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Wesh as a mirative marker in contemporary French: A cognitive pragmatics approach

This paper investigates the linguistic and cognitive properties of the particle *wesh* ('what') in contemporary French as a mirative marker. Mirativity is studied in languages with dedicated grammatical markers, such as Lhasa Tibetan and Turkish, but remains underexplored in languages with lexicalized markers such as French. While *wesh* is commonly recognized as a colloquial expression in French, its function as a mirative marker has yet to be systematically discovered. This paper addresses this gap by examining *wesh* as an instance of the cognitive process of surprise, using a corpus-based approach to analyze its syntactic distribution and pragmatic function in naturally occurring discourse. Data from the LCC and the French Web 2023 corpora reveals that *wesh* frequently appears in exclamatory contexts. By integrating insights from cognitive pragmatics, this study explores how *wesh* interacts with contextual elements to signal epistemic shifts, and sheds light on the mechanisms through which speakers encode mirativity in a language without dedicated grammatical markers.

Keywords: mirativity, discourse markers, *wesh*, cognitive pragmatics, epistemic stance

1. Introduction

Mirativity can be described as a universal functional-semantic category that marks unexpectedness or surprise (DeLancey, 1997). While some languages, like Turkish, use dedicated grammatical markers such as the suffix *-miş* to signal mirativity, others rely on syntactic, prosodic, or lexical strategies (Aikhenvald, 2012). In French, where mirativity is not grammatically encoded, it is conveyed through discourse markers, word order, and contextual cues. A recent study explores how certain expressions, such as *aller + infinitive*, can take on mirative functions in specific contexts (Celle & Lansari, 2015). This paper examines *wesh* ('what'), a colloquial expression of Maghrebi Arabic origin (*waš*, وش), as a potential mirative marker in contemporary French. While *wesh* is widely recognized as a discourse marker in urban discourse (Guerin, 2018; Canal, 2024), its function in signaling surprise or unexpectedness remains underexplored. The present research seeks to address three main questions: (i) Does *wesh* function as a mirative marker in contemporary French? (ii) How can mirative uses of *wesh* be identified? (iii) Has *wesh* retained its original interrogative

meaning, or has it developed new discourse functions? Using data from the Leipzig Corpora Collection (LCC) and the French Web 2023, this study employs both qualitative and quantitative methods to analyze the syntactic distribution and pragmatic function of *wesh* in naturally occurring discourse. The results contribute to a broader understanding of mirativity in French by demonstrating how discourse markers can serve as functional substitutes for grammatical mirative markers.

2. Theoretical framework
2. 1. About mirativity

Mirativity can be described as a universal functional-semantic category that marks unexpectedness or surprise (DeLancey, 1997). It refers to a linguistic and cognitive phenomenon where speakers utilize language to express surprise, unexpectedness, or their reaction to newly acquired information. Therefore, mirative expressions inform the participants in a conversation about the type of relation that the speaker has towards the information that is being conveyed, in fact, it goes beyond the mere transmission of facts to involve the subjective response of the speaker to the content being communicated.

DeLancey first introduced the term mirativity in 1997 that described a grammatical category signaling the presence of unexpected or non-presupposed information in a sentence. He observed this category in a wide range of languages, including Turkish, Hare and Tibeto-Burman languages, and established the term mirativity to capture this feature found in them (DeLancey, 1997). Throughout his paper, DeLancey points out different occurrences of mirative constructions in five different languages: Turkish, Hare, Sunwar, Tibetan, and Korean. An illustrative instance of grammatically marked mirativity can be observed in the Athabaskan language Hare. Let's consider the following example:

> *(1)   Mary e-we'   ghalayeda lo*
> Mary its-hide   work.IMPF
> 'Mary is working on hides.' (DeLancey 1997: 39)

DeLancey (1997) explains that his example would be fitting in a scenario where the speaker observes Mary covered in moose hair, but without knowing that she works on a hide for a fact. When using an imperfective verb, followed by the particle *lo* as in (1), the interpretation leans towards being mirative, because the speaker is not marking or highlighting the information source but rather the "novelty" of it. (DeLancey 1997: 39)

Aikhenvald (2012) follows the same analytical and descriptive line drawn by DeLancey (1997) in studying mirativity. She addresses the fashion of which certain

evidential markers can acquire mirative meanings in specific contexts by illustrating examples from various languages with evidential grammatical structures to express surprise or unexpectedness beyond the scope of evidentiality. Additionally, Aikhenvald (2012) confirms that if evidentials mark grammatically the nature of the information source or the way it was obtained, then miratives inform us about the status of the proposition regarding the speaker's knowledge of the world that shape their consciousness. She insists on exploring the semantic and pragmatic content of mirativity through different languages suggesting that it subsumes values that can be classified as follows:

- sudden discovery, sudden revelation, or realization (a) by the speaker, (b) by the audience (or addressee), or (c) by the main character.
- surprise (a) of the speaker, (b) of the audience (or addressee), or (c) of the main character.
- unprepared mind (a) of the speaker, (b) of the audience (or addressee), or (c) of the main character.
- counter-expectation (a) to the speaker, (b) to the addressee, or (c) to the main character.
- information new (a) to the speaker, (b) to the addressee, or (c) to the main character (Aikhenvald, 2012: 437).

These semantic dimensions of mirativity can be manifested "independently, through other categories, and also through lexical means" (Aikhenvald, 2012: 437). Consequently, Aikhenvald (2012) suggests that when identifying the existence of mirativity in a given language, it is necessary to specify "the subset of the range of mirative meanings grammaticalized in the language" (Aikhenvald, 2012: 437). Indeed, Various languages utilize distinct linguistic strategies to convey mirative meanings. Aikhenvald (2012) presents a series of examples that involve different grammatical means, including the use of complex verbal constructions tailored specifically for expressing mirativity. In addition, some languages employ unique verbal affixes or particles to convey mirative nuances, and mirative meanings can also be conveyed through the use of specialized series of pronouns and other linguistic devices.

Similarly, important insights were made on mirativity by Peterson (2017) that, I think, complement the previous theoretical perspectives presented in this paper. Certainly, Peterson (2017) states that it is fundamental to observe mirativity by going back to the basics of "discovering and documenting how a speaker of a language" expresses surprise linguistically. This is because he explains that there is a theoretical gap caused by the lack of "diagnostics for testing mirativity that utilizes the best

practices and first principles of semantic and pragmatic investigation" (Peterson 2017: 314).

Furthermore, Peterson (2017) attempts to draw a systematic line between languages that present a highly mirative and evidential systems and the ones that do not by classifying mirative marking in two main categories. The first one is a type of mirativity that can be parasitic on sentence parts and meanings, when it is not a part of the entailed meanings of the sentence itself. The second one is the non-parasitic mirativity and it is characterized by being propositional or illocutionary and it can be observed in languages that possess words, morphemes or other particles that encode mirative meaning (Peterson, 2017: 319).

Consequently, Peterson (2017) proposes empirical tests for mirative meaning that will presumably represent a manageable fieldwork that congregates semantic and pragmatic elements into one analysis. He proposes that the same way linguists are able to conduct diagnosis that target structure, they can also probe meaning as follows:

Empirical tests for surprise meaning:
a. Entailment: Does surprised meaning affect the truth conditions of the sentence?
b. Presupposition: Is surprised meaning presupposed?
c. Implicature: Can the surprised meaning be targeted for cancellation (i.e., a cancellable implicature)?
d. Challengeability: Can the surprised meaning be targeted for assent or dissent?
e. Embeddability: Can the surprised meaning be semantically embedded?
f. Displacement: Can the surprised meaning be displaced in time and space? (Peterson, 2017: 324)

Peterson's empirical tests provide a systematic framework for assessing the semantic and pragmatic layers of mirativity, which can be applied to analyze *wesh* in context. For example, the entailment test examines whether the presence of *wesh* alters the truth conditions of an utterance, helping us determine if its use introduces a meaning of surprise that is integral to the proposition. The presupposition test checks if the unexpected or surprising nature conveyed by *wesh* is assumed by both speaker and listener. Through the implicature test, we can observe whether the mirative reading of *wesh* is cancellable, indicating that its contribution is pragmatic rather than strictly part of the core semantic content. Similarly, challengeability assesses whether interlocutors can agree or disagree with the implied surprise, thus revealing the evaluative force of *wesh*. The embeddability test shows if the mirative meaning can be found within larger, more complex sentences, and the displacement test investigates whether the

expression of surprise can be shifted temporally or spatially within discourse (Peterson, 2017).

2. 2. Mirativity in French

Furthermore, mirativity in French is a rising topic of the moment. Unlike languages with grammaticalized mirative markers, French expresses mirativity through indirect means, such as intonation, discourse markers, and verbal constructions. By way of illustration the construction *aller + infinitive* has traditionally been associated with movement or future tense, but research has identified a specific usage where *aller* (infinitive verb *to go*) conveys a sense of unexpectedness or surprise (Celle & Lansari, 2015). Unlike its typical use for motion or to express future events, mirative *aller* functions as an observation on past, present, or anticipated events, to highlight a discrepancy between what is expected and the reality of events (Damourette & Pichon, 1936). This retrospective surprise is inherently epistemic, as it signals an incongruity between prior knowledge of the speaker and a given reality (Celle & Lansari, 2015). Mirative *aller* frequently expresses negative evaluation, framing events as irrational or frustrating, as in (2):

> (2) *Et ce connard est allé m'emboutir une aile !*
> 'And that idiot ran into my car!'
> (Larreya 2005: 351)

Unlike temporal *aller*, which is used in the present and imperfect tenses, mirative *aller* appears in a variety of tenses and moods, this is evident in (3):

> (3) *Tu ne vas pas me dire que tu tiens à rester dans cette boîte pour ton plaisir.*
> 'You're not going to tell me that you actually enjoy staying in this company.'
> (Frantext, Clavel Bernard, La Maison des autres, 1962: 160)

The construction here is used not to indicate simple future reference but to express doubt or disapproval about a potential statement from the speaker's perspective. It marks unexpected or surprising events that are not bound to the constraints of traditional temporal constructions, where the speaker rejects a possible assertion (Bres & Labeau, 2012).

Additionally, imperative forms can serve as two pragmatic functions; warnings and expressions of doubt, for example:

(4) *Ne va pas t'imaginer qu'il y a de quoi être fier.*
'Don't go thinking you have anything to be proud of.'
(Frantext, Weyer Gans François, Macaire le Copte 1981 : 55)

The flexibility of *aller + infinitive* in marking epistemic surprise, retrospective judgment, and anticipated rejection suggests that mirativity in French is not fully grammaticalized but instead emerges through discourse strategies, reinforcing the close connection between unexpectedness, inference, and speaker stance (Celle & Lansari, 2015).

The authors discuss that the verb *to go* in English has not been widely analyzed for its non-motional applications like *aller+ infinitive* (*to go+ infinitive*). In idiomatic expressions like *go mad* or *go missing*, *go* signifies a change of state rather than motion, and in these cases, it requires do-support in negative, emphatic, or interrogative forms (Clark, 1974). These constructions are not auxiliary verbs but rather markers of evaluative modality and aspect (Celle & Lansari, 2015). According to Bourdin (2003), the *go V-ing* construction functions as a marker of both aspect and modality. This evaluative aspect of *go* is emphasized in expressions that indicate a departure from a normal state, such as:

(5) *My jeep went missing.*
(Le Carré, 2001)

Additionally, the structural *go and V* serves a similar evaluative function, often expressing surprise or disbelief about an event for instance:

(6) *I thought she could walk home with some of her friends, and let herself in. Then the silly girl goes and loses her key.*
(Coe, 1997)

Such constructions, while focusing on the telicity of the action, also reflect the speaker's responsibility in the event's actualization and expectation. This perspective aligns with typological research suggesting that *go* may indicate a completive aspect, emphasizing the endpoint or finality of an action (Bybee, Perkins, & Pagliuca, 1994). Thus, both *go V-ing* and *go and V* constructions operate as markers of modality, evaluative judgment, and aspect in English, underscoring the agent's responsibility or the abnormality of the event (Celle & Lansari, 2015).

The authors deduce that "mirative *aller* and *go* function as modal modifiers" (Celle & Lansari, 2015: 309), and that there are three types of mirative meaning in these constructions. First, in the *go missing* construction, surprise emerges from the

interruption of a normal state, a meaning that is uniquely expressed in the English *go V-ing*. Second, surprise can result from the speaker witnessing an event that contradicts their expectations, a meaning that is common across the constructions *aller + infinitive*, *go V-ing*, and the phrase *go and V* for example:

> (7) *The markets are in complete disorder, yet they remain unable to solve the situation themselves and so go looking for a public sector bailout. Risk management, the buzz word of the financial markets since the collapse of Barings Bank in 1995, is clearly an oxymoron.*
> (The Guardian, Friday 19 September 2008)

Third, vetative (Celle & Lansari, 2015) uses involve anticipating a dissonant event in an attempt to prevent it, often found in imperative or negative contexts, and this meaning is conveyed by all three constructions as in (10):

> (8) *Now don't go and spill it all over the photos!*
> (Celle & Lansari 2015: 308)

In these constructions, when the grammatical subject is animate, the focus shifts to the subject's responsibility for the unexpected or surprising event. For example, in French:

> (9) *T'es malade ! où t'es allé attraper ça?*
> You're sick! Where did you catch that?
> (Celle & Lansari 2015: 308)

The construction with *aller* is a modal modifier that only encodes the beginning of a process, while the English *go V-ing* and *go and V* constructions convey aspectual differences. The *go V-ing* construction generally takes verbs of activity or cognition, while the *go and V* construction is incompatible with cognitive state verbs:

> (10) *You mustn't go and castigate yourself for crimes you didn't commit.*
> (Celle & Lansari 2015: 308)

As demonstrated, lexical items such as *aller* can acquire mirative functions through their use in specific contexts and effectively extending beyond their conventional meanings. Celle and Lansari (2015) argue that while *aller* is traditionally associated with movement or the expression of future reference, its integration into everyday discourse allows it to signal unexpectedness or surprise when used in constructions

like aller + infinitive. In these contexts, *aller* does not merely indicate a physical or temporal progression; instead, it functions as a marker that conveys the speaker's evaluative judgment about unexpected or surprising events. This transformation occurs through pragmatic processes whereby the construction is embedded in a discourse that contrasts the speaker's prior expectations with the observed reality, while charging the utterance with an epistemic dimension. Speakers can implicitly communicate both a sense of disbelief and negative appraisal, which indicates that the mirative meaning is not inherent in the lexical item itself, rather it is co-constructed through interaction and context (Celle & Lansari, 2015).

2. 3. What is *wesh*

In North African Arabic dialects, it is common to use *wesh* in informal settings and as a way of greeting, that simply translates to the English *what*. Latinized forms of the particle can be written in various ways such as *wach* or *wech*. The most common use of *wesh* is in the phrase *wech rak,* meaning 'how are you.' In its integration into French, the lexeme evolved from a strict interrogative into a multifaceted discourse marker. Canal (2024) explains that *wesh* is now used in several pragmatic functions:

- as a casual greeting (comparable to "*Salut*!" (Hi)),
- as an exclamatory remark (e.g., "*Wesh! T'es sérieux?*" (What! Are you serious?) to express surprise or disbelief), and
- as a particle intended to capture attention or signal an unexpected shift in conversation (Canal 2024).

Moreover, the evolution of *wesh* is not merely functional; its graphical representation has diversified as well. Variant spellings such as *wesh*, *wech*, and *ouaich* have emerged over time, which are affected by the phonological adaptations to French and the influence of cultural phenomena like hip-hop and urban slang on its form and usage (Canal 2024).

According to Canal (2024), the term *wesh* has undergone significant functional diversification in its integration into French, taking on various syntactic roles. First, as a noun referring to a person (Noun (P)), it can denote an individual characterized by attributes associated with the term and it's used as in a *wesh* individual. Second, it functions as a noun referring to a type of language or speech style (Noun (L)), exemplified by expressions such as *parler wesh* (to talk *wesh*) which refers to a specific type of speech. Third, *wesh* is employed as an adjective to describe certain behaviors or attitudes (e.g., une attitude *wesh*), thereby functioning in a descriptive term. Additionally, it serves as an interrogative adverb, used in forming questions or queries as in *Wesh*? meaning 'What?' Furthermore, the term operates as an interjection of salutation (Interjection (S)), as seen in greetings like *Wesh, ça va?* (Hey, how's it going?). Then, it is also used as an expressive interjection (Interjection

(E)) to convey surprise or emphasis such as in phrases like: *Wesh, c'est incroyable*! (Wow, that's incredible!). Lastly, there are ambiguous cases, designated simply as "?" cases, where the context is crucial for interpretation. Canal's (2024) classification illustrates the dynamic evolution of *wesh* within contemporary French discourse, reflecting both its linguistic adaptability and its sociocultural significance (Canal, 2024).

2. 4. *Wesh* as a borrowed word

Guerin (2018) examines borrowed words in contemporary urban French by analyzing natural interactions in popular, multicultural neighborhoods in the Île-de-France region. According to Guerin (2018), the process of borrowing in this context does not merely involve the replication of a foreign term into French, rather it is a complex operation where the choice of the source language itself activates a specific shared frame of reference among speakers. This shared background provides the basis for the pragmatic interpretation of the utterance, meaning that the borrowed word both signals and reinforces social identities and collective cultural references.

Guerin (2018) explains that *wesh* is not used for its original lexical content but as a multifaceted discourse marker. Drawing on Mc Auley's (2017:184) observations, *wesh* is "un item multifonctionnel et polyvalent, qui exerce simultanément et de manière efficace plusieurs fonctions pragmatiques particulières (a multifunctional and versatile item that simultaneously and effectively performs several specific pragmatic functions.)

The study shows that *wesh* appears in various positions within an utterance to indicate a need for shared interpretative context, rather than implying a negative or oppositional stance. Its usage is intended to evoke a presumptive context of shared socio-cultural norms thereby inviting interlocutors to draw on common experiential knowledge and cultural practices (Guerin 2018: 10). In this way, *wesh* is classified as a borrowed word that has undergone a pragmatic transformation: while it has been integrated morphologically into French, its primary function is to act as a discursive cue that activates a communal interpretative framework rather than to serve a referential role.

By situating *wesh* within the broader phenomenon of "emprunts urbains contemporains" or contemporary urban borrowings, Guerin (2018) underscores that the borrowing process in urban French is not simply about filling lexical gaps. Instead, it involves a nuanced reappropriation that reflects social identity, group membership, and pragmatic necessity. The author reconceptualizes borrowings as a dynamic process in which the source language plays an active role in shaping communicative practices among speakers who, despite not necessarily being

bilingual, are deeply engaged in negotiating their social identities in everyday discourse (Guerin, 2018).

These borrowings suggest an interpretative operation based on the principle of loaning, which triggers a shared frame of reference or a common ground among speakers. Guerin (2018) argues that these words are not merely linguistic imports but are embedded in social practices that reflect broader cultural dynamics within urban France (Guerin, 2018). To illustrate, unlike direct translations, *wesh* does not correspond exactly to *quoi*, however its meaning is dependent on context and the speaker's intent, it mainly serves as a contextualization cue. Borrowed words act as pragmatic markers as they often carry meanings that extend beyond their literal definitions, requiring shared understanding among speakers to be fully interpreted.

While linguistic borrowing is common in the formation of vernaculars, borrowed words such as *wesh* reveal not only linguistic adaptation but also social relationships and shared representations within contemporary society. Guerin (2018) adopts a sociolinguistic perspective that centers on speakers, their linguistic needs, available resources, and interactions, without assuming that these borrowings originate solely from bilingual speakers. These borrowings function similarly to verlanized words or slang, without necessarily indicating an assertion of foreign identity. Instead, they reflect the inevitable linguistic dynamics of French in contact with other languages. If these linguistic choices express an identity, it is primarily a social rather than an ethnic identity. This distinction is crucial in discussions about the marginalization of suburban youth, as their use of these borrowings does not stem from a rejection of French cultural identity but rather from an adaptation to contemporary societal realities (Guerin, 2018).

3. Methodology

This study investigates the use of *wesh* as a mirative marker by employing a mixed-method approach using the Leipzig Corpora Collection (LCC) for the French language and the French Web 2023 corpus (frTenTen23). The LCC's French corpora, a collaborative project by Leipzig University, the Saxon Academy of Sciences and Humanities, and the Institute for Applied Informatics, provide a diverse linguistic dataset, including news sources, private communication (such as the Private-Ommert and Private-Stadler subcorpora), and web-based texts. Additionally, the French Web 2023 corpus (frTenTen23) offers extensive contemporary data. The study integrates quantitative analysis, examining the frequency, co-occurrences, and contextual distribution of *wesh* across different registers. Complementing this, a qualitative approach is employed to interpret selected examples, illustrating how *wesh* functions as a discourse marker in mirative contexts.

This corpus-based approach analyzes *wesh* from a cognitive pragmatic perspective that allows a classification of the particle as a mirative discourse marker in contemporary French by combining quantitative and qualitative methods. The research begins with corpus selection and data extraction that is done manually, by drawing from various sub-corpora, including news sources, private communication (Private-Ommert and Private-Stadler), and web-based texts. Additionally, occurrences of *wesh* are selected using corpus linguistic tools, accounting for spelling variations and contextual adaptations. The first stage of analysis is quantitative, focusing on frequencies to determine how often *wesh* appears in different registers, co-occurrence analysis to identify words frequently appearing alongside it, and contextual distribution analysis to assess its placement within discourse structures. This helps establish whether *wesh* is primarily associated with expressions of surprise, irony, or emphasis. The study then proceeds with a qualitative analysis, where selected occurrences are manually examined to interpret their pragmatic functions, particularly in conveying mirativity. This includes evaluating how *wesh* contributes to discourse structure, whether it signals unexpectedness, emphasis, or emotional reaction, and how its functions vary across private, online, and formal registers. Finally, I integrate the findings from both analyses to explore the extent to which *wesh* functions as a mirative marker, its potential evolution, and whether its usage is becoming grammaticalized or remains lexically flexible.

In the results section, I will apply Peterson's (2017) empirical tests for surprise meaning that I've discussed in the first section of the theoretical background to analyze the mirative function of *wesh* in contemporary French. Specifically, I will examine whether the use of *wesh* affects the truth conditions of the utterance (entailment), whether its element of surprise is presupposed, if it can be cancelled as an implicature, its challengeability, its ability to be embedded within larger syntactic structures, and its displacement in time and space. Additionally, the analysis focuses on both syntactic and contextual cues; these include the presence of exclamatory intonation (where applicable), co-occurrence with the other discourse markers, word order, and the presence of an epistemic contrast between expectation and reality.

This study draws primarily on written, web-based corpora, as well as digital communication, particularly on social media, that replicates features of spoken interaction, such as informality, spontaneity, and expressive nuance. This allows for observing the pragmatic and discursive functions of *wesh*.

4. Results

This section presents the findings of the study, starting with a quantitative analysis of the frequency, and contextual distribution of *wesh* across different corpora, followed by a qualitative examination of its pragmatic functions as a mirative marker. The results provide insights into the varying usage patterns of *wesh* across different registers, as well as its role in expressing mirativity, emphasis, or discourse structuring.

Table 1 presents an analysis of the occurrence of the term *wesh* across four French corpora from the Leipzig Corpora Collection (LCC). It lists each corpus alongside its total number of sentences, the number of sentences that include *wesh*, and the subset of those sentences where *wesh* is used in a mirative (expressive or exclamatory) function. For instance, the French news corpus from 2022 comprises 6,720,800 sentences, with nine sentences containing *wesh* and only one instance demonstrating mirative usage. The 2023 French news corpus contains 6,512,818 sentences, seven of which include *wesh*, with two sentences exhibiting a mirative function. Notably, the French mixed corpus from 2012, which is considerably larger at 74,823,426 sentences, shows sixty-two occurrences of *wesh* and four instances of mirative usage. The French news corpus from 2020, with 7,566,888 sentences, reveals nine occurrences of *wesh* and two instances of mirative usage.

Table 1. 4 Subcorpora from the LCC

Corpus	Size (sentences)	Examples with *wesh* (sentences)	mirative usage (sentences)
French news corpus based on material from 2022	6,720,800	9	1
French news corpus based on material from 2023	6,512,818	7	2
French mixed corpus based on material from 2012	74,823,426	62	4
French news corpus based on material from 2020	7,566,888	9	2

The findings reveal that *wesh* appears at a low frequency in formal and news-oriented texts, yet its presence is consistent across different Corpora and time periods. This suggests that while *wesh* is primarily used in informal and colloquial communication, it retains a stable role even within more structured language registers. Moreover, the occurrence of mirative usage, though limited, indicates that *wesh* functions as a

nuanced expressive tool that is capable of conveying mirative meanings. These primary results support the hypothesis that informal language elements, such as *wesh*, play a vital and enduring role in contemporary communication, by reflecting underlying sociolinguistic trends and the adaptive evolution of language.

The data from the French Web 2023 corpus in table 2, consists of approximately 1.196 billion sentences, of which 16,561 occurrences of *wesh*. A targeted sample of 100 occurrences was analyzed in detail, with 32 instances exhibiting mirative usage. This finding suggests that, although the overall occurrence rate of *wesh* is relatively low when considering the size of the corpus, its use in mirative contexts is notably prominent within the sampled data.

Table 2. French Web 2023 corpora

corpus	Size (sentences)	examples with *wesh* (sentences	examples analysed (sentences)	mirative usage (sentences)
frTenTen23	1,196,093,735	16,561	100	32

In the Leipzig corpora, *wesh* appears infrequently overall, yet its mirative function is consistently present, despite being in low absolute numbers. In contrast, the French Web 2023 corpus, drawn from a vast array of digital texts, shows a higher absolute frequency of *wesh*, and within a targeted sample of 100 sentences, nearly one-third of occurrences exhibit mirative usage. These findings suggest that while *wesh* maintains its role as an expressive marker in informal registers, its use is amplified in digital, web-based communication, which reflects the evolving dynamics of colloquial expression in contemporary French discourse.

Using Peterson's empirical tests, let us introduce some of the cases of *wesh* as a mirative marker from a cognitive pragmatic perspective:

> (11) *Mais* wesh *ce trailer de Final Fantasy XVI est une dinguerie [...]*
> But wesh, this trailer of the Final Fantasy XVI is silly [...]
> (www.jeuxvideo.com, 20/10/2022)

In (11), *wesh* demonstrates how the speaker expresses his disapproval or negative surprise through this mirative combination of *mais* and *wesh* within the propositional content of the utterance. In this construction, the term *wesh* is not used as an independent exclamation but is integrated into the sentence's elements. The pragmatic function of *wesh*, when paired with the contrasting marker *mais*, emphasizes a deviation from expectation and enhances the overall mirative effect of the statement. Consequently, the mirative usage of *wesh* serves not only as a marker of the speaker's surprise but also shapes the cognitive framing of the information being conveyed.

Therefore, in (11) the use of *wesh* does not affect the core truth conditions of the proposition, it can be evaluated as true or false independently of the presence of *wesh*. Therefore, the surprised meaning is not entailed, which supports a non-truth-conditional mirative interpretation. Additionally, the surprised meaning is semantically embedded and integrated into the sentence's overall meaning through the construction of *mais + wesh* and word order. Another empirical feature found in (11) is that the element of surprise introduced by *wesh* is not necessarily bound to present events. The speaker could be reacting to a trailer viewed in the past or in the present moment. This shows that *wesh* is displaceable in time, as it possess a mirative function within the sentence.

Let's observe the following example (12):

> (12) Wesh *tu es vraiment trop bon !*
> 'Wesh, you're really too good!'
> (feedproxy.google.com, 21/07/2011)

In this statement, *wesh* serves as a mirative marker expressing the speaker's surprise but does not alter the truth conditions of the sentence. The core propositional content of (12) remains unchanged, meaning that the truthfulness of the statement does not depend on the presence of *wesh*. Instead, *wesh* adds a pragmatic layer of unexpectedness, signaling that the speaker perceives the event as surprising or noteworthy. Without *wesh*, the interpretation of surprise would rely on intonation or an exclamation mark rather than an explicit linguistic marker. This demonstrates how *wesh* functions as an expressive element rather than a truth-condition modifier. Therefore, surprised meaning does not affect the truth conditions of the sentence; rather its role is to convey the speaker's emotional reaction.

Another test proposed by Peterson (2017) is whether the mirative meaning is presupposed. To answer that let us observe (13):

> (13) *Aujourd'hui, j'ai croisé dans la rue un gamin que je ne connais pas qui m'a dit 'Wesh t'as changé mon frère.'*
> 'Today, I ran into a kid in the street who I don't know, and he said to me: 'Wesh, you've changed, my brother.'
> (www.hardgamers.org, 09/03/2010)

In example (13), *wesh* does not introduce a presupposed meaning but rather conveys a spontaneous expression of unexpectedness. The prepositional content remains unaffected in terms of presupposition, meaning that the speaker's surprise is not integrated into the listener's prior knowledge. Instead, *wesh* signals an immediate

emotional reaction, emphasizing the unexpected nature of the observed situation. the given information in (13) is not already assumed as given or shared knowledge between the speaker and listener for the sentence. However, in (13), the speaker's surprise is not a prerequisite for understanding the statement. Thus, *wesh* functions pragmatically, on a conversational level to actualize the listener's knowledge about the speaker's statement.

Although mirative meaning is not presupposed as we've seen in (13), *wesh* can introduce an element of surprise that is not tied to the present moment, and therefore being able to be displaced in time and space:

> (14) Wesh *c'est bien pour le 19 février, ya déjà un moment qu'on le sait d'ailleurs.*
> 'Wesh, it's confirmed for February 19, we've known that for a while now anyway '
> (tr.jeuxactu.com, 16/12/2009)

The sentence (14) conveys information about an event (the confirmation of a date), but the use of *wesh* suggests that the speaker is expressing surprise about a given fact, that has already been known previously. Consequently, this indicates that *wesh* can signal a reaction to an event regardless of when it occurred, whether in the past, present, or future, the element of surprise introduced by this linguistic marker is not bound to present events. This shows that mirative *wesh* is displaceable in time.

In addition, if we eliminate the marker *wesh*, the statement will only possess an informative function that draws on the prepositional content, without expressing a mirative meaning. However, by utilizing *wesh*, the utterance acquires a meaning of counter-expectation (Aikhenvald, 2012), even though the event is already established knowledge. Thus, the surprised meaning can be displaced in time and space.

By applying Peterson's (2017) empirical tests, we can see that *wesh* functions as a mirative marker within a cognitive pragmatic. For instance, when this marker co-occurs with contrastive particles (11), it emphasizes a deviation from expected outcomes. In addition, the mirative meaning introduced by *wesh* is not presupposed (13); it does not require the listener to hold prior knowledge of the speaker's surprise. Instead, *wesh* pragmatically encodes an immediate emotional response, updating the common ground at the conversational level. Furthermore, the mirative effect associated with *wesh* is temporally displaceable, allowing the expression of surprise regarding events that occurred in the past, present, or future (16). As seen above, *wesh* plays a major role in expressing mirativity in utterances that could maintain a primarily informative function in the absence of such marker.

5. Conclusion

This study has demonstrated that *wesh* functions as a mirative marker in contemporary French, from a cognitive pragmatic perspective. Through corpus-based analysis, it is evident that *wesh* is primarily used by younger speakers in informal registers, especially on social media and digital communication platforms. As observed, *wesh* can be identified through specific syntactic and pragmatic patterns: it frequently appears in exclamatory constructions, in conjunction with contrastive discourse markers such as *mais* ('but') and is often used to emphasize a speaker's reaction to an event or statement. Some of the linguistic and cognitive properties of *wesh* as a mirative marker is that it contributes to expressions of surprise without altering the truth conditions of an utterance, applying Peterson's (2017) empirical tests. In addition, *wesh* has undergone semantic and pragmatic shifts in contemporary French. It now functions not only as a conversational opener but also as an expressive marker with mirative and emphatic functions (Guerin, 2018).

Beyond its specific role in mirative constructions, *wesh* exemplifies linguistic innovation in French. Its increased use in spoken language underlines how discourse markers contribute to non-grammaticalized expressions of mirativity. This study supports the broader argument that mirativity is not solely encoded through grammatical structures but can also emerge through pragmatic and discourse-level mechanisms. Future research should expand on these findings by conducting broader corpus-based studies, incorporating more diverse spoken and digital language sources.

While the primary focus of this study is identifying mirative functions of *wesh* through syntactic and pragmatic patterns, the results also invite further investigation into how these functions correlate to its mirative use. Although this paper has not systematically examined intonation due to the reliance on written corpora, *wesh*'s prosodic features and phonological variants likely play a role in shaping its interpretive function. Furthermore, questions remain as to whether *wesh* can signal surprise not only from the speaker but also from the addressee, and whether its use interacts with broader contextual or multimodal cues. These lines of inquiry represent promising directions for future research on *wesh* as a mirative marker.

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