An alternatives based account of *some*-exclamatives

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1 Introduction

Israel (1999, 2011): indefinite determiner *some* allows for exclamative readings. The interpretation, according to Israel, is that some individual is an extreme exemplar of the *some NP*.

(1) Boy, was she (ever) some dancer! (Israel, 1999)
"She was a dancer and she was an exceptional dancer."

(2) That was some wine she brought to the party!
"She brought wine to the party and it was very good wine."

(3) Some friend she turned out to be!
"She was a friend and she was a particularly poor friend."

(4) It's going to be some party! (Israel, 2011)
"We're having a party and it's going to be a great party."

Immediate question: How can *some* exclamatives begin to derived compositionally from independently needed components?

Big picture:

- Addressing non-canonical uses of determiners, particularly epistemic indefinites. In this case, the determiner *some*.
- Exploring what components are common to different types of exclamatives.
- Arguing that at least some exclamatives are kind-related.

Where we're going:

- *Some* exclamatives exclaim about the particular subkind instantiated
- *Some*-DP denotes set of alternatives, varying by subkind
- Intonation marks presence of covert exclamative operator
- Exclamative operator ranks propositions by unexpectedness

2 More on *some* exclamatives

There are other properties of *some* exclamatives. First, the *some* DP is not referential. Instead, the *some* DP turns up mainly in predicative positions.

(5) a. John is some lawyer!
b. *Syntactic Structures* is some book to read before bed!
c. This could be some mistake if we don't get it fixed right away.

Some exclamatives do not get quantity interpretations, unlike other nominal exclamatives.

(6) The wine we drank! It would've filled buckets!
(quantity interpretation possible)

(7) #That was some wine we drank! It would've filled buckets!
(no quantity interpretation possible)

Differs from wh-exclamatives in the readings available.

(8) Wh-exclamatives Rett (2008)
a. *Who/Which people he associates with!
b. *When/Where she studies!
c. *Why she bought that pony!

(9) *Some* exclamatives
a. *Situation: A linguist prefers to socialize with the geologists and the chemists rather than linguists and philosophers.*
Those are some people he associates with.
b. *Situation: Someone prefers to study at 4am.*
That's some time to study!
c. That's some reason to buy that pony.

Some exclamatives carry a particular intonational contour on the *some* indefinite. Removing this intonation destroys the exclamative meaning.

(10) a. That was some wine she brought to the party!
b. #That was some wine she brought to the party.

(11) a. It's going to be some party!
b. #It's going to be some party.

Not clear that the singular indefinite has a comparable exclamative interpretation to it, either.

(12) a. #This is a party!
b. #John is a lawyer!

Conclusions:

- *Some*-DP in doesn't refer to a particular entity—rather, it denotes a property.
- Express something somewhat different than wh-exclamatives.
- Lack of an "*an*-exclamative" suggests that a property of *some* is important.
- Intonation is also important in creating exclamative interpretation.

3 On exclamatives

3.1 Question theory of wh-exclamatives

One line of attack: wh-exclamatives underlying are questions, plus some additional meaning. This is the approach of Zanuttini & Portner (2003) and Gutiérrez-Rexach (1996).

Basic idea:

- Wh-exclamatives wear their question semantics on their sleeve (e.g., by using a wh-word)
- Questions are sets of propositions, following Hamblin (1973) and Karttunen (1977).
- Treat sentential core of wh-exclamative as denoting a set of propositions as well.

(13) What things John eats!

Intuition: exclamatives convey an unexpected fact. The set of alternatives is widened to include alternatives not previously under consideration.

(14) Widening (Zanuttini & Portner, 2003)
For any clause S containing R_{widening}, widen the initial domain of quantification for R_{widening}, *D1*, to a new domain, *D2*, such that
i. $[\![S]\!]^{w,D2} - [\![S]\!]^{w,D1} \neq 0$ and
ii. $\forall x \forall y[(x \in D1 \;\&\; y \in (D2 - D1)) \rightarrow x < y]$

Applying widening to the set in (15-a), we might get the set in (15-b).

(15) a. $[\![S]\!]^{D1} = \left\{ \begin{array}{l} \text{John eats jalapeños,} \\ \text{John eats serranos,} \\ \text{John eats poblanos} \end{array} \right\}$

b. $[\![S]\!]^{D2} = \left\{ \begin{array}{l} \textbf{John eats habaneros,} \\ \text{John eats jalapeños,} \\ \text{John eats serranos,} \\ \text{John eats poblanos} \end{array} \right\}$

Widening the set:

- Widened set now includes the proposition *John eats habaneros*.
- Models unexpectedness, as this proposition wasn't in the unwidened set

3.2 Question theory + degrees

Castroviejo Miró (2008) takes a slightly different approach. Rather than domain widening, order set of alternatives based on degrees of some gradable property *P*.

(16) $\left\{ \begin{array}{c} \text{John eats } d_1\text{-P things,} \\ \text{John eats } d_2\text{-P things,} \\ \text{John eats } d_3\text{-P things,} \\ \vdots \\ \text{John eats } d_n\text{-P things} \end{array} \right\}$

Ordering on a set of alternatives isn't enough, though. Additional move of structuring the set of alternatives.

- Alternatives are partitioned into expected propositions, false propositions, and a single strongest true proposition.
- Single true, strongest proposition entails all the expected propositions, but the false propositions do not necessarily entail the strongest true proposition.
- Attitude towards this set of propositions.

My approach:

- Closely in the spirit of question-like approaches to exclamative sentences.
- Ordered set of alternatives.

4 Indefinites

4.1 On epistemic indefinites

Epistemic indefinites: indefinites that include a flavor of uncertainty as to the referent of the indefinite. Widely attested cross-linguistically: English *some*, Spanish *algún*, Japanese *wh-ka*, German *irgendein*, Romanian *vreun*, and other languages

(17) a. Some professor is dancing on the table.
b. #Some professor is dancing on the table, namely Prof. Jones.

(18) A: Some cabinet minister has been shot.
B: #Who?

(19) #María se casó con algún estudiante del departmento de
María SE married with ALGUN student of.the department of
lingüística: en concreto con Pedro
linguistics: namely with Pedro
'María married a linguistics student, namely Pedro.'
(Spanish, Alonso-Ovalle & Menéndez-Benito (2010))

Comparison: Singular indefinite *a* in English is compatible with a similar sort of epistemic flavor, it does not require it like *some*.

(20) Mary is dating a student from the linguistics department, namely Peter.

Some (and other epistemic indefinites) have lexical properties that make them suited for expressing uncertainty. Different ways of cashing this out (not exhaustive):

- Farkas (2002): *some* contributes a variable such that the possible assignments for that variable in a particular context are not the same.
- Alonso-Ovalle & Menéndez-Benito (2003): *Algún* differs from *un* in triggering domain widening, and the hearer infers the speaker was trying to avoid a false claim.
- Alonso-Ovalle & Menéndez-Benito (2010): *Algún* competes with the indefinite *un*, but encodes presupposition that the domain of its first argument not be a singleton, and pragmatic reasoning generates the feeling of uncertainty
- Aloni & Port (2012): epistemic indefinites induce a domain shift (domain widening or method of identification)

4.2 Alternatives and indefinites

Indefinites trigger the generation of alternatives (Kratzer & Shimoyama (2002); Alonso-Ovalle & Menéndez-Benito (2003); see AnderBois (2011) for a related line of thought in Inquisitive Semantics)

(21) $[\![a\ girl]\!]^{w,g} = \{x : x \text{ is a girl and } x \text{ is in } g(D)\}$
(where D is a variable ranging over sets of individuals)
(Alonso-Ovalle & Menéndez-Benito, 2003)

In a broad sense, theories like this make sentences containing indefinites similar to questions, in that both have (at some level) alternatives in their denotation.

Where we're going:

- Use epistemic indefinitehood of *some* in constructing exclamative meaning
- Indefinite generates set of alternatives
- Constraints particular to *some* as an epistemic indefinite put constraints on the alternatives that are generated
- Creates a contrast with *a*, which is not an epistemic indefinite and doesn't participate in creating exclamatives

5 An analysis of *some* exclamatives

5.1 Proposal in a nutshell

Basic proposal: exclamative arises due to interaction between exclamative operator and semantics of *some*

- Adopt a question-like semantics for exclamatives.
- Source of alternatives is *some*.
- Exclamative operator captures alternatives, imposes an ordering on them, and asserts an attitude

What are the alternatives?

- In wh-exclamatives, alternatives somewhat transparently are related to the question-like form.
- In *some* exclamatives, no question. Alternatives come from *some*-DP instead.
- Idea: Alternatives that vary with respect to subkind of kind denote by NP.

5.2 Subkinds

Different lines of thought converge on kind-level information being present within the DP (not exhaustive):

- Zamparelli (2000): kind predication low in extended DP
- Krifka (1995): common nouns are polysemous between an individual and kind denoting interpretation
- McNally & Boleda (2004): common nouns have a covert kind argument (nouns denote relations between kinds and individuals)

Assume a version like that of McNally & Boleda (2004), who propose that nouns have covert kind arguments.

- A noun such as *lawyer* would be translated as in (22).
- R is a realization relation that is true just in case y is an instantiation of the kind x (Carlson, 1977).

(22) $[\![lawyer]\!] = \lambda x_k \lambda y\, [R(y, x) \wedge \textbf{lawyer}(x)]$

In translating nouns modified by relational adjectives, such in *bankruptcy lawyer* or *real estate lawyer*, the relational adjective is treated as a property of kinds.

(23) $[\![real\ estate]\!] = \lambda x_k\, [\textbf{real-estate}(x)]$

This combines with the noun via a modified predicate intersection rule.

(24) If α is a branching node and β and γ are the node's daughters, and β is type $\langle k, t\rangle$ and γ is type $\langle k, et\rangle$, then $[\![\alpha]\!] = \lambda x_k \lambda y\, [[\![\gamma]\!](x)(y) \wedge [\![\beta]\!](x)]$
(adapted from McNally & Boleda (2004))

(25) $[\![real\ estate\ lawyer]\!] = \lambda e_k \lambda y\, [R(y, x) \wedge \textbf{lawyer}(x) \wedge \textbf{real-estate}(x)]$

Effectively, the use of the relational adjective forces the modified NP to denote one of its subkinds.

5.3 Semantics of *some*

Some in *some* exclamatives has two jobs:

- Existentially quantify over subkinds
- Introduce a set of alternatives

NPs that do not have clear, well-established kinds are odd in *some* exclamatives, suggesting that kinds play a role here.

(26) ??This is some green bottle!

(27) #John is some local lawyer!

(28) #John is some person from the next room!

A first approximation of *some* is as in (29), where k is a kind. This asserts that there is some kind such that the nominal applies to it.

(29) $[\![some]\!] = \lambda P_{\langle k,et\rangle}\lambda x \exists k\,[P(k)(x)]$

But, some work needs to be done:

- Building on work on indefinites, *some* introduces a set of alternatives.
- Many proposals for EIs have as their core idea the possibility of the EI holding of more than one possible individual.
- I analyze *some* as being constrained by the condition in (30). (See Weir (2012) for a similar proposal.)

(30) Anti-singleton condition: $[\![some\ NP]\!]$ must have at least two members.

Adapting (29) to be alternative sensitive, we get (31).

(31) $[\![some]\!] = \{f : \exists k \text{ s.t. } f = \lambda P_{\langle k,et\rangle}\lambda x\,[P(k)(x)]\}$

Of course, this is a set and not a function. Two additional moves needed:

- "Hamblinize" all denotations so that they are sets.
- Modify Function Application to deal with these new Hamblinized denotations by combining alternatives pointwise (as in (32))

Intuition: combine alternatives from one set with another. Alternatives percolate up through the derivation.

(32) Hamblin Function Application
If α is a branching node with daughters β and γ, and $[\![\beta]\!]^{d,C} \subseteq D_\sigma$ and $[\![\gamma]\!]^{d,C} \subseteq D_{\langle\sigma,\tau\rangle}$, then $[\![\alpha]\!]^{d,C} = \{c(b) : b \in [\![\beta]\!]^{d,C} \wedge c \in [\![\gamma]\!]^{d,C}\}$
(based on Kratzer & Shimoyama (2002))

Example in (33). The final line is a set of propositions such that John instantiates some subkind of being a lawyer.

(33) John is some lawyer (no exclamation)
a. $[\![lawyer]\!] = \{\lambda x_k \lambda y\,[R(y,x) \wedge \mathbf{lawyer}(x)]\}$
b. $[\![some\ lawyer]\!] = \{f : \exists k \text{ s.t. } f = \lambda y\,[R(y,k) \wedge \mathbf{lawyer}(k)]\}$
c. $[\![John]\!] = \{\mathbf{j}\}$
d. $[\![John\ is\ some\ lawyer]\!] = \{f : \exists k \text{ s.t. } f = [R(\mathbf{j},k) \wedge \mathbf{lawyer}(k)]\}$

What this gets us:

- This is a set of alternatives varying by subkinds of lawyers.
- Just as a question (modeled as Hamblin alternatives) forms the core of a wh-exclamative, alternatives are at the core of the *some*-exclamative as well.
- Alternatives from a different source: semantics of *some*, rather than semantics of questions.
- EIness of *some* (the condition in (30)) ensures we wind up with a non-trivial set of alternatives.

5.4 Role of intonation

Assumption: intonation marks the presence of a morpheme (abbreviated ExOp here) necessary for exclamative interpretation.

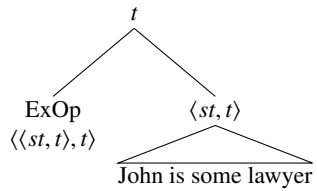
- Intonation assigned a special status in other theories, such as in Castroviejo Miró (2008); D'Avis (2002)
- Role of ExOp will be to impose ordering over set of alternatives.
- Additionally, assert an attitude towards a proposition.

Why ExOp?

- Set of propositions itself isn't a licit contribution to the discourse (only a proposition is)
- ExOp is necessary since alternatives need to be transformed into a single proposition.

Depart from Castroviejo Miró and represent ExOp syntactically. Intonation of *some*-exclamatives marks the presence of ExOp.

(34)



To a first approximation, ExOp structures the set of alternatives so that they are ordered by unexpectedness. But, it also crucially asserts an attitude towards the most unexpected proposition (MAX(P)).

(35) $$[\![ExOp]\!] = \lambda P_{\langle st,t\rangle} \forall p \forall p' \left[\begin{array}{c} P(p) \wedge P(p') \wedge \\ p <_{\text{unexpected}} p' \vee p' <_{\text{unexpected}} p \wedge \\ \mathbf{attitude}_j(\text{MAX}(P)) \end{array}\right]$$

On **attitude**:

- Attitudes need holders, so **attitude** is indexed to a judge j (a la Lasersohn (2005)).
- Evidence that this is judge-dependent comes from embedded *some*-exclamatives, as in (36). Being able to embed is a hallmark of judge-dependent, but not expressive, content.

(36) a. John thinks that Mary is some lawyer! (attitude holder: John)
b. Mary thinks that the Catcher in the Rye is some story! (attitude holder: Mary)

(37) Bill said that he has to mow the damn lawn. (attitude holder: speaker only)

5.5 At-issue vs. not at-issue content

Main predication (roughly "John is a lawyer") doesn't seem to be the at-issue content: as a *some* exclamative cannot answer the questions about who an individual is, as in (38).

(38) A: Who is John?
B: *John is some lawyer!

Question-answer pairs suggest that degrees or particular subkinds are also not what is at-issue in *some* exclamatives.

(39) A: How bad/good of a lawyer is John?
B: *John is some lawyer!

(40) A: How fun is this wedding?
B: *This is some wedding!

Not that *some* exclamatives can never answer questions: they must answer questions relating to the attitude held by the speaker instead.

(41) A: What do you think of this wedding?
B: This is some wedding! (The food's cold, there's a cash bar, ...)

On the analysis proposed, these contrasts begin to make sense.

- Main component of ExOp is assserting an ordering over propositions and an attitude towards a proposition.
- Particular subkind that the subject instantiates is hidden away in the alternatives.
- Likewise, the attribution of lawyerhood (to give an example) is also hidden away in the alternatives
- Support for attitude being asserted, and not presupposed or expressive.

6 Conclusion

Big picture:

- Draw parallels between the semantics of *some*-exclamatives and other types of exclamatives.
- Analysis of *some*-exclamative builds on independently motivated insights about indefinites and epistemic indefinites.
- Analyze *some*-exclamatives and wh-exclamatives as having a common core: alternative semantics.
- Source of alternatives is the epistemic indefinite *some*, with alternatives varying with respect to the subkind of the NP that *some* combines with.
- Additional support for question-theory of exclamatives.

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