

The things that we can(not) exclaim!

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- 1 Introduction
- 2 Exclamatives as expressive intensification
- 3 Wh-exclamatives
- 4 Nominal exclamatives
- 5 Outro

The puzzle

English has both *wh*- and nominal exclamatives (e.g., Portner & Zanuttini 2005; Rett 2011):

- (1) a. What (strange) stories Nina tells!
b. The (strange) stories that Nina tells!
≈ 'I am expressing feelings at the very high degree that the stories that Nina tells have on a certain explicit or implicit scale'

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Russian only has wh-, but not nominal exclamatives:

- (2) a. Kakije (strannyje) istorii Nina rasskazyvajet!
what.ADJ (strange) stories Nina tells
'What (strange) stories Nina tells!'
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Note: you can yell DPs in Russian, but such utterances don't have the same degree-based semantics as wh-exclamatives in both languages or English nominal exclamatives, nor do they have a prosody resembling that of Russian exclamatives

This talk in a nutshell

- I propose, partially following Esipova 2021, that both wh- and nominal exclamatives are instances of expressive intensification (akin to *She is damn smart*), with the expressive component of the expressive intensifier promoted to being the primary speech act (not unlike in *Damn she is smart!*)

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- However, while English has a DP-internal expressive intensifier projection and can thus have nominal exclamatives, Russian doesn't and can't
- I am not married to the specific implementation I'll present today, but I like the main insight that the contrast between English and Russian wrt nominal exclamatives is linked to the differences in how the two languages do expressive intensification

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The degree constraint on exclamatives

The degree constraint (e.g., Elliott 1974; Rett 2011): exclamatives (i.e., sentences with a special syntax whose primary goal is to express the speaker's feelings about a preadjacent) **must be about (extreme) degrees** (i.e., positions on an ordered scale, supplied overtly or covertly)

- E.g., in English you can exclaim strings like (3), but not like (4):

- (3) {How smart she is! / What a terrible friend you are!}
'I am expressing feelings about the (very high) degree to which {she is smart / you are a terrible friend}'
- (4) *{Who came! / What I am about to tell you!}
Intended: 'I am expressing feelings about {the person who came (or the fact they came) / the thing I am about to tell you (or the fact that I am about to tell you this)}'

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- In Esipova 2021, I show that:
 - at least in Russian, there are two types of exclamations (broader notion than exclamatives) involving wh-items, with different prosody and semantics/pragmatics
 - and the first type, which I maintain to be true exclamatives, obeys the degree constraint

Esipova 2021: exclamatives as expressive intensification

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- Exclamatives are instances of expressive degree intensification, akin to (5a) and even more obviously (5b), where intensification is done prosodically and/or via gesture (see Esipova 2019a,b, 2022, a.o.), w/the expressive intensifier “promoted to the left periphery with its expressive component thus being the primary speech act”—cf. (5c)

- (5) a. Anya is damn smart.
≈‘Anya is very smart + I am expressing feelings on the side’
- b. Anya is [smart]^{prosody+face-intensification!}
≈‘Anya is very smart + I am expressing feelings on the side’
- c. Damn {Anya is / is Anya} smart!
≈‘I am expressing feelings about the very high degree to which Anya is smart’

Esipova 2021: exclamatives as expressive intensification

- Thus, exclamatives like (6) have the semantics in (7), where:
 - the *wh*-constituent denotes a property of degrees;
 - the E-FORCE operator (term from Rett 2011, but the semantics is different: this one is a permanently promoted expressive intensifier) modifies this property saying that *d* is “extreme”, iota-binds the *d* variable, and outputs an expressive speech act about this *d*
- (6) How smart Anya is!
- (7) $E\text{-FORCE}(\lambda d.\text{smart}(a) = d)$ expresses the speaker's feelings about $\iota d.\text{extreme}(d) \wedge \text{smart}(a) = d$

Updating the story

I preserve the insight from [Esipova 2021](#) that exclamatives involve degree intensification, but instead of having an E -FORCE operator that is an expressive intensifier that has been permanently promoted to the left periphery and does all these diverse things in one step, I propose that:

Updating the story

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- in non-exclamatives containing expressive intensification, this expressive speech act remains a secondary speech act on the side
- exclamatives are formed by moving an expressive intensifier head ExprInt into the left periphery Force projection so that its expressive speech act component becomes the primary speech act while its intensification component remains interpreted in its original position

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Wh-exclamatives in English and Russian

- I follow Esipova 2021 in that in both English and Russian wh-exclamatives, the wh-constituents are relative clauses over degrees (there I provide independent evidence for that from Russian based on which wh-items are used in exclamatives and relative clauses over degrees vs. questions about degrees)

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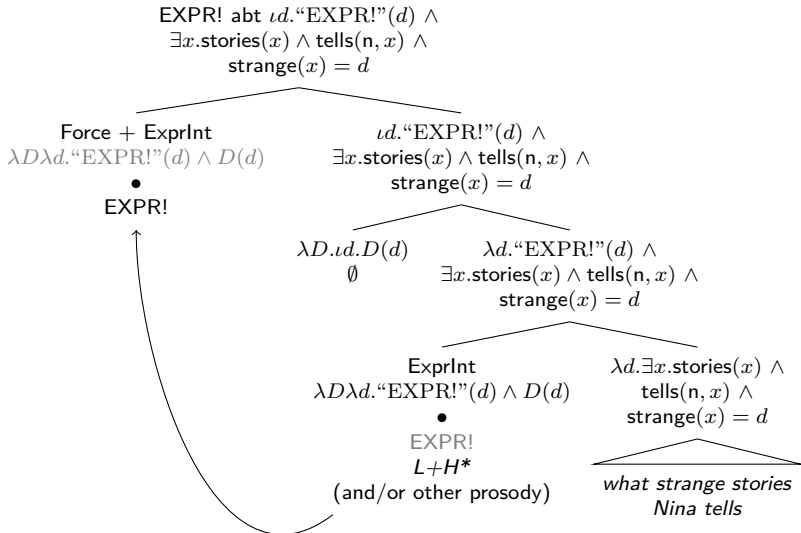
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 - while its degree intensification component remains interpreted in its original position

Wh-exclamatives in English and Russian

(8)



(EXPR! = “expressive speech act”; I adopt the demonstration-based semantics for expressive intensifiers from Esipova 2022, where “EXPR!”(d) means that an instantiation of d warrants an “EXPR!” reaction)

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Nominal exclamatives in English

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(9) He's a damn {coward / fool}.

Possible interpretation: 'He's a {coward / fool} to a "damn"-worthy degree + an expressive speech act on the side'

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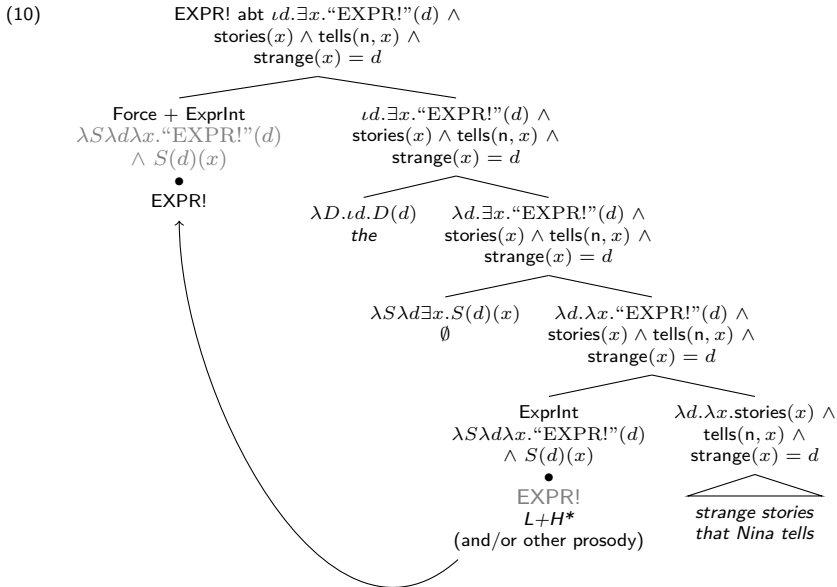
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- But in nominal exclamatives like (1b), it's the individual variable that gets existentially closed off after the degree is intensified, and then *the* iota-binds the degree (not the individual!) variable, the rest of the derivation proceeding similarly to (8)

Nominal exclamatives in English



Lack of nominal exclamatives in Russian

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Lack of nominal exclamatives in Russian

- I propose that unlike English, Russian doesn't have a DP/AdjP/AdvP-internal ExprInt projection
- Russian expressive intensifiers can only modify relative clauses over degrees (again, same wh-items as in exclamatives and relative clauses over degrees, but not in questions about degrees), and their expressive component can also be promoted to be the primary speech act:

- (11) a. On {pizdec, oxuet', s uma sojti} kakoj trus(livyj).
 he Expr what.ADJ coward(ly)
 ≈'He's an "EXPR!"-worthy degree of a coward!'
- b. {Pizdec, Oxuet', S uma sojti} kakoj on trus(livyj)!
 Expr what.ADJ he coward(ly)
 ≈'EXPR! at the "EXPR!"-worthy degree that he's a coward.'

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- Moving forward, would be nice to have more cross-linguistic typological data on (i) presence vs. lack of nominal exclamatives, and (ii) presence vs. lack of DP/AdjP/AdvP-internal expressive intensification (and potentially other things, e.g., presence vs. lack of articles)

Thanks!

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Questions?

More on the lack of nominal exclamatives in Russian

Adding an overt determiner, e.g., a demonstrative, doesn't make nominal exclamatives possible in Russian:

- (12) #{Èti / te} (strannyje) istorii, čto Nina rasskazyvaet!
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Some of the things we can exclaim instead of nominal exclamatives in Russian (other than wh-exclamatives):

(13) Čto za (strannyje) istorii Nina rasskazyvajat!
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(14) Vot tak (*strannyje) istorii Nina rasskazyvajat!
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(15) Nu i (strannyje že) istorii Nina rasskazyvajat!
 INTERJ and/even (strange PRT) stories Nina tells

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Bottom line: you need a clause-y thing for a proper exclamative in Russian

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