

Can we find common ground? Expressions of surprise and Speech act types

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1 Introduction

In this talk, I discuss the interpretation of modal particles in declaratives and standard questions compared to their interpretation in exclamatives and special questions, focusing on surprise and disapproval (S/D-) questions in German.

In particular, I will argue that exclamatives are akin to assertions (cf. Rett 2011) and involve a [+subjective] evaluation (cf. Lasersohn 2005) on part of the speaker of the state of affairs evident in the utterance situation.

Wh-exclamatives come in two varieties in German, as V2-clauses and as Vfinal-clauses, as is illustrated in (1). While both utterances in (1) involve an unexpected state of affairs that the speaker is surprised of or bewildered with, they differ in illocutionary force: I will argue that (1a) involves a directive speech act, requesting an explanation for the unexpected state of affairs, while the utterance in (1b) shares properties with an assertion.

- (1) a. Wen HAT er da wieder eingeladen!?
 Whom has he here again invited
 ‘Why has he invited such a person?’
 b. Wen er DA wieder eingeladen hat!
 Whom he here again invited has
 ‘I am surprised by the type of person he invited’

2 Standard questions and S/D-questions

I am treating modal particles as evidential markers that indicate differences in the knowledge state of speaker and hearer (CG) about the relevant state of affairs. For instance, the question in (2a) is relevant in a situation in which both speaker and hearer know that John is to come but it is still to be fixed when. The speaker has evidence that the hearer has just been on the phone with John and with asking (2a) he solicitates information about the point in time of John's coming given that the hearer has now more information. The modal particle refers to a difference in the knowledge state of speaker and hearer and the pertinent question is interpreted as a request for that information.

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- (2) a. Wann kommt Hans nun? (standard question)
When come Hans now
b. Wann KOMMT er nun? (S/D question)
When comes he now?

In particular, I am following Krifka (2013) in treating modal particles as propositional anaphors that indicate salient state of affairs in the context. The intonational morpheme in (2b) is taken by Hinterhölzl & Munaro (2015) to indicate the presupposition of a state of affairs that is unexpected by the speaker. For instance, (2b) is appropriate in the following situation: John is expected to arrive with the train at 8h. Speaker and hearer are at the train station waiting for John. It is 8:05 and the train has not arrived yet, when the speaker utters (2b). The state of affairs that is unexpected is that the train still has not arrived. It is this state of affairs that the modal particle makes reference to yielding the reading 'now (that the train has not arrived) the question arises 'when will he come'.

Note, in particular, the difference in the interpretation of the modal particle. While the modal particle has an epistemic interpretation referring to the knowledge state of a discourse participant in the standard question, the modal particle has a deictic meaning referring to evidence that is directly accessible in the utterance situation.

Typically, this deictic component is enforced by other deictic elements in the utterance. Compare for instance the standard question in (3a) with the S/D question in (3b). With (3a) the speaker asks the hearer for information about the content of John's shouting. With (3b), the speaker expresses surprise or bewilderment about what John is shouting and at the same time requests the hearer to provide an explanation for the content of John's shouting. In essence the speaker with (3b) exhorts an explanation for why John is shouting the things he is shouting. That is, Hinterhölzl & Munaro (2015) propose that a S/D question is not simply the expression of an emotional stance of the speaker with respect to a particular state of affairs but constitutes a directive speech act.

- (3) a. Was schreit denn der Hans? (standard question)
What shouts PAR the John
'What is John shouting?'
b. Was SCHREIT denn der da?! (S/D question)
What shouts PAR this-one here
'Why does he shout?'

Hinterhölzl & Munaro (2015) propose the following analysis of a standard and S/D question, as is illustrated in (36). In a standard question the *wh*-element comprises a focus feature and a *Q*-feature, the latter of which licenses a directive SA. The *wh*-element in a S/D-question lacks the relevant focus feature. While in a standard question the *wh*-element is assumed to be focused and the speaker requests the hearer to evaluate the focus alternatives of the relevant proposition, a S/D questions involves a request of the speaker on the hearer to evaluate an existentially closed proposition. The reader is referred to Hinterhölzl & Munaro (2015) for further details.

- (4) a. S *requests* H to evaluate [+obj] the focus alternatives of p, $p = \lambda x$. John shouts x
b. S *requests* H to evaluate [-obj] the proposition p, $p = \text{John shouts (something)}$

the analysis in (4b) does not seem sufficient to account for the discourse impact of (3b):

- (5) Complex SA: S expresses a [-obj] evaluation of the proposition (John shouts something)

& S *requests* H to evaluate FA of p, $p = \lambda x \text{ reason}(x)$ & John shouts something for x

- (5) raises the question where the content of the second conjunct is coming from? Is it a conversational implicature? Is this an indirect Speech act in the sense of Searle (1975)?

- (6) Wen HAT er denn dA wieder eingeladen!? ##Aber ich will keine Erklärung von dir!

- (7) S expresses an [-obj] evaluation of the proposition (John shouts something) & S *requests* H to evaluate [+/- obj] the relevance of p, $p = \text{John shouts something}$

ad (7) that S has no explanation for p (expressing his surprise or bewilderment with p), its relevance can be explicated with giving a (good) reason for p.

in other words, an [+objective] evaluation of a proposition involves the truth values of a proposition or in case of the question the truth values of the focus alternatives of a proposition, while a [-objective] evaluation of a proposition involves the relevance of (the reasons for uttering) p.

- (5) also raises the question what it means exactly to *express* a negative evaluation of a proposition. This question will be tackled in more detail in the next section.

3 Standard Assertions and Exclamations

The very same difference in the interpretation of the modal particle appears to be relevant for characterizing the difference between standard assertions and exclamations, as is illustrated in (8).

- (8) a. Der zweite Weltkrieg begann ja mit dem Überfall auf Polen
The Second World War started PAR with the attack on Poland
b. Hier ist es ja ganz WARM!
Here it is PAR quite warm

According to Zimmermann (2012), the modal particle *ja* indicates that the content of the relevant proposition is uncontroversial. For instance, the speaker may use the modal particle in (8a) to indicate that the proposition that he asserts is part of or can be derived from the common ground. In this way, the modal particle modulates the illocutionary force of the assertion reducing the typical discourse commitment connected with this speech act type namely, to supply relevant evidence for the speaker's claim in case its validity is challenged by the hearer.

Note that the impact of the modal particle in (8b) is crucially different. It does not indicate that the relevant proposition *that it is warm* is part of or derivable from the common ground (cf. also Kratzer 1999 for the mirative use of 'ja'). Rather it indicates that there is uncontroversial evidence for the respective state of affairs in the utterance situation.

Exclamatives have recently received a lot of attention in the literature that discusses sentence types and their proper characterization. While there is agreement that exclamatives form a separate sentence type, there is disagreement on whether they form a separate illocutionary type and whether there is a special force feature or operator that determines their clause type and (some of) their syntactic properties.

In particular, Zanuttini & Portner (2003) argue against the presence of such a force element and propose that the illocutionary impact of exclamatives is derived indirectly and follows from two semantic properties of exclamatives: a) a *wh*-operator variable structure that introduces a domain of quantification that is subject to widening and b) the presence of an abstract F (for factivity) in the CP domain.

I will argue that exclamatives are akin to assertions (cf. Rett 2011) and involve a [+subjective] evaluation (cf. Lasersohn 2005) on part of the speaker of the state of affairs evident in the utterance situation.

4 About judgment types and their dependent discourse commitments:

Note now that an evaluation not only occurs in exclamations and exclamatives, but also in standard declaratives, as is indicated in (9a). What is special with exclamations is that the evaluation is subjective, very much like in assertions based on predicates of personal taste (cf. Lasersohn 2005). Lasersohn (2005) talks about two different perspectives - a subjective perspective and an objective perspective - under which statements are made. Note, however, that this choice is not free even with the same predicate. It crucially depends on the type of evidence that a speaker has at his disposal, as is illustrated in (9bc).

- (9) a. John unfortunately did not come to the party
b. I feel sick (subjective evaluation)
c. John probably feels sick (objective evaluation)

While the speaker, as an experiencer, has direct access to his inner physical condition and is in a position to make a judgment about his health state before any external symptoms are visible in (9b), the speaker in (9c), noticing that John's face is completely pale, may on the basis of this evidence utter the objective judgment that John probably feels / seems to feel sick.

We conclude that a) internal evidence leads to a subjective evaluation and b) external evidence leads to an objective evaluation. Furthermore, we assume that the type of speech act crucially depends on the type of evidence and evaluation a speaker is ready to give. In particular, we assume that an objective or epistemic evaluation triggers an assertion about the actual world (w^a) and is paired with the speaker's commitment to provide objective

evidence for his claim, while a subjective or emotional evaluation triggers an assertion about the world of the speaker (w^s) and is paired with the speaker's commitment to provide some explanation for the internal motivation of his claim.

In particular, I will provide arguments for the assertive character of utterances like (8b) and argue that what is at issue and asserted in (8b) is not the proposition *that it is quite warm in here*, but the speaker's subjective evaluation of this fact as surprising:

5 Some evidence for the assertive character of exclamations:

In particular, depending on the type of intonation, (8b) is likely to express positive surprise. As such it may be used in a situation to express a compliment to the other discourse participant, as is illustrated in (10). Obviously, this can be interpreted as a perlocutionary effect of the assertion of surprise.

- (10) A: Hier ist es ja ganz WARM!
B: Ja ich habe extra für dich eingheizt, weil dir sonst immer kalt bei mir ist
Here it is PAR quite warm!
Yes, I have put the heating on for you, since I know that you tend to feel cold at my place

If exclamations are a type of assertion, we expect the presence of the typical discourse commitment of an assertion, that is, that the speaker takes responsibility for his assertion. This normally means that the speaker is committed to the truth of the asserted proposition. In (10), the speaker seems to be committed to be surprised, as is illustrated in (11).

Note that this effect may not be explained as a case of explicit rejection of a presupposition, as in (12). In (12), the adverbial *wieder* (again) triggers the presupposition that the hearer has been at the speaker's place before. This presupposition can be explicitly retracted. As is shown in (11) the unexpectedness of the relevant state of affairs cannot be retracted. The effect in (11) seems to be stronger than in (12). Thus what the speaker seems to be committed to is his evaluation of the relevant state of affairs as surprising / unexpected.

- (11) Hier ist es ja ganz WARM! ##Aber das habe ich erwartet
Here it is PAR quite warm. But that have I expected
- (12) A to B in a coffeehouse:
Kommst du mich wieder besuchen? Da fällt mir ein, DU warst ja noch gar nicht in meiner Wohnung
Are you going to visit me again? It just occurs to me that YOU have not seen my place yet.

In a similar vein, the speaker is committed by the utterance of (10) to a high (or higher than expected) degree of warmth, as is illustrated by the oddity of the continuation in (13a). Furthermore, his assertion of surprise and commitment to the asserted evaluation of the relevant state of affairs may be subject for discussion, as any standardly asserted proposition is. This is illustrated in (13b-c). The reply can be another subjective assertion, as in (13b), or an objective observation, as in (13c).

- (13) a. Hier ist es ja ganz WARM! ##Aber eigentlich kommt es mir hier kühl vor.
Here it is quite warm! But in fact, it appears to me to be cool here.
b. A: Hier ist es ja ganz WARM! B: Mir kommt es nicht so warm vor.
A: Here it is PAR quite warm! B: It does not appear to be so warm to me.
c. A: Hier ist es ja ganz WARM! B: Hm, Das Thermometer zeigt 19° Celsius
A: Here it is PAR quite warm. B: Yeah, but the thermostat displays 19 degrees

6 What is the difference between an exclamation and a subjective assertion?

- (14) Hier ist es ja ganz WARM!
Here it is PAR quite warm.
(15) Ich bin überrascht, dass es hier ganz warm ist
I am surprised that it is quite warm here

(16) shows even though (14) constitutes an assertion about w^s , this content is shared by speaker and hearer and should thus enter the CG

- (16) A: Hier ist es ja ganz WARM!
B: Warum überrascht dich das?

However, this content needs to be activated to license propositional anaphors, as is illustrated in (17) and (18)

- (17) A: Hier ist es ja ganz WARM!
B: Das überrascht mich nicht! (that it is warm; ## that you are surprised)
(18) A: Ich bin überrascht, dass es hier ganz warm ist!
B: Das habe ich erwartet (that it is warm; that you are surprised)

Proposal:

- all uttered propositions (whether objective or subjective) are put on the table of discussion
- it is these propositions that can be taken up directly by anaphoric pronouns
- modal particles are special in that they can refer to any content that is evident in the CG or in the utterance situation

Analysis:

- (19) a. Hier ist es ja ganz WARM = obj (here it is warm), subj (surprise) not on the table)
b. Ich bin überrascht (subj, objectivized by being put on the table)
dass es hier ganz warm ist (presupposed, already in CG)

7 Exclamations and Exclamatives

A *wh*-exclamative is a special sentence form that expresses a judgement about a degree of a certain quality of an individual with respect to some norm. As such it focuses on the difference in the degree of a certain quality of an individual between the actual state of affairs and the speaker's expectation, as is illustrated in (20). In other words, what the speaker asserts in (20) is that he is surprised about the difference in the degree to which he expected it to be warm and to which it actually is warm.

- (20) Wie WARM es hier ist!
How warm it is here!

The subjective kind of evaluation on part of the speaker can be made more evident by the use of different expressive elements, as illustrated in (21). The expressions in (21) not only express a high degree of unexpectedness but are rather taken to express that the relevant degree exceeds what can be tolerated.

- (21) a. Was für eine Affenhitze es hier hat!
What for an ape-heat it here has
This heat is intolerable!
- b. Was für ein Sauwetter es heute wieder gibt!
What for a swine-weather it today again has
This weather is unbearable!
- c. Was für ein Scheißspiel die Borussia wieder abgeliefert hat!
What for a shit-game the Borussia again delivered has
The soccer game that the players from Borussia delivered exceeds what a real fan can endure

Conclusions:

- the content of exclamatives is added to the CG without being put on the table of discussion (cf. Bruce & Farkas 2010), it is thus similar to the accommodation of presuppositions
- but can be made a QUD as in (16b)

8 Appendix: Embedded V2 a case of a subjective judgment?

The status of embedded V2 and its impact on interpretation have been subject of extended discussion in recent times (cf. Gärtner 2001, 2002; Antomo and Steinbach 2010, Catasso 2016 and Catasso and Hinterhölzl 2016 among others).

- (22) a. Die Felder sind weiß, weil es geschneit hat
The fields are white, because it snowed has
- b. Es hat geschneit, weil die Felder sind ganz weiß
It has snowed because the fields are completely white

While the verb-final causal clause in (20a) provides the reason for the state of affairs expressed in the matrix clause, the V2-clause in (21b) provides the reason, or rather the evidence on which the claim of speaker that it has snowed is based.

While *weil* is generally taken to relate propositions in (20a), the role of *weil* in (20b) is disputed. For Antomo & Steinbach (2010), *weil* in (20b) relates two independent speech acts. For Hinterhölzl (2020), the adverbial clause in (20b) lacks independent assertive force and V2 is taken to only indicate that the embedded proposition is (epistemically) anchored to the speaker.

Modal particles and types of assertions:

there is a difference in the interpretation of modal particles and standard assertions and exclamatives (special assertions), illustrated in (23):

- (23) a. Der zweite Weltkrieg begann ja mit dem Überfall auf Polen (epistemic ja)
The Second World War started PAR with the attack on Poland
b. Hier ist es ja ganz WARM! (evidential ja)
Here it is PAR quite warm

Let us now compare the impact of the modal particle *ja* in (23) with its impact in an embedded V2-clause, as in (24). What is uncontroversial in (24) is the new, maybe unexpected evidence in the utterance situation that the fields are white. Imagine that the speaker wakes up in the morning and looking out of the window is uttering (24): the *weil*-clause expresses new information and not information that is uncontroversial because it has already been part of the common ground between speaker and hearer.

- (24) Es hat geschneit, weil die Felder sind ja ganz weiß!
It has snowed because the fields are PAR completely white

However, there are also cases of epistemic *ja* in *weil*+V2-clauses, as is illustrated in (25) and (26). It is clear that in (25) and (24) *ja* does not have an evidential reading and also that the embedded clauses express relations between propositions. For instance in (24), the reading is that the speaker is sad because at his place there is no snow, arguably constituting a simple relation between two state of affairs. (25) is from Catasso (2016); for (26) I am indebted to Martina Faller.

- (25) Ich musste heute deshalb nichts kochen, weil ich hab' ja noch was gehabt vom Braten am Sonntag
I had to cook nothing today therefore, because I still had some (rest) of the roast on Sunday
(26) Ich bekomme Schneebilder und das finde ich sehr schön,
aber das macht mich auch traurig, weil hier gibt es ja keinen Schneefall
I receive pictures with snow and that I find very beautiful but it also makes me sad because here there is no snow

Something else must be going on in the clauses in (25) and (26). For sure, the modal particle is not modifying the embedded proposition, since the proposition that there is no snow at the speaker's place can be taken to constitute new information in the context of (27).

Note first the impact of V2 in the case of (26), repeated here in (27a), and compare it with the impact of a verb-final clause in (25b).

- (27) a. Ich bin traurig weil hier gibt's ja keinen Schnee! (negative evaluation)
b. Ich bin traurig weil es hier keinen Schnee gibt (neutral evaluation).

So that we may say that what is at issue in (27a) is not so much the embedded proposition, but the speaker's positive or negative evaluation of this proposition.

In conclusion, V2 in these cases indicates that something more than the plain proposition is at issue. V2 seems to indicate that the speaker's positive or negative evaluation of the state of affairs expressed by the embedded clause forms the basis for the causal relation between the embedded clause and the state of affairs in the matrix clause.

what is uncontroversial is the negative evaluation of the speaker of the proposition (here there is no snow) that is at the basis of explaining why the speaker is sad: the negative evaluation of there being no snow is the uncontroversial reason for the speaker to be said (cf. 27c).

- (27) c. Ich bin traurig weil hier gibt's leider keinen Schnee
I am sad, because here there-is unfortunately evidently no snow
- (28) Wenn es läutet und da steht der Gerichtsvollzieher vor der Tür, dann können einem schon die Ohren schlackern
When the bell rings and there stands the (legal) executor before the door then can one well the ears shake

Conclusion: in cases of embedded V2 the verb moves to (activates) the Judgment Phrase or better the Commitment Phrase in (Krifka 2020) that can be taken to occur between EvidP and ForceP.

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