THE CHARACTERIZATION OF EXCLAMATIVE CLAUSES: PRESUPPOSITION, NEGATION, AND QUESTION-ANSWER PAIR

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Abstract: This paper aims at presenting three of the characteristics identified in the case of exclamatives, namely presupposition, negation and the incapacity to function as answers in the question-answer minimal pair. Due to the fact that this type of clause was often disregarded in the Romanian grammars, the purpose of the article is to prove that there are some features which contribute to the establishment of an autonomous status of the exclamatives. The quoted studies illustrate that there are many divergent opinions concerning the status of this type of clause but also numerous similarities which are yet to be exploited.

Keywords: exclamative, semantic, presupposition, negation, answers

1. Introduction

The attempt to describe the exclamative clauses is a laborious process due to the complexity which characterizes them. Although the exclamatives are discussed separately in the Romanian syntactic context, they are often presented as being dependent on the other clause types due to the similarities occurred both in structure and use.

Mainly it is recognized the fact that the exclamatives are characterized by an affective dimension. Therefore the locator expresses an attitude towards an event which surprised him or violated his expectations. However this pragma-semantic approach is not sufficient to establish an autonomous status for this clause type. In most of the Romanian grammars the exclamative constructions were mainly referred to in terms of punctuation, by the presence of the exclamation mark. This type of clause was either described in a sketchy way – largely compared with other types of clauses – or was not considered a type of clause to begin with.

Therefore, the status of these sentences is somehow ambiguous while their distinctive role from a syntactic and discursive perspective is questioned.

However, recently, the focus is on describing the exclamative clauses in point of their syntax, semantic content, and their function. This comprehensive approach is based on several particularities identified by Zanuttini and Portner (2003), Beyssade (2009), Burnett (2009), Sæbø (2010), Rett (2011), Giurgea (2015) among others.

In this article I will debate upon three of these properties that were considered to be specific for the category of exclamatives, namely *presupposition*, *negation*, and *the impossibility of functioning as answers*. The reason for selecting these characteristics relies on the fact that they determine a wider description of the exclamative clauses, and they overcome the initial perspectives in which the criteria taken into account were reduced to the exclamation mark and the semantic feature [+affective].

2. Presupposition

Despite their apparently conflicting opinions, authors like Beyssade (2009), Abels (2010), Giurgea (2015) admit that the *presupposition* represents the propositional content in the case of exclamative constructions. In a pragmatic approach of the exclamatives, Beyssade (2009: 2) operates with the concept of presupposition in order to distinguish between exclamatives and declaratives; in exclamatives the speaker utters a presupposition as opposed to the certainty expressed by means of

declaratives. Furthermore, she introduces a supplementary distinction between *exclamations* and *exclamatives*, in point of speech acts: "An exclamative type is a linguistic form, associated with syntactic features. As for exclamations, they describe a type of semantic content or a type of speech act." This statement enables two directions of analysis: the linguistic approach in the case of *exclamatives,* and the pragmatic perspective in the matter of *exclamations*.

However, this bipolarity highlights the idea according to which the exclamative clauses have autonomy, since they can be interpreted by taking into account both their construction and content. In what follows, I will adopt Beyssade's distinction and I will operate with the two terms, exclamative and exclamation, in the appropriate context.

The presupposition approach is also supported by Abels (2010), who develops this idea by stating that, according to this criterion, the exlamatives can be characterized by factivity. In other words, the author emphasizes the fact that from this type of clause is triggered the truth-value as it is understood by the speaker: "`the propositional content` is inherently presupposed" (Abels, 2010: 6).

Within the same frame, Marandin (2008) presents veridicity as a *sine qua non* condition in exclamatives. This relies on the speaker's commitment, marked by subjectivity, and also by the association with factive emotive predicates (Abels, 2010), and within embedded exclamatives:

(1) John is amazed at what a good student he is.

In example (2), surprize and emotion expressed by the verb can be updated by means of presupposition, and thus violate the addressee's expectations (Abels 2004):

(2) John is surprised by Diana's family.

The construction can be interpreted both in terms of the number of family members, and in terms of the qualities attributed to each member. The exceeding of the hearer's expectations illustrates another feature of exclamatives, namely the membership of the gradable expressions.

> „Exclamatives, unlike declaratives, presuppose that the proposition expressed is mutually known by speaker and hearer. The presupposed proposition is one which involves a *scalar degree*. The degree itself is not mutually presupposed; the speaker purports to know it, but assumes that the hearer does not, since the speaker`s purpose in exclaiming is to inform the hearer that the degree in question is extreme." (Michaelis 2001 in Merin and Nikolaeva, 2008:12)

In addition, unlike the assertive constructions, the exclamatives can provide a piece of information that was already uttered, without introducing any news in conversation: "Presupposition can contain information that has been previously uttered." (Driemel, 2015:412). This situation explains the phenomenon of "accommodation" (Grimshaw 1979, *apud* Merin and Nikolaeva, 2008: 41) which defines exclamations as being the subjective approach to something that is certain.

The presupposition represents a key concept in the Romanian literature as well: "conținutul propozițional al exclamativelor este presupus, nu asertat" [1](Giurgea 2015:266). However it is remarkable the presence of perception verbs when formulating embedded exclamatives. These, in this case, can introduce a new information in communication without altering the expressive dimension of the clause like (3):

(3) "Să vezi ce rochie frumoasă și-a luat Mariana!" (Giurgea 2015:268). / Wait to see what a beautiful dress Mariana bought!

[1] The propositional content of the exclamatives is presupposed, not asserted.

The example uses the verb *to see* "al cărui sens literal presupune accesul independent al ascultătorului la informație"[2] (*Idem, ibidem*), but the subordinate clause is an exclamative since it can be identified based on several aspects: affective, subjective, and evaluative. Thus, within the Romanian context the ambiguity is enabled by the use of embedded exclamatives when introducing a new piece of information in communication. Yet, this is disentangled by the presence of evaluation. The commitment of the speaker and his subjective interpretation cannot be summited to a denial.

Throughout presupposition, the exclamatives clearly oppose to declaratives, whose value of truth can be contested easily. This aspect will be debated in what follows in point of negation.

3. Negation

Negation was widely discussed in the context of exclamatives. Unlike declaratives, exclamative clauses meet the criterion of factivity by relating to a personal evaluation made by the speaker as far as an event is concerned. Therefore, the starting point is represented by the truth-value that the speaker considers to be relevant for communication. Since the construction is subjective and implies the speaker's presupposition, in this respect, its predicate cannot be negated (Zanuttini și Portner 2000).

A distinction should be made here, between negating the content and negating the presupposition. As Abels (2010) pointed out, the content can be indirectly negated by using an adverbial phrase such as *not really*, but not the subjective presupposition of the speaker.

Chernivoskaya (2012) stresses that even though the content of an exclamative can be denied to a certain extent, it is impossible to diminish its emotive and expressive attitude:

(4) A: How tall Dana is!

B: *Not really*, Dana wears heels.

The fact that exclamatives are incompatible with negation relies on the pragmatic feature of „double illocutionary life" (Marandin 2008). In a dialogue, the utterance of a speaker who does not necessarily expects an answer, cannot be combated. In such contexts, exclamatives cannot appear in a question-answer minimal pair.

Negation can occur in interrogative exclamations like (5) ("questions in form and exclamations by function", see Quirk et al. 1985:825) and often it triggers the approval of the hearer.

(5) **Isn't** she **pretty**!

Extremely expressive, the Romanian case is marked by a powerful illocutionary force rendered by negation within the exclamative. The use of negation and specialized exclamative word (-*wh* words) suggests an extreme degree of the event in question or a large quantity that surprized or amazed the speaker (Giurgea 2015:272), like (6), (7), and (8). Needless to say that these constructions are accompanied by inversion to highlight the remarkable character and also that the astonishing actions cannot be completely perceived by the speaker or his interlocutor, and that is more convenient to list the things that the subject did not rather than those he did. In English this matter can be formulated using the verb at the positive form and a determiner for quantity.

(6) Ce **n-a văzut** băiatul ăsta, la viața lui! / *The many things he saw!*

(7) Ce **n-a cântat**! / *The many songs he sang!*

(8) **Unde n-a fost**, vara trecută! / *The numerous places he visited the previous summer!*

[2] whose literal meaning presupposes the independent access of the hearer to the information

The negation, as mentioned above, is accompanied by the precence of exclamatory words, or these words can appear autonomously but receiving a negative connotation. For example adverbs like *where* and *how* which lose their basic meaning, of rendering location and modality, and they gain an expressive charge. In these situations they are used to convey intensity or to introduce a subjonctive in rethorical exclamatives like (9), (10), and (11).

(9) **Unde n-**a fost plimbată, și tot nu e mulțumită! / *The many places she's visited and she is still unhappy.*

(10) **Cum** să uit eu cheile?! / *How could I've forgotten the keys?!*

(11) **Cum** să mai dau eu ochii cu el?! / *How could I face him again?!*

4. The impossibility to function as answers

The property of the exclamatives that prevents them to function as answers in communication has been widely commented upon in the literature (Zanuttini și Portner (2003), Miró (2007), Beyssade (2009), Burnett (2009), Sæbø (2010), Rett (2011), and Giurgea (2015)).

(12) "*What did she buy*? / *What a beautiful present she bought*!" (*apud* Giurgea 2015:7)

In spite of their grammaticality, constructions like (12) and (13) do not satisfy the pragmatic dimension of interrogatives, thus faulting the maxim of quality concerning speech acts. The reason relies on two features of the exclamatives: subjectivity and the semantic feature [+affective]. From a pragmatic point of view, questions are used to request pieces of information, a condition unfulfilled by exclamatives which imply commitment and a subjective attitude. In the same context, they cannot be used as questions either: "Wh- exclamatives do not make questions because they do not have the appropriate intonation and because they do not have the grammatical markers that are associated with lack of speaker commitment" (Miró, 2010:7)

(13) A: What time is it?

B: *How fast time passes by!

Within the same angle of investigation – to find an explanation for the incapacity of exclamatives to receive an answer – Chernilovskaya et al. (2012) take into account the concepts of *confirmation* and *acceptance*. The former implies that the hearer is familiar with the event discussed and can share the speaker's attitude without confirming it in terms of content. The latter explains a discrepancy between the exclamatives and other types of acceptance replies. In this case, the hearer does not know the event and takes the observations as such:

(14) A: What a crowd!

B: #Oh! #Okay!" (*apud* Chernilovskaya et al. 2012:113)

The *"yeah responses"* identified within the same context are counted as the partial acceptance of the hearer, namely the *audience challenge*. In this regard, the content of an exclamative can be contested, however its expressive dimension cannot. In addition, there is the case of *lying* by means of which an

exclamative construction cannot be directly considered false form a descriptive or expressive point of view.

However, there is an exception corresponding to this criterion. Due to language productivity, many cases of exclamatives which were used as indirect answers (or comments) were identified in the literature. Although the requirement of providing pieces of information is not fulfilled, from a pragmatic point of view, constructions like (15) and (16) are considered to be exclamatives:

(15) A: Do you think I will find a job?

B: How naive you are! (*apud* Zevakhina 2013: 162)

(16) A: Do you think this lecture is going to help us?

B: Hm! The questions she asks!

An exceptional case is represented by the Romanian language where exclamatives can function in some communication situations as interrogatives (17). The speaker's attitude is transmitted throughout the expressivity of exclamative constructions, but in point of description, a piece of information is indirectly requested. This context cannot be interpreted as being purely interrogative since it is characterized by the feature [+ affective] and it involves the speaker's commitment and subjectivity. A similar message can be rendered by means of an embedded exclamative introduce by an optative, but illocutionary force is diminished by the fact that an answer on behalf of the hearer is not necessarily expected (18), (19).

(17) **Vreau** să știu cine te-a influențat! / I want to know who influenced you!

(18) **Aș vrea** să știu cine te-a influențat! / I wish I knew who influenced you!

(19) **Mi-ar plăcea** să știu cine te-a influențat. / I would like to know who influenced you!

4. Conclusions

Up to this point, the opinions concerning the description of exclamatives in terms of the three characteristics taken into account seem rather divergent and the difficulty relies on finding the particular features that exclamatives possess. As pointed out above, there are situations in which the exclamatives partially overlap the structure of declaratives or interrogatives.

However, the exclamative clauses are distinguishable in point of their affective component and their expressive force. Despite their similarity with the interrogatives with respect to word order, the function of the exclamatives is different. Furthermore, even though they do not possess a particular prosody the communication context determines their taxonomy.

The three characteristics approached – presupposition, negation, and question-answer pair – prove that there is an increased concern for establishing an autonomous status of these construction and their integration among the other types of clauses: declarative, interrogative, and imperative.

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