**The Role of Focus in the Interpretation of Exclamative Sentences**

1. **Theoretical Background:** Most, if not all, of the analyses of exclamative sentences (some examples in (1)) propose a direct semantic or syntactic connection between exclamatives and partial (i.e. wh-) questions. For example, Zanuttini & Portner (2003) (Z&P) propose that the class of exclamatives (EXCs) is entirely defined by two properties: 1) EXCs contain a wh-operator-variable structure and 2) EXCs contain an abstract morpheme F in the CP domain (Z&P (2003:2)). They argue that the wh-operator gives rise to a set of alternative propositions, the likely answers to the interrogative version of the sentence (Hamblin (1973); Groenendijk, & Stokhof (1984)). Then, through a pragmatic inference process triggered by the abstract factive morpheme F, exclamatives widen this set so that it includes not only likely answers, but also extreme, or unexpected ones. In this paper, we argue that the presence of wh-operators in exclamatives simply an instantiation of a more general process through which exclamatives with the properties observed by Z&P can be formed. In particular, we claim that any lexical item or grammatical feature whose semantic function is to introduce sets of alternative propositions could be used in the construction of exclamative sentences. To argue this point, we present a case study of a language that does not have wh-exclamatives, Quebec French. We show that, in the absence of a wh-operator, another grammatical feature, focus, performs a similar role in creating expressions that are interpreted in a very similar manner to the wh-exclamatives seen in languages such as English and Standard French.

2. **The Data:** We present new data on the system of EXCs in Quebec French (QF). Unlike Standard French (SF), that has exclusively Wh-exclamatives (Milner (1978)), we show that exclamatives in this language can take one of two forms: Firstly, a focused degree adverb such as tellement ‘so much’, trop ‘too much’, assez ‘enough’ etc. can be inserted into the left periphery of the DP shell or the vP shell (2a). Alternatively, a focused swear word, such as ostie ‘lit. eucarest’, tabarnak ‘lit. tabernacle’ etc. can be inserted before the complementizer que ‘that’ (i.e. into the left periphery of CP), and the sentence following que keeps its canonical affirmative word order (2b). We first show that, despite their lack of wh-morphology, these two constructions (adverbial exclamatives and swear-word exclamatives) meet Z&P's semantic criteria for identifying EXCs: factivity, scalar implicature, and inability to function in question/answer pairs. As shown in (3), adverbial exclamatives may only be embedded under a factive verb like savoir ‘to know’, not se demander ‘to wonder’. Swear-word exclamatives may not be embedded at all. Additionally, as shown in (4), both classes of exclamatives introduce a non-defeasible conventional scalar implicature that the proposition(s) they denote lie at the highest end of a scale, in these cases, the scale of ‘prettiness’. Finally, using both types of exclamatives as answers to partial questions is bizarre (5). We therefore conclude that these constructions with focused degree quantifiers and focused swear-words have a similar semantics and pragmatics to wh-exclamatives, and propose an analysis that shows how their interpretations can be derived in the absence of wh-operators.

3. **The Analysis:** Following a Rooth (1985)-style semantics for focus, we propose that focusing the degree quantifier in an expression P introduces a set of propositions into the computation. This is the set of the alternatives to P, which are derived by replacing the focused constituents of P with their alternatives on an implicational scale, in this case, a scale of degree quantifiers (approx. (6)). As known since Horn (1972), the use of a particular element Q on a scale pragmatically implies that propositions containing elements higher up on the scale than Q are false. We therefore propose that the primary set of propositions in an EXC created by focus contains the expression itself and its lower scalar alternatives. Just as it widens the first set of propositions in wh-exclamatives, we propose that the presence of the morpheme F widens the set of alternatives to include the alternatives with degrees on the higher end of the scale. Thus, under our analysis, the QF exclamative Jean a TELLEMENT vu une belle fille! expresses the same set of propositions as the English How very beautiful the girl that Jean saw is!. Furthermore, we propose that the derivation of swear-word exclamatives proceeds in the same way. We show that, while it is often difficult to assign a meaning to a swear-word in isolation, in the vast majority of their uses, QF swear-words function as degree adverbs (7). Therefore, when it is focused, ostie also introduces a set of propositions that is widened to include propositions about extreme degrees of prettiness. We conclude that, contrary to most current thought on the matter, wh-morphology in exclamatives is simply a side effect of a semantics and pragmatics based on alternatives.
(1)  a. How very tall Paul is! (English)  
b. Combien Paul est grand!/Que Paul est grand! (Standard French; Milner (1978:265))  
   How many Paul is tall / What Paul is tall = 'How very tall Paul is!'  
c. Que alt que és en Pau! (Catalán; Castroviejo Miró (2006:3))  
   What tall that is the Paul = 'How very tall Paul is!'  

(2)  a. Jean a vu TELLEMENT une belle fille! Jean a TELLEMENT vu une belle fille!  
   Jean has seen SO a beautiful girl Jean has SO seen a pretty girl  
   'Jean saw such a pretty girl!/How very pretty a girl Jean saw!'  
b. OSTIE qu'il est beau!/ TABARNAK qu'il est beau!  
   Ostie that he is handsome/ Tabarnak that he is handsome  
   'How very handsome he is!'  

(3)  a. Marie sait que Jean a TELLEMENT vu une belle fille!  
   Mary knows that Jean has SO seen a pretty girl  
   'Mary knows that Jean has seen such a pretty girl! Mary knows how pretty a girl Jean saw!'  
b. *Marie se demande si Jean a TELLEMENT vu une belle fille!  
   Mary reflex. ask if Jean has SO seen a pretty girl  
   'Mary wonders if Jean has seen such a pretty girl!/ Mary wonders how pretty a girl Jean saw!' 

(4)  a. ??Jean a TELLEMENT vu une belle fille!...mais elle était pas extrêmement belle  
   Jean has SO seen a pretty girl...but she was not extremely pretty  
   'How very pretty a girl Jean saw!...but she wasn't extremely pretty…'  
b. ??Ostie que Jean a vu une belle fille!...mais elle était pas extrêmement belle  
   Ostie that Jean has seen a pretty girl...but she was not extremely pretty  
   'How very pretty a girl Jean saw!...but she wasn't extremely pretty…'  

(5)  a. Q: Jean, il est grand comment?  A: ?Jean, c'est TELLEMENT un grand gars!  
   Jean, he is tall how? Jean, it is SO a tall guy  
   Q: 'How tall is Jean?'' A: ?How very tall Jean is!  
b. Q: Jean, il est grand comment?  A: ?OSTIE qu'il est grand, Jean!  
   Jean, he is tall how? Ostie that he is tall, Jean  
   Q: 'How tall is Jean?' ' A: ?How very tall Jean is!  

(6)  <pas de tout, un peu, pas mal, assez, tellement, extrêmement, totalement, trop…>  
   '<not at all, a bit, a fair bit, enough, so, extremely, totally, too…>’  

(7)  a. J'ai dormi en ostie la nuit passée! / J'ai dormi en tabarnak la nuit passée!  
   I have slept in ostie the night last / I have slept in tabarnak the night last  
   'I slept a lot last night!'  
b. C'est un ostie d'idiot!/ C'est un tabarnak d'idiot!  
   It is a ostie of idiot/ It is a tabarnak of idiot  
   'He's a big idiot!'  

References


1 While syntactically QF adverbial exclamatives are more like the English degree fronting construction such a Adj N, they are semantically and pragmatically more akin to English wh- exclamatives, so we will often put Wh-EXCs as English glosses.