

What I will tell you about “matrix” *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! / *Where we are going! Type 2
 (3) Look who came! / You won’t believe where we are going!

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), concluding that (iii) languages differ on if exclamatives can have both types of scalar readings and which *wh*-items can participate in which reading.

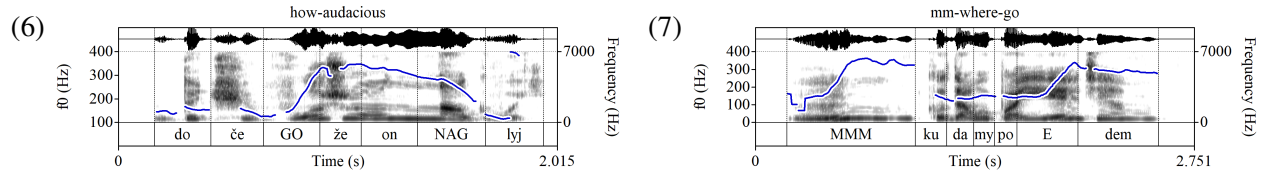
This paper contests N&C’s claims at least for Russian, arguing that: (i) Russian Type 2 sentences are not matrix exclamatives, but interrogatives embedded under a complex mirative predicate expounded prosodically (i.e., syntactically, they are like the English sentences in (3)); (ii) Type 1, but not 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 expounded 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)):

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| <p>(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!’</p> | <p>(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’m about to tell you!’</p> |
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However, the differences between the two suggest distinct structures with distinct semantics.

Prosody and vocalizations 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 often have a singsongy, mid-plateau boundary contour; they bear a nuclear pitch accent on the last lexically stressed syllable and cannot have contrastive focus on the *wh*-item: (7). Also, Type 2 sentences are often preceded by vocalizations/interjections (*mmm*, *oj*, *oo*, simulated gasp, etc.), realized with the same mid-plateau contour.



Affective & attitudinal component The exclamative meaning component of Type 1 sentences is expressive, i.e., it is an immediate, non-truth-conditional expression of emotion, akin to swearing or yelling *Ouch!*, and is, thus, best modeled as a direct manipulation of the context (e.g., Potts 2007). The emotions thus expressed can range from anger to awe, with gradient aspects of prosody (overall pitch height/range, intensity, voice quality, etc.) reflecting further nuance. While surprise can be part of the exclamative affect, and Type 1 sentences are possible in information acquisition contexts, neither is obligatory, i.e., they are not inherently mirative.

In contrast, Type 2 sentences are always uttered when the speaker either just acquired some piece of information themselves or is about to divulge it to the addressee. Their affective component is restricted to either mild/pretend surprise/excitement 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) 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). The mild/pretend nature of this affect, shown in (8), somewhat resembles the “light-heartedness” of the English calling contour (also singsongy and mid-plateau) in (9) and is in contrast to Type 1 sentences and embedding interjections in (10) (genuine surprise) and (11) (strong negative affect). The latter two also have different prosody from Type 2 sentences (with the primary prominence on the interjection and a falling boundary contour) and are incompatible with the mid-plateau contour in (7).

(8) 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 used to have a crush on.

✗ I almost got run over by a truck.

(9) Get well soon! H* !H-L%

✓ The addressee has a light cold.

✗ The addressee is seriously ill.

(Jeong & Condoravdi 2017, (4))

(10) Ogo kto prižel!

INTERJ who came

≈‘I can’t believe who came!’

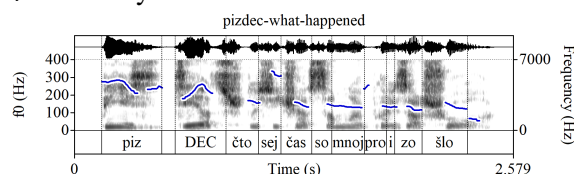
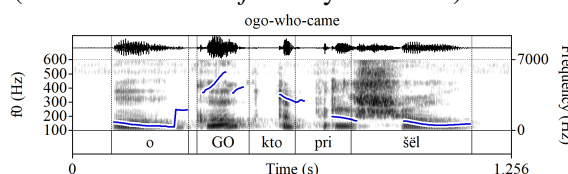
(cf. *Wow that she left!* in Zyman 2018)

(11) Pizdec što sejčas so mnoj proizošlo!

INTERJ.VULG what.N now with me happened

≈‘I’m fucking shook by what just happened to me!’

✗ ‘celebrity’ context ✓ ‘truck’ context



I, thus, claim that, unlike Type 1, Type 2 sentences are not matrix *wh*-exclamatives, but interrogatives embedded under a complex mirative attitude predicate expounded 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) map onto specific sub-exponents. Yet, there exists a sub-type of Type 2 sentences, which I will briefly discuss, whose boundary contour is a sharp rise rather than a mid-plateau: their information acquisition component is necessarily addressee-oriented; they convey genuine excitement of the speaker; but they are still incompatible with negative emotions.

Kontrast marking 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): (11) *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 prišel? \\\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 and 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 Jeong & Condoravdi. 2017. *BLS*. McCoy. 2003. *JLLI*. Nouwen & Chernilovskaya. 2015. *Linguistic variation*. Potts. 2007. *Theoretical linguistics*. Rett. 2011. *L&P*. Rett & Murray. 2013. *SALT*. Simeonova. 2015. *CLA*. Zyman. 2018. *Snippets*.