The semantics and pragmatics of some-exclamatives

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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.
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

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.
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.

- 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.
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
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)
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

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!
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!*

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

(20) \[ \text{Who came to the party?} = \{ \text{Mary came to the party,} \]
\[ \text{Bill came to the party,} \]
\[ \text{Bob came to the party,} \]
\[ \text{…} \]
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, 

\[
EXC \overset{\text{def}}{=} \lambda a \lambda w \lambda p \langle s, t \rangle \exists P \langle s, \langle st, et \rangle \rangle [P(w)(p)(a)]
\]
Zanuttini & Portner (2003) take exclamative sentences to denote set of propositions, but widening operation is responsible for exclamative meaning.

(22) What peppers he eats! = \{ he eats poblanos, he eats serranos, he eats jalapeños \}
(23) What peppers he eats! + widening =

\[
\{ \text{he eats poblanos,} \\
\text{he eats serranos,} \\
\text{he eats jalapeños} \} \subseteq \{ \text{he eats poblanos,} \\
\text{he eats serranos,} \\
\text{he eats jalapeños,} \\
\text{he eats habaneros} \}
\]

widened set
**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
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

Treat indefinites as denoting sets of alternatives:

- Indeterminate pronouns in Japanese (\textit{wh-ka} series) and German (\textit{irgend-} series) (Kratzer & Shimoyama, 2002)
- Spanish epistemic indefinite \textit{algún} (Alonso-Ovalle & Menéndez-Benito, 2003)
- Indefinite raises issue of which alternative(s) are true.

Alternative semantics for indefinites is the link between exclamatives and \textit{some}.
Kratzer and Shimoyama (2002)

(24)  

\[ \begin{align*}
\text{a. } & \llbracket \text{dare} \rrbracket^{w,g} = \{x : \text{human}(x)(w)\} \\
\text{b. } & \llbracket \text{nemutta} \rrbracket^{w,g} = \{\lambda x \lambda w'. \text{slept}(x)(w')\} \\
\text{c. } & \llbracket \text{dare nemutta} \rrbracket^{w,g} = \\
& \{p : \exists x [\text{human}(x)(w) \land p = \lambda w'. \text{slept}(x)(w')]\}\end{align*} \]
A semantics for *some*

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

\[(25) \quad \llbracket \text{*some professor is dancing on the table*} \rrbracket_w^g = \{p : \exists x [\text{professor}(x)(w) \land p = \lambda w'. \text{dance}(x)(w')]\}\]

However, this representation doesn’t distinguish *some* from *a*.
Some is an epistemic indefinite

*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*. 
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 Fintel (2000).

(29)  \( \text{whatever}(w)(F)(P)(Q) \)  

(Analysis D’)

a. presupposes: \( \exists w', w'' \in F: \text{i}x.P(w')(x) \neq \text{i}x.P(w'')(x) \)

b. asserts: \( \forall w' \in F: Q(w')(\text{i}x.P(w')(x)) \)

*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

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
Some-exclamatives invoke reference to kinds at some level.

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

(30) *People in the next room are widespread.*
Argument 1: NPs without kinds

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

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

_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*

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

\[
\text{[car]} = \lambda x_k. \text{car}(x_k)
\]

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.

\[(39)\]

\[
\begin{array}{c}
\text{NumP} \\
\langle e, t \rangle \\
\text{Num} \\
\langle kt, et \rangle \\
\text{NP} \\
\langle k, t \rangle \\
\text{car}
\end{array}
\]
Lexical items of category Num (such as the singular indefinite article and *some*) minimally do the following:

- Provide existential closure over kinds

\[(40) \quad R(y, k) \rightarrow y \text{ is an instantiation of kind } k\]

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

\[(41) \quad \llbracket [\text{NumP} \ [\text{NP} \ car]] \rrbracket = \lambda y \exists x [\text{car}(x) \land R(y, x)]\]
Analyze alternatives in *some*-exclamatives as ranging over subkinds of the kind denoted by the NP.

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

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.
(44) \[[John is some lawyer]\]
\[\{p' : \exists x_k \text{ s.t. } p' = [R(j, x_k) \land \text{lawyer}(x_k)]\}\]

(45) \[[Ex-Op] = \lambda P \quad \begin{bmatrix}
\text{there is a salient ordering} \\
\text{for } P \text{ and} \\
\text{ATTITUDE(speaker)}(\text{MAX}(P))
\end{bmatrix}\]

(46) \[[Ex-Op(John is some lawyer)] = \]
\[p' : \exists x_k \text{ s.t. } p' = [R(j, x_k) \land \text{lawyer}(x_k)]\] \text{ and} \\
\text{there is a salient ordering} \\
\text{for } P \text{ and} \\
\text{ATTITUDE(speaker)}(\text{MAX}(P))

**Why some?** Exclamative operator requires a non-trivial set of propositions to form a scale. Anti-singleton condition ensures this.
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*.
- 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...
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.
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
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 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 $⟨e, t⟩$ to $⟨⟨e, t⟩, t⟩$ 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).
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!
Characteristic properties typeshift (Beller, 2013):

\[(62) \quad \text{char} = \lambda P \lambda x \lambda i. \text{Mosty Mostz}[P(y) \land \neg P(z) \to \exists Q[Q(y) \land \neg Q(z) \land Q(x) \text{ at } i]]\]