

Verb Movement in German Exclamatives – from syntactic underspecification to illocutionary force

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The paper addresses the question to what extent syntax determines the interpretation of a sentence in terms of its illocutionary force value. It is a wide-spread assumption that the C-domain hosts syntactic features like [interr], [decl], [excl] etc. and that V-C movement (and subsequent movement of other phrases) applies in order to satisfy the syntactic requirement that these features be valued – ignoring for the moment the differing technical executions. However, such an approach makes it difficult to capture those cases where the sentence form mismatches with its interpretation. E.g. a declarative like *He comes for sure* can be used as a Y/N question if an appropriate rising intonation is used. On the other hand, a clause like *who is coming* can never be used as a declarative, i.e. an assertion. This asymmetry can hardly be explained in a theory that intertwines the syntax and the semantics in such a rigid way as the theories alluded to above.

We will take the opposite view and suggest that verb-movement to the C-domain is not triggered by syntactically represented Force-features in C; instead, V-C-movement is only a syntactic precondition for the various components of the grammar to access the interpretive layer of the structure to force a certain interpretation. There is one well-known case where a further syntactic operation leads to a Force-value, namely the additional movement of a wh-phrase to Spec-CP. Following Cheng (1991), we assume that in this case the clause is syntactically typed, leading to an unambiguous question interpretation. But if there is no further syntactic operation, we would expect that the resulting verb-initial (V1) structure is systematically ambiguous. And this is in fact the case: V1-structures can be either Y/N questions or exclamatives; in German and Icelandic even a particular type of declarative. The claim is thus that V1-structures are syntactically underspecified w.r.t. their interpretation and only by invoking non-syntactic means (intonation, or a certain lexical choice), these structures can be disambiguated. In this sense, syntax hands over "premature" structures to the interfaces.

We will base the following discussion on German and we will concentrate on Y/N questions vs. (wh-less) V1-exclamatives. German allows exclamatives with verb-movement quite readily, (1-2). Since V1-structures (1) are canonically interpreted as Y/N questions, it seems quite plausible at first sight that they are merely 'pragmatically re-interpreted', cf. Huddleston (1993). This fits (at first sight) very well with the analysis of exclamatives as being 'based' on questions: indeed, Z & P (2003) suggest that the operation of widening is also operative in verb-initial exclamatives, but that widening covers in this case only the opposite truth-value. But such an account cannot capture the data: First, this analysis implies that the person in (1a) normally does the opposite to the described event. This is not true for (1a); instead the emphasis is on the degree of the activity. Second, there is no way to derive the fact that e.g. a 'neutral' motion verb does not allow a V1-exclamative; however as soon as there is a (gradable) manner component expressed, the construction is fine; thus, the degree component is indispensable for an exclamative interpretation, cf. Rett (2006). Third, the addition of certain particles (4a), and the use of an article together with a mass noun (4b), renders a Y/N question interpretation impossible but the exclamative interpretation is fine. This shows that it cannot be solely the C-layer which is responsible for the interpretation. Rather there is a conspiracy between V-movement and a certain lexical choice in (4), leading to the respective interpretation. If there are no lexical items of this sort, then only intonation - as a last resort mechanism in the sense that another component of the grammar has to 'step into the breach' - is able to yield an unambiguous interpretation. But the syntactic structure itself is ambiguous, lending the hypothesis above further empirical justification. In sum, the interaction of various components is responsible for Force-interpretation. However, the weight or the impact of the single components may differ in various languages; this is dependent on the morpho-syntactic situation or the grade of grammaticalization of certain configurations, particles etc. Note for example that the structure in (2b) is unambiguously exclamative. (2a) is ambiguous between exclamative and interrogative (although only with an interpretation of *how* as manner *how* still it is ambiguous). The discussion of the status of (2b) in the German grammar will build the last part of the paper. We will suggest that in this case, there is nevertheless no spec-head-agreement between *was* and the finite verb. *Was* is a head, base generated in the left periphery, cf. Corver (1990), leading to a syntactic configuration that is obviously uniquely connected to the exclamative interpretation. Note that there is no argumental base for *was* and therefore no ambiguity of the sort found in (5) arises. The

discussion of further properties of *was* and its connection to the degree component will finish the paper.

Examples and References

- (1) a. Hat der sich aufgeregt!
has he REFL. fussed
How he fussed!
b. Schnarcht der!
snores he
How he snores!
- (2) a. Wie bist du gross geworden!
how are you big become
How big you became!
b. Was ist der viel gereist!
What is he much travelled
How much he has travelled! (in his life)
- (3) a. *Ist der nach Hause gelaufen! (fine as a question)
is he to home walked
b. Ist der nach Hause gerannt!
is he to home run
- (4) a. Ist der aber gewachsen *? !
Is he but grown
b. Hat der ein Glück *? !
Has he a luck
- (5) Was hat die schön gesungen ? !
what has she nicely sung
How nice she sang!
What did she sing nicely?

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