

# The semantics and pragmatics of *some*-exclamatives

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# Introduction

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Exclamatives comment on some extreme or unexpected property.

- (1) a. What a large watermelon! (wh)
- b. How beautiful the birds sing! (wh)
  
- (2) The peppers he eats! (nominal)
  
- (3) Aren't you happy! (negative inversion)

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

## Introduction

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

- (4) Boy, was she (ever) some dancer!  
“She was a dancer and she was an exceptional dancer.”
- (5) That was some wine she brought to the party!  
“She brought wine to the party and it was very good wine.”
- (6) Some friend she turned out to be!  
“She was a friend and she was a particularly poor friend.”
- (7) It’s going to be some party!  
“We’re having a party and it’s going to be a great party.”

## Some-exclamatives

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Israel (1999, 2011):

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

I offer an analysis of *some*-exclamatives that's in the same spirit as Israel's intuition.

## Basic data

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*Some*-exclamatives are defined by several properties:

- Noteworthiness or scalar extremity (already noted)
- Necessity of “exclamative intonation”. No exclamative reading without intonation.

- (8)
- a. John is some lawyer.
  - b. That was some wine we brought to the party.
  - c. *Gulliver’s Travels* is some book.

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

## Is this an exclamation?

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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.

**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.

(9) A: How good of a lawyer is John?

B: \*John is some lawyer!

(10) A: What does John do for a living?

B: \*John is some architect!

**Factivity:** *Some*-exclamatives are factive in that they presuppose that the property denoted by the NP holds of the subject.

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



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

## Is this an exclamative?

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

- (12) 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 (utterance is anchored to speech-time and speaker)

## Previous work on exclamatives

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# Theories of exclaimatives

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A few styles of approaches to exclaimatives (not exhaustive):

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

# Embedding Approach

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No need for a separate theory of exclamatives, if we are able to account for examples of embedded exclamatives.

(13) It's amazing how tall you are!  
                                  embedded exclamative

## Embedding Approach

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Analyze root exclamative as deriving from application of amazement predicate.

(14) amazing(how tall you are)

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

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

## Degree Approach

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Exclamatives are degree constructions on par with other degree constructions like comparatives (Castroviejo Miró, 2006; Rett, 2011).

Make use of covert gradable property.

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

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

**Problem:** *Some* has a scalar notion inherent to it in some cases: quantity. But, *some*-exclamatives never get a quantity interpretation.

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

This contrasts with nominal exclamatives, which allow a quantity interpretation.

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



## Question Approach

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Gutiérrez-Rexach (1996) and Zanuttini & Portner (2003) assume a Hamblin-Karttunen style question semantics for exclamatives (Hamblin, 1973; Karttunen, 1977).

The meaning of a question is a set of propositions corresponding to possible answers (alternatives).

$$(20) \quad \llbracket \textit{Who came to the party?} \rrbracket = \left\{ \begin{array}{l} \text{Mary came to the party,} \\ \text{Bill came to the party,} \\ \text{Bob came to the party,} \\ \dots \end{array} \right\}$$

## Question Approach: Exclamative Operator

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

- (21) 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,  $EXC \stackrel{\text{def}}{=} \lambda a \lambda w \lambda p_{\langle s,t \rangle} \exists P_{\langle s, \langle st, et \rangle \rangle} [P(w)(p)(a)]$

## Question Approach: Widening

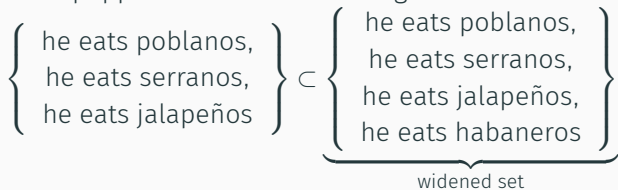
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Zanuttini & Portner (2003) take exclamative sentences to denote set of propositions, but widening operation is responsible for exclamative meaning.

$$(22) \quad \text{What peppers he eats!} = \left\{ \begin{array}{l} \text{he eats poblanos,} \\ \text{he eats serranos,} \\ \text{he eats jalapeños} \end{array} \right\}$$

## Question Approach: Widening

(23) What peppers he eats! + widening =



## Question Approach

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

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

## Indefinites and *some*-exclamatives

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Some types of linguistic phenomenon are argued to involve reference to sets of propositions (alternatives).

- Semantics of questions (Hamblin, 1973; Karttunen, 1977)
- Focus (Rooth, 1985, 1992)
- Question-theories of exclamatives (Zanuttini & Portner, 2003)

# Indefinites and alternatives

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Treat indefinites as denoting sets of alternatives:

- Indeterminate pronouns in Japanese (*wh-ka* series) and German (*irgend-* series) (Kratzer & Shimoyama, 2002)
- Spanish epistemic indefinite *algún* (Alonso-Ovalle & Menéndez-Benito, 2003)
- Related move made for indefinites in Inquisitive Semantics (AnderBois, 2011).
- Indefinite raises issue of which alternative(s) are true.

Alternative semantics for indefinites is the link between exclamatives and *some*.



(24) Kratzer & Shimoyama (2002)

a.  $\llbracket \text{dare} \rrbracket^{w,g} = \{x : \text{human}(x)(w)\}$

b.  $\llbracket \text{nemutta} \rrbracket^{w,g} = \{\lambda x \lambda w'. \text{slept}(x)(w')\}$

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

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

$$(25) \quad \llbracket \text{some professor is dancing on the table} \rrbracket^{w,g} \\ = \{p : \exists x[\mathbf{professor}(x)(w) \wedge p = \lambda w'.\mathbf{dance}(x)(w')]\}$$

However, this representation doesn't distinguish *some* from *a*.

## Some is an epistemic indefinite

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*Some* differs from the indefinite *a* in being an epistemic indefinite.

- Indefinites that impose restricts on the speaker regarding their knowledge of the referent.
- Contrast with other indefinites in requiring (rather than merely allowing) uncertainty

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

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

Need additional constraints to differentiate *some* and *a*.

## Modeling the ignorance component of *some*

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How to model the ignorance component of *some*?

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

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

Adapt proposal from von Stechow (2000).

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

- (29)  $\text{whatever}(w)(F)(P)(Q)$  (Analysis D')
- presupposes:  $\exists w', w'' \in F : \lambda x.P(w')(x) \neq \lambda x.P(w'')(x)$
  - asserts:  $\forall w' \in F : Q(w')(\lambda x.P(w')(x))$

*Whatever* statements:

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

## Some as alternative generator

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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

How to adapt the analysis of *whatever*:

- Sentences with *some* are constrained to always have at least two alternatives.
- Encoded as a presupposition of *some*.
- Ignorance in the canonical use of *some* arises via implicature.
- In exclamative environment, no implicature arises.

## Kinds in *some*-exclamatives

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## Arguments for kinds in *some*-exclamatives

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*Some*-exclamatives invoke reference to kinds at some level.

1. NPs without well-established kinds
2. Post-nominal adjectives



## Argument 1: NPs without kinds

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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.

(30) \*People in the next room are widespread.

## Argument 1: NPs without kinds

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

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

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

## Argument 2: Post-nominal adjectives

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More evidence come from adjectives like *visible* and *navigable*. Only have stage-level interpretations post-nominally (Bolinger, 1967; Larson & Marušič, 2004; Leffel, 2014).

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

## Argument 2: Post-nominal adjectives

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

- (35) a. This is some navigable river! (We barely made it to the river mouth alive!)  
b. \*This is some river navigable!
- (36) a. These are some visible stars! (I can barely see them, and I know where to look!)  
b. \*These are some stars visible!

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

## Kinds independently with *some*

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

- (37)
- 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?

Examples are argued to express ignorance about the relevant subkind, not an individual.

# Analysis

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

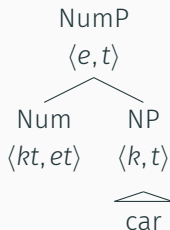
$$(38) \quad \llbracket car \rrbracket = \lambda x_k. \mathbf{car}(x_k)$$

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

Articulated DP structure with a NumP dominating NP.

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

(39)





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).

(40)  $R(y, k) \rightsquigarrow y$  is an instantiation of kind  $k$

- Claim: Singular indefinite as well as *some* are of the category Num.

(41)  $\llbracket \llbracket \text{NumP } \llbracket \text{NP car} \rrbracket \rrbracket \rrbracket = \lambda y \exists x_k [\text{car}(x_k) \wedge R(y, x_k)]$

## What do the alternatives range over?

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

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

## Number of alternatives

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*Some* is constrained so that sentences using *some* include at least two alternatives.

(43) Anti-singleton condition: The set of alternatives for a sentence containing  $\llbracket \textit{some NP} \rrbracket$  must have at least two members.

- This condition is used by *some* in its canonical use to derive ignorance.
- Used here to ensure at least two alternatives (more on this in a second).

These alternatives feed to an exclamative operator that applies to the sentential core of the *some*-exclamative.

## Exclamative operator

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Exclamative operator is the difference between an ordinary assertion using *some* and *some-exclamative*.

- Scalar extremeness comes from exclamative operator (Castroviejo-Miró, 2012)
- Orders the alternatives the sentence denotes using some salient ordering (noteworthiness, unlikeliness, surprise, ...)
- Expresses attitude towards extreme proposition; other propositions backgrounded.

Intonational contour on *some-exclamative* marks presence of this operator.

## Exclamative operator

$$(44) \quad \llbracket \text{John is some lawyer} \rrbracket \\ = \{p' : \exists x_k \text{ s.t. } p' = [R(\mathbf{j}, x_k) \wedge \text{lawyer}(x_k)]\}$$

$$(45) \quad \llbracket \text{Ex-Op} \rrbracket = \lambda P \left[ \begin{array}{l} \text{there is a salient ordering} \\ \text{for } P \text{ and} \\ \text{ATTITUDE}(\mathbf{speaker})(\text{MAX}(P)) \end{array} \right]$$

$$(46) \quad \llbracket \text{Ex-Op}(\text{John is some lawyer}) \rrbracket = \\ \left[ \begin{array}{l} P = \{p' : \exists x_k \text{ s.t. } p' = [R(\mathbf{j}, x_k) \wedge \text{lawyer}(x_k)]\} \text{ and} \\ \text{there is a salient ordering} \\ \text{for } P \text{ and} \\ \text{ATTITUDE}(\mathbf{speaker})(\text{MAX}(P)) \end{array} \right]$$

**Why *some*?** Exclamative operator requires a non-trivial set of propositions to form a scale. Anti-singleton condition ensures this.

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*.
- Kinds play a role in *some*-exclamatives as being what varies in the alternatives.
- Analyzed *some*-exclamatives as involving an attitude to the particular subkind that the subject is instantiating.

A couple puzzles...

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## Puzzle 1: Obligatory pejorativity

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

- (47) 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.

- (48) 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.



## Puzzle 2: Notion of 'kind' in *some*-exclamatives

Perhaps *some*-exclamative doesn't track standard notion of kind very well.

(49) Some knife this is!

- a. It couldn't even cut this banana!
- b. #It has a wooden handle!
- c. #It's made of ceramic!

(50) Some doctor he is!

- a. He couldn't diagnose my athlete's foot!
- b. #He's a foot specialist!

Tracking something closer to properties characteristic of a kind?

## Puzzle 2.5: *Some*-exclamatives × Lexical semantics

Lexical semantics of NP not very well studied with exclamatives. But, interactions do exist.

- (51) a. What a doctor!  
b. Boy, isn't he a doctor!

(Ai Taniguchi, p.c., forthcoming)

*Some*-exclamatives seem to exclaim about different characteristic properties, depending on NP.

(52) This is some knife! (event)

(53) He is some doctor! (event)

(54) This is some cake! (physical properties)

## Wrap-up

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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.

Many facets left to explore:

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

# Thank you!

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# Appendix

## Appendix: *Some*-exclamatives in argument position

*Some*-exclamatives can sometimes be used in argument position.

(55) 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.

(56) \*Some book is sitting on the table!

## Appendix: What kinds of kinds?

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

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

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).

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

## Appendix: Lexical differences among NPs

Lexical semantics of the NP matters for interpretation.

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

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

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

## Appendix: Plurality and *some*

Issue: Ignorance implicature only arises when *some*-NP is singular.

- (61) Some professors are dancing on the table, namely Prof. Jones and Prof. Smith!

## Appendix: Characteristic properties

Characteristic properties typeshift (Beller, 2013):

$$(62) \quad \llbracket \text{char} \rrbracket = \lambda P \lambda x \lambda i. \text{MOST}_y \text{MOST}_z [P(y) \wedge \neg P(z) \rightarrow \exists Q [Q(y) \wedge \neg Q(z) \wedge Q(x) \text{ at } i]]$$