Kinds, epistemic indefinites, and *some* exclamatives

Curt Anderson
Heinrich-Heine-Universität Düsseldorf, SFB 991

Sinn und Bedeutung 21
September 6th, 2016

Introduction

Exclamatives comment on some extreme or unexpected property.

(1) a. What a large watermelon!
b. How beautiful the birds sing!

(2) The peppers he eats!

Most work on exclamatives in English has focused on these wh-exclamatives and nominal exclamatives.

Introduction

Israel (1999, 2011): exclamative construction making use of the determiner *some*.

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

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

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

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

Some-exclamatives

Israel (1999, 2011):

- First notes their existence
- But, sets them aside to look at other uses of *some*
- Hypothesizes that the exclamative nature is related to *some*'s nature as an attenuator.

Roadmap

The goal: Provide an analysis of *some*-exclamatives that depends on independent semantic/pragmatic properties of *some*, as hypothesized by Israel.

Where we're going:

1. Previous theories of exclamatives
2. Argue for a connection between *some* and previous theories of exclamatives.
3. Provide an analysis based on independent properties of *some*, motivated by *some*'s status as an epistemic indefinite.
4. Argue that *some*-exclamatives involve reference to kinds.

Some-exclamatives

Basic data

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b. That was some wine we brought to the party.
c. *Gulliver’s Travels* is some book.

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- Typically predicative.
- Lack of an *a*(*n*)exclamative. Properties of *some* are crucial for building exclamative meaning.

Is this an exclamative?

Zanuttini & Portner (2003) note three semantic/pragmatic features of exclamatives.

- Inability to function in question/answer pairs
- Factivity
- Scalar implicature (noteworthiness)

These features are also exhibited by *some*-exclamatives.

Zanuttini & Portner (2003): Q/A Pairs

Question/Answer Pairs: *Some*-exclamatives are difficult to use in answering a question, even though they have semantic content that could in principle answer the question.

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

(9) A: What does John do for a living?
B: *John is some architect!

Zanuttini & Portner (2003): Factivity

Factivity: *Some*-exclamatives are factive in that they presuppose that the NP applies to the subject.

(10) A: Man, John is some friend.
B: Hey, wait a minute! I didn't know you were friends with John.

Zanuttini & Portner (2003): Scalar implicature

Scalar Implicature: *Some*-exclamatives comment on something noteworthy or surprising.

Is this an exclamative?

Zanuttini & Portner's features are similar ones proposed by Michaelis & Lambrecht (1996).

(11) Semantico-pragmatic properties of the abstract exclamative construction

a. presupposed open proposition
b. scalar extent
c. assertion of affective stance: expectation contravention
d. identifiability of described referent
e. deixis

Previous work on exclamatives

Theories of exclamatives

Lots of analyses of exclamatives. A few styles of approaches to exclamatives (not exhaustive):

- Embedding Approach (Abels, 2005)
- Degree Approach
  (Rett, 2011; Castroviejo Miró, 2006)
- Question Approach
  (Gutiérrez-Rexach, 1996; Zanuttini & Portner, 2003)

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(13) amazing(how tall you are)

An issue: *Some*-exclamatives do not embed under *amazing*. Difficult to say that amazement predicate provides exclamative flavor.

(14) *It's amazing John is some friend!

Degree Approach

Exclamatives are degree constructions on par with other degree constructions like comparatives (Castroviejo Miró, 2006; Rett, 2011). Make use of covert gradable property.

(15) a. What desserts John baked!
b. The places John visited!

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(15) a. What desserts John baked!
b. The places John visited!

(16) a. What *G* desserts John baked! (*G*=delicious)
b. The *G* places John visited! (*G*=exotic)

Degree Approach

One issue: *Some* has a scalar notion inherent to it—quantity. But, *some*-exclamatives never get a quantity interpretation.

(17) *That was some wine we drank! It would've filled buckets!

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(17) *That was some wine we drank! It would've filled buckets!

This is in contrast to nominal exclamatives, which can get a quantity interpretation.

(18) The wine we drank! It would've filled buckets!

Question Approach

Examples: Gutiérrez-Rexach (1996); Zanuttini & Portner (2003)

Assume a Hamblin-Karttunen style question semantics is at work in exclamatives (Hamblin, 1973; Karttunen, 1977).

(19) Semantics of a question

$$[\![\textit{Who came to the party?}]\!] = \left\{ \begin{array}{c} \text{Mary came to the party,} \\ \text{Bill came to the party,} \\ \text{Bob came to the party,} \\ \ldots \end{array} \right\}$$

Question Approach: Exclamative Operator

Gutiérrez-Rexach 1996 assumes an exclamative operator that asserts an emotive attitude (surprise, disgust, ...) towards a proposition.

(20) Let a be the speaker, w a world (typically the actual world), p a proposition, and $P \in EMOT$ (the set of emotive properties). Then, $EXC \stackrel{\text{def}}{=} \boldsymbol{\lambda} a \boldsymbol{\lambda} w \boldsymbol{\lambda} p_{\langle s,t\rangle} \exists P_{\langle s,\langle st,et\rangle\rangle} [P(w)(p)(a)]$

Question Approach: Widening

Zanuttini & Portner (2003) take sentence to denote set of propositions, but widening rather than exclamative operator is responsible for exclamative meaning.

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Question Approach: Widening

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(22) What peppers he eats!

$$\left\{ \begin{array}{c} \text{he eats poblanos,} \\ \text{he eats serranos,} \\ \text{he eats jalapeños} \end{array} \right\} \subset \underbrace{\left\{ \begin{array}{c} \text{he eats poblanos,} \\ \text{he eats serranos,} \\ \text{he eats jalapeños,} \\ \text{he eats habaneros} \end{array} \right\}}_{\text{widened set}}$$

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A problem: These theories play on an obvious similarity between questions and exclamatives. What similarity does *some* have to a question?

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Claim: *Some*-exclamatives are best analyzed with a Question Theory, based on independently motivated assumptions about indefinites and *some*.

Indefinites and *some*-exclamatives

Indefinites and alternatives

Alternative semantics, the semantics of questions, has been used in the analysis of indeterminate pronouns in Japanese and German (Kratzer & Shimoyama, 2002) and Spanish epistemic indefinites (Alonso-Ovalle & Menéndez-Benito, 2003).

(And see also AnderBois 2011 for similar thoughts in Inquisitive Semantics.)

Examples

(23) Kratzer & Shimoyama (2002)

a. $[\![dare]\!]^{w,g} = \{x : \textbf{human}(x)(w)\}$

b. $[\![nemutta]\!]^{w,g} = \{\lambda x \lambda w'.\textbf{slept}(x)(w')\}$

c. $[\![dare\ nemutta]\!]^{w,g} =$
$\{p : \exists x[\textbf{human}(x)(w) \wedge p = \lambda w'.\textbf{slept}(x)(w')]\}$

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

Epistemic indefinites

What are epistemic indefinites?

- Indefinites that impose restricts on the speaker regarding their knowledge of the referent.
- Canonical English case: unreduced *some*
- Contrast with other indefinites in requiring (rather than merely allowing) uncertainty

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(25) A: Some cabinet minister has been shot!
B: #Who?

(26) A: A cabinet minister has been shot!
B: Who?

Analyzing *some*

A semantics for *some*

Model *some* as introducing a set of alternatives, a la Kratzer & Shimoyama (2002). Kratzer & Shimoyama-style analysis:

(27) $[\![\textit{some professor}]\!]^{w,g} = \{x : \textbf{professor}(x)(w)\}$

(28) $[\![\textit{some professor is dancing on the table}]\!]^{w,g}$
$= \{p : \exists x[\textbf{professor}(x)(w) \wedge p = \lambda w'.\textbf{dance}(x)(w')]\}$

Difference between *a* and *some*

Issue: This doesn't model a difference between the singular indefinite *a* and *some*!

Need an additional constraint for *some*.

Modeling the ignorance component of *some*

How to model the ignorance component of *some*?

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Whatever has a similar epistemic flavor to *some* (the speaker doesn't care or know the identity of the referent).

(29) There's a lot of garlic in whatever (it is that) Arlo is cooking.

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Adapt proposal from von Fintel (2000).

Modeling *some*

von Fintel (2000) reformulates Dayal (1997)'s analysis of *whatever*:

(30) whatever(w)(F)(P)(Q) (Analysis D')

a. presupposes: $\exists w', w'' \in F : \iota x.P(w')(x) \neq \iota x.P(w'')(x)$

b. asserts: $\forall w' \in F : Q(w')(\iota x.P(w')(x))$

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Whatever statements:

1. Presuppose that the speaker cannot identify the referent of the free relative.
2. Assert that some property Q holds of the referent.

Some as alternative generator

Modeling *some*:

- Useful insight in semantics of *whatever*: presupposition of more than one individual satisfying a description (across worlds).
- Adapt this intuition so that *some* also constrains alternatives.

Adapting the analysis

How to adapt the analysis of *whatever*:

- *Some* is constrained to always generate at least two alternatives.
- Encoded as a presupposition of *some*.
- Ignorance arises via implicature.
- See also Weir 2012 for a related proposal for *some* based on Alonso-Ovalle & Menéndez-Benito 2010.

Interlude: Kinds and *some*

Arguments for kinds in *some*-exclamatives

Some-exclamatives invoke reference to kinds at some level.

Argument 1: NPs without kinds

Some evidence.

- Carlson (1977) argues that reference to a kind requires an well-established kind.
- Some NPs such as *green bottle*, *person from the next room*, and *non-Methodist* do not have well-established kinds associated with them.

(31) *People in the next room are widespread.

Argument 1: NPs without kinds

It is odd to use these in *some*-exclamatives.

(32) a. ??This is some green bottle!
b. #John is some person from the next room!

(33) ??He is some non-Methodist!

Argument 2: Post-nominal adjectives

More evidence come from adjectives like *visible* and *navigable*. Only have stage-level interpretations post-nominally (Bolinger, 1967; Larson & Marušič, 2004).

(34) a. the stars visible (stage-level only)
b. the rivers navigable (stage-level only)

(35) a. the visible stars (stage-level or individual-level)
b. the navigable rivers (stage-level or individual-level)

Argument 2: Post-nominal adjectives

Some-exclamatives resist these adjectives post-nominally, but allow them prenominally.

(36) a. This is some navigable river! (We barely made it to the river mouth alive!)
b. *This is some river navigable!

(37) a. These are some visible stars! (I can barely see them, and I know where to look!)
b. *These are some stars visible!

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b. *These are some stars visible!

Also consistent with *some*-exclamatives invoking reference to a kind.

Kinds independently with *some*

Weir (2012) also independently argues for *some* involving reference to kinds.

(38) a. I saw some contraption in the copy room this morning.
b. I came home to find some plant growing through a hole in my wall.
c. Doctor, some growth appeared on my arm. Should I be worried?

Kinds in *some*-exclamatives

NP semantics

Assume that common NPs denote properties of kinds (and their subkinds) (Zamparelli, 1995; Gehrke & McNally, 2013, a.o.)

(39) $[\![car]\!] = \lambda x_k.\mathbf{car}(x_k)$

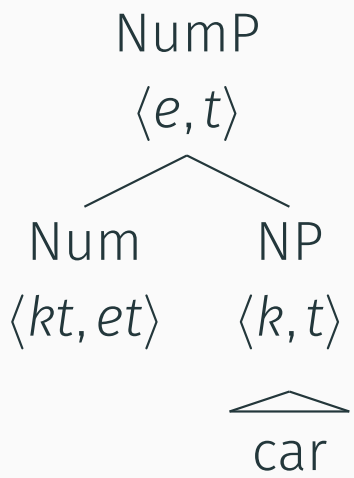
For instance, *car* is a property of the CAR kind, as well as subkinds such as SPORTSCAR, BMW, CLOWN CAR and so on.

NP semantics

Articulated DP structure with a NumP dominating NP.

Num is the locus for shifting kinds to individuals (Gehrke & McNally, 2013; Déprez, 2005).

(40)



NP semantics

Lexical items of category Num (such as the singular indefinite article and *some*) minimally do the following:

- Provide existential closure over kinds
- Relate kind to instantiating individual (R relation; cf. Carlson (1977)).
- Singular indefinite as well as *some* are of the category Num.

(41) $[\![[_{NumP}\ [_{NP}\ car]]]\!] = \lambda y \exists x_k\, [\mathbf{car}(x_k) \wedge R(y, x_k)]$

What do the alternatives range over?

Analyze alternatives in *some*-exclamatives as ranging over subkinds of the kind denoted by the NP.

(42) $[\![\textit{John is some lawyer}]\!]$
$= \{p' : \exists x_k \text{ s.t. } p' = [R(\mathbf{j}, x_k) \wedge \mathbf{lawyer}(x_k)]\}$

Exclamative operator

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- Orders the alternatives the sentence denotes using some salient ordering (noteworthiness, unlikeliness, surprise, ...)
- Expresses attitude towards extreme proposition.

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(43) $$[\![\textit{Ex-Op}]\!] = \lambda P \left[\begin{array}{c} \text{there is a salient ordering} \\ \text{among the propositions in } P \text{ and} \\ \textsc{attitude}(\textbf{speaker})(\textsc{max}(P)) \end{array} \right]$$

Presence of exclamative operator marked with exclamative intonation.

Additional consideration: What kinds of kinds?

Assume that kinds are involved, but caveat: doesn't correspond to intuitive notion of kind.

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(44) (*Background: John is a pet insurance lawyer.*)
#Wow, John is some lawyer!

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Cannot exclaim about subtype of lawyer. Rather, one must exclaim about John's behavior as a lawyer (loses cases often, doesn't know the law).

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Possibility: *Some*-exclamative is an expression of what the speaker considers normal members of the kind to be like (cf. d'Avis 2016).

Wrap-up

Taking stock

What does the picture look like now?

- *Some*-exclamatives have in common with other exclamatives an alternative semantics.
- Alternatives come from independently motivated constraints to model ignorance requirements of *some*.
- Argued that kinds play a role in *some*-exclamatives.
- Analyzed *some*-exclamatives as involving an attitude to the particular subkind that the subject is instantiating.

Unfinished business

Many facets to explore:

- Nature of pejorativity and why a pejorative interpretation is obligatory in certain syntactic configurations.
- How to more precisely state the alternatives invoked and how they are ordered
- Exploring lexical semantic differences among classes of NPs.

Thank you!

Acknowledgements: Marcin Morzycki, Alan Munn, Cristina Schmitt, Alan Beretta, Ai Taniguchi, Sebastian Löbner, Willi Geuder, Katja Gabrovska, and audiences at SWAMP 2015 and LSA 2016.

Email: andersc@hhu.de
Website: curtanderson.github.io

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Appendix

Appendix: Obligatory pejorativity

In-situ variant allows neutral (a) or pejorative (b) interpretation.

(45) 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.

Preposed variant only allows pejorative (b) interpretation.

(46) 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.

Appendix: *Some*-exclamatives in argument position

Some-exclamatives can sometimes be used in argument position.

(47) John picked some book to read!

One analysis: raise type of *some* from $\langle e, t\rangle$ to $\langle\langle e, t\rangle, t\rangle$ using typeshift from Partee 1987.

However, some impossible cases are still predicted to be good.

(48) *Some book is sitting on the table!

Appendix: Lexical differences among NPs

Lexical semantics of the NP matters for interpretation.

(49) John is some lawyer! (behavior-based)

(50) This is some cake! (quality-based)

(51) This is some knife! (quality-based or behavior-based)

Appendix: Normalcy in *some*-exclamatives

d'Avis (2016): Considers generic sentences in part to express a conception of normalcy on the part of the speaker.

Proposal: Draw up alternatives based on speaker's conception of what is an (ab)normal property for the kind denoted by the NP to hold.