

“Like”, hedging and mirativity. A unified account.*

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1 Introduction

The notion of *mirativity* refers to expressions of surprise or exceeded expectation. (i.a. DeLancey 1997; Peterson 2010; Rett 2011; Rett and Murray 2013)

- *Independent* manifestations: express mirativity through dedicated means, e.g. prosody.
- *Dependent* manifestations: express mirativity through linguistic markers that are also responsible for encoding other, seemingly unrelated functions.

Dependent mirativity common with evidentials (e.g., Turkish: Slobin and Aksu 1982; Peterson 2010):¹

- (1) Kemal gel-**miş**.
 Kemal come-EVID/MIR
 Kemal came.
Reading 1: The speaker sees Kemal’s coat hanging in the closet and infers he has arrived.
Reading 2: The speaker sees Kemal arrive but was not expecting for him to attend.

The English particle *like* shows a parallel polysemy between a mirative (2b) and *hedging* use (2a).

- (2) a. They were **like** 20 dollars or something.² ≈approximately
 b. I just realized I’ve been eating chips that are 5 months old but they’re **like**... really good.³ ≈p is surprising

Proposal: Both uses of *like* widen the size of a contextually restricted set, admitting elements that were previously excluded.

- Outline:**
 §2 Overview of the data
 §3 Diagnosing mirative from hedging *like*
 §4 Uniting these uses in a single proposal
 §5 Situating mirative *like* in a broader context

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¹See also Cheyenne, (Rett and Murray 2013), Cuzco Quechua (Faller 2002), Ostyak (Nikolaeva 1999), Mapundungun (Aikhenvald 2004); and Tajik (Lazard 2009).
²Twitter use @ChrissyCostanza, 8 July 2015.
³Twitter use @spiraledbass, 27 April 2017.

2 Overview of the data

The **hedging use** indicates a **lowered state of commitment to the exactness of the predicate:** (Dinkin 2016; Sharifian and Malcom 2003; Siegel 2002; Jucker and Smith 1998; Schourup 1985)

- (3) a. One of them was called *like* Prophecy or something like that. Jucker & Smith (1998: 186)
 b. There’s a foreign boy in my group and he’s *like* European or something.⁴
 c. They had *like* scraped her. D’Arcy (2007: 171)

Typical behavior of discourse particles: *like* modulates an aspect of the relationship between the speaker and the proposition, signaling that the speaker has a *weakened* degree of commitment to the assertion.

It has been suggested that *like* signals:

- “a possible minor nonequivalence of what is said and what is meant” (Schourup 1985: 42);
- “that the closeness of fit between the utterance and the thought it represents is looser than the hearer may otherwise have expected.” (Jucker and Smith 1998: 185); and
- “that the phrase it modifies is detached from commitment to a literal reading” (Dinkin 2017: 238).

The **mirative use** of *like* is undocumented, in contrast to its better-studied hedging use.

Commonly used when **the speaker finds the embedded proposition surprising or unexpected.**

- (4) a. Never thought I would say this, but Lil Wayne, is *like*... smart.⁵
 b. My friend I used to hang out with is *like* ... rich now. WHOA!⁶
 c. Whoa! I *like* ... totally won again!⁷

Also occurs without any other markers of surprise:

- (5) a. I just realized I’ve been eating chips that are 5 months but they’re *like*... really good⁸
 b. not to alarm anyone but his hand is *like*... really really fast..⁹
 c. Yeah it was some dude who was a janitor at a school. Hes *like*... a millionaire now.¹⁰

The contribution of *like* closely resembles the one attributed to mirative evidentials in the literature:

- signalling a lack of “psychological preparation” on the part of the speaker (DeLancey 1997: 35);
- marking “a more or less spontaneous reaction to a new, salient, often surprising event” (Aikhenvald 2004: 197).

However! Mirative *like* is both speaker and hearer-oriented:

- the speaker must find the proposition surprising, and
- the speaker must believe that the hearer will also find p surprising.

⁴Twitter use @catimacri, 19 September 2016.
⁵Twitter use @shabangcohen, 12 May 2015.
⁶Twitter use @hogwartsgrand, 21 Jul 2015.
⁷https://www.reddit.com/r/TheSimpsons/comments/1aif0o/whoa_i_like_totally_won_again/
⁸Twitter use @spiraledbass, 27 April 2017.
⁹Twitter use @seeingblind, 11 November 2017.
¹⁰Twitter use @EliShovan, 1 November 2017.

First, *like*, but not an exclamative, is felicitous if the the hearer will find *p* surprising.

- (6) **Context:** Sue sees her old high school friend Bill pull up in a fancy car. Three weeks later she runs into John, who just got back to town after spending a month abroad. Sue has reason to believe that John has never seen Bill in his fancy car.
- Sue, to John:** #(Wow,) Bill is rich now!
 - Sue, to John:** ✓ Bill is *like*... rich now

Second, *like* is infelicitous when the speaker knows that the hearer does *not* find *p* surprising.

- (7) **Context:** John has long been telling Sue that their old high school friend Bill has become rich. Sue never believed him, though. One day, Bills pulls up in a fancy car in front of both of them.
- Sue, to John:** ✓(Wow,) Bill is rich now!
 - Sue, to John:** # Bill is *like*... rich now.

Third, the mirative use of *like* is odd in contexts without an addressee, unlike other markers:

- (8) **Context:** Sue is walking alone on the street and sees her old high school friend Bill pull up in a fancy car. Taken aback by what she sees, she utters:
- Sue, alone:** ✓(Wow,) Bill is rich now!
 - Sue, alone:** # Bill is *like*... rich now.

⇒ The hearer-orientedness of the surprise effects conveyed by *like* will motivate an analysis that treats the particle as operating over the Common Set of the conversation, that is, a shared conversational space.

3 Diagnosing mirative from hedging *like*

They two uses share a core similarity: *both are non-at-issue*.

First, both hedging and mirative *like* fail to interact with logical operators such as negation or modals.

- similar to what has been observed for presuppositions and conventional implicatures (Potts 2005 among others)

- (9) Interaction with negation
- Mary’s shoes didn’t cost, *like*, twenty dollars.
Intended: # It is not the case that the speaker is hedging the claim that M’s shoes cost 20 dollars.
Intended: ✓ It is not the case that M’s shoes cost twenty dollars, but the speaker is hedging this claim.
 - My friend I used to hang out with isn’t *like* ... rich anymore.
Intended: # It is not the case that the speaker is surprised that the friend they used to hang out with is no longer rich.
Intended: ✓ It is not the case that the friend the speaker used to hang out with is rich, and the speaker is surprised.

Second, *like* cannot be challenged via direct denials, but only via constructions that question the felicity

conditions of the utterance (e.g., *Hey, wait a minute!* response, Shanon 1976; von Stechow 2004).

- (10) a. A: Mary’s shoes cost *like* twenty dollars.
 B: # No, that’s false! They cost exactly twenty. Why do you sound so tentative?
 B: ✓ Hey, wait a minute. They cost exactly twenty. Why do you sound so tentative?
 b. A: My friend I used to hang out with might be *like* ... rich now.
 B: # No, that’s false! This is very plausible.
 B: ✓ Hey, wait a minute. This is very plausible. Why do you suggest this is surprising?

⇒ Hedging and mirative *like* are not part of the at-issue content.

We now turn to the major differences between mirative and hedging *like*.

3.1 Prosodic differences

Hedging *like* does not present a specific intonational profile.

- Siegel (2002): can be surrounded by pauses, appositive-like.
- also possible to find cases in which hedging *like* is prosodically integrated.

Mirative *like* is necessarily followed by a longer pause, represented (henceforth) with ellipses.

⇒ While a hedging interpretation is normally available when *like* is prosodically integrated, a mirative reading becomes unavailable if there is no pause following *like*, as shown by the examples below.

- (11) a. ✓ Mary’s shoes only cost, *like*, twenty dollars. Pause, hedging
 b. ✓ Mary’s shoes only cost *like* twenty dollars. Prosodically integrated, hedging
- (12) a. ✓ My friend I used to hang out with is *like* ... rich now. Pause, mirative
 b. # My friend I used to hang out with is *like* rich now. Prosodically integrated, mirative

Representative examples from *Lambda* transcript of the Santa Barbara Corpus of Spoken American English (SBCSAE) (Bois et al. 2000).

Both utterances from a single speaker, from the same section of the transcript.

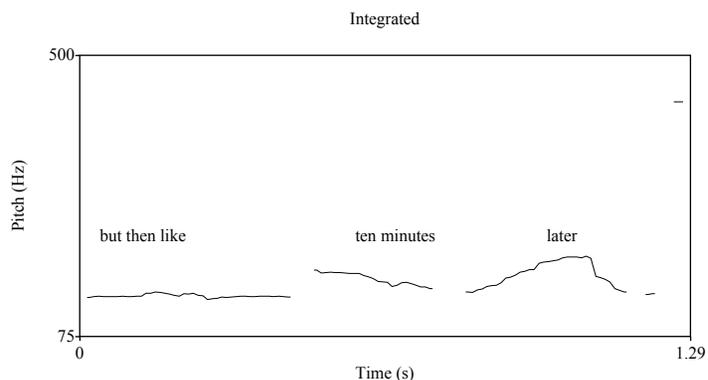
- (13) Context: Miles is telling his friends about a recent experience at a dance club.
- ...but then **like ten minutes later** she and her friend are over at their table.
 - ...twenty minutes later, they were kinda **like .. all over each other**.

In (13a), *like* is observed on its hedging use.

As (14) shows, its use is prosodically integrated:¹¹

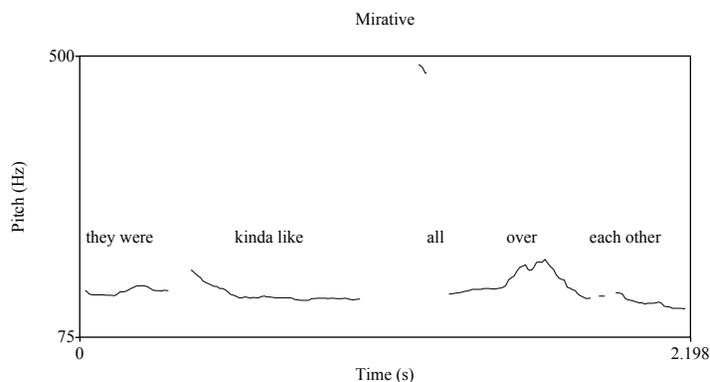
¹¹Prosodic contours extracted using Praat (Boersma and Weenink 2017).

(14) ...but then **like ten minutes later** she and her friend are over at their table.



This can be contrasted with the mirative use in (13b), where *like* is followed by a long pause.

(15) ...twenty minutes later, they were kinda **like .. all over each other**.



3.2 Compatibility with other modifiers

Only mirative *like* is felicitous with markers that indicate full commitment to the proposition.

- (16) a. # Mary's shoes only cost like {totally/definitely} twenty dollars. Hedging
 b. ✓ Whoa! I, like, totally won again! Mirative

3.3 Reportative predicates

In mirative uses, the surprise effect contributed by *like* must exclusively be ascribed to the speaker.

- (17) a. John said that Mary's shoes cost *like* twenty dollars. Anchor: ✓ John; ✓ Speaker
 b. John said that his friend is *like* ... rich now. Anchor: # John; ✓ Speaker

3.4 Truth-conditional effects

Hedging *like* can have an effect on the truth conditions of the sentence (Siegel 2002).

- (18) A: Mary's shoes only cost, *like*, twenty dollars.
 B: No, they cost 17 dollars.
 A: ✓ Well, I said *like*.

This is not true of mirative *like*:

- (19) A: Whoa! My friend I used to hang out with is *like* ... rich now.
 B: No! He isn't actually that rich!
 A: # Well, I said *like*.

3.5 Illocutionary force

Mirative *like* is constrained by type of speech act:

- (20) a. Imperatives
 # Be *like*... smart now!
 b. Questions
 # Who is *like*... smart now?

Hedging *like* is not subject to the same restrictions:

- (21) a. Bring me *like* 20 dollars!
 b. How *like* much did the shoes cost?

3.6 Denial and contradiction

Mirative and hedging *like* engender different types of unacceptability when their content is denied (similar to indirect vs mirative evidentials in Cheyenne, Murray 2010).

- (22) **Contradiction**
 a. #It's raining, and it's not raining
 b. #The shoes are *like* 20 dollars and they are exactly 20 dollars.
- (23) **Moore's Paradox**
 a. #It's raining, but I don't believe it's raining.
 b. #My friend I used to hang out with is *like* ... rich now, and this is not surprising.

Table 1: Hedging vs. mirative *like*

Use	Commitment markers	Shifts to Subj.	Affects TC	Quest/Imp	Denying produces
Hedge	#	✓	Yes	✓	Contradiction
Mirative	✓	#	No	#	Moore's Paradox

The two central questions:

- What is the common core shared by these two uses? → Section 4
- How does this core speak to other cases of dependent mirativity? → Section 5

4 Analysis

4.1 Hedging like: widening pragmatic halos

In a nutshell:

- Hedging *like* widens the halo of the expression it applies to (\approx Siegel 2002), increasing the acceptable degree of deviation from its literal meaning in a particular communicative situation.
- This mechanism derives the intuition that the speaker isn’t fully committed to the proposition.

The proposal:

- Most natural language expressions come with a *pragmatic halo* – a set of objects of the same denotation type, which differ only in “pragmatically ignorable” ways (Lasersohn 1999).
- Various authors have offered different perspectives on the proper treatment of halos (i.a. Krifka 2006; Sassoon and Zevakhina 2012; Lauer 2012).
- Today: Morzycki’s (2011) proposal to treat halos as sets of alternative denotations
- Halo members bear a context-dependent *degree of resemblance* to the original denotation.
- Resemblance modeled via a cross-categorial “approximateness” relation \approx , which holds between two objects if they are similar to at least degree d in context C .

- (24) a. $\llbracket \alpha \rrbracket^{d,C} = \{ \beta : \beta \approx_{d,C} \alpha \}$
 b. $\beta \approx_{d,C} \alpha$ iff, given the ordering imposed by the context C , β resembles α to (at least) degree d and α and β are of the same type.

- (25) Those shoes cost **\$20**.

- (26) a. **Casual student:** $\llbracket \$20 \rrbracket^{0.7,C} = \{ \$17, \$18, \$19, \$20, \$21, \$22, \$23 \}$
 b. **Frequent customer:** $\llbracket \$20 \rrbracket^{0.9,C} = \{ \$19, \$20, \$21 \}$
 c. **Shop attendant:** $\llbracket \$20 \rrbracket^{1.0,C} = \{ \$20 \}$

- (27) $\llbracket \text{like} \rrbracket (\llbracket \alpha \rrbracket^{d,C}) = \{ \beta : \beta \approx_{d',C} \alpha \wedge d' < d \}$

- (28) a. **Casual student:** $\llbracket \text{like} \rrbracket (\llbracket \$20 \rrbracket^{0.7,C}) = \{ \text{Number: Number} \approx_{d',C} 20 \wedge d' < 0.7 \}$
 b. **Frequent customer:** $\llbracket \text{like} \rrbracket (\llbracket \$20 \rrbracket^{0.9,C}) = \{ \text{Number: Number} \approx_{d',C} 20 \wedge d' < 0.9 \}$
 c. **Shop attendant:** $\llbracket \text{like} \rrbracket (\llbracket \$20 \rrbracket^{1.0,C}) = \{ \text{Number: Number} \approx_{d',C} 20 \wedge d' < 1 \}$

Imprecision and hedging *like* are not confined to cardinalities or amounts.

- (29) a. He’s *like* European or something.
 b. **Similarity criterion:** proximity to Europe

- (30) a. One of them was called *like* Prophecy or something like that.
 b. **Similarity criterion:** phonological resemblance to “Prophecy”

Similar to Siegel’s (2002) analysis. But halos assumed to be always there regardless of *like*.

- (31) $\llbracket \text{like } \alpha \rrbracket = v : v = \llbracket \alpha \rrbracket$ or $\alpha \in \text{Halo}(\alpha)$ (from Siegel 2002: 62)

4.2 Mirative like: widening Context Sets

In a nutshell:

- *Like* operates over the *Context Set* of the conversation: the set of possible worlds that are considered by the speakers as candidates for the actual world.
- *Like* signals that worlds that were previously held out of consideration due to their outlandishness should instead be considered.
- The use of the particle facilitates acceptance of propositions that are likely to undergo scrutiny.

4.2.1 Preliminaries: Context Sets and Plausibility

Context Sets

- Conversation is a collective endeavor to discard candidate worlds that are not compatible with the current one.
- **The Context Set** (Stalnaker 1978, 2002): The worlds that are recognized by the speakers to be the candidates for the actual world
- Set of *doxastic alternatives* $CS_{w,G}$, where G = group of participants, and w = actual world

- (32) $CS_{G,w} = \{ w' : \text{it is compatible with what } G \text{ believe for } w' \text{ to be } w. \}$

Plausibility

- When reasoning about possible worlds, we tend to rule out *outlandish* worlds – that is, worlds that are very distant from the current one, even if they are in principle compatible with it.
- Independent evidence: interpretation of modals in Klecha (2014)

- (33) Alice: I want to go outside, but I don’t want to get wet.
 Bryan: You have to wear the raincoat.
 Alice: # No, I don’t have to. I could cover every inch of my skin in duct tape.

- (34) a. **At a Science Olympiad:**
 In order to get the ball across this gap, we *have to* lay down a bridge. True
- b. **At a Rube Goldberg device-building olympiad:**
 In order to get the ball across this gap, we *have to* lay down a bridge. False

- The practice of excluding outlandish worlds is deeply engrained in communication.

- Plausibility-based restrictions should also be incorporated in modeling how we compute candidate worlds in a conversation.

We need to enrich our notion of Context Set with 2 ingredients (Klecha 2014):

1. ST, an operator that applies to two worlds v and w and returns the degree of stereotypicality of v given what we know in w
2. θ , representing the minimum threshold of stereotypicality that a world must have (with respect to the evaluation world) to count as plausible

$$(35) \quad CS_{G,w}^{\theta} = \{w' : \text{(i) it is compatible with what G believe in } w \text{ for } w \text{ to be } w'; \\ \text{(ii) } ST(w')(w) \geq \theta\}$$

4.2.2 Updating with outlandish worlds

By accepting a proposition we *eliminate* from the CS those worlds that are not compatible with it.

Regular assertion

- (36) $p =$ A friend that I used to be close with now has two kids.
- a. $\mathbf{p(w11)} = \mathbf{1}$; $ST(w1)(w11) = 0.4$
 - b. $\mathbf{p(w22)} = \mathbf{1}$; $ST(w1)(w22) = 0.5$
 - c. $p(w33) = 0$; $ST(w1)(w33) = 0.7$
 - d. $p(w44) = 0$; $ST(w1)(w44) = 0.8$
- (37) a. Initial state: $CS_{G,w1}^{0.1} = \{w11, w22, w33, w44\}$;
 b. Sue asserts p .
 c. John accepts the assertion.
 d. New state: $CS_{G,w1}^{0.1} = \{w11, w22\} \cap \{w11, w22, w33, w44\} = \{w11, w22\}$

Outlandish assertion

- (38) $p =$ A friend that I used to hang out with is rich now.

Imagine the following is true in $w1$: The person in question comes from a low-income family; they were very unsuccessful at school; they had a merely average work ethic; they were rather unambitious.

- (39) a. $\mathbf{p(w11)} = \mathbf{1}$; $ST(w1)(w11) = 0.08$
 b. $\mathbf{p(w22)} = \mathbf{1}$; $ST(w1)(w22) = 0.07$
 c. $p(w33) = 0$; $ST(w1)(w33) = 0.7$
 d. $p(w44) = 0$; $ST(w1)(w44) = 0.8$
- (40) a. Initial state: $CS_{G,w1}^{0.1} = \{w33, w44\}$;
 b. Sue asserts p .
 c. John accepts the assertion.
 d. New state: $CS_{G,w1}^{0.1} = \{w11, w22\} \cap \{w33, w44\} = \emptyset$

- Pragmatic restrictions excluding outlandish worlds are *defeasible* (Klecha 2014): they can be lifted, slackened or tightened by the interlocutors throughout the conversation.
- But while the listener always has the possibility of autonomously considering remote worlds, this is not guaranteed to happen.
- Assertions proposing counter-expectational updates are very likely to undergo special scrutiny before p becomes common knowledge.

For example: they trigger double-checking moves (Romero and Han 2004):

- (41) a. Sue: My friend I used to hang out with is rich now.
 Joe: *Wait, really?*
 b. Luke: I won again!
 Mary: *Wait, is it true?*

- *Like* serves as a device to signal that outlandish worlds should be considered in the update.
- The particle lowers the stereotypicality of the Context Set.
- By doing so, it minimizes the risk that the assertion be rejected and/or scrutinized.

4.2.3 Mirative Like: Addressing scrutiny, expanding Context Sets

Assertions are functions that take a proposition and an input conversational state as argument, and return an output conversational state (Krifka 2001).

Assertions can be represented through a multi-layered structure, which encodes two components:

1. The proposition p
2. The *illocutionary* content, i.e. A proposal to add p to the CG.

- (42) A friend that I used to hang out with is rich now.
- Input Proposition: $p = \lambda w. \text{“A friend . . . rich now”}$ is true in w .
 - Input CS: $CS_{G,w}^{\theta} = \{w' : ST(w')(w) \geq \theta\}$
 - Illocutionary content: $CS_{G,w}^{\theta} \cap \{p\}$

- By using *like*, the speaker specifies that the p -update operation ought to be carried out not with respect to the Input CS, but to $CS+$.

- a. $CS_{G,w}^{\theta} = \{w' : ST(w')(w) \geq \theta\}$
 b. $CS_{G,w}^{+\theta} = \{w' : ST(w')(w) \geq \theta' \wedge \theta' < \theta\}$

- Assertions modified by *like* make use of $CS+$ in the illocutionary proposal, as opposed to CS .

- (43) a. **A friend that I used to hang out with is *like* . . . rich now.**
- Input Proposition: $p = \lambda w. \text{“A friend . . . rich now”}$ is true in w .
 - Input CS: $CS_{G,w}^{\theta} = \{w' : ST(w')(w) \geq \theta\}$
 - Expanded Input CS: $CS_{G,w}^{+\theta} = \{w' : ST(w')(w) \geq \theta' \wedge \theta' < \theta\}$
 - Illocutionary content: $CS_{G,w}^{+\theta} \cap \{p\}$

This move crucially puts the listener in a better condition to accept the proposal.

- *Compositionally*: It expands the pool of candidate worlds, ensuring that the worlds in which *p* is true are in contention.
- *Pragmatically*: It speaks to the speaker’s cooperativeness, showing that they are willing to go our of their way to make sure that the update goes through.
- Regardless of *like*, whether the proposal is accepted is up to the addressee

Two final observations:

- The association between *like* and surprise is indirect.
- By targeting a *shared* space in the conversation the effect of particle crucially involves both interlocutors (→ hearer-oriented effects).

4.3 The common core behind hedging and mirative effects

In both uses, *like* expands a pragmatically restricted set.

- Hedging use: a Halo
- Mirative use: a Context Set

Different effects grounded in the interaction between widening and the such a set.

- Expanding Halos → More distant denotations considered → Hedging + Weakening
- Expanding Context Sets → More distant worlds considered → Surprise + Strengthening

Open question: how does the hedging/mirative polysemy of *like* relate to the the other pragmatic and syntactic functions that this form can have in English?

- D’Arcy (2005): as many as nine separate functions, including:

- (44)
- | | | |
|----|--|---------------------------------|
| a. | Mary feels <i>like</i> she’s going to succeed. | <i>conjunction</i> |
| b. | The doll was child- <i>like</i> . | <i>suffix</i> |
| c. | Mary was <i>like</i> , “why not?” | <i>quotative complementizer</i> |

The notion of relaxing a standard of similarity seems to be relevant to these uses (see also use of *like* in similatives, Rett 2013):

- Similarity between two individuals for the conjunction use,
- Similarity between two adjectives for the suffixal use,
- Similarity between two speech events for the quotative use (see Davidson 2015)

5 Mirativity: the cross-linguistic picture

What semantic/pragmatic property(ies) construe(s) *like* and narrative/indirect evidentials as a suitable natural class for the expression of speaker’s surprise?

Difficult to directly compare Rett & Murray 2013’s proposal with *like*.

However, two commonalities:

- In both cases, mirativity arises through a structurally similar mechanism to the one that yielded the other reading.
- In both accounts mirativity is modeled as a speech act phenomenon.
→ Is mirativity inherently encoded at the illocutionary level?

More general pattern: in both hedging *like* and indirect evidentials the speaker leaves open the possibility that things might be otherwise.

Both hedging and indirect evidentiality leave room for a $\neg p$ option that would have been instead unavailable in the case of non-hedged statements or assertions backed up by direct evidence.

Notably, the underlying presence of a $\neg p$ option is also present in the expression of surprise.

- Backer (1970), cited in Giannakidou and Mari 2016: “we say that a certain fact is odd or strange if it seems counter to our view of what is logical.”
- Variety of proposals that explore the link between surprise and negation (Giorgi and Pianesi 1997; Giannakidou 2015; Giannakidou and Mari 2016).¹²

Emerging generalization:

- Constructions that independently leave room for $\neg p$ worlds are suitable linguistic forms to express the category of mirativity;
- The specific semantic/pragmatic mechanism through which surprise is expressed depends on how each form makes $\neg p$ available.

Subjunctive mood in Italian: lack of commitment to the (public) truth of *p*, or scope of predicates that express emotion/surprise (Mari 2016; Giannakidou and Mari 2016).

6 Conclusion

In this talk, we’ve aimed to:

- shed light on a previously undocumented use of *like* as a mirative particle.
- show that mirative and hedging effects share common reference to a set widening operation.
- raise a number of issues that could improve our understanding of how surprise is linguistically conveyed and encoded across a wide variety of different languages and constructions.

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¹²Crucially, the association of surprise with a negative proposition is empirically substantiated by several independent properties, e.g. NPI licensing. See Giannakidou (1999) for further discussion.

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