

CROSS-LINGUISTIC EVIDENCE FOR THE THREE TYPES OF WH-EXCLAMATIVES

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Wh-exclamatives:

Prototypical instances and semantic theories for them

Degree exclamatives in (1) and (2).

(1) *What a big tree you have in your garden!*

(2) *How big this tree is!*

Zanuttini and Portner (2003): propositional semantics

A special operator widens a set of alternative propositions and the speaker's surprise is captured by a conventional scalar implicature.

Rett (2008, 2011): degree semantics

This approach captures the fact that only degree exclamatives are possible. However, this is true of only some languages (e.g., English).

Wh-exclamatives: Some more data and theories

Hoe Jan zijn paard berijdt! (Dutch; Nouwen and Chernilovskaya 2015: 212))

how Jan his horse ride.prs.3sg

'How Jan rides his horse!'

OK Evaluative reading: 'Jan rides his horse beautifully/clumsily/etc.'

OK Manner reading: 'Jan rides his horse saddled/bare-backed/etc.'

O, kam uyd-tan abon! (Ossetic; my data)

interj where be-pst.intr.1sg today

'Wow, the place I have been today!' ('Wow, where I have been today!', lit.)

Vau, ma (še-)jima af-ta! (Hebrew; my data)

interj what comp-mother bake.pst-3sg.f

'Wow, the stuff mom baked!' ('Wow, what mother baked!', lit.)

??*(*Ar daijereb,*) *raťoms žinavs čem-s važ-s coťa!* (Georgian)

neg believe.fut.2sg why sleep.he_dat my-dat son-dat little.nom

'You won't believe why my son sleeps so little!'

Nouwen and Chernilovskaya (2015): noteworthiness approach

Two types of wh-exclamatives (degree and non-degree) involve a noteworthiness evaluation either on DP-level or on clause-level.

(Non-)embeddability of wh-exclamatives

Embeddability approach: exclamatives are embeddable

- Elliott (1974: 233) as **Hypothesis 1**:

word order of S, V, O phrases in matrix wh-exclamatives =

word order S, V, O phrases in embedded wh-exclamatives =

word order S, V, O phrases in embedded wh-interrogatives;

- Elliott (1974: 232) as **Hypothesis 2** ("matrix-embedded asymmetry"):

A set of wh-words acceptable in embedded exclamatives \subseteq

a set wh-words acceptable in matrix exclamatives.

Non-embeddability approach (insubordination approach; Evans 2007, Koenig and Siemund 2007, 2013): exclamatives emerged via ellipsis of matrix clauses (hypothesis of insubordination).

Non-assertivity approach (Mithun 2008): embedded structures function as matrix exclamatives => evidence for extension of use of embedded structures, not necessarily insubordination via ellipsis.

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Current study: Methods

- Synchronic cross-linguistic study of exclamatives (Zevakhina 2016).
- New data from 11 genealogically (un)related languages: Basque, Bulgarian, Estonian, Georgian, Hebrew, Hindi, Korean, Lithuanian, Ossetic, Russian, Turkish.
- Collection of data: questionnaire sentences with supported contexts translated by native speakers, grammaticality judgements of construed sentences via email correspondence/personal communication.
- Questionnaire is available via https://www.eva.mpg.de/lingua/tools-at-lingboard/pdf/Exclamatives_questionnaire.pdf
- Data from the literature sources: English, German, Dutch, Classical Greek, Romance languages (Catalan, French, Italian, and Spanish), Hungarian

Current study: Hypotheses and Results

Hypothesis 1 is supported w.r.t. the following parameters:

- (non-)obligatoriness of wh-movement;
- the position of a (moved) wh-phrase;
- (non-)obligatoriness of subject-verb inversion.

This is compatible with both the embeddability and non-embeddability approaches.

Hypothesis 2 is supported.

The study revealed three cross-linguistically valid groups of wh-exclamatives which differ w.r.t. the matrix-embedded asymmetry.

The following wh-words were tested in exclamatives: inanimate object ('what'), personal ('who'), quantitative ('how many/ much'), locative ('where'), temporal ('when'), causal ('why'), kind ('what kind'), individual ('which') and manner ('how').

- **Group 1: qualitative and quantitative wh-exclamatives** (wh-exclamatives with gradable adjectives or adverbs)
Felicitous in both matrix and embedded contexts.
Five contexts tested:
 - ❖ wh-word + NP with a gradable adjective in an attributive position (e.g., *What a beautiful dress my sister bought!*);
 - ❖ wh-word + NP with an elided gradable adjective in an attributive position (e.g., *What a dress my sister bought!*);
 - ❖ wh-word + gradable adjective in a predicative position (e.g., *How beautiful this dress is!*);
 - ❖ wh-word + gradable adverb (e.g., *How fast my brother runs!*);
 - ❖ wh-word + an elided gradable adverb or a verb (e.g., *How my brother runs!*).

Some contexts are exclamative-only.

Some contexts are sensitive to ellipsis of a gradable adjective/adverb.

Both qualitative and quantitative wh-exclamatives seem to be prototypical instances of wh-exclamatives: if a language allows for wh-exclamatives at all, it allows for qualitative and quantitative wh-exclamatives.

- **Group 2: kind, individual, and manner wh-exclamatives**

Their felicitousness is subject to cross-linguistic variation.

Their felicitousness is identical in matrix and embedded contexts.

- **Group 3: the rest of wh-exclamatives**

Felicitous in embedded contexts.

Implicit hierarchy ranging from the most to the least appropriate matrix clauses cross-linguistically:

inanimate object/ personal wh-exclamatives (Basque, Bulgarian, Dutch, Estonian, Georgian, German, Hebrew, Hungarian, Lithuanian, Ossetic, Russian, and Turkish) >

locative (Basque, Estonian, Lithuanian, Russian) >

temporal (Bulgarian, Georgian, German, Hungarian, and Ossetic) >

causal (in my sample, no language allows for them in minimal/neutral contexts).

If a language allows for causal matrix wh-exclamatives, it should also allow for inanimate object, personal, locative, and temporal matrix wh-exclamatives.

Current study: Discussion

Semantics

- Degree vs. non-degree noteworthiness evaluation on both DP-level vs. clause-level.
- Non-degree noteworthiness evaluation on clause-level are of 2 types: argument vs. adjunct.

Syntax

- Syntax of wh-exclamatives is identical in matrix and embedded use => (non-)embeddability?
- Further facts: idiosyncratic embedded use. Not every predicate allows for exclamatives and not every form of such a predicate (cf. also factivity criterion of exclamatives).

**He exclaimed how big elephants were!*

**I don't know how big elephants are vs. He knew how big elephants are.*