Mirativity and evidentiality in Bantu: An Introduction

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This Special Issue addresses how evidentiality and mirativity are expressed in various Bantu languages. Both the notions of evidentiality and mirativity remain underexamined for the Bantu languages – the following quote is quite typical: "It appears that expressing evidentiality as a verbal affix or clitic is the most common strategy. With the exception of Africa, it occurs on every continent" (De Haan 2013, via Storch 2018). Storch (2018: 610) however adds that "It seems as if the contrary is true and that precisely this strategy is also present in a number of African languages" (referring to the language Shilluk). That is, evidentiality and mirativity are present in African languages in general, and Bantu in particular - we just have not been looking for them enough. It was this observation and ongoing discussion that caused us to organise the online workshop 'Mirativity and evidentiality in Bantu' held in October 2021, which formed the starting point for this special issue. Our hope in organising the workshop was to spark interest and discussion in the topic, as well as to provide a forum to share ongoing and emerging work on evidentiality and mirativity. It is now our hope that bringing together these papers in this Special Issue of SAL will form a turning point, with an increase in attention paid to and research on evidentiality and mirativity in Bantu linguistics.

In this short introduction, we briefly introduce the notions of evidentiality and mirativity, present an overview of previous research on these notions in Bantu languages, and provide summaries of the papers that make up the volume.

1. Mirativity and evidentiality

Evidentials are grammatical markers used to encode the source of information. The broad notion of evidentiality goes beyond information source, however, to also include attitude to knowledge, reliability, belief and evidence for, or justification of what is said (see Aikhenvald 2004, 2014 for an overview). Evidentiality has most widely been identified and studied in languages of South America, although as the field of study grows, there are an increasing range of language families of the world in which evidentiality has been observed.

We illustrate an instance of evidentiality here with examples from Botne's (1997) examination of the Bantu language Kilega (D25)[1]. Kilega has three evidential particles, which are optionally used to indicate the evidence for the information in the statement. The first, *ampó* (1), is used for information for which the speaker has strong reliable evidence, primarily based on direct sensory evidence (the speaker has heard or seen it themselves), but information from a trusted source or inference is also possible. The second particle, *émbɛ*, "indicates that the grounds for asserting the proposition are presumptive; that is, they are based on cause-effect relations, whether tactile, auditory, or visual." (Botne 2020: 467), as illustrated by (1). The third particle, *ámbo*, indicates that the information reports what the speaker was told from another source (1).

     Kilega (Botne 1997, glosses adapted)

(1)   a.   **ampô**   é-ku-rûr-á   mompongɛ
           DIR.SENS.EV 1SM-PRS-pound-FV   3rice
           'She's assuredly pounding rice [I can hear it].' (1997: 518)

        b.   **ɛ́mbɛ**   m-bula   zé-ko-lɔ́k-a
           INF.SENS.EV 9-rain   9SM-PRS-fall-FV
           'Maybe it will rain.' [speaker has heard thunder in the distance] (1997: 516)

        c.   **ámbo**   Másudí   é-ko-sámb-a
           REP.EV   1.Masudi   1SM-PRS-be.sick-FV
           '[I've heard/I'm told that] Masudi is sick.' [report from M. or someone else] (1997: 511)

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[1] Bantu languages are offered referring to using an alpha-numerical system in Maho's (2009) update of Guthrie (1948)'s classification.

Mirativity is a somewhat controversial category which expresses a speaker's (or hearer's) surprise in relation to an action or event (DeLancey 1997; see Aikhenvald 2012 for an overview). This links also to notions of unexpectedness or unusualness. While some consider mirativity to form its own category, others argue that mirativity as a distinct category does not exist.

Ultimately, both the notions of eventuality and mirativity form part of the larger conceptual space of epistemicity, or knowledge management (Forker 2018, Boye 2012, Behrens 2012, Grzech et al. 2020, Aikhenvald 2021). We illustrate mirativity through the particle *-o* in Rukiga (JE14), which is used for contrastive topics, but also to express a mirative interpretation, as in (2) and (3). The mirative aspect of meaning would be absent without the *-o* particle.

Rukiga (Asiimwe & Van der Wal 2021: 3, 19)
(2)   E-n-júra   **y-ó**   y-áâ-gw-a.
        AUG-9-rain   9-CM   9SM-N.PST-fall-FV
        'It has really rained (heavily/or for a long time, more than expected).'

(3)   Context: Someone has a function or has organised an event and sends out invitations. For one reason or another, s/he does not expect many guests to turn up. Many guests turn up to the surprise of the host.

        Abantu **bó** bíija.
        a-ba-ntu   **ba-o**   ba-ij-a
        AUG-2-person   2-CM   2SM.N.PST-come-FV
        'People really came (many people turned up, more than those expected).'

A conceptual issue in the area of evidentiality and mirativity (and related concepts) is the distinction between 'real' evidential/mirative markers and evidential/mirative strategies (Aikhenvald 2004, Peterson 2017). Obligatoriness is sometimes seen as a defining characteristic for 'true' evidentiality, but the core distinction that can be made is whether the evidential or mirative aspect of meaning is the primary meaning of the marker (where 'marker' is used in the broadest sense of the word), or whether their primary meaning is in another area, for example aspect or deixis, and evidentiality/mirativity is a secondary aspect of meaning (Boye & Harder 2009). Drawing this distinction in his overview of evidentiality in African languages, Botne (2020: 497) notes that "there are at least a few languages in Africa that can be said to have true evidential systems. Apart from those few, there is a rather large number that exhibit evidential strategies of various kinds, apart from simply saying the equivalent of 'they say' or 'it is said'."

Crane et al. (in press) note that while "fully grammaticalized, obligatory evidentiality systems are thought to be rare in the languages of Africa, and in Bantu languages in particular", "ongoing semantic research in Bantu languages continues to uncover systems that are primarily evidential in their semantics, as well as other grammatical categories that can be exploited secondarily to express evidential distinctions." As these evidential (and mirative) strategies may develop into 'true' evidential (and mirative) markers, and because the choice of which grammatical strategies are co-opted for evidential/mirative meaning is not arbitrary, it is worthwhile studying the various dedicated or secondary strategies that Bantu languages use in the expression of evidentiality and mirativity.

In the next section, we provide a brief kaleidoscope of the strategies found in Bantu languages, drawing on examples from the literature. In Section 3, we then go on to summarise the papers in the present volume, highlighting the strategies found in these contributions.

2.   The expression of mirativity and evidentiality in Bantu languages

As seen in examples (1)-(3) above, evidentiality and mirativity can be expressed by means of particles. But there is variation in the linguistic strategies used to express mirativity and evidentiality: verbal conjugations, demonstratives, expletives and complementisers have all been identified as strategies employed for encoding evidentiality and mirativity in Bantu languages in previous literature. We briefly illustrate here.

Crane et al. (in press) describe how evidentiality can creep into the tense/aspect conjugational system. They explain how Bantu shows rapidly renewing T/A forms, which creates overlap in T/A meaning. This overlap can then lead to a shift towards evidential marking. They note also that this shift can happen especially in combination with different lexical aspectual verbs, e.g., stative versus resultative. Once there is an evidential difference between forms, this may lead to one of the forms also being used in other T/A environments, thus blurring the picture between primary and secondary meaning, and showing how evidential and aspectual meaning may develop side by side.

To illustrate the combination of aspectual markers and evidentiality, Roth (2018) shows how the marker *-Vká* in Ikoma (JE45) indicates direct (typically visual or auditory) evidence in the perfective, contrasting with the *-iri* perfective, as illustrated in (4).

Ikoma (Roth 2018: 89, glosses adapted)
(4)   Context: A child is taking a nap in the bedroom of a house.
   a.   A-ká-βook-a.
                1SM-DIR.EV-wake.up-FV
                'S/he is waking up.' / S/he has just woken up.'
                Further context 1: Speaker is in the same room and can see the child.
                Further context 2: Speaker is in an adjacent room but can hear the child.

   b.   N-a-βook-iri.
                FOC-1SM-wake.up-PFV
                'S/he has just woken up.' / 'S/he is awake.'
                Further context: Speaker is outside the house and cannot see or hear the child.

Crane et al. (in press) further discuss these data in the context of verbal semantics, concluding that *-Vká* also contributes an aspectual meaning (present perfective). See for further illustration and analysis Crane et al. (in press), and also Kanijo (2020) for evidential TAM strategies in Nyamwezi.

Similarly, Devos (2014) shows how in Shangaji (P312) the verb *-ingela* 'to enter' has grammaticalised to an auxiliary with ingressive aspectual meaning ('to begin V-ing'), but it is often used in a non-ingressive interpretation. In longer narratives, it is used to structure events, but in spontaneous speech types, *-ingela* typically marks unexpectedness and surprise, as illustrated in (5).

Shangaji (Devos 2014: 309, glosses adapted)
(5)   ki-law-a   kí-rímbalaal-a   thoní thoní thoní
        1SG.SM-go-PFV   1SG.SM-lay.down-PFV   IDEO
        '[After having fun] I went to sleep,

        k-**engel'**   o-síl-á   khomaála
        1SG.SM-begin.PFV   15-hear-FV   hello
        'when suddenly I heard: "Hello!"

        ki-sisimuuw-u   ki-n-síngán-a   pep'   ali   ki-n-táhíri
        1SG.SM-wake-PFV   1SG.SM-1OM-meet-PFV   1a.senior   Ali   1SG.SM-1OM-ask-PFV
        hábaári
        9.news
        'I woke up, met sir Ali and greeted him.'

Nicolle (2012) analyses the use of *-no* demonstrative forms in a range of Bantu languages and indicates that they may be used 'metarepresentationally' to express the speaker's perspective, including surprise and amazement. In the example from Giryama (E72a), by using the *-no* demonstrative "the speaker expresses surprise that his mother has divided the day's ugali (maize meal) into two portions" (Nicolle 2012: 211).

Giryama (Tsangwa 2005: 56, via Nicolle 2012: 211, glosses adapted)
(6)   Kwa-noni   **mino**   **uno**   wari   were   mu=na
        for-why   1SG.DEM   11.DEM   11.ugali   PST   18=COM
        wa   kwangu   mungine?
        11.CONN   17.POSS.1SG   18.another
        'Why is it that there was another ugali for me?'

Gluckman & Bowler (2016, see also Gluckman 2021) show that the expletive subject markers *ga-* (class 6) and *e-* (class 9) in Logooli (JE41) differ in evidentiality, where the former marks direct evidence and the latter indirect evidence with

perception verbs (see also the article by Crane in this volume). This is illustrated in (7) which shows two different contexts of use.

Logooli (Gluckman & Bowler 2016: 1065)
(7)   a.   Context: The speaker sees Imali coughing and sneezing.
             Ga-/$^?$E-fan-a   kuresa   Imali   a-saal-a.
             6SM-/9SM-seem-FV   like   1.Imali 1SM-be.sick-FV
             'It seems like Imali is sick.'

       b.   Context: It's flu season, and Imali didn't come to school.
             E-/$^\#$ga-fan-a   kuresa   Imali   a-saal-a.
             9SM-/6SM-seem-FV   like   1.Imali 1SM-be.sick-FV
             'It seems like Imali is sick.'

For Kinyarwanda and Luganda, two complementisers have been documented as expressing an evidential distinction. Botne (2020) illustrates for Kinyarwanda (JD61) that *ko* is neutral, but (adding) *ngo* expresses hearsay evidence. When used as an initial particle, *ngo* can express doubt. See also Diercks (2013) for evidential use of agreeing versus non-agreeing complementisers in Lubukusu, Persohn (2020) for the same in Kinyakyusa, and Wicks (2006) for Lunyole; see also Güldemann (2008) and Crane (this volume) for general discussion.

Kinyarwanda (Givón & Kimenyi 1974:101, via Botne 2020: 494, glosses adapted)
(8)   a.   Y-a-vuze   ko   a-zaa-z-a.
             1SM-PST-say.PFV   COMP   1SM-RMFUT-come-FV
             'S/he said that s/he'll come' [and I have nothing to add]

       b.   Y-a-vuze   (ko)   ngo   a-zaa-z-a.
             1SM-PST-say.PFV   COMP   REP   1SM-RMFUT-come-FV
             'S/he said s/he'll come.' [so I heard, though I have reasons to doubt it (i.e., that s/he will)]

Kinyarwanda (Jacob 1987:394, via Botne 2020: 494, glosses adapted)
(9)   Ngo   a-ra-rwáaye.
       REP   1SM-FOC-be.sick-PFV
       'It seems that he is ill.' ('Il paraît qu'il est malade.')

The use of complementisers to express hearsay is also the topic of one of the papers in this issue (Kawalya), and as we will see, there are other (potentially surprising!) strategies used for evidential and/or mirative meaning in Bantu languages. We describe the new discoveries and contributions in the next section.

3.   The papers in this special issue

The paper by **Asiimwe** shows a range of linguistic means by in which Rukiga speakers express mirativity, diving deeper into four of them: object marker doubling, predicate doubling, and the particles *-o* and *ku*. None of these are dedicated mirative strategies, as Asiimwe shows by a detailed illustration of the multiple contexts in which they may appear, and the strategies can be combined to create a stronger pragmatic effect. Both points are illustrated in (10).

Rukiga (Asiimwe this volume)
(10)   Okusheka kwé Busíngye yáasheka.
        o-ku-shek-a   **ku-o**   Busingye   a-aa-shek-a
        AUG-15-laugh-FV   15-CM   1.Busingye   1SM-N.PST-laugh-FV
        'As for laughing, Busingye has (really) laughed.'
        •   It is true Busingye laughed.   [verum]
        •   She has laughed really hard.   [intensity]
        •   She laughed (but she did not sing).   [contrast]
        •   The situation was not funny but she laughed anyway.   [depreciative]
            She may also have laughed in a manner that was irritating.

- I am surprised she laughed that hard.   [mirativity]

Crane's contribution forms an overview of where researchers might look for evidentiality, whether dedicated grammatical(ised) markers or evidential strategies. Two areas of grammar are highlighted, which Crane shows are particularly productive for expressing and developing evidential interpretations: quotatives and tense/aspect markers. The former show a connection between reported discourse and evidential values such as hearsay; and the latter show frequent temporal overlaps that are liable to produce semantic and pragmatic extensions. Based on data from a range of Bantu languages from the literature and Crane's own research, she shows not only that quotatives and tense/aspect acquire evidential meaning, but that quotatives often develop related functions such as doubt, counterfactuality, negative attitudinal evaluation, and mirativity, and that tense/aspect verbal morphology may also develop mirative functions.

        Lippard et al. show that object marking in the presence of a coreferring lexical object is not acceptable in Lubukusu and Cinyungwe in a neutral context, but that the marker and lexical object may cooccur (OM-doubling) under particular emphatic interpretations. They uncover and illustrate four such interpretations with extensive contextual information: verum, mirativity, exhaustivity, and intensity – see (11).

Lubukusu (Lippard et al. this volume, adapted)

(11)   Wekesa   a-ka-nyw-a   kamalwa.
        1.Wekesa   1SM.PST-6OM-drink-FV   6.beer
        'Wekesa drank beer.'
        Available interpretations:

- #out of the blue
- The sentence is an emphatic confirmation of the act.   [verum]
- It is a well-known fact that Wekesa does not drink, so seeing him drink is surprising. [mirative surprise]
- The sentence expresses the sheer amount of alcohol consumed.   [intensity]
- It is a well-known fact that Wekesa is a drunkard, so any doubt is met with this [mirative reprimand]
  sentence.

With this descriptive starting point, they continue the analysis in three interesting ways. First, they observe crosslinguistic microvariation in which precise interpretations and contexts license OM-doubling. Second, they show for a further range of languages (Tiriki, Wanga, Ikalanga, Rukiga – see Asiimwe this volume; and Zulu) that these show similar effects, indicating that there is still a lot to be discovered about Bantu object marking. And third, inspired by Cruschina's (2019ab, 2021) analysis of focus fronting in European languages, they apply tests to establish the associated meanings as part of the semantics or pragmatics, suggesting that they may be conventional implicatures.

        The contribution by **Kawalya** examines the particles *nti* and *mbu* in Luganda. While previous accounts typically consider these particles to have the same (or very similar) functions, Kawalya draws on corpus data to show that *nti* is only used to express direct evidence while *mbu* is used to report information based on hearsay (see 12), or in cases of doubt, disbelief or disapproval. It is further argued that the apparent conflation in meanings between *nti* and *mbu* is likely the result of the direct evidence function of the former and the hearsay function of the latter. The particles cannot be used interchangeably.

Luganda (Kawalya, this volume, glosses adapted)

(12)   Omusájja báámúsánze mu nsíkó, **mbú**.
        o-mu-sajja   ba-a-mu-sanze   mu   n-siko   **mbu**
        AUG-1-man   2SM-PST-1OM-find.PFV   18   9-bush   **HEARSAY**
        'They found the man in the bush, they say.'

The restrictions on which particle can occur in which context suggests that the evidential functions of these particles are indeed salient aspects of the grammar of Luganda. The paper draws on data from a Luganda corpus containing almost 6 million tokens and covers data from 1890s-2020s, making it a particularly rich source of data.

        The paper by **Kihara** examines mirativity in Gĩkũyũ and Swahili. The paper makes a case that contrary to what has been previously reported, both of these languages exhibit mirativity. In Gĩkũyũ the particles *kaĩ, githĩ, anga, ni,* and *otho* are used to encode mirativity while Kiswahili uses *kwani, mbona, kumbe,* and *si*. More specifically, these particles are used when there is evidence that contradicts a speakers' knowledge, thereby expressing surprise or disbelief at a

state-of-affairs that contradict a speakers' state of knowledge or expectations. This is illustrated in (14), where *kaĩ* expresses the speaker's surprise upon seeing clothes lying on the ground.

Gĩkũyũ (Kihara, this volume, glosses adapted)
(14)   Context: There is someone washing clothes outside. The speaker of steps out and notices that the clothes are on
         the ground, most likely because the drying line has broken.
         Kaĩ   mũ-kanda   w-a-tuĩk-a?
         MIR   3-rope   3SM-PRS-break-FV
         'Is it that the drying line has broken?'

Moreover, the paper makes the case that in the two languages, evidentiality has a direct bearing on mirativity.

4.   Summary and future prospects

To summarise, Bantu languages do indeed express mirativity and evidentiality in their grammar. The languages under examination in this Special Issue show a number of instances of these categories in use, as well as the range of different possible meanings that can expressed with the notions of evidentiality and mirativity.

        In terms of generalisations, overall, amongst this admittedly relatively small sample, we see common strategies for encoding these functions, i.e. the presence of particles and the use of morphological markers. A striking feature of evidential and mirative markers in Bantu languages – or at least those which are looked at here – appears to be that these have other functions in the language more widely. This includes their use as object markers (e.g. in Lubukusu and Zulu), noun class (15) prefixes (e.g. in Rukiga), complementisers, quotatives (e.g. in Gĩkũyũ), interrogatives or exclamatives (e.g. in Swahili), and tense/aspect markers more widely (as discussed by Crane). While this is not to say that this is true of all Bantu languages, the polyfunctionality of these markers may go some way to account for their under-reporting in Bantu languages, whilst also reflecting cross-linguistically common pathways of change (cf. Aikhenvald 2011).

        By way of a conclusion, we share here once again the key questions behind both the original workshop and the call for papers for the current Special Issue. It is our hope that the papers herein, as well as these questions, will continue to drive forward the discussion of mirativity and evidentiality in African languages, and in Bantu languages in particular, and that we will see an increase of research in this hitherto under-examined domain.

- Do Bantu languages have grammaticalised evidentiality (as has been claimed for example for South American languages)?
- What strategies and mechanisms are used to encode evidentiality and/or mirativity in Bantu languages - i.e. particles, bound morphemes, lexical words, TAM conjugations, word order variation?
- Which other aspects of the grammar do these interact with - e.g. the conjoint/disjoint alternation, focus marking, TAM distinctions, inversion, presentational constructions, fronting?
- Related but more specific: What markers, which are often otherwise analysed as TAM markers, (also) encode evidential and mirative meanings? In other words, which inflectional markers do double duty? (cf. Forker 2018)
- Which evidential and mirative meanings go together with which other (more basic?) meanings in the Bantu languages? Cross-linguistically common sources are logophoric markers, (im)perfective and progressive aspect, and demonstratives, for example.
- What can the Bantu languages tell us about how different aspects of evidentiality, mirativity, information structure, and epistemic modality link to each other? For example, what is the link between truth focus, direct evidence, and certainty of the speaker, if any?
- Are there links between miratives and contrastive topic? Or miratives and thetics (cf. García Macías 2016)?
- Which different flavours are possible, within and between languages, of surprise, source of information, expectation/expectedness? Only the most basic direct/indirect, or also reported/inferred, for example?

We close with Thera Crane's words, which we hope may prove true: "Increased attention to evidential and mirative strategies in Bantu languages, including those in the present volume, will lead to discoveries that will continue to expand typological understanding of evidentiality" (and mirativity, HG+JW).

Abbreviations
Numbers refer to noun classes, unless followed by SG/PL, in which case they refer to person.
AUG   augment

CM	contrastive marker
COM	comitative
COMP	complementiser
CONN	connective
DEM	demonstrative
DIR	direct
EV	evidential
FOC	focus
FV	final vowel
IDEO	ideophone
N.PST	near past
INF	inferential
MIR	mirative
OM	object marker
PFV	perfective
POSS	possessive
PRS	present
PST	past
REP	reportive
RMFUT	remote future
SENS	sensory
SM	subject marker

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