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## 7 The mirative values of Italian *altro che*

**Abstract:** The Italian linguistic construction [*altro che X*] (lit. ‘other than X’, also manifested as *altroché*) is attested in contemporary Italian with two mirative functions, “mirative rejection” and “mirative confirmation”, respectively. Based on the CODIT corpus of Italian, this study aims to delineate the evolutionary trajectory of [*altro che X*] from its original meaning ‘other than/different from’ to its current mirative values of rejection and confirmation. Furthermore, it seeks to demonstrate that the mirative functions of [*altro che X*] are the culmination of a single diachronic pathway, prominently influenced by dialogic, corrective and exclamatory contexts. Finally, drawing from the diachronic evolution of [*altro che X*], this paper proposes an expanded interpretation of mirativity, encompassing not only surprise triggered by a specific entity or event (first-level mirativity), but also surprise triggered by some expectation regarding the validity or invalidity of an entity or event (second-level).

**Keywords:** Grammaticalization, Pragmatics, Italian, Correction, Mirativity

### 1 Introduction: Aims and scope

According to the literature, mirativity marks “that the speaker’s mind was ‘not prepared’ for the information which is now being relayed” (DeLancey 1997: 36). In other words, mirativity consists in the explication, through more or less grammaticalized linguistic means, of surprise conceived as sudden discovery, sudden revelation or realization, unprepared mind, counter-expectation and new information (Aikhenvald 2012).<sup>1</sup>

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1 This article is the result of a continuous collaboration between the two authors. For the purposes of Italian academia, Caterina Mauri is responsible for Sections 1, 3.4, 3.5, 4; Antonia Russo is responsible for Sections 2, 3.1, 3.2, 3.3, 5. We wish to thank two anonymous referees, Daniel van Olmen, and Susana Rodríguez Rosique for useful comments on a first version of the article. The research here presented was partly developed within the PRIN 2022 PNRR project “DiverSIta: diversity in spoken Italian”, coordinated by Caterina Mauri (University of Bologna; MUR project code P2022RFR8T - CUP J53D23017320001). The project is funded by the European Union - NextGenerationEU with the The National Recovery and Resilience Plan (NRRP) - Mission 4 ‘Education and Research’ - Component 2 ‘From Research to Business - Investment 1.1m Public Call PRIN 2022 NRRP published with the DDN. 1409 of 14.09/2022.

Starting from this definition, we will argue that the Italian construction [*altro che X*], literally ‘other than X’, deriving from the meaning ‘different from X’, has acquired mirative values over the centuries. We will show that the mirativity expressed by this construction is different from the more prototypical examples of mirativity discussed in the literature, pointing to the relevance of expectations as sources of surprise. Let us consider some examples:

- (1) *Lo stesso, ultimo tentativo del premier di salvarsi con l'arrivo dei "voltagabbana" (altro che responsabili!) finisce con l'aggravare la crisi*  
 DEF:M.SG same:M.SG last:M.SG attempt:M.SG of:DEF.M.SG premier of  
 save:INF:REFL with DEF.M.SG arrival: M.SG of:DEF.M.PL turncoat  
 (altro che responsible:PL) end:PRS:3SG with DEF.M.SG aggravate:INF:REFL  
 DEF.F.SG crisis:SG  
 ‘The same, last attempt of the premier to save himself with the arrival of the “turncoats” (**far from responsible!**) ends up aggravating the crisis’ (ItTenTen20)
- (2) *Altro che noia, la vela entusiasma i giovani*  
 altro che boredom DEF.F.SG sailing excite:PRS.3SG DEF.M.PL young.people  
 ‘Far from/Forget boredom, sailing excites young people’ (ItTenTen20)
- (3) *Altro che pucciosa... questa fa gonfiare il mio cuoricino*  
 altro che cute :F.SG... this:F.SG make:PRS.3SG swell:INF DEF.M.SG  
 my:M.SG little.heart:M.SG  
 ‘Other/more than cute. . .this one makes my little heart swell’. (ItTenTen20)
- (4) *Storia stupenda e finale perfetto altroché!!*  
 story:F.SG amazing:F.SG and final:SG perfect:M.SG altroché!!  
 ‘Wonderful story and perfect final, **no doubt!**’ (ItTenTen20)

We argue that in these examples [*altro che X*] (or *altroché*) has a mirative value, because it conveys some surprise by the speaker (DeLancey 1997). If we look at example (1), we indeed see that the speaker not only rejects the idea of responsibility connected to the politicians at issue, but they also appear to be surprised by the fact that anybody could have considered them (i.e. the turncoats) as responsible. In this case, it is clear that the speaker has a completely opposite opinion, in fact the example could be paraphrased as “other than responsible, all the opposite!”. A similar and more explicit example is the one in (2): in this case [*altro che X*] is used to reject what was previously said/

inferred from the context, conveying a certain surprise at the fact that someone might have thought that sailing bores young people. The rejection is then strengthened by a diametrically opposite position, i.e. sailing excites young people.

The two points of view in (2) occupy different positions along an argumentative scale and contribute to different argumentative directions (Ducrot 1980): the first argues against the enthusiasm of young people for sailing, while the second argues in favor. The speaker presents both arguments because they are both deemed as relevant in the context, but the second one is positioned at a higher level on the scale and thus exhibits greater argumentative strength (cf. Birkelund 2012: 7).

In example (2), the rejected element and its substitution are both made explicit in the utterance, and the same occurs in example (3). Yet, in the latter the alternatives connected by [*altro che X*] contribute to the same argumentative direction. They are indeed not opposite to each other, but rather constitute different degrees along the same semantic scale of appreciation. Both *cute* and *makes my little heart swell* attribute a positive evaluation to a certain State of Affairs (SoA), but the latter (*makes my little heart swell*) is positioned at a higher degree of positive emphasis, thereby reinforcing the positive evaluation already expressed by the adjective *cute*. In this case, therefore, [*altro che X*] is not used to convey an opposition, but is rather employed to reinforce the speaker's position and, at the same time, to convey a certain surprise at the fact that someone might have considered the object in question *only* cute, and not something more.

Finally, in example (4) we observe the use of *altroché*, that is, the unverbized form of *altro che*, attested in Italian as a strategy of confirmation. The speaker is not only reinforcing their illocutionary stance, but they are also somehow surprised and seem to add between the lines "how could anybody doubt that the story was wonderful??" As we shall see, this usage represents the last stage in the diachronic evolution of [*altro che X*] and shows a conventionalization, both at a semantic and syntactic level, of the reinforcing value of this construction already present in cases like (3).

Although surprise is clearly perceptible in the examples just discussed, what exactly works as surprise trigger is not straightforward. This paper has two major aims. First of all, based on the diachronic corpus of Italian CODIT, we will identify the successive stages that led [*altro che X*] from the original meaning of 'other than/different from' (Gianollo & Mauri 2020) to the rejective and confirmative mirative values just discussed. We will show that the mirative uses of [*altro che X*] are the outcome of a single diachronic trajectory, in which dialogicity and exclamative contexts play a central role.

Second, we will also question the identification of the surprise trigger within mirative [*altro che X*] constructions and we will address the issue of the *locus* of surprise, proposing a second-level mirativity type, rooted in the acknowledgment of some unexpected validity belief, rather than in the acknowledgment of some

unexpected SoA. We will indeed argue that the speaker's surprise may be triggered by (i) the sudden realization that a given entity or event holds true, but also (ii) by the sudden realization of some (wrong) *expectation* that a given entity or event could hold (or not hold) true (i.e., surprise at a validity expectation).

The article is structured as follows. Section 2 presents the corpora used for data collection and the methodology adopted for the analysis. Section 3 is dedicated to the analysis of the data, in order to illustrate the successive diachronic stages through which [*altro che X*] developed the functions attested in contemporary Italian. Section 4 focuses on the concept of mirativity, both in general and in relation to the construction under examination. Finally, Section 5 will draw some conclusions, summarizing the most relevant results drawn from this work.

## 2 Data and methods

Our main source of data was the CODIT corpus (*CORpus Diacronico dell'Italiano* 'Diachronic corpus of Italian', Micheli 2021), which includes texts from the 13<sup>th</sup> century to the 20<sup>th</sup> century. It contains about 29 million tokens and it is structured into five subcorpora depending on the chronological period. The periodization follows that adopted for the MIDIA corpus (see Iacobini, De Rosa & Schirato 2017) and is based on important linguistic and social facts of Italian history" (Micheli 2022: 2).

The first step of the diachronic analysis was to delimit the object of our study. From the origins, the construction [*altro che X*] was indeed used not only with the meaning of 'other than/different from X' but also (and very frequently), with an exceptive value 'unless/except X' in both negative (5) and positive (6) sentences:

- (5) *Non mi ricorda d' avere né udito né*  
 NEG 1SG.DAT recall:PRS.3SG of AUX:INF neither hear:PRTC.PST nor  
*letto che segno di vittoria Cristo si*  
 read:PRTC.PST that sign:M.SG of victory:F.SG Christ REFL  
*portasse al limbo altro che lo splendore*  
 bring:SBJV.PST:3SG to:DEF.M.SG limbo **altro che** DEF.M.SG splendour:SG  
*della sua divinità*  
 of:DEF.F.SG her F.SG divinity:F.SG

'I do not recall having neither heard nor read that Christ took any sign of victory to limbo **other than** the splendour of his divinity' (Giovanni Boccaccio, *Esposizioni sopra la Comedia di Dante*, 14<sup>th</sup> cent.)

- (6) *Tancredi, serbati coteste lagrime a meno desiderata*  
 Tancredi save:IMP:2SG this:F.PL tear:F.PL to less desired:F.SG  
*fortuna che questa, né a me le dare, che*  
 luck F.SG that this:F.SG nor to me DEF.F.PL give:INF that  
*non le desidero. Chi vide mai alcuno altro che*  
 NEG them desire:PRS.1SG who see:PST.PFV.3SG ever anyone **altro che**  
*te piangere di quello che egli ha voluto?*  
 you weep:INF of what M.SG that **he** AUX.IND.PRS.3SG want:PRTC.PST  
 'Tancredi, save these tears for less desirable fortune than this, nor give them to me, for I do not desire them. Who ever saw anyone **but** you weep for what he wished?' (Giovanni Boccaccio, *Decameron*, 14<sup>th</sup> cent.)

We decided to exclude such occurrences from our diachronic dataset, which in the end consists of 479 occurrences of [*altro che X*], from the 13<sup>th</sup> to the 20<sup>th</sup> centuries (see Table 1), and includes all usages of *altro che* (also in its univertized form *altroché*), but the exceptive ones.

**Table 1:** Total occurrences of *altro che/altroché* over the centuries.

	XIII	XIV	XV	XVI	XVII	XVIII	XIX	XX	TOT.
<b>Altro che/</b>	3	39	45	95	22	20	190	65	<b>479</b>
<b>Altroché</b>									

Each occurrence was coded based on a set of parameters that have been judged to be relevant for the diachronic path. First, we considered if [*altro che X*] was an *argument* of the verb (*tenere* 'keep' in (7)) or not (as in (8)), since with the emergence of its mirative values this construction has gradually acquired a certain degree of syntactic independence.

- (7) *Così quelle persone che tengono altro che quello che*  
 so those:F.PL people who keep:PRS.3PL **altro che** what:M.SG that  
*la santa ecclesia predica e ordina, sono*  
 DEF.F.SG holy:F.SG church preach:PRS.3SG and command:PRS.3SG be.PRS.3PL

*gustamento e corrompimento di quella*  
 spoil and corruption of that:F.SG

'so those people who keep anything **other than** what the holy church preaches and commands, are spoiling and corrupting it (the church)' (Jacopo della Lana, *Commento alla Commedia di Dante Alighieri*, 14<sup>th</sup> cent.)

Second, we coded whether [*altro che X*] occurred in *corrective* contexts, in *exclamative* contexts and in *dialogic* contexts since these three parameters (correction, exclamation and dialogicity) have been argued in the literature to be connected to mirativity (Zeevat 2009, Unger 2019, Rett 2008, Traugott 2010) and may therefore have played a role in the emergence of the mirative functions at issue. Example (8) shows an instance of [*altro che X*] occurring in a context that can be classified as corrective, exclamative and dialogical, while (7) was classified as non-corrective, non-dialogical and non-exclamative:

- (8) *Spero bene che Guido non mancherà di pagarmi gl'*  
 hope:PRS.1SG well that Guido NEG fail:FUT:3SG of pay:1SG.DAT DEF.PL  
*interessi del mio capitale. Giovanni, sempre*  
 interest: M.PL of:DEF.M.SG my:M.SG capital:M.SG Giovanni still  
*urlando, cercò di rassicurarlo: - Altro che gl'*  
 shouting try:PST.PFV.3SG of reassure:3SG. M.ACC **altro che** DEF.3PL  
*interessi! Anche il doppio se le occorrerà!*  
 interest: M.PL even DEF.M.SG double if you need:FUT:3SG  
 'I hope Guido will not fail to pay me the interest on my capital. Giovanni, still shouting, tried to reassure him: - **Not (only)** the interest! Even double if you need it!' (Italo Svevo, *La coscienza di Zeno*, 20<sup>th</sup> cent.)

We then coded each occurrence also for the syntactic position occupied by [*altro che X*], with special attention to the utterance-initial and utterance-final positions, which provide important clues for the gradual independence and conventionalization of the construction. Example (9) shows an occurrence of the unverbized form *altroché*, which is completely syntactically independent and occurs in utterance-final position, within an exclamative context:

- (9) “*nessuna pianificazione, per quanto attenta, potrà mai sostituire una bella botta di culo*”. *Di quello abbiamo bisogno, **altroché!***  
 no planning however careful:F.SG can:FUT:3SG ever  
 replace:INF DEF:F.SG beautiful:F.SG lucky.break of that:M.SG  
 have:PRS.1PL need: M.SG **altroché**  
 “no amount of planning, no matter how careful, can ever replace a good stroke of luck”. That is what we need, **indeed!**’ (ItTenTen20)

We also considered the type of relation between the (explicitly or implicitly mentioned) elements related by *altro che*. *Altro che* may indeed relate elements that are somehow opposed to each other (cf. (3)) or located at different degrees on a scale, as in examples (2) and (8). Table 2 summarizes the parameters that were employed in the diachronic analysis of [*altro che X*]:

**Table 2:** Summary of the parameters adopted for the analysis.

Parameter	Values
<i>Altro</i> is argument of the verb	Yes/No
Corrective context	Yes/No
Exclamative context	Yes/No
Dialogic context	Monologue (M) Dialogue (D) Dialogic monologue (D/M)
Utterance-initial position	Yes/No
Type of relation between the two alternatives	Scalar/Opposite

The analysis adopts a qualitative approach, due to the overall low frequency of the construction [*altro che X*]. Nonetheless, for each century we will provide both absolute numbers and relative frequencies of (i) the construction, (ii) the various functions identified and (iii) the contexts of use, where relevant and useful to make the diachronic picture clear. Our goal is to catch the different stages which characterized the diachronic path of [*altro che X*], following the proposals put forward by Heine (2002), Diewald (2002) and by Mauri & Giacalone Ramat (2012), among others, which emphasize the gradual nature of diachronic change and the central role played by bridging contexts in allowing for reanalysis (Heine 2002; cf. critical contexts in Diewald 2002 and double-compatibility contexts in Mauri & Giacalone Ramat 2012). As argued by Heine (2002), in bridging contexts the interpretation of

the element undergoing change is ambiguous between the original meaning and the new one, thus allowing for a reanalysis. The presence of ambiguous contexts, of course, is not a sufficient condition for the change to take place; indeed, frequency is a determining factor in realizing the change (Bybee 2006; Mauri & Giacalone Ramat 2012).

Finally, to examine in detail the mirative semantics of the [*altro che X*] construction in Contemporary Italian data, we relied not only on our native intuitions, but mostly on a variety of resources, of both written and spoken Italian: the LIP corpus (Lessico di frequenza dell'Italiano Parlato, De Mauro et al. 1993), the KIP module of the KIParla corpus (Mauri et al. 2019) and the Italian Web corpus (ItTenTen20) (Jakubíček 2013) were consulted.

### 3 The diachrony of [*altro che X*]: Successive stages

In this section, we will be concerned with the successive stages of the change undergone by [*altro che X*], which, starting from its original value of 'different from', gradually comes to acquire a mirative function. We will highlight the factors, mainly contextual in nature, that led to the emergence of new values and to the development of new syntactic behaviors.

#### 3.1 The original value of [*altro che X*]: Diversity

From the 13<sup>th</sup>–14<sup>th</sup> century the construction [*altro che X*] appears with the meaning 'different from X'. With this function, the pronoun *altro* 'something different/other' is always an argument of the verb and relates elements that are opposed to each other (10) or placed at different degrees on a scale (11):

- (10) *ma se lui altro che bene avvenisse oltre*  
 but if he **altro che** good happen:SBJV.PST:3SG beyond  
*misura mi dorrebbe*  
 measure:F.SG 1SG.DAT grief:COND:3SG  
 'but if **other than** good [*bad*] happened to him, beyond measure it would grieve me' (Giovanni Boccaccio, *Filocolo*, 14<sup>th</sup> cent.)

- (11) *vattene a casa tua, e non mi dare più*  
 go:IMP:2SG to house:F.SG your:F.SG and NEG 1SG.DAT give:INF more  
*impaccio altrimenti io farò altro che parole con*  
 trouble:M.SG otherwise I do:FUT:1SG **altro che** word:F.PL with  
*teco*  
 with.you  
 ‘go to thy house, and give me no more trouble; otherwise I will do **other than**  
 words with thee’ (Anonimo, *Leggenda di Lazzaro, Marta e Maddalena*, 14<sup>th</sup> cent.)

In example (10) *altro che bene* (‘other than good’) refers to something different from good, i.e., something bad that could happen, and which would grieve the speaker. This oppositional reading is triggered by the negative feeling (grief), which cannot be generated by anything other than some bad event. On the other hand, in example (11), *altro che parole* (‘other than words’) keeps a diversity meaning (‘something different from words’), but the context is also compatible with the reinforcing interpretation ‘more than words/worse than words’. Such a reinforcing interpretation is licensed by the fact that in the preceding sentence the speaker already warns the interlocutor with severe words, and thus, if that warning is not enough to make her intentions clear, she will be forced to get to a higher degree (i.e., ‘different from/more than words’) and get physical. Warning with words and warning with more-than-words are certainly different but not opposite, they rather go in the same argumentative direction confirming the speaker’s attitude, with the latter standing at a higher degree of “persuasion”, thus reinforcing the speaker’s intentions.

We find the construction [*altro che X*] with its original diversity meaning mainly in declarative (98%), monological (67%) and non-corrective (>90%) contexts, independently of the semantic relation existing between the alternatives. In Table 3 and Figure 1, the frequencies of the ‘diversity’ [*altro che X*] construction are shown across the centuries: as we can see, the occurrences of [*altro che X*] with its original value gradually decrease through the centuries, reaching the 8% of the total occurrences in the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

**Table 3:** Absolute numbers and relative frequencies of Diversity [*altro che X*] across the centuries.

	XIII	XIV	XV	XVI	XVII	XVIII	XIX	XX
Occurrences of [ <i>altro che X</i> ] with <b>Diversity function</b>	3	38	42	78	16	10	31	5
	100%	97%	93%	82%	73%	50%	16%	8%
TOT occurrences of [ <i>altro che X</i> ] in the century	3	39	45	95	22	20	190	65

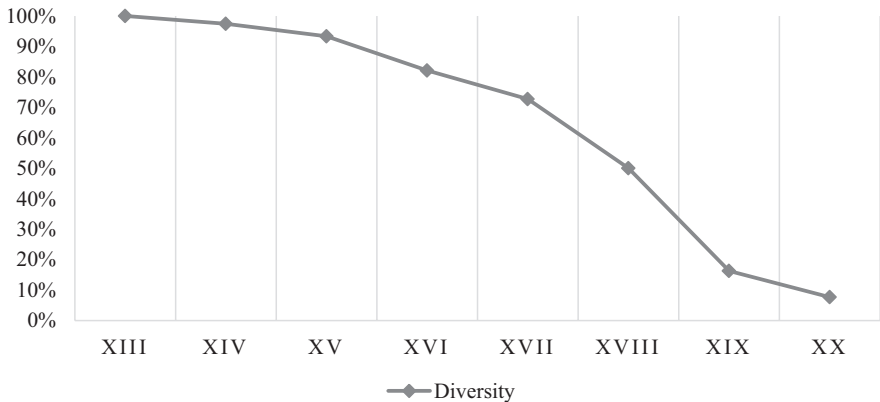


Figure 1: Diversity [*altro che X*] across the centuries, based on relative frequencies.

### 3.2 From diversity to correction, *via* dialogicity

Gradually, between the 14<sup>th</sup> and the 16<sup>th</sup> century, [*altro che X*] starts to be attested in dialogic contexts characterized by some correction, keeping its semantic and syntactic properties (i.e., it is still compatible with the meaning ‘different/other from’ and is attested as a verbal argument). In these occurrences, X is the correction of something wrong that was previously mentioned or was expected based on the previous context. As we noted in Section 3.1, also when it is used in corrective contexts, [*altro che X*] can relate elements that are opposite to each other (12) or located at different degrees on a scale (13):

- (12) CLEAN. *Venivo per vedere se io trovavo Pasifilo*  
 come:PST.IPFV:1SG to see:INF if I find:PST.IPFV:1SG Pasifilo  
*che io lo menassi a desinar meco*  
 so I 3SG.ACC take:SBJV.PST:1SG to eat:INF with:me  
 CAR. *O patrone, di' pure che tu passi di*  
 oh master say:IMP.2SG please that you pass:PRS:2SG of  
*qui per vedere altro che Pasifilo*  
 here to see:INF **altro che** Pasifilo

‘CLEAN. I came to see if I could find Pasifilo, so I would take him to eat with me [. . .]’

CAR. Oh patron, say that you’re passing this way to see something **other than** Pasifilo [. . .]’ (Ludovico Ariosto, *I suppositi*, 16<sup>th</sup> cent.)

- (13) CAL. *Oh, benedetto frate! Io pregherrò sempre Dio per lui.*  
 oh blessed friar I pray:FUT:1SG always God for him
- LIG. *Oh, buono! Come se Idio facessi le grazie*  
 oh, good! as if God do:SBJV.PST:3SG DEF.F.PL grace:F.PL  
*del male come del bene! el*  
 of:DEF.M.SG evil:M.SG as of:DEF.M.SG good DEF.M.SG  
*frate vorrà altro che prieghi!*  
 friar:M.SG want:FUT:3SG **altro che** pray:M.PL  
 ‘CAL . Oh , blessed friar! I will always pray to God for him.  
 LIG . Oh , good! As if God would do the graces of evil, as of good! The friar will  
 want **other/more than** prayers!’ (Niccolò Machiavelli, *La mandragola*, 16<sup>th</sup> cent.)

As we can read from example (12), which is dialogic in nature, the speaker (Car.) corrects what was explicitly said in the previous turn by his interlocutor (Clean.) with a different (opposite) alternative. What the speaker (Car.) wants to say is that his interlocutor wants something different than seeing Pasifilo to eat with him (i.e., something that has to be kept secret). Example (13) shows an instance of correction between different degrees on a scale. As in example (12), the speaker (Lig.) corrects something that was explicitly said in the previous turn by his interlocutor. In the opinion of the speaker (Lig.), what the prior wants is something different from prayers, actually something more. The context reveals that [*altro che X*] is used by the speaker to express the idea that prayers are not enough for the friar, who wants indeed something more than just prayers (i.e., money or some other reward).

Typically, in corrective contexts the element being rejected and corrected is explicitly mentioned in the preceding discourse and is then repeated, constituting the X within the [*altro che X*] construction (see examples (12)-(13)). Crucially, however, already in the 16<sup>th</sup> century we find also “implicit” corrective contexts, namely those in which the element being corrected is something that is expected based on the previous context, but is not made explicit until the [*altro che X*] construction is used: in other words, in implicit corrective contexts the rejected element is mentioned for the first time only within the [*altro che X*] construction, as in (14). In this latter case, [*altro che X*] is employed with a counter-expectative function, thus setting the stage for the emergence of mirative values (Aikhenvald 2012):

- (14) NIBBIO *Verso l'argenti cotesto è una*  
 through DEF.M.SG silver this:M.SG be:PRS.3SG INDEF.F.SG  
*favola: ma né i cinquanta fiorini anche*  
 fable.F.SG but NEG DEF.M.PL fifty fiorini even  
*puotono; e mi par che il*  
 can:PRS:3PL and 1SG.DAT seem:INF that DEF.M.SG

*beccarli vi faccia facile; che*  
 get:INF:3PL.ACC 2PL.DAT make:SBJV.PRS:3SG easy that  
*tosto che dicate al padre o*  
 rather that say:SUBJ.PRS:2PL to:DEF.M.SG father or  
*al suocero*  
 to:DEF.M.SG father-in-law

ASTROLOGO *Deh! insegnami pur altro che di mungere*  
 deh teach:1SG.DAT please **altro che** to milk:INF  
*le borse che gli è mio*  
 DEF.F.PL purse:F.PL REL 3SG.DAT be.PRS:3SG my:M.SG  
*primo esercizio*  
 first exercise

'NIBBIO: Towards silver, this is a fable: but not even fifty florins can do it; and it seems to me that it will be easy for you to get them; as soon as you declare it to your father or your father-in-law. . .

ASTROLOGER: Oh! Teach me something other than emptying purses, which is my first exercise' (Ludovico Ariosto, *Il negromante*, 16<sup>th</sup> cent.)

As we can observe from this example, the argument 'to milk the purses', which can be interpreted as 'to spend money', is not explicitly expressed in the previous turn; the first speaker (Nibbio), however, talks in a general way about money and the value of this in relation to silver and therefore, even if what the interlocutor rejects is not explicitly expressed in the previous turn, it is closely related to it and is clearly accessible in the discourse frame.

Between the 17<sup>th</sup> and the 18<sup>th</sup> century two other types of construction emerge in corrective contexts, that make the diversity function of [*altro che X*] emphatic, by means of modifiers. [*Tutt'altro che X*] (lit. 'completely other than') expresses emphatic opposition and increases its frequency around the 17<sup>th</sup> century, with a peak, as we will see, in the 19<sup>th</sup> century:

- (15) *et era solito dire che il concilio fosse*  
 and be.PST.IPFV:3SG used say:INF that DEF.M.SG concilium be:SBJV.PST:3SG  
*utile sempre che si trattasse di tutt'altro che*  
 useful:SG as long as IMPERS discuss:SBJV.PST:3SG of **tutt'altro che**  
*dell' autorità del Papa*  
 of:DEF.M.SG authority of:DEF.M.SG Pope  
 'and [he] used to say that the council [of Trento] was useful as long as it discussed **completely different [things] from** the authority of the pope' (Sarpi, *Istoria del concilio tridentino*, 17<sup>th</sup> cent.)

[*Ben altro che X*] (lit. ‘well other/more than’) is employed to indicate not only something different, but something more: it is employed to reinforce, emphatically referring to a higher degree than the entity corrected by *altro che*:

- (16) *Tal maestà ti impresse in volto [...] che vede*  
 such majesty 2SG.DAT imprint:PST.PFV:3SG in face:SG [...] that see:PRS.3SG  
*ognun che questa sua divina opra a ben altro che*  
 everyone that this.F.SG her divine work to **ben altro che**  
*al pianto destina*  
 to:DEF.M.SG weeping:M.SG assign:PRS.3SG  
 ‘Such majesty imprinted in thy face [...] that every one sees that this divine work of his is destined for **much other/more than** weeping’ (Cesare Cantù, *Margherita Pusterla*, 19<sup>th</sup> cent.)

The modifiers *tutto* (‘completely’) and *ben* (‘well’) emphasize the corrective intention underlying the use of [*altro che X*] and might<sup>2</sup> anticipate/accompany the emphasis that, during the same period, will be increasingly conveyed by the exclamatory context in which [*altro che X*] starts to appear with a mirative meaning (see Section 3.3).

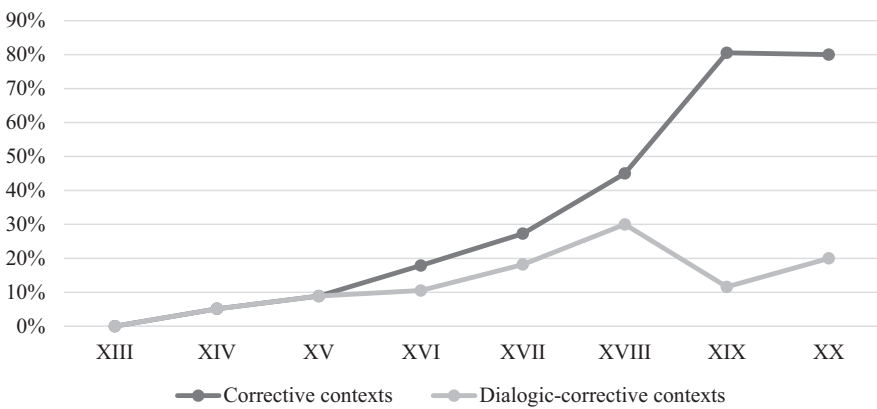
In Table 4 and Figure 2 we can observe the correlation between the rise of corrective contexts and dialogicity: between the 14<sup>th</sup> and the 16<sup>th</sup> century, we indeed observe that the first occurrences of [*altro che X*] with a corrective intention are systematically attested in dialogic contexts, as shown by the complete coincidence of the two lines in Figure 2 up to the 15<sup>th</sup> century. It is only in the 16<sup>th</sup> century that we start to find corrective uses of [*altro che X*] outside dialogues, uses that will become increasingly frequent thereafter. This confirms, in our view, the crucial role played by dialogicity in the development of corrective constructions, such as the one under examination (cf. Traugott 2010 for the concept of dialogicity, and Mauri & Giacalone Ramat 2012 for a discussion of the role of dialogicity in the rise of adversative markers).

Corrective contexts are compatible with the original value of [*altro che X*] (‘different from X’), but, at the same time, they are systematically characterized (i) by the same refutative illocution that we find in mirative rejection (cf. example (1)-(3)) and (ii) by the fact that the rejected element may become explicit for the first time within the [*altro che X*] construction (as in (14)). For this reason, we argue that corrective contexts, especially the implicit ones like (14), can be considered as bridging between a purely ‘diversity’ function of [*altro che X*] and the emergence of a rejective function, as will become clear in the next section.

<sup>2</sup> A more in-depth study still needs to be conducted on these two structures, particularly regarding their emergence and evolution in relation to the mirative uses under examination.

**Table 4:** Absolute numbers and relative frequencies of corrective contexts and corrective-dialogic contexts in which [*altro che X*] is attested across the centuries.

	XIII	XIV	XV	XVI	XVII	XVIII	XIX	XX
<b>Corrective contexts</b>	0	2	4	17	6	9	153	52
	0%	5%	9%	18%	27%	45%	81%	80%
<b>Dialogic-corrective contexts</b>	0	2	4	10	4	6	22	13
	0%	5%	9%	11%	18%	30%	12%	20%
<b>TOT occurrences of [<i>altro che X</i>] in the century</b>	3	39	45	95	22	20	190	65

**Figure 2:** Correlation between the parameters of dialogicity and correction over the centuries.

### 3.3 From corrective diversity to mirative rejection, *via* exclamation

In the 16<sup>th</sup> century, we see an increase in contexts where [*altro che X*] occurs in utterance-initial position. Crucially, during the 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> centuries all the cases of utterance-initial [*altro che X*] are verbal arguments, which means that the construction is still syntactically dependent from the verb, although it starts to be fronted. It is only from the 18<sup>th</sup> century that utterance-initial [*altro che X*] ceases to be a verbal argument and starts to occur as a syntactically independent construction. Let us consider examples (17) and (18), both from the 16<sup>th</sup> century:

- (17) *ella più abonda d' ogni loco al producir*  
 it more abound:PRS.3SG of any place:M.SG to:DEF.M.SG produce:INF  
*atto e prescritto, sì che eterna abbondanza*  
 suite:PRTC.PST and prescribe:PRTC.PST so that eternal:F.SG abundance:F.SG  
*la circonda, e di tutti i paesi fruttuosi*  
 3SG.ACC surround:PRS.3SG and of all:M.PL DEF.M.PL country:M.PL fruitful:M.PL  
*più ricca è d' Adria l' arenosa sponda.*  
 more rich:F.SG be.PRS.3SG of Adria DEF.F.SG sandy:F.SG shore:F.SG  
***Altro che*** *valli amene o colli ombrosi, sembrano*  
**altro che** valley:F.PL pleasant:F.PL or hill:M.PL shady:M.PL seem:PRS.3PL  
*d' Adria placida e tranquilla i palagi ricchissimi*  
 of Adria placid:F.SG and peaceful:F.SG DEF.M.PL palace:M.PL very.rich:M.PL  
*e pomposi*  
 and pompous:M.PL

'It abounds more than any place suited and prescribed for production, so that eternal abundance surrounds it, and the sandy shore of the Adriatic is richer than all fruitful lands. **Other than** pleasant valleys or shady hills, seem the rich and pompous palaces of placid and peaceful Adria' (Franco Veronica, *Rime*, 16<sup>th</sup> cent.)

- (18) ***Altro che*** *la tua Cinzia aveva io quivi!*  
**altro che** DEF.F.SG your:F.SG Cinzia have:PST.IPFV:3SG I here  
*Er' io un torso di pera diventato*  
 AUX:PST.IPFV:1SG I DEF.M.SG trunk:M.SG of pear:F.SG become:PRTC.PST:M.SG  
 '**Other than** your Cinzia I had here! I became a pear trunk' (Francesco Berni, *Rime*, 16<sup>th</sup> cent.)

In examples (17) and (18) we observe two contrastive contexts, in which the rejected element is a verbal argument that is fronted and is identified as the focal part of the sentence (Cruschina 2019). These syntactically marked occurrences are likely to have played a role in favoring the change from the stage described in the previous section, where [*altro che X*] is a verbal argument and occurs in corrective contexts, to the stage that we observe between the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> centuries, where [*altro che X*] ceases to be used as a verbal argument and becomes a rejective, syntactically independent construction, frequently associated to utterance-initial position.

The occurrence of the construction [*altro che X*] in a syntactically marked position, as in (17) and (18), characterized by a corrective contrastive focus, may have favored its reanalysis as an independent rejection marker. Rejective [*altro che X*] indeed typically occurs in utterance-initial position and tends to be associated to

exclamative contexts, with mirative effects. The rejected item may be introduced for the first time through [*altro che X*], as in (19), or it may be explicitly introduced in previous discourse, as in (20):

- (19) “È questa l’ Opera” esclamò quindi “ove  
 be.PRS.3SG this:F.SG DEF.F.SG Opera exclaim:PST.PFV:3SG then where  
 la Banti sarà conosciuta. **Altro che** Semiramidi,  
 DEF.F.SG Banti AUX.FUT:3SG know:PTCP.PST:F **altro che** Semiramidi  
**altro che** Galatee, **altro che** Meropi! Questo sarà il  
**altro che** Galatee **altro che** Meropi this:M.SG be:FUT:3SG DEF.M.SG  
 tuo trionfo per tutti i secoli  
 your:M.SG triumph:M.SG for all:M.PL DEF.M.PL century:M.PL  
 “‘This is the opera,” he exclaimed, “thanks to which Banti will be known. **Far from** Semiramids, **far from** Galatee, **far from** Meropi! This will be your triumph for all centuries [ . . . ]” (Lorenzo Da Ponte, *Memorie*, 18<sup>th</sup> cent.)
- (20) [la fata] gli disse:- Dunque la mia  
 [DEF.F.SG fairy F.SG 3SG.DAT say:PST.PFV:3SG so DET.F.SG my:F.SG  
 medicina ti ha fatto bene davvero?  
 medicine:F.SG 2SG.DAT AUX.IND.PRS.3SG do:PTCP.PST good really  
 - **Altro che** bene! Mi ha rimesso al  
 - **altro che** good! 3SG.DAT AUX.IND.PRS.3SG bring:PRTC.PST to:DEF.M.SG  
 mondo! . . .  
 world:M.SG  
 [the Fairy] said to him: – So my medicine has really done you good? – **Other/ more than good!** It brought me back to life! . . . – (Gabriele D’Annunzio, *Forse che sì forse che no*, 19<sup>th</sup> cent.)

In example (19) we can observe that the speaker is surprised at the expectation that Semiramidi, Galatee and Meropi could be conceived as valid alternatives and rejects them. Probably, the speaker knows that in the common opinion these operas are considered the most beautiful of that century. However, having seen another opera, that is better than those most appreciated generates surprise in the speaker for the commonly shared assessment/belief. On the other hand, in example (20) we have a first speaker who asks his interlocutor if medicine has done him good ‘for real’, implying a certain disbelief. In response, the interlocutor, surprised by this disbelief, rejects the term ‘good’ as too limited and corrects it with a stronger statement that confirms and reinforces the interlocutor’s assumption. Mirative rejection is thus present in both examples, but we may identify a difference, depending on the semantic relation between the elements related by *altro che* and on the

argumentative direction pursued by the speaker: we can see an *oppositive* rejection in (19), where the speaker aims to contrast an expectation, and a *reinforcing* rejection in (20), where the speaker aims to reinforce it.

Correction and mirativity have already been argued to be closely related in the literature, especially with respect to the explicitness of the corrected element. As noted by Zeevat (2009: 122), “it is tempting to think of the mirative markers as correction markers. And not entirely wrong because they can be used in this role”. According to Zeevat, what distinguishes them is the degree of accessibility of the SoA to which the marker refers. The corrective marker, in fact, “requires a statement to be corrected, an adversative marker, something that is ‘adverse’ to it” (Zeevat 2009: 127). In contrast, the mirative marker refers to something that is not directly traceable in the preceding context, something that Zeevat calls a *weak presupposition*. According to him, “the expectation can be much weaker than the belief of the interlocutor (or the common ground, or a second speaker) and can even be vanishingly weak: a mere suggestion or what somebody might think” (Zeevat 2009: 122). Something similar is also observed by Cruschina (2019), who makes a distinction between *corrective focus* and *mirative focus*, distinguishing them by the fact that the former implies “a correction with respect to one or more alternatives already explicitly present in the context”, while the latter is based on the idea that “the asserted proposition is considered less probable, and therefore more unexpected, than other alternatives, on the basis of the speakers’ shared expectations and knowledge” (2019: 252, our translation).

Correction appears to entertain a crucial diachronic relationship with mirativity, particularly in the case of the [*altro che X*] construction. The use of [*altro che X*] with a diversity meaning in corrective contexts (cf. Section 3.2) is indeed the intermediate stage allowing for the development of the subsequent rejective functions. As also noted by Zeevat (2009: 129):

It would seem that the different degree of toleration for weak antecedents can be much better understood as the outcome of a natural historical process, in which proper lexical presupposition triggers lose descriptive meaning in favor of a linking and distinguishing function, acquire more toleration for inaccessible antecedents, and lose their ability to force accommodation.

Correction and mirativity share the commonality that “a presupposed expectation is asserted to be false” (Zeevat 2009:122). From a diachronic perspective, although it is not easy to find clearcut chronological evidence in the data, the construction [*altro che X*] is likely to have started occurring in corrective contexts to reject an antecedent that was explicitly asserted in previous discourse (cf. (12–13)), soon acquiring the ability to reject an antecedent that was only accessible (implicitly) from the context (cf. (14)), ending up with rejecting an antecedent that coincides

with something that the interlocutor may have thought, i.e. an expectation (cf. (19)). We thus observe an increasing degree of intersubjectivity and counter-expectation, connected to the gradual loss of an explicit antecedent to be rejected, as is summarized in (21):

- (21) *rejecting an antecedent that was explicitly asserted in previous discourse* > *rejecting an antecedent that is only accessible from the context* > *rejecting an antecedent that coincides with an expectation.*

This cline goes hand in hand with an increase of syntactic independence, whereby [*altro che X*] is attested in utterance-initial position and may even occupy a whole turn. In its mirative function, it cannot be identified as a verb argument anymore, but rather becomes an autonomous construction at full.

It is interesting to consider the relation between the rise of the mirative rejective function of [*altro che X*] and exclamative contexts. Such contexts typically make a certain degree of emphasis and surprise explicit and are therefore likely to have played a role in the emergence of mirativity. The correlation between mirative rejection uses (black line) and exclamativity (dark gray line) can be observed in Table 5 and Figure 3:

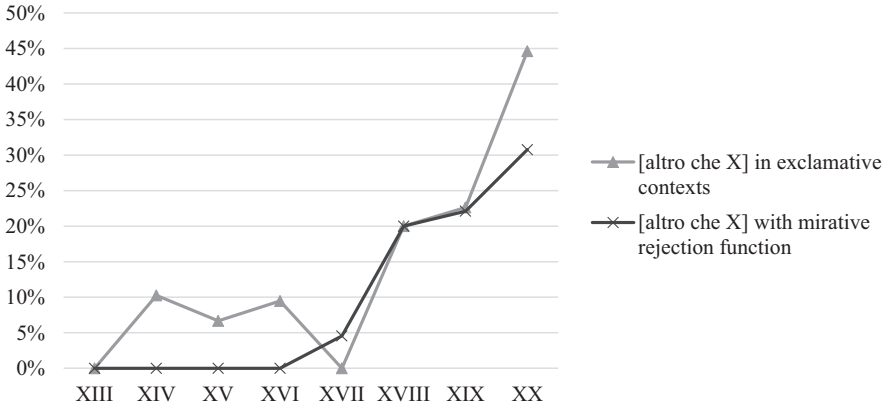
**Table 5:** Absolute numbers and relative frequencies of mirative rejective [*altro che X*] in exclamative contexts across the centuries.

	XIII	XIV	XV	XVI	XVII	XVIII	XIX	XX
<b>[<i>altro che X</i>] in exclamative contexts</b>	0	4	3	9	0	4	43	29
	0%	10%	7%	9%	0%	20%	23%	45%
<b>[<i>altro che X</i>] with mirative rejection function</b>	0	0	0	0	1	4	42	20
	0%	0%	0%	0%	5%	20%	22%	31%
TOT occurrences of [ <i>altro che X</i> ] in the century	3	39	45	95	22	20	190	65

Once again, as for Figure 2, we can see the role played by context in triggering the change. The mirative function appears between the 17<sup>th</sup> and the 18<sup>th</sup> century, while the use of [*altro che X*] in exclamative contexts starts to be attested already between the 14<sup>th</sup> and the 16<sup>th</sup> century.

We may indeed hypothesize that a rise in frequency of the exclamative contexts maybe have supported the emergence of the new mirative rejective functions of [*altro che X*].

Some studies differentiate mirativity from exclamativity (see Olbertz 2009, Lau and Rooryck 2017). However, many studies see exclamativity as one of the main



**Figure 3:** Correlation between mirative rejection function and exclamative contexts.

strategies to express surprise (Rett 2008, Sanchez Lopez 2014, Argine 2017, Unger 2019, Escalona Torres 2020). Furthermore, according to Unger (2019) “exclamations, exclamatives, and mirative utterances express the same range of pragmatic meanings” (Unger 2019: 2, note to text number 1), so that both mirative and exclamative statements are not used to convey propositional content but rather to express the impression that a given piece of information has left on us.

Based on the diachronic data discussed in this section, we consider exclamativity as one of the possible strategies by which surprise can be expressed. In particular, the increasing use of [*altro che X*] in exclamative contexts, in which correction was frequently associated to some surprise, may have favored its reinterpretation as a mirative strategy.

### 3.4 From reinforcing rejection to mirative confirmation

A further step in the evolution of the [*altro che X*] construction took place during the 19<sup>th</sup> century, when rejective [*altro che*] starts to be attested without an X following it, assuming a conventionalized meaning (or ‘formulaic’ value, according to Calaresu 2018) and becoming a completely independent response strategy. This use, exemplified in (22) and (23), always occurs in exclamative contexts and can be analyzed as a mirative *confirmation* marker with the meaning of ‘Sure! No doubt!’. The antecedent being rejected becomes very general and coincides with some uncertain belief or doubt by the interlocutor, which is replaced by a stronger belief, thus reinforcing the speaker’s argumentative position and leading to a confirmation meaning.

- (22) IL PREFETTO *Secondo lei, dunque, si può*  
 according.to 2.SG.POLITE then, IMPERS can:PRS.3SG  
*prestar fede anche a ciò che dice*  
 land:INF faith also in what REL say:PRS.3SG  
*la signora*  
 DEF.F.SG lady:F.SG
- LAUDISI ***Altro che!*** *In tutto e per tutto come a ciò che*  
***altro che*** completely like in what  
*dice lui*  
 say:PRS.3SG 3.SG

'IL PREFETTO: [. . .] In your opinion, then, can we believe also in what the lady says?

LAUDISI: **Of course!** Completely. Just like we believe in what he says!' (Luigi Pirandello, *Enrico IV*, 20<sup>th</sup> cent.)

- (23) Zia Lena *E... lui lo sa?*  
 and he it know:PRS.3SG
- L'ignota *Bruno? **Altroché!** Anche di questo "peggio" saranno*  
 Bruno? **altroché** even of this:M.SG worse AUX.FUT:3PL  
*informati, non è vero?*  
 inform: PRTC.PST NEG be:PRS.3SG true

'Aunt Lena : And. . . him, does he know?

The Unknown: Bruno? **Indeed!** They'll know about this "worse" too, won't they? (Luigi Pirandello, *Come tu mi vuoi*, 20<sup>th</sup> century)

In examples (22) and (23), both dialogical in nature, the speaker is surprised at the addressee's doubt and provides immediate confirmation. The positive reinforcing value of [*altro che*] in (22) is further underlined by the adverbial locution *in tutto e per tutto* 'completely', which strengthens the speaker's agreement with what was cautiously suggested by their uncertain interlocutor. In example (23), we can observe the univerbation *altroché*, employed to emphatically provide a positive answer, conveying some surprise at the interlocutor's doubt. Crucially, in both cases the use of [*altro che*] as a mirative confirmation marker would not be acceptable if the speaker had not been surprised: if the speaker had added something like "I was indeed expecting your question", the use of the [*altro che*] / *altroché* construction would have been felt as contradictory.

From a syntactic perspective, it is interesting to observe that the confirmative construction [*altro che*] acquires a higher degree of syntactic autonomy and freedom. As we can see in example (24), [*altro che*] is indeed also attested in utterance-final position, a position that is typically associated to markers expressing concern or interest for the addressee's opinion (Degand 2014):

- (24) *Ti pare che faremmo bene noi, se defraudassimo*  
 2SG.DAT seem:PRS.3SG that do:COND:1PL right we if defraud:SBJV.PST:1PL  
*i poveri di quanto possono pretendere secondo*  
 DEF.M.PL poor:M.PL of what can:PRS.3PL demand:INF according.to  
*il minimo dei patti stabiliti da*  
 DEF.M.SG minimum of:DEF.M.PL pact:M.PL establish:PRTC.PST:M.PL by  
*tuo padre? Sian pur patti d' usura,*  
 your:M.SG father:M.SG be:SBJV.PRS:3PL even pact:M.PL of usury:F.SG  
*li santifica adesso la carità! No no!*  
 them sanctify:PRS.3SG now DEF.F.SG charity:F.SG no no  
*Pagheranno, pagheranno gli interessi, altro che!*  
 pay:FUT.3PL pay:FUT.3PL DEF.M.PL interest:M.PL **altro che**  
 'Do you think it would be right for us, if we defrauded the poor of what they could demand according to the minimum of the pacts established by your father? Let them be usury pacts, charity sanctifies them now! No no! They'll pay, they'll pay the interest, more than that!' (Italo Svevo, *La coscienza di Zenò*, 20<sup>th</sup> cent.)

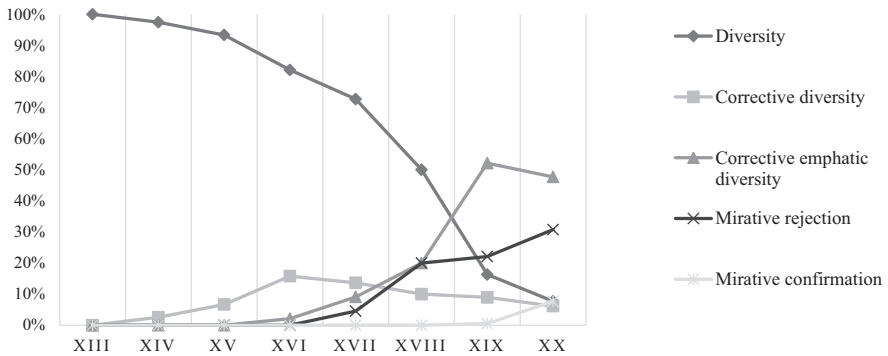
In cases like (24), it becomes evident that [*altro che*] has developed the function of an emphatic assertive marker, reinforcing what the speaker has just said. This should not be surprising since, as Calaresu (2018: 507, our translation) observes, the systematic use of words or combinations in replies often leads these to “develop autonomous, holophrastic discursive functions, disengaging themselves from the need for explicit ECHO(S) – the inferred presence of which, however, remains the key to understanding their residual anaphoric capacity”. The process defined so far thus seems to be a case of *vertical grammaticalisation*, i.e. a process of progressive compacting of several conversational moves into a single turn and phrasal structure (Calaresu 2015: 43–44).

### 3.5 The history of [*altro che X*]: A summary

Table 6 and Figure 4 show the diachronic evolution of the construction [*altro che X*] over the centuries, summarizing the successive steps that have been described in detail in the previous sections.

**Table 6:** Occurrences of [*altro che X*] across the centuries: absolute numbers and relative frequencies of the various functions identified.

	XIII	XIV	XV	XVI	XVII	XVIII	XIX	XX
<b>Diversity function</b>	3	38	42	78	16	10	31	5
	100%	97%	93%	82%	73%	50%	16%	8%
<b>Corrective diversity function</b>	0	1	3	15	3	2	17	4
	0%	3%	7%	16%	14%	10%	9%	6%
<b>Corrective emphatic diversity function</b>	0	0	0	2	2	4	99	31
	0%	0%	0%	2%	9%	20%	52%	48%
<b>Mirative rejection function</b>	0	0	0	0	1	4	42	20
	0%	0%	0%	0%	5%	20%	22%	31%
<b>Mirative confirmation function</b>	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	5
	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	1%	8%
<b>TOT occurrences of [<i>altro che X</i>] across the century</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>39</b>	<b>45</b>	<b>95</b>	<b>22</b>	<b>20</b>	<b>190</b>	<b>65</b>



**Figure 4:** Evolution of [*altro che X*] / [*altro che*] through the centuries: attested functions.

As we can observe from Figure 4, [*altro che X*] appears in the earliest phases (13<sup>th</sup>–14<sup>th</sup> century) with its original ‘diversity’ meaning (> 90%). Already in the 14<sup>th</sup> century (approx. 3%), with a peak frequency in the 16<sup>th</sup> century (approx. 16%),

[*altro che X*] appears in dialogic contexts characterized by a corrective intention ('corrective diversity' in Figure 4) and relates both opposing elements (cf. (10) and (12)) and elements found at different degrees of the same scale (cf. (11) and (13)).

Between the 17<sup>th</sup>–18<sup>th</sup> century, two constructions emerge (here referred to as cases of "corrective emphatic diversity", see Section 3.2), [*tutt'altro che X*] (cf. (15)) and [*ben altro che X*] (cf. (16)), which in the 20<sup>th</sup> century constitute the majority of the occurrences of [*altro che X*]. In both these constructions, [*altro che X*] is still a verbal argument and keeps a diversity meaning, but some emphasis is systematically conveyed. The frequency of these constructions increases right before the emergence of mirative rejective uses, and this may suggest that they played some role, but further investigation is needed to verify this hypothesis. For now, we limit ourselves to observing the sudden increase of these structures in conjunction with the emergence of the mirative uses of [*altro che X*], leaving open the question of a possible correlation between the two uses. What we know is that corrective contexts have played a crucial role in drawing the development of [*altro che X*] from a diversity meaning to a mirative rejective function.

The 17<sup>th</sup> century is characterized also by the first occurrences of [*altro che X*] as a syntactically independent construction. It is no longer a verbal argument, but rather behaves as an autonomous construction with a mirative rejective value, often in exclamatory contexts. Even with this new meaning, [*altro che X*] can relate both opposing elements and elements positioned at different degrees of the same scale, reinforcing the speaker's argumentative position. The reinforcing uses of rejective [*altro che X*] led in the 19<sup>th</sup> century to a further evolutionary step, one in which *altro che/altroché* does not need to be followed by X anymore and conventionalizes as a marker of mirative confirmation meaning 'Sure! (how could you have any doubt?)'.

As we already observed, the main factors that played a role in the evolutionary process of [*altro che X*] were primarily contextual in nature. We have indeed shown how the emergence of dialogic contexts preceded and favored the first occurrences of [*altro che X*] in corrective contexts: in these cases, the construction is used to explicitly express a corrective move in relation to some accessible antecedent. Moreover, corrective contexts were fundamental for the transition from a diversity meaning to the development of mirative rejection functions, and then to mirative confirmation. As Zeevat (2009) reminds us, corrective constructions are often used as mirative markers, and there exists a certain historical-evolutionary connection between correction, which rejects some explicit antecedent, and mirativity, which rejects an antecedent that is present in the common ground or in the interlocutor's mind, as an expectation. Finally, as we observed in Section 3.3, exclamatory contexts also seem to have played a role in the emergence of the mirative meanings of [*altro che X*].

## 4 Mirativity: The *locus* of surprise

In this Section, we will discuss the semantics of mirativity, specifically focusing on the *locus* of surprise in the case of the Italian construction [*altro che X*]. As we have already seen throughout this article, mirativity is intertwined with a series of other phenomena such as correction, exclamativity, and counter-expectation. In order to identify the exact mirative semantics of the construction under exam, let us first briefly summarize how these phenomena correlate with the development of the mirative values in the [*altro che X*] construction (Section 4.1), and then put forward our proposal (Section 4.2).

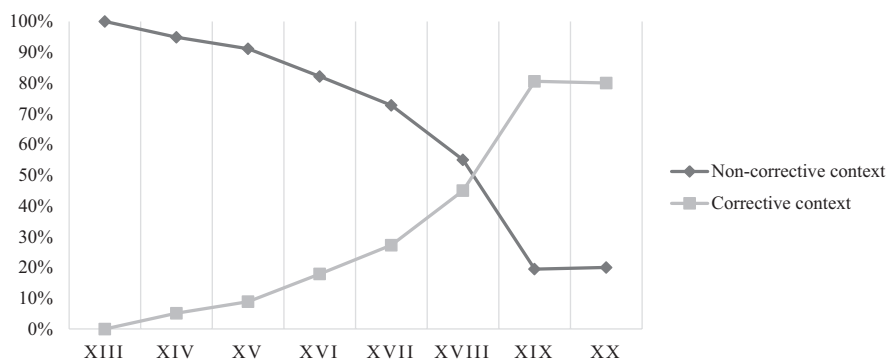
### 4.1 Looking for mirativity: Correction, exclamativity, counter-expectation

Mirativity has been associated in the literature to some inherent correction, as we have seen in detail in Section 3.3 (see Zeevat 2009, Cruschina 2019). As we can observe in Table 7 and in Figure 5, in the early centuries [*altro che X*] was used in most cases in non-corrective contexts as a verb argument with the meaning ‘different from X’. Over time, starting from the 14<sup>th</sup> century, the construction began to appear in corrective contexts, where [*altro che X*] started to be used to correct something (an antecedent) that was previously mentioned by an interlocutor (real or fictive).

**Table 7:** Absolute numbers and relative frequencies of [*altro che X*] in corrective and non-corrective contexts across the centuries.

	XIII	XIV	XV	XVI	XVII	XVIII	XIX	XX
Occurrences of [ <i>altro che X</i> ] in <b>non-corrective contexts</b>	3	37	41	78	16	11	37	13
	100%	95%	91%	82%	73%	55%	19%	20%
Occurrences of [ <i>altro che X</i> ] in <b>corrective contexts</b>	0	2	4	17	6	9	153	52
	0%	5%	9%	18%	27%	45%	81%	80%
TOT occurrences of [ <i>altro che X</i> ] in the century	3	39	45	95	22	20	190	65

Corrective contexts thus gradually increase in frequency and around the 18<sup>th</sup> century they overtake non-corrective contexts. The chart clearly shows the actual layering situation, in which [*altro che X*] is employed in both corrective and non-corrective contexts, although with a clear predominance of the former (approx. 80% of total occurrences). As we have already discussed, our study confirms Zeevat’s



**Figure 5:** Corrective contexts over the centuries.

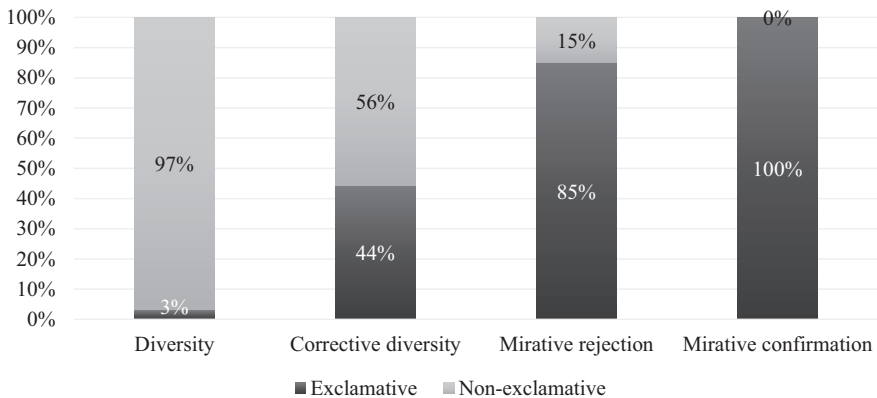
hypothesis (2009) recognizing a connection, also evolutive in nature, between the concept of correction and that of mirativity, distinguishing them according to the degree of accessibility of the refuted antecedent (see Section 3.3). We identified implicit corrective contexts, namely those lacking an explicit antecedent to be refuted, as bridging between the diversity meaning and the mirative rejective function of [*altro che X*].

Mirativity has also been discussed in relation to exclamative contexts (see Aikhenvald 2012 and Unger 2019). Exclamatory contexts are the minority of the contexts in which [*altro che X*] is employed with a purely diversity meaning, but they increase considerably in association with corrective functions, becoming the great majority with mirative functions and the totality for mirative confirmation (cf. Table 8 and Figure 6). As we already argued above, exclamation and mirativity are not overlapping concepts, but exclamation constitutes one of the strategies through which it is possible to express a state of surprise or unprepared-mind (especially for languages that do not possess morphological means to express it, see Rett 2008, Sanchez Lopez 2014, Argine 2017, Unger 2019, Escalona Torres 2020), and is therefore frequently associated to mirativity.

Finally, mirativity has been defined as bearing a counter-expectative meaning, being characterized by the sudden realization that some entity or situation holds, contrary to previous expectations (Aikhenvald 2012, Unger 2019). The rejective functions of [*altro che X*] explicitly refute some previous antecedent that was held as true, but we would not say that the speaker's surprise originates in the contrast between the expectation and the truth. When using [*altro che X*], the speaker's surprise rather seems to derive from the sudden realization that, at some point, somebody in the context (frequently the hearer) could *expect* the specific situation to hold true.

**Table 8:** Absolute numbers and relative frequencies of each function of [*altro che X*] in exclamative and non-exclamative contexts.

	Exclamative contexts	Non-exclamative contexts
<b>Diversity</b>	7	216
	3%	97%
<b>Corrective diversity</b>	20	25
	44%	56%
<b>Mirative rejection</b>	57	10
	85%	15%
<b>Mirative confirmation</b>	6	0
	100%	0%

**Figure 6:** Functions of [*altro che X*] in exclamative and non-exclamative contexts.

A similar analysis is proposed by Martinez (2023: 6) on mirative English response particles *yeah-huh* and *nu-uh?*, which convey a “sense of surprise, disbelief, or rejection of the addressee’s belief of the proposition they asserted.” According to Martinez, “a felicitous use of *yeah-huh* and *nuh-uh* requires a discourse context in which the speaker did not expect the addressee to believe the asserted proposition”.<sup>3</sup>

In other words, it is the very existence of some validity expectation regarding the antecedent (i.e. the belief that it may hold true) that clashes against the speak-

<sup>3</sup> According to Martinez (2023: 7), the speaker’s expectation is not necessarily that the addressee already believes SoA<sub>1</sub> to be true, but, minimally, that the addressee would accept it if it were asserted.

er's expectations. This can still be argued to be a counter-expectative meaning but based on a different type of contrast than the one described by Aikhenvald (2012). How can the mirative semantics of [*altro che X*] thus be described? What is the speaker's surprise generated by or, in other terms, what is the *locus* of surprise?

## 4.2 Second-level mirativity

Various types of mirativity have been proposed in the literature (see also Dessì Schmidt et al., this volume). So-called speaker-oriented mirativity occurs when a speaker has an expectation for SoA<sub>1</sub> and is surprised by the occurrence of SoA<sub>2</sub> that clashes with their initial expectation (Aikhenvald 2012), as in (25):

- (25) *Riusci*                      *a toglierlo*                      *in men che non si dica*    *e*  
 manage:PST.PFV.3SG to remove:INF:1SG.ACC in no time                      and  
*subito aprì*                      *la scatola* [. . .]. “*Ma che. . .?! Wow!*”  
 soon open:PST.PFV.3SG DEF.F.SG box:F.SG what the. . .?! **wow!**  
*Commentò*                      *mentre tirava*                      *fuori dalla*  
 comment:PST.PFV:3SG while pull:PST.IPFV:3SG out from:DEF.F.SG  
*confezione un paio di boxer leopardati*  
 box:F.SG DEF.M.SG pair of boxer leopardised:M.PL  
 ‘He managed to remove it in no time and immediately opened the box [. . .].  
 “What the. . .?! Wow!” he commented as he pulled a pair of leopardised boxer  
 shorts out of the box.’ (IfTenTen20)

Addressee-oriented mirativity (or *fictive mirativity*, Dessì Schmidt et al., this volume), on the other hand, is exploited rhetorically and is characterized by the fact that “the writer creates expectations in the reader, awakening curiosity by showing interest in the issue, by not readily providing an answer to the question. . .” (Boch et al. 2007: 112, translation of Tutin 2015). According to Tutin (2015), for example, speaking of the expression of mirativity within scientific writings, surprise is generated when the observed facts contradict the expectations explicitly or implicitly mentioned in the premise by the writer himself.

- (26) **This somewhat surprising result** can be explained, in our view, with a definition. . .’ (Tutin 2015: 2)

These scenarios are summarized in Table 9, and, within this picture, we can certainly state that [*altro che X/altroché*] is a speaker-oriented mirative strategy, in that the surprise is experienced by speaker.

**Table 9:** Speech act participants and the *locus* of surprise.

Mirativity type	<i>Speech Act Participant experiencing some expectation for SoA<sub>1</sub></i>	<i>Speech Act Participant experiencing some surprise at SoA<sub>2</sub></i>
<b>Speaker-oriented</b>	<i>Speaker/Addressee</i>	<i>Speaker</i>
<b>Addressee-oriented</b>	<i>Speaker/Addressee</i>	<i>Addressee</i>

Yet, the origin of the surprise in mirative [*altro che X*], namely the surprise trigger, is not the sudden realization that SoA<sub>2</sub> holds true instead of the expected SoA<sub>1</sub>, but rather the sudden realization that there *was* some expectation regarding the validity of SoA<sub>1</sub>. The *locus* of surprise is thus located at a different level, that is, the level of expectations. Furthermore, given the high dialogicity of the contexts in which [*altro che X*] occurs, it is not always straightforward to separate the speaker's expectations from the hearer's expectations, but we often deal with contextual expectations. Therefore, the elements identified in Table 9 (namely, speech act participant experiencing the expectation for SoA<sub>1</sub> and speech act participant experiencing surprise at SoA<sub>2</sub>) are not enough to account for the type of mirativity we are dealing with. We need a different representation of mirativity, which keeps (i) the premises, namely the expectations, separate from the (ii) *locus* of surprise (i.e. the trigger or source of surprise), and further identifies (iii) the speech act participant experiencing surprise.

Depending on the surprise trigger, we can thus distinguish between *first-level mirativity*, in which surprise is originated by the sudden realization that SoA<sub>2</sub> holds true instead of the expected SoA<sub>1</sub>, from *second-level mirativity*, in which surprise is generated by the sudden realization that there was some expectation that SoA<sub>1</sub> could hold true. The latter is the case for [*altro che X*]. In turn, first-level mirativity can be speaker-oriented or addressee-oriented, depending on the speech act participant experiencing surprise. This proposal is summarized in Table 10:

**Table 10:** Mirativity types: first and second-level mirativity.

Mirativity type	Premise	<i>Surprise trigger</i>	Speech Act Participant experiencing surprise
<b>1° LEVEL</b> <i>Speaker-oriented</i>	Speakers/Addressee have an <b>expectation for SoA<sub>1</sub></b>	<b>Realization of SoA<sub>2</sub></b>	<b>Speaker</b>
<b>1° LEVEL</b> <i>Addressee-oriented</i>	Speakers/Addressee have an <b>expectation for SoA<sub>1</sub></b>	<b>Realization of SoA<sub>2</sub></b>	<b>Addressee</b>
<b>2° LEVEL</b> <i>Speaker-oriented</i>	Speakers/Addressee have an <b>expectation for SoA<sub>1</sub></b>	<b>Expectation for SoA<sub>1</sub></b>	<b>Speaker</b>

What distinguishes [*altro che X*] (or *altroché*) from the cases of prototypical mirative strategies such as *Wow!* is precisely the source, or *locus*, of surprise. As we have been able to observe from the examples of mirative rejection (Section 3.3) and mirative confirmation (Section 3.4), the speaker's surprise is not generated by the acknowledgment of an unexpected SoA<sub>2</sub>, but rather resides in the sudden realization of some expectation or doubt regarding the (non)validity of SoA<sub>1</sub> (cf. also Martinez 2023). In the case of mirative rejection, the speaker rejects a given SoA, for which there was some expectation of validity by the hearer or in the context, at the same time expressing surprise at the validity expectation itself. In other words, by using [*altro che X*] the speaker not only refutes X, but also conveys some surprise at the very fact that anybody could believe that X was valid, as exemplified in (27).

- (27) *Il solo sospetto che potesse avere o  
 DEF.M.SG mere:M.SG suspicion:M.SG that may:SBJV.PST:3SG have:INF or  
 sviluppare tendenze omosessuali gli ha impedito  
 develop:INF tendency:F.PL homosexual 3SG.DAT AUX.PRS.3SG prevent:PRTC.PST  
 di proseguire il suo percorso vocazionale in seminario.  
 to pursue:INF DEF.M.SG his:M.SG path:M.SG vocational:SG in seminary  
 E vuoi sapere come è finita? Sì  
 and want:PRS.2SG know:INF how AUX.PRS.3SG end:PRTC.PST REFL  
 è iscritto a giurisprudenza e ha  
 AUX.PRS.3SG enrol:PRTC.PST in law school and AUX.PRS.3SG  
 trovato la morosa. **Altro che** omosessualità!  
 find:PRTC.PST DEF.F.SG girlfriend:F.SG. **Altro che** homosexuality  
 'The mere suspicion that he might have or develop homosexual tendencies  
 prevented him from pursuing his vocational path in the seminary. And you  
 want to know how it ended? He enrolled in law school and found a girlfriend.  
**Forget about homosexuality!**' (ItTenTen20)*

In the case of mirative confirmation, the speaker is surprised by some doubt or request of confirmation raised by the interlocutor (or by the context), which questions the validity of X: the speaker thus confirms X and at the same time expresses surprise at the very fact that anybody could doubt that X was valid, as exemplified in (28): Mika Ahola is asked whether he still trains on the 450 motorbike and his answer not only confirms that he does, but also conveys some surprise at the fact that this was even questioned.

(28) PRECEDING CONTEXT:<sup>4</sup>

‘Your name has always been linked to performance motorbikes. You have raced with TM 300 2-strokes, with VOR 530s. At the Enduro Indoor in Genoa you were one of the few to tackle logs and fords with the big 450. And you won. Do you still train on the 450?’ Mika Ahola:

*Altroché*, sono cresciuto con le moto  
 of course AUX.PRS.1SG grow.up:PTCP.PST:M.SG with DEF.PL.F motorbike  
*di grande cilindrata e mi piace riuscire a*  
 of big piston:F.SG and 1SG.DAT like:3SG manage:INF to  
*dominarle [ . . ]*  
 dominate:3PL.ACC

‘**Altroché** (of course), I grew up with big bikes and I like to be able to dominate them [ . . . ]’ (ItTenTen20)

On the one hand we have uses, such as the one exemplified in (27), in which the rejected element is presented as not valid and the whole structure seems to subtend an implicit question such as “how could you even think that X was valid?!”. On the other hand, we also have occurrences like (28), in which X is confirmed by the speaker as certainly true, suggesting an implicit question such as “how could you doubt that X was valid?!”. In both cases [*altro che X*] (or *altroché*) acts as an anaphoric marker of the incorrect/correct SoA<sub>1</sub>, which was mentioned in the preceding context or is inferable from it, and is exploited by the speaker to emphatically express their distance with respect to some previous validity or invalidity expectation.

The anaphoric function of [*altro che X*] makes this construction intrinsically dialogical in Traugott’s terms (Traugott 2010), because the speaker brings into play two points of view: their own point of view and that of an interlocutor (real or fictional). As we know, dialogical does not mean dialogual, and in argumentative contexts it is indeed frequent to observe *dialogical* monologues, where the speaker employs mirative rejective [*altro che X*] to introduce the rejected point of view and rhetorically oppose two different perspectives. The function of mirative confirmation is instead attested only in dialogues, where a speaker A explicitly expresses a doubt about X through a direct question addressed to speaker B, who then confirms X rejecting the doubt.

<sup>4</sup> For particularly long examples such as this one and those following, we have included glosses only for the part directly related to *altro che*, while for the rest we have provided a translation as faithful as possible to the original.

Both mirative functions of [*altro che X*] thus express surprise at a mental state of knowledge, expectation, or doubt that the speaker/listener had at a certain moment. This type of surprise seems to have elements in common with the surprise generated by obviousness, that Cruschina (2019: 261) mentions in the context of *mirative focus*. According to him, “an answer with an obvious mirative focus still generates surprise, namely *surprise against expectations* that turn out to be unfulfilled by the interlocutor” (translation and emphasis is ours). Surprise generated by obviousness is treated in terms of prosodic analysis by Kraus (2018), who identifies the *Surprise-Redundancy Contour* (SRC) (Sag & Lieberman 1975, Kraus 2019) as an inherently mirative strategy and which is defined as “an utterance-level prosodic tune that carries pragmatic information about speaker’s attitude” (Kraus 2019: 23). To best exemplify this type of strategy, let us consider the following example by Cruschina (2019: 261, es. (37)):

- (29) A: *Chi sta suonando al pianoforte?*  
 who AUX.PRS.3SG play:GER to:DEF.M.SG piano:SG
- B: *Gianni sta suonando! Perché lo chiedi? Lo sanno tutti che in questa casa è l'unico a sapere suonare il pianoforte*  
 Gianni AUX.PRS.3SG play:GER why it ask:PRS.2SG 3SG.ACC:M know:PRS.3PL all:M.PL that in this:F.SG home:F.SG be.PRS.3SG DEF:M.SG only:M.SG to know:INF play:INF DEF.M.SG piano:SG
- ‘A: Who is playing on the piano?  
 B: **Gianni** is playing! Why do you ask? Everyone knows that in this house he is the only one who knows how to play the piano. . .’

We observe that the focal anteposition in the sentence “Gianni is playing!” is a strategy aimed at expressing surprise with respect to the question posed by speaker A. In fact, speaker B takes it for granted that everyone knows that Gianni is the only one present who can play the piano, and is therefore surprised at the doubt, or absence of knowledge, raised by speaker A. In other words, we may say that the *locus* of surprise does not lie in the acknowledgment of a SoA, but rather in the acknowledgment of some expectations (or lack of them) regarding the SoA. Therefore, we should consider the mirativity expressed in (29) as second-level mirativity (cf. Table 10).

The [*altro che X*] construction and the mirative focus exemplified in (29) indeed share the fact that the speaker’s surprise is not generated by an unexpected SoA<sub>2</sub>, but rather by a prior epistemic condition, in terms of beliefs and expectations, attributed to the interlocutor. Let us consider an example where the wrong expectation is not attributed to the interlocutor, but to the speaker themselves:

(30) *FORUM DISCUSSION TOPIC: “Apparently rare song”* (ItTenTen20)

‘I found it [the song] watching youtube videos posted by a “forum friend”, we’re both members of another forum, and as soon as I listened to it I thought. . .’

“*cavolo ma questa la conosco bene, altro che rara!*”

man but this:F.SG DEF:F.SG know:PRS.1SG good **altro che** rare:F.SG

‘Man, I know this one really well, **altro che** rare!’

Example (30) shows the message of a user in a forum having the subject ‘Apparently rare song’. The user’s aim is to find the title or the singer of a song, which they think is ‘rare’ but which, at the same time, they know very well. The speaker argues that as soon as they heard the song in a video, they suddenly realized that this song was not as rare as they expected: at this point, by saying ‘*altro che* rare!’ they not only reject the fact that the song was rare, but they also express surprise at their previous wrong expectation, making explicit a “sudden discovery, sudden revelation or realisation [. . .] by the speaker” (Aikhenvald 2012: 437). This sudden revelation seems to be further reinforced by the presence of the formula *cavolo* (‘man’), an expression frequently used in contemporary Italian to express surprise.

Based on the analysis described so far, we believe that [*altro che X*] can be counted among the mirative strategies in Italian. We observed that this construction indeed shares most of the properties normally associated with the expression of mirativity, namely correction, exclamativity and counter-expectation. Moreover, we contend that the scope of mirativity should be expanded to encompass what we propose to consider second-level mirativity. We propose that the elements triggering the speaker’s surprise should not be confined solely to explicit statements or specific events unfolding in front of the participants in a conversation (first-level mirativity). Instead, surprise triggers also include the interlocutors’ mental states, particularly concerning their expectations about shared knowledge and beliefs (second-level mirativity).

## 5 Conclusions

This study offers a comprehensive analysis of the mirative values of the Italian linguistic construction [*altro che X*], exploring its evolutionary trajectory and proposing an expansion of the notion of mirativity itself. Our investigation, based on the CODIT corpus of Italian, traces the development of [*altro che X*] from its original meaning ‘different from X’ to its contemporary mirative functions of rejection and confirmation.

This study shows that the mirative uses of [*altro che X*] are the outcome of a single diachronic pathway, along which dialogic, corrective, and exclamatory contexts play a crucial role. This evolutionary process reflects a shift from the initial function of mere diversity to the expression of mirative rejection and confirmation. The mirative functions of [*altro che X*] are particularly prominent in dialogical contexts, where the construction allows the speaker to express surprise and distance with respect to previously held beliefs or expectations.

The paper further proposes an expanded interpretation of mirativity. We argued that mirativity should not only encompass surprise triggered by the sudden realization of a specific state of affairs, but it should also include surprise arising from *validity expectations* about a given state of affairs. This expansion may open the door to the identification of further second-level mirativity expressions, and to further explorations into the diachronic development of mirative expressions in other languages. In conclusion, the study of [*altro che X*] not only sheds light on a specific construction of the Italian language but also enriches our understanding of mirativity as a linguistic and cognitive phenomenon. By highlighting the role of expectations in triggering surprise, it invites a reevaluation of how mirativity is conceptualized and manifested across languages.

## List of abbreviations

1	1 <sup>st</sup> person
2	2 <sup>nd</sup> person
3	3 <sup>rd</sup> person
AUX	auxiliary
CLIT	clitic
COND	conditional
DAT	dative
DEF	definite
F	feminine
IMP	imperative
IMPERS	impersonal
INDEF	indefinite
INF	infinitive
IPFV	imperfective
M	masculine
NEG	negation
PL	plural
PL	plural
PRS	present
PRTC	participle

PST	past
PFV	perfective
REFL	reflexive
SBJV	subjunctive
SG	singular

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