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## MIRATIVITY IN THE SLOVAK LANGUAGE ON THE EXAMPLE OF PREFIXAL VERBS IN THE DAILY NEWSPAPER SME

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*The phenomenon of mirativity, which is based on conveying information that is new or unexpected and causes surprise and counter-expectation, was observed and analysed in many languages; however, there is a lack of research on the topic in the Slovak language. The aim of this paper is to identify, analyse and compare mirative meanings based on Aikhenvald's range. We have applied Aikhenvald's approach to the set of collected prefixal verbs of sight perception in the past tense using journalistic texts selected from the daily newspaper SME that are listed in the Slovak National Corpus. We are particularly interested in showing how the grammatic and semantic categories of Aktionsart are intertwined with the concept of mirativity. The results demonstrate that the most frequently used types of Aktionsart in sentences with mirative overtones are inchoative, comitative, delimitative and resultative.*

**Keywords:** *Aikhenvald's range of mirative meanings; lexical aspect; prefixal verbs; visual perception; Slovak National Corpus; journalistic text*

## 1. Introduction

The concept of mirativity, derived from the Latin word *mirum* – *surprise*, was introduced for the first time by S. DeLancey (1997: 35), who defined it as “the transmission of information that is new or unexpected to the speaker”. Mirativity can be defined as “an overtone of surprise that is often linked to the lack of previous knowledge of the speaker” (Aikhenvald 2021: 30). A rich amount of research on the topic has been conducted by Professor A. Aikhenvald from James Cook University, Australia, who is interested in this phenomenon that is researched mainly in exotic languages (e.g. from the Brazilian Amazon basin). Nevertheless, every language has its own means of expressing the overtones of mirativity, which is a general notion subsuming counter-expectation, unprepared mind, new information, etc. A. Aikhenvald (2012: 435), considers primarily verbal affixes, compound predicates and pronouns as linguistic devices for expressing mirative meanings.

Many other researchers were interested in the mirative overtones in different verbal systems, e.g. in the subjunctive in Romanian (Avram 2015), but also in the simple future tense in Spanish, which is not necessarily associated with the expression of the future (Escandell-Vidal; Leonetti-Jungl 2019). The possibilities of mirative meaning in non-genuine infinitive constructions in English (complex constructions with infinitive clauses) were investigated by G. Girard-Gillet (2020). “Verbs particularly susceptible to mirative extensions cover mental and physical states, or resulting states which the speaker cannot control” (Aikhenvald 2004: 208). This is also the case of verbs of sight perception that we are going to examine in this paper.

In our research, we observed the mirative overtones in a research sample where the literary work of M. Butor was excerpted. The sample consisted of verbs of perception in which we focused on nuancing the meaning by analysing prefixation and Aktionsart as crucial indicators (Ráčková 2023). Aktionsart includes shades of meaning resulting from the lexical-grammatical function of prefixes (Turočková 2012: 54–55) belonging to the framework of aspectuality (Sekaninová 1980: 33). Mirativity, as well as Aktionsart, is a grammatic-semantic category and it accompanies the meaning of many types of Aktionsart in Slovak prefixal verbs in the past tense. We chose the past tense because we observe that in the Slovak language different manners of action (Aktionsart) are best identifiable in the past tense, and these can result in mirative meanings despite the fact that in general, Slovak language is characterized by a strong evidential system.

Indeed, Aktionsart can be considered as one of the mirative strategies<sup>1</sup>, e. g. the means by which the mirativity is expressed. A. Aikhenwald states that “a mirative extension may arise in the context of a particular choice of person, tense-aspect, or verb class” (2004: 208).

Regarding the literature review, we confirmed in the course of our research that among the Slavonic languages, the phenomenon of mirativity has probably received the most attention in the Bulgarian language / Bulgarian linguistics, even before S. DeLancey defined the concept (l-participium – Tsonev 1911, as cited in Yovkova-Shii 2004; Weigand 1923, as cited in Yovkova-Shii 2004). In Bulgarian research cases, the concept is associated a priori with state verbs (Bres; Levie 2018: 192). Completed actions are expressed by means of a participle in the aorist together with an auxiliary verb (Yovkova-Shii 2004: 30).<sup>2</sup> This concept is partially considered, together with evidentiality, in a contrastive Spanish-English-Czech perspective by D. Kratochvílová (2022: 18–19). Mention of the mirative function as a subjective modality can be found in *Syntax mluvené češtiny – Syntax of Spoken Czech* (Hoffmanová; Homoláč; Mrázková 2019). Further theoretical aspects are included directly into methodology and analysis in the next part of this paper.

## 2. Background

### 2.1. Data set

Our main focus was on the journalistic texts and verbs of visual perception used in the daily newspaper SME.<sup>3</sup> We chose this daily newspaper for the research because SME newspaper’s digital platform (<https://www.sme.sk/>) has been the second most widely read of this type in Slovakia, after *Aktuality.sk*, since 1993, and it has been delivering credible news from the world, Slovakia and individual regions. For example, in May 2023, it recorded more than 19,000 reader visits (Similarweb 2023).

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<sup>1</sup> Online consultation with A. Aikhenvald (20-02-2023).

<sup>2</sup> Some researchers of Bulgarian language speak about admirative instead of mirative (Gerdzikov 1984: 131; Guentchéva 2006: 136). Also in studies about the Albanian language, the term admirative has been used (Friedman 2003: 205–206).

<sup>3</sup> In our previous research *Prefixálne slovesá percepcie ako výsledok prekladu* (Ráčková 2023), the literary research sample was examined. However, journalistic texts from SME include sometimes literary examples.

Anyway, we did not work with the archive of the periodical, but we searched the texts in the *Slovak National Corpus* (*Slovenský národný korpus – SNK*), where we manually selected sentences from this newspaper. It is defined as “a reference material source of knowledge about the Slovak language and its real usage, which is extracted from the corpus using specialised search tools”.<sup>4</sup>

We worked with the five chosen prefixal verbs *uvidieť* (*to catch sight of*), *pozrieť* (*to take a look at*), *uzrieť* (*to behold*), *zazrieť* (*to spot*) and *zbadat'* (*to notice*)<sup>5</sup> as the majority of these verbs of sight perception express mirative meanings in the past tense. In general, the verb *to see* and its synonyms are among the most polysemous elements in the language (Viberg 1993: 347), which is the reason why we think the mirative overtones could be frequent. We further situated our reasoning of mirativity within the theoretical framework of lexical semantics, word formation and linguistic typology.

## 2.2. Research aim and methodology

Our main aim was to identify and analyse mirative overtones in the Slovak language with a special focus on Aktionsart, one of its mirative strategies. We observed the relation between the mirativity overtones and different predominant types of Aktionsart. In terms of the frequency, we were interested to find out which mirative meanings from Aikhenvald's range chart of mirative meanings are predominant and in what types of Aktionsart. We also investigated in which of the five verbs the mirative meanings are the most recurrent.

Our research sample consisted of 150 occurrences, i.e. 30 selected sentences united with each of the five selected prefixal perfective verbs of visual perception in the past tense. The authentic material was retrieved from the *Slovak National Corpus*, version *prim-10.0-public-all*, containing 1,688,211,881 tokens, by sorting out only the occurrences from the daily newspaper SME. In the qualitative analysis, we applied a semasiological approach which consisted of three steps or stages. At the initial stage, we

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<sup>4</sup> In original: „referenčný materiálový zdroj poznatkov o slovenčine a jej reálnom používaní, ktoré sa z korpusu získavajú pomocou špecializovaných vyhľadávacích nástrojov“ (<http://korpus.juls.savba.sk/>, 01-07-2023).

<sup>5</sup> These translations are only for guidance, as everything depends on specific use and context. In the analysis, we can see that the selected Slovak verbs are quite often translated simply as “to see something” or “to look at something”.

focused on the form of the verbs and specified the meaning they denote. Specific aspects of meaning enabled us to identify the presence or absence of a mirative marker. Subsequently, at the second stage, we indicated the manner or manners of action viewed as one of the mirative strategies. At the final stage, we were interested in how these categories are intertwined.

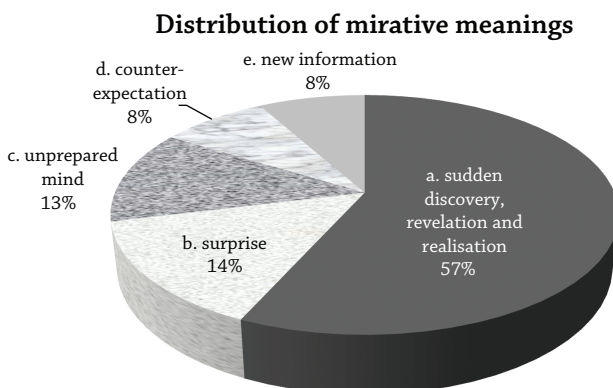
For these purposes, we used Aikhenvald's range chart of mirative meanings compared to different modalities of Aktionsart which fall under mirative strategies<sup>6</sup>. Based on Aikhenvald (2012: 437), "mirative strategies are grammatical markers of other categories whose primary function is not mirative but can express mirative meanings in certain circumstances". The grammatical means of expressing mirativity in the Slovak language, one of the Slavonic fusional languages, therefore comprise the past tense, prefixes and Aktionsart. These categories only provide mirative markers in some contexts and are not grammaticalised as in some other (non-Slavonic) languages. We assumed that due to the perfectiveness of the analysed verbs, the most frequent forms of Aktionsart are inchoative and resultative. Therefore, we applied the "inverted pyramid" principle, proceeding by their arrangement from the core types of Aktionsart to the less significant ones. In our research question, we also asked whether the most mirative overtones in the Slovak research sample refer to the surprise mirative marker as the expression of surprise in the main semantic line.

### 3. Analysis and results of mirative meanings versus types of Aktionsart

The semantic nuances of prefixal verbs of visual perception primarily move on the axis of expected (non-mirative meaning) – unexpected (mirative meaning). In our research sample, 74 % (111) of the occurrences of the verbs *uvidieť* (to catch sight of), *pozrieť* (to take a look at), *uzrieť* (to behold), *zazrieť* (to spot) and *zbadáť* (to notice) in the past tense contain mirative meanings. In accordance with A. Aikhenvald's range chart of mirative meanings (2012: 437) that express the speaker's astonishment, we have identified all five mirative overtones, with a great predominance of a. sudden discovery, revelation or realisation – 63 occurrences (57 %), then b. surprise – 16 occurrences (14 %), c. unprepared mind – 14 occurrences (13 %), d. counter-expectation – 9 occurrences (8 %) and e. new information – 9 occurrences (8 %).

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<sup>6</sup> Online consultation with A. Aikhenvald (20-02-2023).



**Fig. 1.** Aikhenvald's range of mirative meanings in Slovak prefixal verbs of visual perception in the past tense

Source: Personal processing (2023)

To demonstrate these meanings in context, we give the following examples for the most represented categories. Sudden discovery, revelation and realisation is illustrated in the disclosure : *Po šiestej ráno ho uvidela z náprotivných dverí petržalského paneláka vychádzať osamelá dôchodkyňa.* 'After six o'clock in the morning, a lonely retired saw him coming out of the opposite door of the Petržalka apartment block'(09-10-1995). The presence of mirative marker of surprise was identified in the statement below : *„Pozri, tam je Miki,“ vykrikla od prekvapenia dáma v stredných rokoch, keď v hlúčiku mladých urastených mužov zazrela Mikuláša Dzurindu.* "Look, there's Miki," exclaimed a middle-aged lady in surprise when she spotted Mikulas Dzurinda in the crowd of young, handsome men' (05-09-2002).

In the next step, we focused on the question of intertwinement of mirativity and Aktionsart as its mirative strategy. First of all, we were looking at the number of kinds of action which were identified in our research sample. It was not rare for one verb to express more than one type of Aktionsart. In the analysis we applied the methodology and definitions introduced by Sekaninová (1980: 41–144), who analysed the verbs in terms of locality, temporality and modality of action<sup>7</sup>. In total, a variety of seman-

<sup>7</sup> The names of types of Aktionsart are directly translated from Sekaninová (1980) terminology in Slovak: *inchoatívny, defínitny, delimitatívny, komitatívny, repetitívny, rezultatívny, semelfaktívny, simultánny*.

tic nuances were identified in the reaserch sample in mirative (121 occurrences) and non-mirative uses. In the mirative meanings, it was a question of inchoative (69<sup>8</sup>), comitative (26), delimitative (14), resultative (13), semelfactive (10), simultaneous (7) and definite (2) manners of action. In the non-mirative overtones, among dominant overtones, we can list definite (25), comitative (7), inchoative (6) and repetitive (5) types of Aktionsart. Resultative (4) and semelfactive (1) manners were also present. In the next part, we analysed specific mirative overtones from Aikhenvald's range in relation to individual types of Aktionsart.

The expression of astonishment also depends on the verb itself. For instance the verb *pozrieť* demonstrates significantly fewer mirative markers compared to other verbs – only 10 % of all occurrences present in our research sample. It can contain the overtone of sudden discovery, revelation or realisation intertwined with resultative and comitative manner of action, as illustrated in the following example 1:

- (1) *Cielene som s tým pracovala, až som sa jedného dňa **pozrela** do zrkadla a rozplakala som sa od šťastia.*

'I worked on it intently until one day, I **looked** in the mirror and cried with happiness' (07-06-2014).<sup>9</sup>

A resultative type of Aktionsart was identified because of the length of action, which lasted for some time. The comitative manner of action was referenced by three actions which succeeded each other – working on it, looking in the mirror and crying with happiness.

In contrast, *uvidieť*, another verb of perception, displayed 100 % mirative meanings. The meaning of unprepared mind is evident in the next occurrence of this verb in the past tense, third person of its plural:

- (2) *Vtom **uvideli** najkrajšie dievča na svete. Tak málo stačilo, aby na servítku vzápätí načmárali základ toho, čo sa neskôr stalo druhou najnahrávanejšou pesničkou sveta hneď po Yesterday od Beatles.*

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<sup>8</sup> Number of occurrences.

<sup>9</sup> All the examples are, as indicated in the beginning of the study, from SME in the Slovak National Corpus. We only cite the date (day-month-year) when the statement appeared in a daily newspaper and translated them into English.

‘They suddenly **saw** the most beautiful girl in the world. It took very little to scribble on a napkin the basis of what would later become the world’s second most recorded song after the Beatles’ Yesterday’ (06-08-2016).

The grammatical means of expressing the overtones of unprepared mind were not only the presence of past tense, prefixal verb or specific person but also the types of Aktionsart, and therefore inchoative and comitative ones. The inchoative manner is united with the beginning of the action of seeing someone, and the comitative manner refers to subsequent actions; the action of seeing somebody is followed by the action of scribbling something. Depending on context, the verb *uvidieť* can express the meaning of counter-expectation, consider example 3 with a semelfactive (single-shot) type of Aktionsart:

- (3) *Tak opísala svoje pocity BRENDA McMULLENOVÁ, keď uvidela vyliezať z vody muža, ktorý prežil skok do Niagarských vodopádov.*

‘That’s how BRENDA McMULLEN described her feelings when she **saw** the man who survived the jump into Niagara Falls climb out of the water’ (25-10-2003).

More than two-thirds of the occurrences with the verb *uzrieť* were mirative. The overtone of new information is present in the next occurrence:

- (4) *V Japonsku nedávno uzrel svetlo sveta prototyp domu budúcnosti vybavený najnovšími technickými vymoženosťami.*

‘A prototype of a future house equipped with the latest technological advances **has** recently **seen** the light of day in Japan’ (15-01-1999).



The idiomatic meaning *uzrieť svetlo sveta / see the light of day* also contains in itself the expression of the beginning of the action, hence the inchoative manner of action. In 97 % of the occurrences of the verb *zazrieť*, mirative overtones appear. Surprise intertwined with inchoative and delimitative manners of action is observable in the next occurrence:

- (5) *Zazrel som v televízii priam chlapčensky rozhorčenú reakciu biskupov mojej cirkvi na možnosť výučby jogy v štátnych školách.*

‘I **saw** on television the boyishly indignant reaction of the bishops of my church to the possibility of teaching yoga in public schools’ (16-07-2001).

The delimitative manner of action distinguishes from the resultative one in the time duration of the action. Whereas the delimitative type of Aktionsart indicates a short action, the resultative manner of action is a result of some action which has lasted for a long time.

The occurrences of the verb *zbadat* in our research sample were 100 % mirative. The most prevalent overtones are with the meaning of sudden discovery, revelation or realisation, as is also characteristic for the whole research sample. The mirative strategies used are, inter alia, inchoative and comitative manners of action:

- (6) *„Aj keď som sa v noci zobudila na šuchotanie balíčkov a zbadala som tmavú siluetu pri okne, rýchlo som zaliezla pod paplón, aby ma náhodou Mikuláš nezbadal a nevezal mi všetky tie sladkosti,“ smeje sa na zážitkoch z detstva sympatická speváčka.*

‘Even when I woke up at night to the rustling of packages and **saw** a dark silhouette at the window, I quickly crawled under the covers so that St. Nicholas wouldn’t accidentally discover me and take all the sweets,’ laughs the likeable singer about her childhood memories’ (19-12-2017).

In the table below, we present more detailed results showing the relationship between Aikhenvald’s range overtones and the four most frequent types of Aktionsart, namely inchoative, comitative, delimitative and resultative. We created it by using a Pivot Table in the Microsoft Office Excel program.

**Tab. 1.** *Aikhenvald's range of mirative meanings versus the types of Aktionsart*

Range vs types	inchoative	comitative	delimitative	resultative	TOTAL
sudden discovery, revelation or realisation	39	15	8	6	68
surprise	15	6	3	0	24
unprepared mind	8	3	1	2	14
counter-expectation	1	2	2	2	7
new information	5	0	1	2	8
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>69</b>	<b>26</b>	<b>15</b>	<b>12</b>	<b>121</b>

Source: Personal processing (2023)

As may be observed in Tab. 1., the distribution of mirative meanings is almost the same as in the whole research sample shown in Fig. 1. In the four most frequent types of Aktionsart, 68 (56 %) display the meaning of sudden discovery, revelation or realisation. In the whole research sample, the number is 63 (57 %). 24 (20 %) meanings carry the overtones of surprise, while in the whole research sample, the number is 16 (14 %). 14 (11 %) of the overtones are those of unprepared mind, nevertheless in the whole sample, the count is 14 (13 %). In terms of counter-expectation and new information, there are almost no differences. In the whole sample, the distribution of counter-expectation and new information is the same. In this selective sample of the most frequent manners of action, there is a very slight predominance of new information over counter-expectation, mainly in the inchoative type of Aktionsart, which is unquestionably the most frequent.

It should be noticed that the delimitative type of Aktionsart was more productive, and it indicated that for the visual verbs of perception with mirative overtones, short momentary actions or events are characteristic.

#### 4. Conclusion

As we stated in our research plan and methodology, the majority of our selective research sample consisted of Slovak prefixal verbs, specifically focused on sight perception in the past tense, with 76 % expressing mirative overtones. However, it is important to note that mirativity is not a grammaticalised category in the Slovak language – neither prefix nor specific tense or person marks the category. Moreover, the Aktionsart does not indicate mirative overtones in every situation and context. This is what we consider unique and reasonable when we look back to our research aim. The analysed verbs of visual perception led us to identify trends, but they cannot be generalised. Following our research finding, we can confirm that the prefixes *z-* and *za-* express the majority of the mirative meanings. The verb *zazrieť* in the past tense was mirative in 97 % of the occurrences while the verb *zbadat'* was mirative in all 100 % of the occurrences. For the verb *pozrieť*, mirative overtones were identified in only 10 % of occurrences. In the midst of these findings lies the ambiguous prefix *u-*, which was reported in 100 % of the mirative overtones for the verb *uvidieť*, but only 63 % of the mirative overtones for the verb *uzrieť*. As shown by the complexity of the aspect of specific prefixes in relation to mirativity, this phenomenon deserves more profound and systematic research. Broadening the corpus sample by adding a variety of newspapers would be one possibility. The lexical means such as adverbs or expressive particles could provide more information about this complex and understudied phenomenon in the Slovak language situated at the crossroads of modality and evidentiality.

Based on our current findings, we can assume that in the Slovak language the overtone of surprise is predominant among Aikhenvald's five range meanings. Despite this assumption, the meaning of a sudden discovery, revelation or realisation was largely predominant in the whole research sample (57 %), containing mirative overtones, as well as in the selective research sample (56 %) containing the four most frequent types of Aktionsart, namely inchoative, comitative, delimitative and resultative, intertwined with mirativity. The overtone of surprise was present in only 20 % of occurrences in the selective research sample, and in only 14 % of the whole research sample with all the numerous types of Aktionsart. In summary, we found out that the most frequent mirative meaning in the five chosen Slovak prefixal verbs of visual perception was that of sudden discovery, revelation or realisation intertwined with inchoative Aktionsart.

The expression of surprise was then the second most frequent mirative overtone. The most frequent type of Aktionsart was without a doubt the inchoative, followed by the comitative, delimitative and resultative types. We also found that the delimitative Aktionsart was more productive than the resultative one because of the length of action, which was mostly brief in the mirative overtones. On the other hand, the resultative type of Aktionsart was the result of a longer-lasting event.

To conclude, our findings can be seen as results from the pilot research of mirativity in the Slovak language. We are convinced that the Slovak National Corpus impel much broader possibilities to examine mirativity overtones in the Slovak language.

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## SAŽETAK

Lucia Ráčková

### MIRATIVNOST U SLOVAČKOM JEZIKU NA PRIMJERU PREFIKSALNIH GLAGOLA U DNEVNOM LISTU SME

Fenomen mirativnosti, koji se temelji na prijenosu informacija koje su nove ili neočekivane, te uzrokuju iznenađenje i protivno očekivanje, opažen je i analiziran u mnogim jezicima. Međutim, nema mnogo istraživanja na ovu temu na slovačkom jeziku. Cilj ovog rada je identificirati, analizirati i usporediti značenja mirativnosti na temelju opsega A. Y. Aikhenvaldove. Primijenili smo pristup A. Y. Aikhenvaldove skupu prikupljenih glagola zapažanja s prefiksom u prošlom vremenu koristeći novinarske tekstove odabrane iz dnevnih novina SME koji su navedeni u Slovačkom nacionalnom korpusu. Posebno nas zanima prikazati kako su gramatičke i semantičke kategorije Aktionsarta isprepletene s konceptom mirativnosti. Rezultati pokazuju da su najčešće korišteni tipovi Aktionsarta u rečenicama s mirativnim značenjem inkohativni, komitativni, delimitativni i rezultativni.

**Ključne riječi:** *opseg značenja mirativnosti prema A. Y. Aikhenvaldovoj; leksički aspekt; glagoli s prefiksom; vizualna percepcija; Slovački nacionalni korpus; novinarski tekst*