

“That was some talk!”: An 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 the structure of exclamatives, in particular, pointing out a case where degrees and kinds seem to be related
- Thinking about ways in which pejorativity might be grammatical present

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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) #This is *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 *a* 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 particular 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} , *DI*, to a new domain, *D2*, such that
- $\llbracket S \rrbracket^{w,D2} - \llbracket S \rrbracket^{w,DI} \neq 0$ and
 - $\forall x \forall y [(x \in DI \ \& \ y \in (D2 - DI)) \rightarrow x < y]$

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

- (15) a. $\llbracket S \rrbracket^{DI} = \left\{ \begin{array}{l} \text{John eats jalapeños,} \\ \text{John eats serranos,} \\ \text{John eats poblanos} \end{array} \right\}$

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

Widening the set now includes the proposition *John eats habaneros*.

3.2 Question theory + degree theory

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

$$(16) \left\{ \begin{array}{l} \text{John eats } d1\text{-P things,} \\ \text{John eats } d2\text{-P things,} \\ \text{John eats } d3\text{-P things,} \\ \vdots \\ \text{John eats } dn\text{-P things} \end{array} \right\}$$

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 in my analysis will be most closely in the spirit of question-like approaches to exclamative sentences.

4 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?

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

- (19) 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

Intuitive flavor of many of these proposals: *some* requires the possibility of having a property hold true of more than one individual.

Where we're going:

- Use epistemic indefiniteness of *some* in constructing exclamative meaning
- 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 and imposes an ordering on them.

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

NPs that do not have clear, well-established kinds are odd in *some* exclamatives.

- (20) ??This is some green bottle!
- (21) #John is some local lawyer!
- (22) #John is some person from the next room!

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

- Zamparelli (2000): kind predication is low (syntactically speaking) within the 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 (23).
- *R* is a realization relation that is true just in case *y* is an instantiation of the kind *x* (Carlson, 1977).

$$(23) \quad \llbracket \text{lawyer} \rrbracket = \lambda x_k \lambda y [R(y, x) \wedge \text{lawyer}(x)]$$

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.

$$(24) \quad \llbracket \text{real estate} \rrbracket = \lambda x_k [\text{real-estate}(x)]$$

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

$$(25) \quad \text{If } \alpha \text{ is a branching node and } \beta \text{ and } \gamma \text{ are the node's daughters, and } \beta \text{ is type } \langle k, t \rangle \text{ and } \gamma \text{ is type } \langle k, et \rangle, \text{ then } \llbracket \alpha \rrbracket = \lambda x_k \lambda y [\llbracket \gamma \rrbracket(x)(y) \wedge \llbracket \beta \rrbracket(x)]$$

(adapted from McNally & Boleda (2004))

$$(26) \quad \llbracket \text{real estate lawyer} \rrbracket = \lambda e_k \lambda y [R(y, x) \wedge \text{lawyer}(x) \wedge \text{real-estate}(x)]$$

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

A first approximation of *some* is as in (27), where *k* is a kind. This asserts that there is some kind such that the nominal applies to it.

$$(27) \quad \llbracket \text{some} \rrbracket = \lambda P_{\langle k, et \rangle} \lambda x \exists k [P(k)(x)]$$

Building on work on epistemic indefinites, I'll assume that *some* introduces a set of alternatives. The epistemic effect will be generated by the constraint in (28).

$$(28) \quad \text{Anti-singleton condition: } \textit{some NP} \text{ must have at least two members.}$$

Weir (2012) also provides evidence that *some* can interact with subkinds.

Adapting (27) to be alternative sensitive, we get (29).

$$(29) \quad \llbracket \text{some} \rrbracket = \{f : \exists k \text{ s.t. } f = \lambda P_{\langle k, et \rangle} \lambda x [P(k)(x)]\}$$

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 (30))

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

$$(30) \quad \text{Hamblin Function Application}$$

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

Example in (31). The final line is a set of propositions such that John instantiates some subkind of being a lawyer.

$$(31) \quad \text{John is some lawyer (no exclamation)}$$

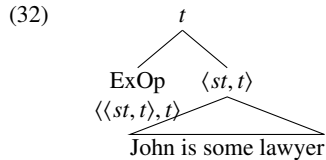
- $\llbracket \text{lawyer} \rrbracket = \{\lambda x_k \lambda y [R(y, x) \wedge \text{lawyer}(x)]\}$
- $\llbracket \text{some lawyer} \rrbracket = \{f : \exists k \text{ s.t. } f = \lambda y [R(y, k) \wedge \text{lawyer}(k)]\}$
- $\llbracket \text{John} \rrbracket = \{j\}$
- $\llbracket \text{John is some lawyer} \rrbracket = \{f : \exists k \text{ s.t. } f = [R(j, k) \wedge \text{lawyer}(k)]\}$

5.4 Role of intonation

Assumption: intonation marks the presence of a morpheme necessary for exclamative interpretation.

- Intonation assigned a special status in other theories, such as in Castroviejo Miró (2008).
- Role of morpheme will be to impose ordering over set of alternatives.

Morpheme (call it ExOp) must be high in the tree, in order to gain access to the set of alternatives.



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 ($\text{MAX}(P)$).

$$(33) \quad \llbracket \text{ExOp} \rrbracket = \lambda P_{\langle st, t \rangle} \forall x \forall y \left[\begin{array}{c} P(x) \wedge P(y) \wedge \\ x <_{\text{unexpected}} y \vee y <_{\text{unexpected}} x \wedge \\ \text{attitude}_j(\text{MAX}(P)) \end{array} \right]$$

Attitudes need holders, so **attitude** is indexed to a judge j (a la Lasersohn (2005)).

5.5 Degree readings with *some* exclamatives

Gradable nouns (*idiot*) naturally get degree-like readings with *some* exclamatives. (34) seems to comment on the degree of idiotness or degree of jerkiness.

$$(34) \quad \begin{array}{ll} \text{a.} & \text{He is some idiot!} \\ \text{b.} & \text{John is some jerk!} \end{array}$$

Suggestion:

- These types of nouns do not come out of the lexicon with kind arguments
- Instead have degree arguments
- This is roughly the proposed of Morzycki (2009), de Vries (2010), and others.

$$(35) \quad \llbracket \text{idiot} \rrbracket = \lambda d \lambda x [\mu_{\text{idiot}}(x) = d]$$

Some can combine with relations of both $\langle k, et \rangle$ and $\langle d, et \rangle$. This suggests that we need a generalized type for both degrees and kinds. This will be called o .

$$(36) \quad D_o = D_k \cup D_d$$

New type for *some*: $\langle \langle o, et \rangle, et \rangle$ (modulo Hamblin). This involves very little actual change to the current proposal:

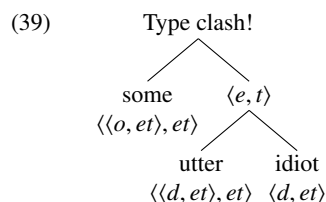
- Existential quantification in *some* merely involves quantifying over D_o rather than D_k
- Alternatives are propositions that vary with respect to degrees.

Prediction: *Some* should compete with nominal degree words (*utter*, *total*) if we treat these words as functions from gradable noun means to properties ($\langle \langle d, et \rangle, et \rangle$).

$$(37) \quad \begin{array}{ll} \text{a.} & \text{He is an utter idiot!} \\ \text{b.} & \text{This is a total disaster.} \end{array}$$

This seems to be true: *some* cannot be present when these adjectives are used.

$$(38) \quad \begin{array}{ll} \text{a.} & * \text{He is some utter idiot!} \\ \text{b.} & * \text{This is some total disaster!} \end{array}$$



A connection between degrees and kinds?

- Behavior of *some* could suggest that degrees and kinds are closely related to each other.
- Not necessarily new in exclamatives: Castroviejo & Schwager (2008) argue that nominal exclamatives show that degrees and kinds are closely related, taking degrees to be equivalence classes of individuals.
- Anderson & Morzycki (2015), Scontras (2014) also note parallels between degrees/amounts and kinds.

5.6 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* exclamation cannot answer the questions about who an individual is, as in (40).

- (40) 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.

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

- (42) 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 instead.

- (43) 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 asserting 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

6 Interesting lingering problems

6.1 Pejorativeness

Pejorative use possible in (44), but preferred (and maybe even obligatory) in (45).

- (44) John is some lawyer!
a. He always wins his cases and does lots of pro bono work.
b. He loses every case and still charges a lot.
- (45) Some lawyer John is!
a. #He always wins his cases and does lots of pro bono work.
b. He loses every case and still charges a lot.

Where does the pejorative sense come from? Is there some way of deriving it compositionally?

6.2 Some targeting the adjective

In some cases, *some* seems to be able to target the adjective, and comment on an unexpected degree of the gradable property.

- (46) This is some healthy meal.
- (47) (*Said at a colloquium dinner when the lettuce in the salad wasn’t wilted*)
Wow, this is some crispy lettuce!

But, *some* modifying adjectives is normally impossible.

- (48) a. *John is some tall.
b. *I need a glue that is some sticky in order to get this to stay together.

How does *some* get access to the adjective in the *some* exclamation, if that is what is going on?

6.3 Referential uses?

Although the main uses of *some* exclamatives seem to be predicative, there are some marginal referential uses. Example:

- (49) (*Students are given the chance to read a book for class, and John chose Syntactic Structures.*)
John picked out some book!

But, not always available.

- (50) #Some friend showed up at work today!

7 Conclusion

Work in progress, but a few things:

- Makes a new connection between kinds and exclamatives, which isn't usually remarked upon (but see Schwager 2009 for another connection between kinds and exclamatives in a different domain).
- Some additional support for a question-like theory of exclamatives
- But, not really questions: exclamatives are instead in the business of structuring sets of propositions

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