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What I will tell you about Russian *wh*-"exclamatives"!

Background *Wh*-exclamatives like (2) (hf. Type 2 sentences) are ungrammatical in English, unlike the *wh*-exclamatives in (1) (hf. Type 1 sentences) or embedded *wh*-interrogatives in (3).

(1) How smart she is! / What a terrible friend you are! *Type 1*

(2) *Who came! / *What I am about to tell you! *Type 2*

(3) Look who came! / You won't believe what I am about to tell you!

Rett (2011) treats this as evidence that exclamatives (as a sentence type; cf. declarative/interrogative/imperative exclamations) must have degree interpretations. Nouwen & Chernilovskaya (2015) (N&C) claim Type 2 sentences are grammatical in several languages, including Russian. They (i) assume that both Type 1 & 2 sentences are matrix *wh*-exclamatives and (ii) argue that both involve comparison with other items placed on a scale, but said scale can rank individuals by the degree to which they have a certain property (Type 1) or events involving the *wh*-referent by their noteworthiness (Type 2), (iii) concluding that languages differ on if exclamatives can have both types of scalar readings and which *wh*-items can participate in which reading.

This paper contests N&C's claims at least for Russian, arguing that: (i) Russian Type 2 sentences are not matrix exclamatives, but interrogatives embedded under a complex mirative predicate exponed prosodically (i.e., syntactically, they are akin to the English sentences in (3)); (ii) Type 1, but not Type 2 sentences in Russian involve comparison with grammatically evoked ranked alternatives. Thus, (iii) at least English and Russian differ only in whether they have that prosodically exponed mirative predicate in their lexicon.

Type 1 vs. 2 in Russian Indeed, Russian allows strings of both Type 1 (in (4)) and Type 2 (in (5)):

(4)
a. Kakaja (že) ona umnaja!
   what.ADJ (KONTR) she smart
   'How smart she is!'

b. Do čego (že) on naglyj!
   to what.N (KONTR) he audacious
   'How audacious he is!'

c. Kak (že) on menja dostal!
   how (KONTR) he me reached
   'How fed up I am with him!'

(5)
a. Kto (*že) prišël!
   who (*KONTR) came
   ≈'[Look] who came!'

b. Kuda (*že) my poedem!
   to-where (*KONTR) we will-go
   ≈'[You won't believe] where we are going!'

c. Čto (*že) ja sejčas rasskažu!
   what.N (*KONTR) I now will-tell
   ≈'[You won't believe] what I am about to tell you!'

However, the differences between the two suggest distinct structures with distinct semantics.

<u>Prosody</u> Type 1 sentences have a falling boundary contour; they mark contrastive focus on the *wh*-item and additional prominence on the predicate associated with it: (6). Type 2 sentences either have a singsongy, mid-plateau boundary contour in (7) or a sharp rise(-fall) one in (8); both bear a nuclear pitch accent on the last lexically stressed syllable and cannot have contrastive focus marking on the *wh*-item (the rising ones can have a different type of prominence on the *wh*-item). Type 2 sentences are also often preceded by vocalizations/interjections (*mmm*, *oj*, gasp, etc.). Note that degree *wh*-items are compatible with Type 2 prosody, but then they also have Type 2 semantics.

(6)

how-audacious
do / če / GO / že / on / NAG / lyj

(7)

oj-what-tell-plateau
OJ / čto / ja / sčas / rass / ka / ŽU

(8)

oj-what-tell-rise
OJ / čto / ja / sej / čas / rass / ka / ŽU

<u>Affect & attitude</u> The primary goal of Type 1 sentences is to express one's immediate emotions towards a proposition about a high degree (cf. utterances whose primary goal is to assert a proposition about a high degree, with an expressive component on the side, e.g., *She's fucking smart/dumb*), which makes them true exclamatives. Said emotions can range from anger to awe, with gradient aspects of prosody reflecting further nuance. The propositional target of this affect can't be truly new information, but is rather presupposed (cf.

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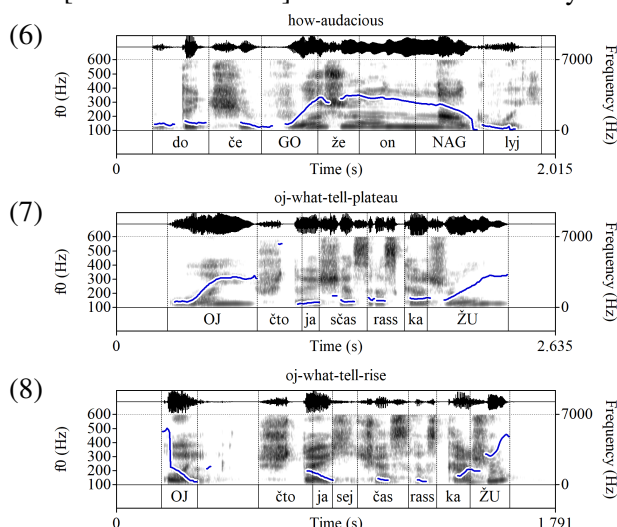
non-expressive emotive predicates presupposing their complement, e.g., *I'm happy/sad that she's very smart*).

In contrast, Type 2 sentences are always uttered in information acquisition contexts, when the speaker either just acquired some piece of information themselves or is about to divulge it to the addressee. The affective component of plateau Type 2 sentences is restricted to mild/pretend amusement of the speaker (e.g., (5a) can be uttered ironically when someone who repeatedly and annoyingly said they were not coming to the party did ultimately show up—in contrast to the embedding interjection in (11), which can in principle convey genuine surprise) or anticipated surprise/excitement from the addressee (e.g., (5b) can be said to a child by a parent about to divulge the destination of their upcoming trip). Rising Type 2 sentences can convey genuine excitement, but both are incompatible with negative emotions. Thus, (9) can't convey strong negative affect, whether uttered with a plateau or a rise—in contrast to Type 1 sentences or the embedding interjection in (12) (note that both (11) and (12) are incompatible with Type 2 sentence prosody). The mild/pretend nature of the affect in plateau Type 2 sentences resembles the "light-heartedness" of the English calling contour (also singsongy and mid-plateau) in (10), analyzed as lack of speaker investment in Jeong & Condoravdi 2017.

(9) Čto sejčas so mnoj proizošlo!
what.N now with me happened
≈'[You won't believe] what just happened to me!'
✓ I ran into a celebrity. ✗ I almost got hit by a truck.

(10) Get well soon! H* !H-L%
✓ The addressee has a light cold.
✗ The addressee is seriously ill.
(Jeong & Condoravdi 2017, (4))

(11) Ogo kto prišël!
INTERJ who came
≈'I can't believe who came!'
(cf. *Wow that she left!* in Zyman 2018)

(12) Pizdec čto sejčas so mnoj proizošlo!
INTERJ.VULG what.N now with me happened
≈'I'm fucking shook by what just happened to me!'
✗ I ran into a celebrity. ✓ I almost got hit by a truck.
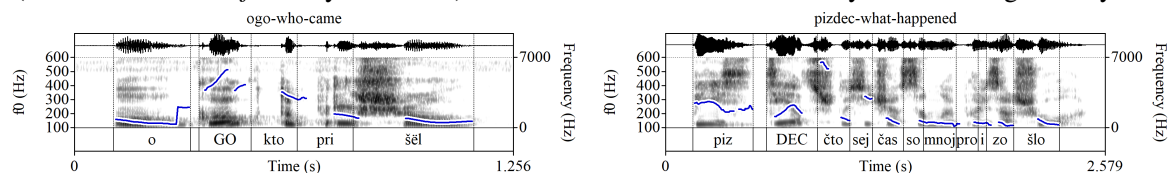
I, thus, claim that, unlike Type 1, Type 2 sentences (both plateau and rising ones) are not matrix *wh*-exclamatives, but interrogatives embedded under a complex mirative attitude predicate exponed prosodically and linked to the speaker or addressee. I will remain mostly agnostic on how the meaning components of this predicate (information acquisition, surprise, lack of speaker investment, etc.) map onto specific sub-exponents.

<u>Kontrast</u> In line with Rett's claim, the exclamative affect in Type 1 sentences is indeed always linked to the degree, i.e., the position on a ranked scale, to which a certain property is instantiated. The scale is evoked via the prominence marking pattern discussed above. The presence of true contrast in Type 1 sentences is further corroborated by their compatibility with the particle *že*, which marks Kontrast, i.e., grammatically evoked contrast (McCoy 2003): (4). In addition to rejecting contrastive focus marking on the *wh*-item, Type 2 sentences are incompatible with *že*: (5). Non-degree *wh*-items are compatible with *že*, though, e.g., in *wh*-questions when the speaker realizes they were mistaken about the (set of possible) answer(s) (here *že* likely marks Kontrast between the speaker's prior epistemic state and the one suggested by the new evidence):

(13) *Someone came in 5 min ago. I was sure it was Nina, but she just texted me that she's still stuck in traffic.*
Kto že togda prišël? \\who KONTR then came \\'Who came then?'

I, thus, claim that Type 2 sentences do not involve comparison of grammatically evoked alternatives, and their "surprise" component should be modeled in terms of exceeding a certain expectation threshold (e.g., Rett & Murray 2013) rather than ranked alternative sets (e.g., Simeonova 2015).

Cross-linguistic implications N&C mostly focus on Dutch. They do discuss some syntactic differences between Type 1 & 2 sentences (noting that the latter "resemble embedded questions", while still maintaining that they are matrix *wh*-exclamatives), but they don't discuss their prosodic or Kontrast-marking properties or any specifics of their affective or attitudinal meaning. Future research should investigate these properties of Type 2 sentences in languages that have been claimed to have them to see how they should be analyzed.

References

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