction and the Turkish mediative, as described by Aksu-Koç & Slobin, and ended up, as Lazard (1999) was quick to note, defining the mirative as something very much like the classic mediative. Assuming my argument (DeLancey 2001, Aikhenvald 2004) that mirativity is distinct from evidentiality, to say that the mirative codes either indirect evidence or unanticipated information is contradictory. The correct significance of the fact that mirative constructions can occur in both direct and indirect evidential contexts is precisely that it proves that they are not evidentials – direct vs. indirect evidence is the fundamental evidential distinction, so a construction which simply ignores that distinction is not an evidential. The essential

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4. I use mediative to refer to the category of indirect evidence which subsumes both inference and hearsay; this category, also referred to as “indirective”, has been the subject of an extensive literature (e.g., Lazard 1996, 1999, 2000; Johanson 2000, 2003).
meaning of the mirative is mirativity, regardless of source of information. We will see further evidence in the next two sections of its essential independence from the direct/indirect opposition.

2.6. **Extended and rhetorical uses of the mirative**

Given the difficulty which Hill has with the straightforward uses of the mirative, it is perhaps to be expected that he is confused by what we might call non-literal uses of mirative or evidential constructions. Perhaps the clue to his perplexity is seen in his questioning whether the Hare mirative would be “grammatical” in one set of circumstances or another. This betrays a fundamental misunderstanding of the nature of categories like the mirative, which express the speaker’s attitude toward the proposition, not some objectively perceivable aspect of it. When we say that construction X *means* M, we are not saying the speakers automatically react to M with X, like Skinnerian pigeons, or even that M must somehow be objectively true of the situation depicted in the utterance including X. Rather, what it means is that the speaker is depicting the situation as being characterized by M. When an English speaker uses the present perfect, it is not because the statement “has” present relevance, in some objectively determinable sense, but that the speaker has chosen to present it in that light. All such categories – including, notoriously, both mirative and mediative constructions – are commonly seen in contexts where mirativity or mediativity are invoked for rhetorical or other purposes, from sarcasm to praise and beyond. This is a topic deserving of extended treatment (for example, see Queixalos 2007 for an extended catalogue of uses of the mirative in Sikuani); here I will only touch on points raised by Hill.

2.6.1. **Non-literal mirativity.** Hill expresses some skepticism about the use of mirative forms to convey compliments. Of the Hare sentence (14), I state explicitly: “Something like this might be said to someone who has just demonstrated more wilderness knowledge *than the speaker thought he had*” (DeLancey 1997: 40, emphasis added).

(14) deshiṭa yedaniyie lō bush be.smart/2SG.SU/IMPF.MIR
‘You’re smart for the bush!’ (i.e., are competent at bushcraft and good at dealing improvisatorily with situations that come up in the bush)

Hill engages in some speculation about when people might say this, but unnecessarily – it should not be that hard to conclude from my description that the sentence would not be so polite in a context where the speaker ought to have known already, and indeed it would not. I can’t exactly perform Hill’s experiment, nor do I claim to be an expert in Dene etiquette, but I can say for
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certain that this sentence would be very complimentary coming from an older, experienced man to a younger person, and bizarre, if not downright insulting, in the other direction. As I have suggested above, Hill misses the point in speculating whether lô would be “grammatical” in the context where the speaker is commenting to a world-renowned musician on his skill. Of course it would be “grammatical”, in some narrow sense, but it would be socially quite inappropriate.

Maslova (2003) provides an excellent example of the mirative use of the inferential in Yukaghir which nicely illustrates the point. See (15):

(15) a. gal’î’e o:-l’el-d’ek
    best.hunter COP-INFER-INTR.2SG
    ‘You proved to be a real hunter!’

b. gal’î’e o:-d’ek
    best.hunter COP-INTR.2SG
    ‘You’re a real hunter!’

Maslova (2003: 228–229) discusses this example:

It seems that a morphological distinction is drawn between properties that are displayed and/or acknowledged by the speaker for the first time (Inferential) and properties that have been established earlier and are therefore known to be present (Direct). For example, in a narrative about the speaker’s very first hunting experience, whereby he was supervised by his elder brother, the brother makes two encouraging statements, first [(15a)] (right after the hunting was over) and then [(15b)]. […] The Inferential marking in [(15a)] indicates that the elder brother has inferred, on the basis of the boy’s behavior, that he has a set of qualities required of gal’î’e (the best hunter of a tribe). By the time of the second utterance, this fact has already been established, and the Direct form is appropriate.

Another Hare example which should help lay to rest the idea of a sensory evidential interpretation of lô is (16):

(16) gôshô yedarehyie lô
    really be.smart.1SG.SU.IMPF MIR
    ‘I’m really smart!’ (DeLancey 1990b)

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.

2.6.2. Mirativity in narrative. Another category of example of the mirative in Watters’ grammar of Kham that seems difficult to analyze in terms of sensory evidence illustrates what he calls the “hindsight” use (D. Watters 2002:
294), where the mirative marks a proposition in a narrative which was not known to the narrator at that time. Here the mirative serves to mark the information as new to the speaker now, from the perspective of the speaker as a participant in the narrative who was at the time unaware of it. For example, in a narrative recounting a visit from his attorney when he was in jail, a speaker says:

(17) Kathmandu-ni ji pi adikhari sahibe mani ge-lai ciu:na
      Kathmandu-from G. P. Adikhari Sahib also we-obj visit
     hu-ke. ho-e ciu:na u-hu-ka3, haldar seroso3
     come-pfv he-erg visit 3SG.SU-COME-LOC Haldar old.man
    ni-da:i-u oleo ge: te ho: ge-ma-so:yi-e.
     3DU.SU-VISIT-1.OBJ MIR we FOC that 1PL-NEG-KNOW-IMPF

‘From Kathmandu, G. P. Adikhari Sahib also came to visit us. When he came to visit, he had (already) met with Old Man Sergeant. But we didn’t know that.’

After the time of the visit, described in this sentence, the speaker learned of the meeting between Adikhari Sahib, his attorney, and Old Man Sergeant. But at the time of the visit, he (the speaker) was not aware of this prior meeting. The use of the mirative here conveys that the information “he had met with Old Man Sergeant”, when he eventually learned of it, was new information, unknown to him at this point in the narrative. There can be no question of “sensory evidence” involved in any way in the use of the mirative construction here. (The same phenomenon is described for Western Apache by de Reuse (2003: 83).)

3. Mirativity, evidentiality, mediativity, or other?

The rest of Hill’s argument against the mirative literature is of a piece with his discussion of Hare and Kham, simply taking a selected set of examples, and imagining or inventing some way that each might be interpreted as having to do with the speaker directly perceiving something or other. Once we have taken a look at one or two examples of his work, there is hardly any need to deal with it further. The Kham, Hare, and other mirative constructions described in the literature do not express direct sensory evidence, and Hill gives us no reason whatever to think otherwise.

A more serious question is whether mirative constructions like these can be reinterpreted as variations on the mediative category. Lazard has complained, quite legitimately, that my earlier papers are vague as to whether I am suggesting mirativity as an alternative analysis to mediativity, or as a component of it, or as an independent category which is also a component of mediativity. Obviously the vagueness of the presentation reflected a vagueness of conception, but
the substantial discussion of these questions, and more importantly, the flood of literature on evidential and mirative systems of the last fifteen years has done a great deal to clarify the issues.

Since Hill effectively adduces no empirical support for his argument, it should hardly be necessary to refute it further. But there is an obvious theoretical refutation, the reason why Hill’s proposal is not only false in fact but impossible in principle, which will serve as the basis for my explanation for the similarities between mediative/indirective and two-term mirative systems.

3.1. **There can be no direct evidential without a contrasting indirect**

If a language has a construction which expresses inferential, indirective/mediative, mirative, or whatever, there is necessarily another contrasting construction which does not. Following Aikhenvald (2004), we can distinguish two types of two-term system. In Aikhenvald’s ”type A1”, the unmarked term explicitly has the opposite value from the marked term – i.e., if the marked term expresses indirect evidence, the other explicitly expresses the category of direct evidence. In “type A2”, the unmarked term is not specified for evidential value, and can in principle be used to report information from any direct or indirect source. The latter is the case for the classic mediative systems, where the non-mediative form is not an evidential, that is, it does not explicitly mean “direct evidence”. It will be important in the next section to note that mediative oppositions, as well as the mirative constructions of Hare, Sunwar, Kham, Kalasha, and other well-known examples, are also type A2.

In type A1 systems, as in Jarawara (Dixon 2003), Chechen (Molochieva 2010, see below), and elsewhere (de Haan 2001, Aikhenvald 2004), one term expresses indirect knowledge (either inference plus hearsay, or inference, hearsay, and some categories of non-visual evidence, see de Haan 2001), and the other explicitly asserts that the statement is made on the basis of direct evidence. Obviously, in such a language the existence of a direct evidential form depends on the contrast with an indirect form, and the two forms divide up the semantic space between them. Of course we also find direct evidentials in more complex evidential systems, as we will see, but again the direct evidential finds its meaning from its place in semantic space, hemmed in on all sides by forms which occupy neighboring semantic real estate. We will see a rather straightforward example and another which is far from straightforward below.

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
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no evidential value at all. Hill is asserting that languages such as Kham, Hare, Sunwar, and Khowar are exactly that. But what would determine when such a construction would be used? There is no such thing as a “direct evidential” that does not contrast with one or more indirect evidentials:

[L]anguages tend to grammaticalize indirect evidentials before they grammaticalize direct evidentials. Languages in general develop grammaticalized quotatives and inferentials before evidentials that mark direct, sensory, evidence. Although there are minor exceptions to this generalization, it appears to be fairly robust crosslinguistically, based on the data reported in de Haan (2005). The explanation for this grammaticalization pattern is related to markedness: when someone is speaking it will normally be assumed the speaker has first hand evidentiary information, unless explicitly stated otherwise. Thus, indirect evidentiality is marked with respect to direct evidentiality and according to markedness theory will have to be marked overtly. (de Haan 2008: 69–70)

We will see further implications of this when we get to the discussion of Tibetan in Section 4.

I have shown above that as a matter of empirical fact the Kham and Hare mirative categories do express mirativity, not direct evidence. What we have seen in this section is that, since in both cases the construction in question is the marked member of a type A2 two-term system, there is no possible way that their meaning could be “direct evidence”. In Section 4 we will apply this argument to the problem of Tibetan evidentiality. In the next two parts of this section we will look at the relationship between mirative oppositions like this and the mediative.

3.2. The mediative

With Lazard (1999, cf. Aikhenvald 2004: 15) we must distinguish the classic mediative from the more expansive notion of evidentiality which we need to describe more complex systems. The mediative or indirective is consistently described as ordinarily used in contexts of inference or hearsay, sometimes also to report directly perceived new information. The mirative constructions of Kham, Hare, Kalasha, and many other languages are described as primarily expressing the category of new information, often used in contexts of inference or hearsay. The obvious question is, are these descriptions of two distinct categories, or simply different perspectives on the same basic phenomenon?

Plungian (2010: 47) presents the problem as a challenge:

[M]irativity is not used to indicate the source information of a situation. Furthermore, a mirative situation is, as a rule, accessed by means of a direct observation by the speakers. However, in spite of this fact, mirativity may in the majority of languages be expressed by means of markers of indirect access, which constitutes an important descriptive and theoretical problem. Linguists who defend a rigid
separation of mirative and evidential values, due to the legitimate semantic differences between both, cannot explain why these values are regularly expressed by means of one and the same marker.

Let us see whether we can or not.

A first approach is to note that the descriptions of these systems in the literature cluster around these two poles, and infer from the considerable consistency of the descriptions of mediative/indirective systems, and more recently of mirative constructions, that there are two distinct phenomena being described. That is, to say that these have been described differently – by speakers of the languages, as well as linguists reporting on them – because they are different. Mediative constructions express the category of “indirectivity”, and to use a mediative to report direct evidence is to place the statement in the same category as statements based on indirect evidence (Lazard 1996, 1999; Johanson 2000; Friedman 2007). A mirative construction expresses the category of new information, regardless of how it is acquired. Thus, although a list of the evidential circumstances in which a Turkic mediative and a Kham mirative might be uttered would look similar, their actual distribution in text and speech might be quite different. And although they could quite possibly be uttered in exactly the same objective circumstances, they would not be saying the same thing about it.

Zeisler (2004: 659) describes the mediative as

a much stronger claim about the “status” of information [than DeLancey’s mirative] […] comprising not merely the relative novelty of immediate perceptions meeting an “unprepared mind”, but also, independent of the means of knowledge, the speaker’s devaluation of the information as unbelievable. The speaker thus keeps “distance” to second-hand information as well as to his or her own observations and signals that, in contrast to normal observations, s/he would not be willing to act as a witness under oath.

This is quite different from the mirative in Hare or Kham, which does not “devalue” the information, but presents it as fact, often as important fact.

Still, in our current state of knowledge, it is certainly not inconceivable that the differences in the descriptions of mediative and mirative systems are somehow artificial, reflecting different presumptions or methodological choices on the part of linguists. For example, Donabedian (2001: 432), trying to reconcile both categorial profiles under a single definition, suggests that the strong association in the literature between the meditative 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. Other values “require a more elabo-
rate scenario and are therefore less likely to occur when native speakers reflect on their language out of context”.

3.3. **Mirative and indirect evidence together**

But there is a stronger argument for the distinctness of the mirative category, which cannot be interpreted as simply a difference among linguists, rather than among languages – the existence of languages where the expression of mirativity is not connected with indirect evidence. Let us hypothesize that the reason for the superficial resemblance between the mediative and the mirative is that the constructions being compared are always the marked member of a two-term type A2 opposition, contrasted with an unmarked, non-evidential form. The apparent similarities then might be inherent in an A2 system. The marked category will have some primary value: inferential, indirect, or mirative. But if there is only one marked term, it is likely to have a broad range of use, giving us the famed mediative constellation – primarily formed around inferential reanalysis of perfects, see DeLancey (1982), Anderson (1986), Lazard (1996), Donabédian (1996), Michailovsky (1996), Lindstedt (2000), Tatevosov (2001), inter alia – and the indirect evidential uses of true miratives like Hare lõ. This is only a slight extension, since information acquired through indirect means often is mirative in nature – otherwise one would already know it, and not have to rely on inference.

Thus a language which has a mirative construction as well as an indirect evidential would constitute direct evidence that the two categories are distinct, especially if the two categories can co-occur. Several such languages have been reported. Grunow-Hårsta (2007) describes such a system in Magar, a Tibeto-Burman language of Nepal, very closely related to Kham (Grunow-Hårsta 2007: 175):

A non-mirative statement simply conveys information, making no claims as to its novelty or the speaker’s psychological reaction to it. A mirative statement conveys that the information is new and unexpected and is as much about this surprising newness as it is about the information itself.

The mirative construction is very similar to that of Kham, a nominalized clause in construction with the copula le:

(18) **Magar (Tibeto-Burman)**

a. *thapa i-lağ le*
   Thapa DEM-LOC COP
   ‘Thapa is here.’

b. *thapa i-lağ le-o le*
   Thapa DEM-LOC COP-NMZ COP(=MIR)
   [I realize to my surprise that] ‘Thapa is here!’
This contrasts directly with distinct inferential and hearsay forms (Grunow-Härsta 2007: 186; note that the non-mirative forms have a different nominalizer):

(19) a. kumari biim-o im-aŋ mu-o le
   Kumari Blüm-GEN house-LOC sit-NMZ MIR
   (I realized to my surprise that) ‘Kumari lives at Blüm’s house.’

b. kumari biim-o im-aŋ mu-mA le-sa
   Kumari Blüm-GEN house-LOC sit-NMZ IMPF- Infer
   ‘Apparently, Kumari lives at Blüm’s house.’

c. kumari biim-o im-aŋ mu-ma le ta
   Kumari Blüm-GEN house-LOC sit-NMZ IMPF HEARSAY
   ‘They say that Kumari lives at Blüm’s house.’

And the mirative combines freely with the indirect evidentials:

(20) hose-ko-ko das-o le-sa
    DEM-HON-PL leave-NMZ MIR- Infer
    (I realize to my surprise that) ‘Apparently, they left.’

Thus in Magar it is impossible to consider mirativity to be simply some kind of side-effect of indirectivity or mediativity, since a mirative construction can be formally direct or indirect, and an indirect construction mirative or not.

Another example of the same kind is Chechen, as described in Molochieva (2010). Chechen has distinct and independent mirative and indirect constructions, which can even co-occur. This gives us four possibilities (examples and interpretations from Molochieva 2010: 218–222, 248–250): (i) unmarked (21a); (ii) marked for mirative, by the suffix -q on the main verb (21b); (iii) marked for indirect, by the auxiliary xilla (21c); and (iv) marked for both (21d):

(21) a. Zaara j-e’a-na vaiga
    Zara.NOM(J) j-come.PFV-PRF 1PL.INC.ALL
    ‘Zara has come (I expected her to come).’

b. Zaara j-e’a-na-q vaiga.
    Zara.NOM(J) j-come.PFV-PRF-MIR 1PL.INC.ALL
    ‘(Wow!) Zara has come!’ (I didn’t expect her to come).

c. Zaara j-e’a-na xilla
    Zara.NOM(J) j-come.PFV-CVB.ANT be.PRF
    ‘Zara has come (I can see her shoes in the hall, but I didn’t see her come).’ (Molochieva 2010: 219)
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Zara. NOM(j) j- come. PFV-CVB.ANT be. PRF-MIR

‘Look! Zara was here!’ (I can see her special cookies in the kitchen (unwitnessed coming; unexpected/new situation; not concurrent with my expectations)).

Chechen has a type A1 evidential system: a statement which is not marked with xilla is necessarily interpreted as based on direct perception (Molochieva 2010: 216). Thus a sentence like (21b) cannot be inferential, but must express direct evidence, but this is has nothing to do with the presence or absence of the mirative suffix. The mirative is equally possible with an inferential predication such as (21d).

The fact that Chechen has distinct mirative and indirect constructions is sufficient to show that these are distinct categories. The fact that they are expressed in independent constructions, which can co-occur, shows that they are not even the same kind of category, i.e., that mirativity and evidentiality are distinct systems, not exponents of a single larger category. We will see further examples of the interaction of distinct evidential and mirative distinctions in Tibetic languages in Section 4.3.

4. Tibetan

4.1. Evidential and other categories in the Tibetic verb

The Tibetic languages have attracted a great deal of attention for their complex and unique evidential/egophoric systems. Grammaticalized mirativity is widely attested across the geographical and genetic range of Tibeto-Burman (D. Watters 2002, LaPolla 2003, Grunow-Hårsta 2007, Shirai 2007, Willis 2007, Lidz 2007, Noonan 2008, Andvik 2010, Hyslop 2011a, b), although there are also languages (e.g., Burmese) and branches (e.g., Bodo-Garo) where we find no evidential or mirative marking at all, and no case has been made for either as a deeply-rooted characteristic of the family. But in the Tibetic languages, and a few of their near neighbors, we find evidential and mirative elements combining with aspect, person, and volitionality in “very unusual and complex systems of evidentiality that are without direct analogues in other areas” (Plungian 2010: 19–20).

I cannot attempt a complete explanation of the “Tibetan” verbal system (for an introduction and overview see Zeisler 2004). There has been a great deal of

5. There is abundant cultural and linguistic evidence for extensive and early contact between Tibetan and Altaic speakers (Roerich 1930, Eberhard 1942, Beckwith 2009), so it is conceivable that Himalayan evidentiality originates in mediative constructions ultimately borrowed from Turkic, the apparent epicenter of the “Great Evidential Belt” (Johanson 2003). See now Binnick 2012 for evidence of both mediative and mirative constructions in Mongol.)
work on Tibetic languages, and especially on evidential and related categories, over the last twenty years (e.g., Huáng 1991; Sun 1993; Tournadre 1996, 2001; Saxena 1997; Denwood 1999; Bielmeier 2000; Volkart 2000; Haller 2000a; Häsl 2001; Hein 2001, 2007; Garrett 2001; Zeisler 2000, 2004; Huber 2000, 2005; Chirkova 2008), but still only a small portion of the Tibetic languages have been described at all. But we have ample data to show that there is, in a sense, a “modern Tibetan verb system”, that is, there is a degree of consistency across many of the modern languages in the gross categories which are distinguished (see Tournadre 1996). (The phrase “Tibetan verb” sometimes refers specifically to the Classical Tibetan system, which is completely different from any of the modern languages.) But the system also shows considerable variation across the branch (Sun 1993, Bielmeier 2000), and Balti, the westernmost Western Tibetic language, apparently does not participate at all in the evidential-egophoric complex which characterizes most of the Tibetic languages: “the distinction between old and new knowledge does not (yet) play a role in the epistemic pattern of the Balti auxiliaries” (Bielmeier 2000: 86).

4.2. The basic pan-Tibetic system

The analysis of Tibetic verbal “conjunct/disjunct” or “egophoric” systems requires reference to aspect, evidentiality and mirativity, volitionality, and person. The literature on Tibetan evidentiality is much concerned with the interactions among these (Jín 1979, 1983; DeLancey 1990a; Häsl 2001; Hein 2001; Bickel 2008; Tournadre 2008). The system is more complex in some languages than others, but there is a fundamental evidential paradigm distinguishing three categories. Almost every author who has discussed the system has a different set of terms; here I will refer to them as generic, personal, and immediate knowledge. The categories can be illustrated by the now hackneyed Lhasa sentences (22):6

(22)  
\[\begin{align*}
\text{a. bod-la} & \quad \text{g.yag} \quad \text{yog-red} \\
& \quad \text{Tibet-LOC} \quad \text{yak} \quad \text{exist GENERIC} \\
\text{b. bod-la} & \quad \text{g.yag} \quad \text{yod} \\
& \quad \text{Tibet-LOC} \quad \text{yak} \quad \text{exist PERSONAL} \\
\text{c. bod-la} & \quad \text{g.yag} \quad \text{'dug} \\
& \quad \text{Tibet-LOC} \quad \text{yak} \quad \text{exist IMMEDIATE} \\
& \quad \text{‘There are yaks in Tibet.’}
\end{align*}\]

6. All Written and Central Tibetan examples are presented in a transliteration of standard orthography. This is essentially the Wylie (1959) system with the addition of hyphens and equals signs to represent two phonologically different types of morpheme boundary. (Transliteration seems to be another topic on which Hill has energetic opinions; see Hill 2012a.)
Hill seems to miss the point of these examples; undoubtedly my earlier discussion of them could have been more precise. In the real world (22b) and (22c) are fairly unlikely sentences – since anyone who knows what a yak is knows that they are associated with Tibet, the ordinary way for anyone to state that fact would be with the generic form (22a), which expresses knowledge for which no evidential source needs be given, as because it is common knowledge.

If the speaker has such warrant for a statement, that is all that is necessary, and the generic is the appropriate form. The use of either the personal or the direct form implies that the statement is not being presented as generic knowledge. So (22b) explicitly emphasizes the personal basis for the statement, that the speaker is making the statement on the basis of personal knowledge rather than common knowledge. The spirit is better captured in English by something like ‘In my country, Tibet, we have yaks’. The point of this example is not, as many readers reasonably inferred from my earlier description, that this is what any Tibetan would be expected to say, but rather that it is something that only a Tibetan could ever say.

But the main point of these data for the problem of mirativity, which Hill ignores, is stated quite plainly: that no Tibetan could ever say (22c). This means, quite simply, that however useful “direct evidence” may be as a description of this category, it is not the case that what is being expressed here is simply that the speaker has direct perceptual evidence for the statement. If that were the case, 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. The reason this is impossible is because any Tibetan has better basis than that for the statement. If one considers a fact to be generic knowledge, then that is the strongest basis one can have for the statement, and one will report the fact using that form. Failing that, personal knowledge is the next strongest warrant. The essential fact about the “direct” or immediate form is that it can be used only when neither of the stronger bases is available:

The use of this what may be termed the immediate evidential indicates that the speaker’s basis for his assertion comes solely from perceptible evidence directly present in the immediate speech-act situation. What is crucial here is that the speaker implicitly denies having any information regarding the situation prior to the current perceptual experience; in other words, this knowledge is entirely novel for the speaker. (Sun 1993: 996–997, emphasis added)

(Sun is discussing an Eastern Tibetic language which does not use ‘dug’ in evidential forms, but this is the same pan-Tibetic category which Hill calls “direct”.) It is for this reason that I adopt Sun’s term “immediate” rather than “direct” for this category – the meaning of the category is not that the speaker
Scott DeLancey has direct evidence, but that immediate direct evidence is the sole basis for the statement.

4.3. The immediate evidential: Mirativity right in front of your eyes

4.3.1. The meaning of ‘dug’. Hill orients his discussion of my Tibetan analysis around the form ‘dug (ḥdug), originally a verb meaning ‘sit, be located’ (Hill 2010: 146), which sense it still retains in the archaic Western and Eastern languages. In many, but not all, Tibetic languages, this has grammaticalized into a marker of imperfective or durative aspect (Hahn 1974: 154–155, Saxena 1997), and further developed into the exponent of the direct/immediate evidential category as a locative/existential copula and in the imperfective paradigm. But we cannot simply identify the form and the function. When ‘dug’ is involved in the evidential system in a Tibetic language, it expresses the immediate evidential value, but the converse is not true: the immediate evidential is expressed by a range of different forms and constructions across the branch.

Hill is quite correct that both foreign scholars and native grammarians have identified the primary sense of ‘dug’ as indicating direct perceptual knowledge of the event or state on the part of the speaker, and that I have asserted on the contrary that “eyewitness knowledge is not the relevant criterion” (DeLancey 1986: 205), rather, the primary sense of the form is mirative. But Hill is magnifying a small, though not inconsequential, issue here. The association of “direct evidence” forms in Tibetan with novelty or “discovery” is well-known and generally acknowledged. I am hardly alone in this view:

Studies of the epistemic categories expressed in Tibetan auxiliaries and copulas have mostly compared the phenomena with mirativity marking, and this is no doubt the correct comparandum in diachronic research. (Bickel 2008: 1)

And it is hardly my own invention:

The choice of the auxiliaries red, ḥdug, and LT soṁ indicates that the knowledge of the speaker is based solely or predominantly on his or her immediate or new visual experience, “uncontaminated” by knowledge of different sources. (Zeisler 2004: 300, emphasis added)

In addition to the system of viewpoint [i.e., egophoricity], the choice between yod, and ‘dug’ very often relates to what might be called generality. yod, often implies that the state of affairs in question is generally the case or has been so

7. Resemblant, but not provably cognate, forms with similar existential/locative and aspectual functions occur in several nearby languages, including Newar in Nepal, the Tani languages in Arunachal Pradesh, and the Bodo-Garo languages of the Brahmaputra Valley. This local areal phenomenon presumably originated in Tibetan.
for a considerable period of time. 'dug,' by contrast often refers to a particular, even momentary state of affairs, and frequently conveys a sense of surprise, recency or discovery. (Denwood 1999:122, emphasis added)

Denwood’s interpretation of the immediate category is explicit in his standard gloss for immediate verb forms:

(23) kho-la deb ‘dug
he-LOC book exist
'(I see) he has some books.'/’Ah, he has some books!' (Other-centered; witnessed; discovery.) (Denwood 1999: 122, emphasis added)

We have already seen that Sun characterizes the immediate category in Eastern Tibetic similarly. In his analysis of the auxiliary systems of Western Tibetic languages, Bielmeier includes both mirativity and direct perception as parts of the definition of duk (< 'dug) but emphasizes the importance of the former (Bielmeier 2000: 98, emphasis added):

An attempt to interpret duk on the pragmatic-epistemic level as "new objective non-definite knowledge, usually based on recent visual perception" faces the same problem as in Purik. Can the speaker always "see" that 'he is a liar'? Using duk in [kʰ’o remba duk ‘he is strong’] he may see the particular quality, but in [kʰ’o sambatSan duk ‘he is intelligent’ and kʰ’o jobo duk ‘he is a liar’] it seems more appropriate to interpret the speaker’s statement as focusing on his new objective non-definite knowledge.

So although Hill is at great pains to contrast my heretical interpretation of ‘dug with the orthodox tradition, there is no such radical disagreement; other scholars who have looked at the problem see it similarly. Presumably Hill sees a contradiction concerning how to characterize the Tibetan immediate evidential category in terms of our superordinate categories: since mirativity is distinct from evidentiality, there is a contradiction in calling it as both at the same time. If this is his point, then it is virtually the only thing he says that I can agree with.

In the next section we will see that, as part of an evidential paradigm, the immediate category should, as Zeisler and Hill insist, be primarily characterized as an evidential, and why.

4.3.2. Mirativity and the immediate evidential. The argument which Hill seems to be trying to articulate is made succinctly and coherently by Zeisler (2004: 301–304), who points out that if the Tibetan immediate evidential were a true mirative, it should be usable in inferential as well as direct evidential contexts, as long as the information related is new. This is, of course, correct, and is true of typical mirative constructions such as those of Kham, Kalasha, and Hare. Zeisler, like Hill, finds the notion of mirativity otiose for the description of Tibetan. But unlike him, she recognizes that this is because the “direct”
evidential category in Tibetan has a strong mirative component (Zeisler 2004: 658):

This distinction in terms of what should rather be called “novelty” corresponds more or less to the distinction in terms of EVIDENTIALITY: immediate perception, not “contaminated” by prior (i.e. old or assimilated) knowledge is new and in a way not yet integrated into the overall knowledge.

For Zeisler, the defining semantic feature of the Tibetan category is “uncontaminated” immediate perception, i.e., information known through direct perception but no other source. That is, Tibetic immediate evidential forms based on ‘dug do not simply express that the speaker’s basis for the statement is direct evidence. Rather, they call explicit attention to that fact, in order to express that that direct evidence is the sole basis which the speaker has for the statement.

The same point is made (but not sufficiently developed) in DeLancey (2001), that eyewitness knowledge does not forbid the use of the personal or generic forms, but that, as Zeisler notes, the direct construction indicates that the speaker has only direct perceptual evidence, and had no knowledge of the fact prior to perceiving it. The strictly limited use of the immediate evidential form compared to miratives such as those of Kham or Hare is an inevitable consequence of its position in a paradigm where it contrasts with other epistemic categories, the personal and generic. As pointed out above, a language will not have a construction which is used always and only for statements based on direct perception, unless that construction contrasts with one or more constructions which express other evidential categories. Typically we find a type A1 two-term contrast between direct and indirect evidence, as in Chechen, but the Tibetic languages show us the more complex, and quite strange, three-term system which we have briefly surveyed. The sense of “direct sensory knowledge”, rather than the commoner sense of “definite first-hand knowledge” (de Haan 1999, 2001), arises through contrast with the generic and egophoric forms. So the very specific sense associated with ‘dug in most of the constructions in which it occurs in Tibetic languages is very much an effect of the paradigm of which it is part. Needless to say, one cannot simply wander off into the wilderness of linguistic variety expecting to find close matches with such a form in languages which lack the rest of the paradigm. But this is precisely what Hill has done, and the results are what one would expect.

Still Zeisler and Hill are correct in pointing out that despite its strong mirative connotations, the immediate evidence category in Tibetic languages is, strictly speaking, an evidential category, and thus by definition not a pure mirative. Note that the immediate category contrasts with the personal and inferential categories; it cannot co-occur with evidential forms as we see in Chechen and Magar. In the next subsection I will speculate on the historical connection between the immediate evidential and mirativity sensu strictu. In Section 4.4
we will see that, in addition to the immediate evidential category, some Tibetic languages also have a true mirative.

4.3.3. On the origin of Tibetic egophoric systems. As we can see even from this very sketchy glimpse, the simple concept of mirativity is not a magical key to the amazing verbal systems of modern Tibetic languages, whose “conjunct/disjunct” or “egophoric” systems are very different from what we are used to in the world of evidentials. Tibetic, and probably specifically Central Tibetic, seems to be the center from which egophoric systems have spread around the Himalayas. In the Tibetan cultural area, true egophoricity has spread to a few non-Tibetic languages, including not only Bodic but non-Tibetic Dakpa (DeLancey 1992b: 46–48, where the language is called Cuona Monpa), Bodish but non-Bodic Newar (Hargreaves 2005) and Kaike (D. Water 2006), Tibeto-Burman but non-Bodish Akha (Egerod & Hansson 1974, Thurgood 1986) and Sangkong (see DeLancey 2010: 4–5), and Tibetospheric but non-Tibeto-Burman Mongguor (Mongolic; Chinggeltei 1989, Slater 2003) and Xibe (Tungusic; Li 1984, Jang et. al. 2011).

Curnow (2001), and now Hill, criticize my description of Tibetic conjunct-disjunct systems as “grammaticalized mirativity”, and that may not have been the most illuminating description. A better way of putting it is that the peculiarities of the Tibetan system are a result of the expansion of a simple two-term mirative system into a larger and more complex (more “grammatical”) system in which each term is constrained to a relatively narrow semantic space. It is clear that, historically, the conjunct or egophoric forms, which express the category which I have been calling personal, are original, and that the conjunct-disjunct/egophoric-allophoric/personal-direct system arose through the innovation of the constructions which now express the direct evidential category (Takeuchi 1990, DeLancey 1992b, Denwood 1999). This is why, pace Curnow, the disjunct/allophoric forms are still formally marked, and the conjunct/egophoric forms are unmarked. For Curnow this seems to be a matter of intuition, but the formal evidence is that the contrast is neutralized before subordinating constructions, where only the conjunct forms can appear (Chang & Chang 1984, DeLancey 1990a). The member of an opposition which consistently occurs in conditions of neutralization is the unmarked member by definition.

The evidential/egophoric systems of the modern Tibetic languages are not cognate; although often we may see cognate morphemes occurring in different systems, they have developed semi-independently in the different languages, and do not always correspond even in morphological structure (Sun 1993, Bielmeier 2000). There is only the most tentative indication of evidential marking in Classical Tibetan (Takeuchi 1990, Denwood 1999: 246), and none at all of an egophoric/allophoric distinction or of the relevance of volitional-
ity (Denwood 1999: 249). In early vernacular writing we see the beginnings of constructions which have evolved into the Central Tibetic and other verbal systems (Saxena 1997, Zeisler 2004). Thus the elaborate egophoric systems of the modern languages are a recent development (Takeuchi 1990, DeLancey 1992, Tournadre 1996, Saxena 1997, Hongladarom 2007). Although they are similar in the set of semantic categories expressed, they differ considerably in the constructions and specific morphological material through which they are expressed. In Central (dBus-gTsang or Ü-tsang) Tibetan, the development of the system involved the innovation of new locational/existential and equational copulas to contrast with original yod and yin. This seems to have begun with the initial grammaticalization of 'dug, originally ‘sit, stay’, into a locational/existential copula contrasting with yod. The spread of this contrast to the equational system is much later, so that even the very closely related Lhasa and Shigatse dialects of Central Tibetan have different innovative forms – Lhasa red corresponds to Shigatse sbas. 8

I suggest that the original innovative category represented by the first grammaticalization of 'dug was mirative, on the grounds that a two-term system will most likely be either unmarked-mirative or direct-indirect, and such systems typically originate from the innovation of a mirative or indirect category. Note that where we find two-way oppositions in neighboring languages, such as Kham, Sunwar, and Qiang, it tends to be the familiar mirative. Since 'dug is the innovative form, and nothing in its subsequent history suggests any association with indirectivity, the most likely inference is that it began as a simple mirative. As we have seen, its semantic range has become more constrained as the evidential paradigm in which it participates has become more complex and precise, but it still retains a strong mirative sense, recognized by most authorities on the subject. Eventually (apparently over not more than a few centuries) the distinction came to be adopted into the verbal system through finitization of nominalized clause constructions (DeLancey 2011).

Conjunct/disjunct or egophoric systems are not confined to the Tibetospheric world. Outside of the Tibetan area, conjunct/disjunct-like phenomena have been reported from the Andes (Dickinson 2000, Curnow 2002, Bruil 2009), and more recently from the Caucasus (Bickel 2008; Creissels 2008a, b) and Papua New Guinea (Loughnane 2009). Similarities and differences among all of these systems have yet to be explored; the suggestions above are solely concerned with the origins of the system in Central Tibetan.

8. I take this spelling from Jin (1958); Haller (2000b) gives ‘bad. The form is /pi Nguy/.
4.4. Tibetan even has pure miratives

Hill makes two assertions: that Tibetan ’dug does not express mirativity, and that no other category in any other language does either. As we have seen, it is generally recognized that ’dug does in fact have a strong mirative force, but there is a good argument that the category with which it is associated is fundamentally an evidential rather than a mirative per se. But even in the Tibetic languages we find numerous examples of mirative constructions which do not involve the ’dug morpheme. Besides the four evidential categories which we have seen, a fifth term is added to the system in some Tibetic languages, as in the Central Tibetic language Dzongkha (Bhutan), where van Driem (1992: 169) describes a “suffix of acquired knowledge”:

The suffix -pas/-bas -bä/-wä is attached to the regular stem of a verb denoting a state or condition and indicates that the information expressed in the sentence is newly acquired knowledge. Conversely, when the suffix is not used […] this implies that the situation expressed forms part of the ingrained knowledge of the speaker, something the speaker has known all along or which, at least, is not a recently acquired insight or not an only recently observed phenomenon.

The form is a nominalizer inflected for ablative or instrumental case; Noonan (2008) notes that a common function of a nominalized clause use as finite in Bodic languages is to express mirativity. We do not at present have a sufficiently detailed description of a system which includes this category9 to allow a serious investigation of how it relates to the immediate evidential category. Nevertheless, even if Hill were correct in denying the mirative nature of the direct evidential category, it turns out that mirativity is still attested as a grammatical category in Tibetic.

Similar developments have occurred in other Tibetic languages (see Tourndre 1996, who uses the term “révélatif”). A clear description of the interaction and independence of mirativity and evidentiality in a dialect of the western Spiti language is Hein (2007). (It may be that the Tabo mirative form has some etymological relation to the Dzongkha “acquired knowledge” form (Hein 2007: 201–202).)

5. Mirative forever

We have seen that even the original case for the mirative can easily weather an attack such as Hill’s. I hope that in this article I have buttressed the original case sufficiently to meet Lazard’s and Plungian’s challenges. In any case, it is a fact, as even Hill acknowledges, that the concept has proved very useful to descriptive linguists, and has contributed to insightful descriptions and analyses.

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of a wide range of languages around the world. The case for the mirative no longer rests simply on my argumentation or examples, but on a broad base of data and analysis. To refute the case one would need to demonstrate how these languages can be better and more insightfully described in some other terms. (This is what Hill pretends to do, but we have seen the results of that.)

Recent research opens up new vistas in the study of mirativity. There are many empirical questions concerning the interaction of mirativity with person (Hein 2001, 2007), with volitionality, with politeness, and many other factors. Several authors have recently reported “2nd person” miratives (Enfield 2007; Bickel 2008; Molochieva 2010; Hyslop 2011a, b). It is clear, and widely acknowledged, that Tibetic systems involve the interaction of mirativity and evidentiality with person, see, e.g., Bickel (2008: 2):

What differentiates Tibetan epistemic morphology from standard average miratives can best be captured by different responses to two key variables: (i) whose knowledge is at issue? (ii) what is the knowledge about? I refer to the first variable as the PERSON variable, and to the second variable as the SCOPE variable.

Crosslinguistic study of conjunct-disjunct systems is only beginning, but already there is reason to doubt whether non-Tibetic systems of this sort necessarily involve evidentiality or mirativity at all. Neither seems to be relevant in the Newar system, where intention/volitionality is the fundamental category involved (Hargreaves 2005). On the other hand, the opposition in Kaire is strongly mirative, and volitionality plays no evident role (D. Watters 2006). An egophoric opposition in Galo, a Tibeto-Burman language of Arunachal Pradesh, is concerned only with the personal/non-personal distinction in categories of knowledge, and seems to be unconcerned with either volition or mirativity (Post no date). As we come to better understand these and other newly-described systems, we will be able to see further into the nature of these component categories and their interrelations.

Another potential line of research involves the interaction of mirativity with the expression of emotional attitude. Unexpected information often provokes some kind of emotional reaction, and it is inevitable that some emotional value will sometimes attach to a mirative construction. Several available descriptions refer to implications of disapproval or other negative attitudes associated with mirative constructions (e.g., Hein 2007, So-Hartmann 2009: 293–294). We are seeing studies such as Queixalos (2007), which present finer-grained analyses of the various semantic subcategories of a mirative construction; detailed studies of this sort will be critical to developing our understanding of the place of mirativity in the world of semantic categories.

It requires a peculiar conception of language description and linguistic typology to imagine that an imaginary descriptive category, as Hill deems the mirative to be, could capture the attention of a faddish public and spawn the
amount of specious description, historical reconstruction, and typological analysis that the mirative has been the occasion of over the past fifteen years. The “efforts” of mine to which Hill attributes the popularity of mirativity have, to tell the truth, not been very engaged with the topic since 2001. So the energy which has powered the bubble must have come from somewhere else. It is evident to me that the explanation lies in the fact that many descriptivists encounter phenomena which are more easily described in terms of mirativity than as anything else. Hill never deals with the question of what it is to be a “valid” category. For me it is quite simple. The mirative has proven itself to be useful in the description of a wide range of languages, and descriptive utility is the only validity there is.

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